

# The Sin of Jasper Standish

*by* "Rita"



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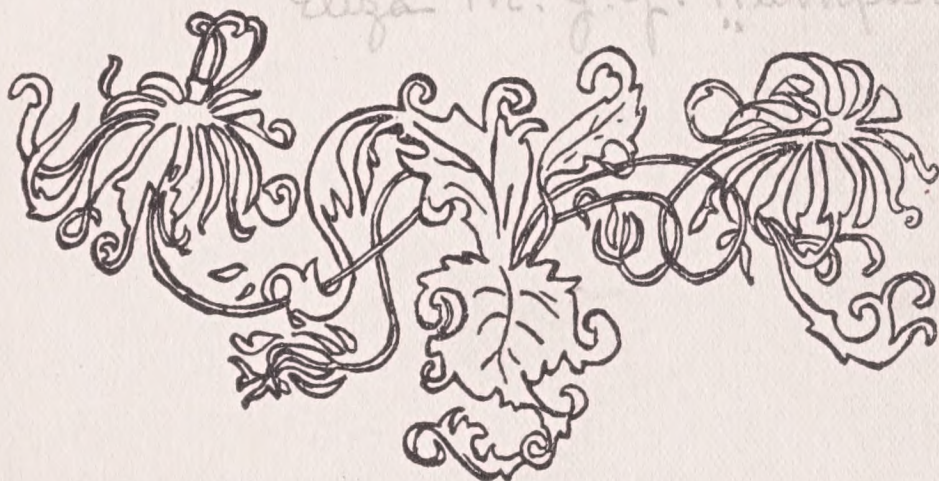
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By "RITA"

*Author of "Vanity," "Kitty," "Sheba"  
"The Good Mrs. Hypocrite," Etc. Etc.*

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a.s.g. Sept. 10, 1902

# THE SIN OF JASPER STANDISH.

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## CHAPTER I.

THERE was great talk in the little town of Rathfurley when it was known that the Hermitage had been taken by an English family.

In the first place the house had been tenantless for many years, and was falling into decay and desolation. In the next it was never supposed that the Mallorys, who were a good old family and only as poor as the "raal gentry" of Ireland generally contrive to be, would ever demean themselves by letting their ancestral acres to any one else. So when the rumor got about, Judy McGee had a good deal to say on the subject to her crony Bridget Mooney, who kept the sweet-stuff shop at the corner of Slancy Street, and Judy's son was a gardener, and was told to keep his eye on the situation, for he might be having as good a chance of it as any one else. Mrs. Mooney was blessed with a daughter christened Honora, a fine strapping girl brought up to service, and at present out of employ. The English family would no doubt be wanting a housemaid, and Honora was advised to be first in the field. If one or both of these applicants were successful, there would be little doubt but that the whole business, pedigree, position, and income of the intruders would soon

be in the hands of the two most notable gossips in Rathfurley.

The result might prove extremely agreeable to the inhabitants of the little town, who of late years had had small chance of external interests.

Though called a town, Rathfurley was little more than a village, boasting of one good street and various dirty minor branches radiating from the centre of that main thoroughfare. It also possessed a market, a bank, or rather a branch of a bank, a post-office, and some shops.

The Hermitage, which had once been an abbey, stood on a slight wooded eminence, about a couple of miles from the town. It overlooked the river, it had extensive park-like grounds, an orchard and kitchen garden, and in summer the roses ran riot everywhere, climbing up the gray stone walls, blooming in the wilderness of shrubs and brambles, throwing wide arms of glowing blossoms across the graveled paths.

Neglect had in no way discouraged their growth, and when the new owner came to look over his purchase it presented a picture of color, perfume, and beauty that almost atoned for lack of culture.

The agent's clerk, who accompanied him, was surprised at the enthusiasm with which he greeted everything. But then Tom Reilly had no artistic tastes.

The new owner decided that the grounds wanted "doing up" only in the form of weeding, grass-cutting, and pruning. He would have nothing altered, no formal beds, no marvels of plots and ornamental borders.

Thus came in Phelim McGee's chance. Young Reilly

had promised to recommend him, and did so. Sir Anthony Orcheton took the recommendation with a geniality scarcely expected from one of his nation, and ordered Phelim and an underling to be turned in on the place without delay.

Inspection of the house proved it a very ancient and very beautiful building.

The hall was square and paneled with oak, the staircase was oak also, and the balustrades were richly carved. Doors opened on three sides into the living-rooms—drawing, dining room, and library. A thick baize swing-door shut off the larger hall from a small one leading into the kitchens. A good many repairs would be necessary to make the interior habitable, and Sir Anthony Orcheton made notes to that effect in his pocket-book. By the advice of young Reilly he almost decided that local talent should have the work, and perform it under his own supervision.

“Is there a decent hotel where I could stay—I and my daughter?” he asked. “We couldn’t expect to get in here under a couple of months at least.”

“There’s the Rathfurley Arms,” answered Reilly. “It’s considered a very fair hotel—not up to London, of course, but I think you would be comfortable.”

Tom Reilly had once been to London, and gave himself occasional airs on the strength of it. Sir Anthony agreed to try the hotel. He asked no particulars as to his neighbors, their pursuits or status in the county or social proclivities. This greatly surprised young Reilly. That any one should wish to settle down in a place like the Hermitage without due knowledge of surroundings,

or some idea of acceptance from the neighborhood, was a fact in no way reconcilable to any previous experience of tenants and their ways.

However, all his hints were unnoticed. Sir Anthony evidently didn't care twopence about hunting or horses, or squireens. Indeed as was found out later the worthy gentleman was somewhat of a recluse; by nature studious, by good fortune wealthy and blessed with an only daughter, whose enthusiasm for everything Irish was the result of a school friendship. The school friend had asked Lyle on occasional visits, and on one of these visits she had heard of the Hermitage, and coaxed her father into taking it. He rarely denied her anything. He accepted the agent's statement that the property was a good investment, and had now come to complete the purchase.

He was not at all inclined to fault his bargain. The situation was beautiful; the house a fine old picturesque dwelling, with possibilities of picturesque improvements adapted to modern comfort. Lyle would be within a couple of miles or so of her beloved Nora Callaghan, and he able to indulge his studious tastes, and his favorite pastime of fishing. He was quite content, and returned with Tom Reilly to the hotel, to inspect its suitability as a temporary home.

The accounts of all these matters spread rapidly. Indeed, no one would have been more astonished than Sir Anthony had he heard what was said, known, and conjectured of him, in such a remarkably short space of time.

The interest that the Irish of all classes take in the concerns of any and every one outside their own imme-

diate circle is apparently the one thing that reconciles them to existence.

“So it’s not a family after all we’re to have, Biddy,” said the proud mother of Phelim, the newly-engaged gardener. “Just an ould gintleman and his daughter. Well, it’s not much in the way o’ style they’ll be after keepin’. Ah glory be! The ould days are gone intirely. Only a trap or two; that’s what young Mr. Tom was sayin’. No hunters; a quiet cob and a ridin’ horse for the young lady. The likes o’ that! And thim grand stables goin’ to waste.”

“Maybe they’ll be havin’ more by and by, Judy, woman,” said her crony. “Though why in the wurrld you’re makin’ sich a hullabaloo about it bates me intirely. Is it yer whole fam’ly you expect to be placin’ there? Why, it’s blessin’ the saints ye ought to be for Phelim’s good luck; but I see you’re after gettin’ Pat in as stable-help now he’s lost his place at Mount Urris.”

Mrs. Judy McGee tossed her head with conscious virtue. “Me, is it? Speak for yerself, ma’am. Maybe there’s yer sister Mary’s two boys, that’s as at home with horses as if they’d been foaled in a stable. That’s what yer manin’.”

“And small blame to me, if I had me eye on thim same. Isn’t Mary Murphy as dacint an’ hard-working a widdy woman as you’ll meet any day between this and County Meath? And six childer to provide for, the poor craythur! But there’s people in this wurrld as thinks the saints has only their consarns at heart.”

Judy McGee bridled visibly at so pointed an insinua-

tion, and the conversation drifted into personalities more or less hostile. Just as the affairs of a past generation came up for judgment, and the argument promised excitement to a listening crowd, the tongues suddenly ceased. There had come a clatter of hoofs up the stony street, and the rider drew rein before the little shop.

“Whisht, woman!” muttered Judy warningly. “It’s the inspector himself.”

All faces turned to the figure sitting so lightly and easily on the beautiful Irish mare, and curtsies and greetings came from all sides. He gave but curt response.

“Have any of you seen Mickey Doolan?” he asked. “Was he this way at all?”

“No, yer honor,” came universal response.

“Ah, well, if you should see him, ask him to drop in this evening. I’ve something for him to do.”

He nodded carelessly to the group and rode off.

“Now what’s he wanting Mickey for?” chorused inquisitive voices.

“A bit o’ poachin’, may be.”

“Poachin’! Ah! thin ’tis you have the black thought av ivery one, Moll Cassidy. What should he want him that way for at all, at all? Maybe it’s some bizness he’ll be after getting the boy to do for him. Not the first time neither.”

“In the name av ivery saint that ivēr wore a crown o’ glory, what’s put that iday into yer head, woman?” asked Mrs. McGee. “Sure his honor has thim as can do his bizness for him better than Mickey any day! Indade, there’s quare things and quare people as Mister

Inspector has to do with. Not that I'd be sayin' the bad wurrd av iny one; only there's somethin' about that same gintleman I niver did feel was quite as it should be. Oh! I'll not be *namin'* anything. A close mouth is as good as a priest's blessing any day."

"Thin it's not many blessin's have come your way, Judy," said Mrs. Cassidy, with fine irony.

"Arrah now, Moll, don't ye be so contumashus. It's well ye know how to kape a saycret, whether it's yer own, or any one else's. And Mr. Standish, for all the handsome face av him, and the way he has wid the girls, is none just too honest or too safe-dalin'. There's thim as can see wid one eye more than others wid two."

"Sure, you'll be killin' us wid curiosity intirely, Mrs. McGee. Maybe as ye know so much ye'll tell us why Mrs. Grapnell at the Bank House is so mighty close? 'Tis she who goes about wid the high head and the silent tongue av yer looking for saycret-keepers. There's a mighty power av throuble, if not worse, behind that tight mouth av hers, or my name's not what ivery one takes it for."

"I never could get at the rights av that," observed Biddy Mooney. "Why a nice pleasant-spoken gintleman like Mister Callaghan should be after takin' an Englishwoman into his sarvice, bates me."

"Sure it was Miss Nora's idea intirely. When she went to school in England to git the grand talk and fine wurrds av thim sort o' gintry as comes trapyzin' over the counthry, she was so taken up wid English ways an' English company her own payple weren't good enough for her any more."

“ ’Twas only a couple o’ years she was over there,” observed another voice.

“ An’ it’s plinty can be done and larned in a couple o’ year, let me tell you, Sally. And didn’t Patsey Finigan give the wurrd that Miss Nora was set on bringin’ a ‘ proper English sarvint ’ back wid her ? That’s the truth av it.”

“ An’ now ’tis English gentry we’re to have at the Hermitage. Glory be ! We shan’t be knowin’ ourselves soon.”

“ Castles fallin’. Indade that’s throe for ye,” lamented Judy McGee. “ Poor ould Ireland isn’t what it was at all, at all. Not but what it’s a stroke of luck my boy’s gettin’ the gardener’s place wid the new payple, an he’ll work in Patrick too, or I’ll be axin’ the rayson why.”

“ Yes, an’ Honora. Don’t ye forgit her, Judy.”

“ Arrah thin, it’s small chance ye’d be givin’ me to do that same, Bridget Mooney. But it’s bringin’ their own sarvints they’ll be, I’m thinkin’.”

“ English sarvints niver stay long in Ireland,” remarked Mrs. Cassidy sententiously. “ ’Tis thinkin’ we’re all Faynians and murderers they’ll be.”

“ Ah thin, let thim stay in their own counthry. We’re none too anxious for their company, or their mane ways, or their outlandish talk.”

“ What’s made the English gintleman buy the property at all ?” inquired Mrs. Mooney suddenly.

“ Divil knows. That’s what we’ve got to find out, Biddy woman. And it’s the luck that’s in it me own boy getting in at once to the place. He’s rare and



quick wid his ears an' his sines. He'll not be long puttin' things together."

"He's his own mother's son at that," said Moll Cassidy, who had gloomy moments when her speech was apt to become ironical and home-thrusting.

"And none the worse for that, I'm hopin', Mrs. Cassidy," responded that same mother sharply. "It's a hard day for a poor woman who's done her best for her family to be hearin' that takin' after herself is accounted a sin or a shame to thim. Maybe yer own childer will be the dacement for goin' agin nature. It's sorra a one av thim fayvors yer man in looks, or yerself in manners. As for Larry, the *omadhaun*, wasn't he stalin' the eggs av me one black hen before me own two eyes a week ago come Sunday whin he thought I was at mass?"

"Arrah, shame to ye, Judy McGee, for a lyin'-tongued, ill-judgin' woman. The poor boy was only after nailin' up the broken palin' av yer hen-house, as were a livin' disgrace to the naybors."

"Disgrace is it! You'll be takin' back that wurrd wid yer own tongue in the inside av two seconds, Mrs. Cassidy, or I'll be tachin' you the manin' av manners."

"Whisht! whisht! woman; givin' the place a bad name afore strangers. Can't you see who's comin' down the street?"

It was Biddy Mooney who spoke. An instant hush fell on the excited group. All eyes turned in one direction.

Coming slowly along, her head held high, her somber eyes gazing straight before her, was the person they had been discussing—Jane Grapnell, housekeeper at the Bank.

## CHAPTER II.

ENTIRE ignorance or indifference to the Irish precept that every one's business is the individual's business, had kept Jane Grapnell in a perfectly equable frame of mind towards her neighbors, or those enterprising shopkeepers who had managed to secure the Bank custom.

Her master had been appointed only a twelvemonth to the position of manager at Rathfurley. She had been scarcely that time in his service. It was quite true, as the gossips had said, that Nora Callaghan had brought this woman with her from England, but the housekeeper's own anxiety to come to the country was chiefly responsible for that action.

Jane Grapnell had held a situation in the school where Nora and her friend, Lyle Orcheton, were finishing their education. A grim, silent woman, a woman never popular with her fellow-servants, it had been a matter of surprise to Nora Callaghan that she should display so much devotion to herself. But she liked the woman and appreciated her trustworthy nature, and the thoroughly conscientious method of her work. It struck her that she would be of inestimable value in her maiden efforts at housekeeping, and finding Jane was as willing to enter her service as she was to have her, the arrangement was concluded forthwith.

Jane Grapnell soon proved herself deserving of her

young mistress's appreciation. She relieved her of all responsibility while ostensibly consulting her on all occasions. She was clever, capable and economical. If her reserve and habits of discipline met with little favor in the eyes of her fellow-servants, they were adequately appreciated by her master and mistress. Except to Nora, however, Jane Grapnell maintained the same cold evenness of manner. She made no friends, rarely went out, except on household matters, and was never known to do more than "pass the time o' day" with the ever alert gossips of the little town.

As she passed the group round Judy McGee's shop on this eventful morning, she noted that some unusual excitement prevailed.

She never flinched before the fire of curious eyes, nor the semi-audible whispers that echoed to her passing steps. She was too much engrossed by her own thoughts to heed what was said of her. These people had no part in her life, nor interest for her mind. They would not have believed such a thing possible, but it was true, and to its truth she owed her unpopularity.

"Bad cess to her for a proud, stuck-up doxy," muttered Judy, whose friendly overtures had never yet received any recognition. "'Tis an ill look she wears, and a hard bed she'll have to lie on before her last hour comes."

"I wonder what's at the back av her now?" added Moll Cassidy.

"Something mighty quare, or may I niver read the cast av an eye," said Bridget Mooney.

"It's wondering I am whatever Miss Nora could see

in the woman to take up wid her so," chimed in Sally Rooney.

And then, giving temporary burial to the hatchet of war that had been so imminent, they went tooth and nail for Jane Grapnell's character, deeds, and morals. That she came off badly goes without saying to any one acquainted with the Irish penalties for an unbreakable reserve.

Meanwhile the object of discussion went on her way, called at the shops, gave her orders, and finally walked off in the direction of the Hermitage.

Once out of the town and the gaze of curious eyes, her face relaxed from its austerity. The set lines softened into weariness the curves of the mouth were more sad than bitter. It was no common face, this of the much-discussed woman. Power, strength, suffering, patience, all spoke out in its tense expression. A woman with a history, and a history tragic and pain-filled; a woman who could endure long, but forgive never.

She walked swiftly along the white even road, where the autumn leaves were already scattered. "Across the fields" gave a short cut to her destiny, and she took it as if it was well known to her.

Coming at last to a lane heavily screened by trees and thick brushwood, she paused. Before her was a small gray stone house, shut off from the lane by a palisade and hedge of laurels. A garden rich with autumn coloring spread on either side the narrow path. At the back of the house was a rough stable and poultry run, and the almost inevitable pig-sty.

Externally the dwelling-place looked more preten-

tious than it was. It really only consisted of five rooms and a kitchen. One of the rooms was a sort of office on the ground floor, with a grained-glass window that was an effective obstacle to curious eyes.

This was the house of Jasper Standish, the county inspector of Rathfurley—a position of no small importance in Ireland, though it possesses little to English minds. In the former country the position can only be held by a man of education, ability, and social distinction. He is as far removed from the accepted idea of “policeman” as our Tommy Atkins is from the officer who commands him.

Jasper Standish had secured the appointment with some difficulty, and not without a large amount of influence to back him up. But he was both clever and fascinating, and gifted with brilliant brains as well as a handsome face. He was wonderfully popular in Rathfurley. He was also ambitious, and entirely without scruples as to how he worked for that ambition.

It was before this man’s house that Jane Grapnell was standing lost in thought. With her English ideas, it had seemed strange that Standish should be on terms of equality with her master’s household, dining there perpetually, playing cards whenever the old gentleman wanted a game, singing Irish songs in a rich baritone to Miss Nora’s accompaniment, riding by her side if by chance they met, as not infrequently happened.

All this set Jane wondering. It also occasioned her much concern. For she passionately loved her lovely young mistress, and almost as passionately—and without any positive reason—disliked Mr. Jasper Standish.

Such antipathies are wholly inexplicable by any rule

of common sense. They may be sent as a warning, or simply aroused by the innate antagonism of thoroughly opposed natures. Yet those who have known and disregarded them, have sometimes lived to regret that disregard. Those who believe in occult force sufficiently to let instinct guide where reason stumbles, have, in like manner, lived to be thankful for a warning uttered through sealed senses, but none the less important.

Something almost akin to morbid curiosity led Jane to examine the appearance and extent of the "Gray Lodge," as it was called.

What there could be about the Lodge and its occupant to interest this morose and silent woman was a secret to all outside herself, but certain it is that from the first moment her eyes had fallen on Jasper Standish, she had been morbidly curious about everything concerning that gentleman.

She stood there so long and so silently that the birds hopped and twittered around her motionless figure without apparent notice. The leaves dropped at her feet as the wind sighed through the boughs. A vague melancholy tinged the scene—the melancholy with which the dying year parts from all the bloom and beauty of her summer prime.

Here this man she so distrusted lived alone, with an old woman as servant and her grandson as groom, stable-boy, and gardener combined. He kept up no "style," but the stables were occupied by a couple of horses that would have been hard to beat for breed, speed, and staying powers.

The woman looked up at last. A footstep had roused her. Beside her stood a small, impish-looking

youth, neither boy nor man. His quick, ferret-like eyes were alert with mischief and curiosity.

“Is it his honor yer wantin’, ma’am?” he inquired, as he peered up at Jane Grapnell’s face.

She started and drew slightly away. “No,” she said hurriedly—“no; I don’t want him.”

“Thin it’s a dale av interest yer after takin’ in his property. Maybe it’s wantin’ to buy it ye are. Sure it’s a tidy bit av a place, but it’s not for sale just yet. The masther’s got a lease av it for two hundred and ninety-nine years, or thereabouts.”

His impish eyes twinkled. He, like most of the poorer folk in Rathfurley, knew Mrs. Grapnell as the English housekeeper at the Bank House, and was well disposed to take a “rise” out of her when opportunity offered. Her dark, stern eyes glanced at him with a silent disdain of his poor witticism.

“Are you in his service?” she asked.

“Thru for ye, ma’am, I am. Errand boy and giniral help. I’m not living in the establishment, so to say. Me name’s Doolan—Mickey Doolan. Maybe ye know it. It’s me father has the big mate stall in the market, where ye gits yer joints.”

“Oh,” she said vaguely, “is it? Then why don’t you work for your father instead of for Mr. Standish?”

“Work for him? Why, he just leathered the life out of me as long as I did. So I took to independence; and it suits me a mighty dale better.”

“But I thought——”

“Oh, yer mindin’ what I said about messenger and errand boy to Mister Standish. Sure, that’s jist the

jokin' way av me. I gets an odd job now an' thin' mostly in the way av pickin' up news, an' helpin' him a bit wid information as to poachin' an' sich like."

Jane Grapnell's usual reserve seemed to have deserted her to-day. Her face was almost eager as she turned to the boy.

"Information! Then of course you know about the cases at the police-court—criminals and offenders?"

"It's mighty clever ye are to guess that!" said the youth, with mock admiration. "I won't be sayin' it to praise meself, but there's many a poor divil I've laid by the heels; an' whin Mister Standish has the hard job before him, it's Mickey Doolan does most av the work, unbeknown to thim as is wanted. Ye understand?"

She looked at him with a sort of eager interest. An informer; a spy; a creature who might be bribed to do any humiliating, dirty work.

So he stood self-confessed. Yet the silent, reserved woman, who made no friends, who "held her head so high," who was accounted a model of discretion, actually displayed more interest in this disreputable being than in the virtues and goodwill of a Mrs. McGee, or a Biddy Mooney.

She put a series of cautious questions to the youth; questions so strange that they seemed to have no possible connection with herself. It puzzled Mickey somewhat, but his odd mixture of lies and truths were uttered with a disarming frankness that would have almost won the faith of one of his own countrymen.



Jane Grapnell, however, had too large an element of caution in her nature to be readily deceived. She was working for an object, and she knew she must not be too particular as to the tools she employed. She sifted Mickey's exaggerations with a skill of which he was unconscious.

At the close of their conversation she presented him with half a crown. He looked from it to her with a face expressive of complete bewilderment, then pocketed it swiftly, and touched his ragged cap with the first sign of respect he had shown her.

"Sure, an' av it's any further conversayshun ye'd be after wantin' wid me, I'm at your service, ma'am. It seems a mighty profitable sort av a thing," he said, with a grin of appreciation.

"I may want you again, Mickey," she said. "Where are you to be found?"

"Mostly down by Cronin's public," he answered. "Or shall I be givin' a call at the Bank House for ye, odd times?"

"No, no," she said quickly; "don't come there. I'll let you know if I need you."

She drew down her veil, and walked quickly away. He watched her, his eyes twinkling.

"What is it she's manin', at all, at all?" he muttered. "Is it a thafe or a murderer that she's thracking? And so mighty grand as ivery one thought she was; and not a 'good day' hardly passing her lips. Well, divil take me, but 'tis yerself's in luck to-day, Mickey boy; an' yer company an honor to be paid for, so it is. Well, she can have plinty av it at the same price, if the fancy takes her. And sorra a wurrd av

this bizness passes me lips to Mister Standish. It's none too fond he is av partin' wid his half-crowns, or sixpences either. Sure, it's himself comin'. What's the dirty work Mickey Doolan's to do for him now?"

### CHAPTER III.

WHEN Sir Anthony decided that the hotel would suit him well enough he sent for his daughter Lyle.

Here, however, feminine opposition came into play. Nora entreated that her friend should stay with her at the Bank House, while the Hermitage was being put into order, and Lyle on her arrival backed up the entreaties of her friend successfully. Her father gave in, and the two girls rejoiced in unlimited freedom and renewed companionship.

There was enough likeness of character and dissimilarity of nature between the Irish and English girl to give that salt of contrast to their friendship which is at once a test and a tie. Nora had all the warm-heartedness and vivacity of her nation, Lyle Orcheton the softness and strength, the temerity and straightforwardness of hers. She was more reserved than Nora, and less apt to make friends, but also she was truer-hearted and more courageous. Her affections, if slower to win, were more durable when once bestowed. Nora's flirtations were numerous; Lyle's reserve shut out anything so frivolous as meaningless attentions. Yet with so much difference and divergence the two girls were deeply attached to one another.

They had much in common. Both were motherless, both were only children. A limited home circle left

them with much outlying force of affection to bestow. Nora gave her friend the largest share, but still had plenty to dispose of. Lyle, on the other hand, concentrated most of her love on this bright and lovely and most winning creature, and gave her second place in her warm, deep heart. Her father ranked first, but he held for her elements of responsibility and consideration by reason of his studious habits, his mild absent-mindedness, and his manlike helplessness in all domestic matters.

She satisfied herself that he was perfectly comfortable and well looked after at the hotel before yielding to Nora's eager persuasions. He also had a general invitation to the Bank House from the genial Tom Callaghan, so that he and his daughter would not be much apart.

The first morning after her arrival Lyle and Nora rode over to the Hermitage. Nora gave up her own little mare "Heartsease" to her friend, and took her father's mount for herself. She could ride anything, and her love of horses was almost a passion.

The morning was lovely—cool, balmy, rain-washed; the sky an arc of Irish sapphire, the woods a blaze of gold and emerald and russet brown. To be young and healthy and heart-free on such a day, and mounted for a rousing gallop, was to taste something of the joy of living.

The girls made a picture that the township appreciated as they trotted down the main street. It was market day, and vehicles were many and strange, and droves of sheep and pigs seemed contesting the "right o' way" with foot passengers.

“You seem to know every one, Nora,” said her friend as they drew rein, and walked their horses.

“It’s rather a case of every one knowing me, my dear. That’s the penalty of my father’s daughter’s position. There’s Judy McGee at her shop door. I must speak to her a minute, or she’ll never forgive me. She’s dying to see you, I’m sure.”

They drew up before a curtsying figure and inspecting eyes. Lyle gave gracious response, but did not find the conversation absorbingly interesting. Certainly it was varied, diverging from the laying qualities of the black hen to the measles of Mrs. McGrath’s youngest grandchild, and taking in by the way such little matters as the widow Murphy’s newly married daughter’s twins, and the curiously bad quality of the potatoes sold at Danny MacGuire’s shop. When these subjects had been discussed long enough to leave behind a faithful photograph of the young stranger’s face, figure, eyes, hair, and the color and fit of her habit as well as the fact of her having borrowed Miss Nora’s own mare, they were permitted to ride on their way.

“Funny people, aren’t we?” said Nora. “I often wonder how we strike English folk on a first acquaintance.”

“I know how you struck me,” said Lyle. “That was when you lived at Derry, you remember; and I spent my first holidays with you.”

“Yes. You told me your opinion, and we nearly had a quarrel. However, you understand us better, or will—once you live among us. Oh! there’s Mrs. Brady O’Neil, Lyle. I wonder if she’ll stop. I’d like to in-

roduce you. It's her nephew, you know, who had the Hermitage, and was obliged to sell it owing to debts. She's your neighbor. A charming woman, and gives such parties! Yes, she's stopping the carriage."

"Ah! Nora," said a cheery voice, "it's a long time since I've seen you. I declare I thought you'd gone to England again. Your English friend, did you say? Delighted to meet you, Miss Orcheton. We shall be neighbors, you know, once you come to the Hermitage. But I suppose that won't be for some time. It must be sadly out of repair. Derrick, poor boy, could not do anything for the place. Why, when he came of age 'twas nothing but debts he found for heritage—his own, and other people's."

She broke off with a laugh.

Lyle looked at her with pardonable curiosity. She was a handsome, florid woman of about forty-five; alert, breezy, good-tempered, with very bright eyes and an ever-ready smile. A general favorite, and sufficiently well off to be of use to the county, as well as popular in it.

"So you're staying with Nora," she went on. "Well that's nicer for you than the hotel. You must come round to me on Tuesday next. Just a few friends. You know, Nora. All young people. A hand at cards and a waltz or two for those who like. Mr. Standish has promised to come. There's not his equal for a partner miles around—as you ought to know, Miss Nora."

She shot a glance of meaning at the pretty Irish girl who tried to look unconscious.

"We shall be very pleased to come, Mrs. O'Neil," she

said. "At least I shall, and I'm sure Miss Orcheton won't say no. She's as fond of dancing as myself."

"I'm glad of that," said the genial lady. "I love young people about me, and the pair of you will be an acquisition to the county. Yes; and there'll be some broken hearts before long, or I'm much belying my countrymen. Well, I mustn't be keeping you. Remember me to your father, Nora, and don't you be forgetting Tuesday—eight o'clock. Good-by."

The carriage drove off, and again the girls proceeded on their way.

"Who is Mr. Standish, Nora?" asked Lyle, after a short silence.

The girl colored faintly. "He's the County Inspector," she answered.

"Oh!" said Lyle, somewhat doubtfully. "A—gentleman?"

"Of course, my dear. The Irish constabulary rank here with the military. It's quite different from England. Mr. Standish is of good family, and goes everywhere. He is very popular, besides being as handsome a man as you'd wish to see."

"I don't care for handsome men," said Lyle curtly. "They're always conceited."

"Well, Jasper Standish isn't that."

"You seem to think a great deal of him, Nora?"

"Not more than of any other man. My fairy prince hasn't come this way yet, my dear."

"Doesn't it seem strange, Nora," said Lyle, after the silence which a sharp trot had engendered, "that we two are here, riding together, life just beginning for us, and somewhere in the world—where we don't

know--there may be two men waiting for us, ready to lay their hearts at our feet? They don't know us, we don't know them; but Fate will bring them when the hour is ripe, and all the world will change for us from that hour."

Nora's brilliant face paled suddenly. "From that hour!" she echoed. "Don't you think, Lyle, that love is unconscious at first--that the change may be there long before we realize it?"

"I can't say. What do we know? Books may be deceiving us. Our experience has all to come."

"Well, I'm not going to take it too seriously," laughed Nora. "I want to enjoy life before I settle down to marriage. Somehow, Lyle, when I look round and watch married people, it seems as if they had mostly got wrong partners, had the wrong cards dealt them, like a bad hand at whist. Lovers who are all devotion, miserable if a day parted them, can bear the separations of married life better than its unity. There's that pretty little Mrs. O'Rourke, for instance. She and Danny O'Rourke certainly made a love match if ever there was one. She went out to India with him. He had an appointment in one of the north-west provinces. A couple of years passed, and she came home. Now she's living with her mother, and as pretty as ever, but the way she flirts and carries on--why, you'd think she had no husband at all. Two years--and such a change! Is love worth no more than that?"

Lyle's face took a deeper gravity.

"I think," she said, "girls are rather unfairly used. We are given an idealized picture of men, and then left to find out the reality. We cannot meet them on



equal ground, or be on any terms of intimacy without being accused of flirting, or allowing them to suppose that we expect a declaration. It is all quite wrong. If there were no outsiders to interfere, to draw false conclusions, or hint at expected results, we might come to a far better understanding before taking the all important step."

"You are quite right," agreed Nora eagerly. "Were you thinking of Mrs. O'Neil's remark?"

"Yes. I shouldn't let it worry me if I were you, Nora."

"My dear, I don't intend to. Jasper Standish is not a marrying man. He is too poor. I have no money. Dear old dad has only his salary to keep things going comfortably. We are very good—friends. That is all."

Lyle glanced quickly at the downcast eyes, the wavering color. A little touch of fear chilled her heart. Was it all? Did nothing underlie that word "friends"? She had read that a man and a girl must needs be something more, or something less, than that. But she never asked a confidence that was not spontaneous, and the subject dropped.

They found Phelim McGee and his young brother and a third "help" hard at work on the pruning and grass-cutting that Sir Anthony had directed. The girls dismounted and left their horses in charge of the ubiquitous Phelim, and then Lyle opened the door with the key the agent had given to Sir Anthony's charge, and she and Nora commenced a tour of investigation.

They were in raptures over the possibilities of the lovely old hall, with its oak panels and Italian ceiling.

They threw open long-closed shutters and let the golden wealth of sunshine into the rooms; they explored every nook and corner, decided on renovations and furniture, most of which was coming from England, apportioned the various bed and dressing-rooms, and were alternately practical and enthusiastic.

“Oh! I wish it were all ready and we were coming in to-morrow!” exclaimed Lyle, after a final decision as to which room was always to be reserved for her friend, so that she might go or stay at her own sweet will.

“You’ll have to wait for a good many to-morrows I’m thinking, if your father employs Rathfurley labor,” answered Nora. “An Irish workman will do anything—except hurry. If you’ll take my advice, have a Dublin firm to do all you want, and do it by contract. Then you may get in this side of Christmas.”

“What! Not for two months! Why, there’s very little to do.”

“Papering, painting, roof, repairs,” enumerated Nora, whose eye was more business-like than her friend’s. “Mind, you’ll be coming in at a bad time. Our winters are mostly rainy, and it’s been unoccupied so long that it may be damp.”

They were standing at the window of a room facing south, with a lovely peep of the river winding its way through distant woods in the full glory of autumn coloring. It was a quaint-shaped room, ending in a turret, and the window was lancet-shaped with small leaded panes. Lyle had decided she would have it for herself as a study and retreat. She turned from the

window to look over available space, and furnish it with imaginary comforts and girlish possessions. Here should stand a bookcase, there a couch, her writing table must stand by the window, her easel——

Suddenly she shivered where she stood in the warm sunlight. Her eyes went from the room within to the scene without. The woods were thick with leaf and song, the hedges still held autumn treasures, rose-scented and fragrant, doves cooed in the boughs in faint caressive notes, the west wind blew soft fragrance through the open casement by which she leaned. Everything spoke of peace and beauty, and yet—how explain that odd, strange feeling which had come upon her ?

“How pale you look !” exclaimed Nora suddenly. “Whatever is the matter ? Why, Lyle, dearest, you’re shaking all over !”

The girl put her hand to her forehead in a bewildered way.

“Yes, I know. I can’t explain. Only somehow, Nora, something tells me I shall be terribly unhappy in this room.”

“Lyle !”

“I can’t say why. It just came—the feeling—the sensation.”

“It is very strange. Now if it had been my experience, I could have accounted for it. We Irish are so superstitious, but you——”

“I’m not, a bit. And yet this has happened to me. What shall I do, Nora ? Laugh at it, defy it, or put it to the test ? Perhaps something has happened in this room—something dreadful.”

“Oh, don’t,” said Nora, shuddering. “You’ll be saying next the place is haunted.”

“It is haunted by some sadness, some misfortune. The shadow passed over me.”

She drew herself up. Her eyes gleamed. “I’ll not be put off my intentions. I never did believe in pre-sentiments. Nora, I’ll defy this one.”

## CHAPTER IV.

QUIET and subdued, Nora Callaghan followed her friend down the broad staircase, where faded and ancient tapestry still hung on the walls, down and into the great hall which they had already furnished in fancy, and so on to the terrace that lay before the curious pointed windows with their lancet panes. The view from here was magnificent, and the two girls stood side by side drinking in the glorious freshness and sunshine; the scents of fresh moist earth and late roses. Myrtle and trailing wistaria had climbed up the portals and window-frames; vine-like tendrils swayed in the breeze, and amidst the thick ivy birds had nested and sheltered for long untroubled years.

Gradually the shadow of that strange presentiment faded. The natural joyousness of youth responded to the call of Nature. Once more the light talk rippled, the girlish laughter sounded. The next thing was to explore the grounds, which sloped gradually down to the river. Here they discovered an old boat-house and a dilapidated punt.

“We must have a boat,” said Lyle. “I learnt to row last summer when we were at Colwyn Bay. An old fisherman taught me.”

“How lovely!” exclaimed Nora, with rapture. “You’ll teach me too, won’t you, darling?”

“Of course.” Then she laughed softly. “‘Thy people shall be my people and my ways thy ways.’ There’s an appropriate misquotation for you. And now I suppose we had better return. It will be dad’s luncheon time, and I promised to be there and give him the program of necessary alterations.”

“Tell him to have workmen from Dublin, or you’ll be a year waiting to get in,” said Nora. “You’re bringing your own furniture, are you not?”

“All the old things—oak, pictures, silver, books. But we shall require a good deal more.”

“How lovely it will be, choosing and buying and arranging it! Your father is such an old dear. He lets you do just what you like.”

“Oh, but his taste is perfect. He won’t let me get anything unsuitable. He wants the Hermitage to be semi-mediæval.”

Then they beckoned the waiting Phelim, and remounting their horses, rode back to the town.

“You won’t be far from police supervision,” said Nora, pointing with her whip to the chimneys of the Gray Lodge, as they showed through the trees. “That is where Mr. Standish lives.”

Lyle’s eyes followed the direction indicated with some curiosity.

“I feel rather interested in that man,” she remarked.

“You are sure to see him soon,” said Nora. “He is always about. In any case, there is Tuesday coming. Mrs. O’Neil’s little parties are delightful; she is the soul of hospitality and kindness. She is very popular hereabouts.”

“Any history?”

Nora laughed. “Ah! I see you are catching it. Yes, there is a history. A bad husband who ran away and died abroad. An only son also dead; drowned in this very river, Lyle. Poor woman, she has had her troubles, they say. However, she seems jolly enough now. She’s of very good family. She was a Miss Brady, of Riverstown. She calls herself Mrs. Brady O’Neil formally. . . . Oh, my dear, here is Mr. Standish. Shall I introduce you, or just pass on?”

“No, don’t stop.”

In an aftertime, dark with horrors and heavy with trouble as yet unguessed, Lyle Orcheton remembered that her first instinct with regard to this man had been one of avoidance—her next, one of distrust: and yet as she cantered easily past and met the quick flash of his dark blue eyes, she confessed to herself she had never seen so handsome a face.

A bow from Nora, a brief “Good morning, Miss Callaghan,” and he had passed them.

A blushing face drooped consciously before the gaze of two questioning eyes.

“Ah, Nora,” said the English girl gently, “has the romance begun, my dear?”

The blush faded as quickly as it had come.

“Nonsense!” she said petulantly. “Why, I scarcely know him.”

Lyle shook her graceful head. “Juliet knew nothing of Romeo; yet she gave him herself, her life.”

“I should not be quite so ready to part with either as that heroine of Shakspeare’s.”

“Irish people are full of romance. It is an inheritance of your country—your clime—your history. He is wonderfully handsome,” she added irrelevantly.

Nora laughed. “I told you that. I’m glad you agree with me.”

“All the same,” continued Lyle gravely, “he awoke a sort of ‘I do not like thee, Dr. Fell,’ instinct on my part.”

“In that second? Nonsense, Lyle? You hardly looked at him.”

“Yet I could describe him accurately. Features delicately correct; eyes dark blue, full lids inclined to droop; straight nose, almost too fine; and lips heavy and full-colored. Cruel lips, Nora. The dark mustache has a duty to perform; it keeps their secret. He would be a tyrant if opportunity offered, and—I would never trust him.”

“It’s quite impossible you can read a person’s character in a single glance,” said Nora petulantly.

“Quite. I only theorize, of course. I am open to persuasion—yours or Mr. Standish’s—that I have misread him. Now let us have a gallop along this road. It’s too good to lose.”

As events turned out, there came no opportunity for an introduction to Jasper Standish until the evening of Mrs. O’Neil’s party.

The two girls looked radiantly beautiful. Happy youth! that is self-sufficient in its own supreme possession—that can afford to laugh at Paris art and Pivet’s bloom! Some such thought crossed Belle O’Neil’s mind as she welcomed the two graceful young figures, and



remembered with a pang the days when Belle Brady had been the beauty and toast of her county.

She was still a fine-looking woman, a woman of ample charms, sparkling eyes, flashing teeth; kindly, good-humored, the soul of hospitality. But she saw the "light of other days" in these bright eyes and graceful figures, and gave an involuntary sigh as tribute to their memory.

"Well, my dears, I suppose it's not cards you'll care to sit down to. There's Miss Kelly, there, is kindly going to play some dance music for us; and the hall's all ready for you. Wait till I find you some partners. Nora, my dear, I think you know everyone. Ah! Mr. Standish, come here half a moment. Let me introduce you to our new neighbor, Miss Orcheton. You'll have a quadrille together to open the ball, won't you? Nora—oh, you don't know my nephew! He's only arrived to-day from India. Sick leave, he says; not that his looks pity him, but that's the voyage. Derrick, this is Miss Callaghan, of the Bank House; and this Miss Orcheton, whose father's your tenant at the Hermitage. Now you look after them, and see they don't want for partners. I'll have my hands full when the cards are started. We're desperate gamblers here, you must know, Miss Orcheton—oh, shocking! But it's life, bless you, and where'd we be without a little pleasant excitement sometimes? It keeps us young, anyway."

Lyle and Nora had received and returned their respective introductions to this running commentary. When Mrs. O'Neil's voice at last ceased, Lyle was conscious of an offered arm, and found herself walking

down the brilliantly-lighted drawing-room by the side of the handsome County Inspector.

Yet all the time she was thinking of a sad and delicate-looking face, out of which two melancholy dark eyes had looked eagerly, almost anxiously, back to her own. It was the face of Derrick Mallory, the past owner of the Hermitage, the man whom she had heard of as spendthrift and gambler, and hero and martyr alternately. And it was his house that would be her home, and over his mortgaged acres she would roam at will. Here was a ready-made interest about him. She wished he had spoken, but a grave bow and that look of pardonable curiosity had been his only response to their introduction.

Meanwhile Jasper Standish was claiming her ear, and inquiring how she liked Ireland.

"I liked it long before I thought of living in it," she answered. "It was my enthusiasm that induced my father to take the Hermitage. I used to come over on visits to Miss Callaghan before they settled at Rathfurley. We were schoolfellows, you know."

"So I heard from Miss Callaghan," he answered.

His voice was pleasant, without very much accent, Lyle glanced at him, and found Nora's admiration excusable. He was even handsomer in evening dress than she had thought him at their first meeting.

"I am staying with her while the Hermitage is being put into order," she said.

"Miss Orcheton, do you know Ireland at all? Do you suppose that important fact hasn't been in the mouth of every gossoon and every gossiping old woman

since you and your luggage arrived at the railway station?"

She laughed. "Yes, I ought to have known that. You are a notable nation of gossips, Mr. Standish."

"Indeed, and we are. No need to tell me that. I'm glad to see you can ride, Miss Orcheton. There's some pretty decent hunting here in the season. I'll be proud to give you a lead across a bit of Irish country, if I may."

She drew herself up somewhat stiffly. "Thank you, but I have never hunted yet. I hardly think I shall care to do so."

"Not care!" His heavy lids upraised themselves in genuine astonishment. "Oh! you can't mean that. Why, 'tis the grandest thing in the world. You'll care fast enough once you try it."

"I think the quadrille is forming," she said evasively. "Shall we take our places?"

If Jasper Standish rode as well as he danced, and sang as well as he talked, she wondered no longer at his popularity.

He claimed a waltz after the quadrille, and then put his name down on her program for a couple more later in the evening. He had done his best to interest her. He had come here to-night with that special purpose. But used as he was to easy conquests, he could not read through this girl's reserve, or meet without flinching the scrutiny of her grave eyes. She made him feel uncomfortable and conscious, and he did not like the sensation. When he was away from her he watched her, and the proud poise of her head, the grace of her slender form, the serious softness of her deep-

fringed eyes affected him as the sparkling beauty of his own countrywomen had never done.

She attracted universal attention and admiration, as was only natural when to youth and beauty, and that most expressive Irish definition "style," was added a rumor of heiress-ship. The only child of a wealthy Englishman, and one foolish enough to take an Irish property, well, it was small wonder if the young bachelors were advised to "be keeping an eye on her."

Nora watched her friend approvingly. Her nature held no such paltry feeling as jealousy, and besides, they were such different styles that it was unlikely they would ever be rivals. Nora was engaged for every dance, but Lyle preferred withholding her program.

"I like to watch you all," she said to Nora, who argued against sitting out when a floor was perfect, and partners numerous, and the night but young.

"I am enjoying myself excessively. Don't you worry about me," she added. And Nora tripped off, wondering at so singular a taste, for dancing and gambling are in the Irish blood, and to refuse the one and avoid the other seems an inexplicable proceeding.

Lyle watched her and Jasper Standish waltzing, and drew her own conclusions. The girl's happy face and shy, sweet smile spoke with translatable eloquence. The man was less easy to read.

It was in one of these moments of observation that a figure approached her, and a voice unlike most of those she had heard that night requested a dance as a

favor. She looked up, and saw Derrick Mallory standing before her.

She handed him her program.

“I thought I saw you going into the card-room,” she said, and then flushed scarlet at self-betrayal. For it was foolish enough to have watched him—without confessing she had done so.

“I went to pass away the time till I might claim this,” he said. “I have not danced yet.”

She looked up then, and met the eyes whose melancholy had so appealed to her. His speech was a little odd, and its veiled compliment rather annoyed her. She put compliments down as poor coinage, which men offer to the presupposed vanity of women.

“What a waste of time and good music!” she said lightly.

“You were not dancing. I found myself wondering what you could be thinking of, sitting in that remote corner and watching those romps so attentively. Our dancing is rather of the fast and furious type, isn’t it? Some one has said of us we can be anything but dignified. I think that’s right. We Irish throw too much zest into everything.”

“And we English too little,” she said. “I rather envy that capacity for ‘letting oneself go.’ It must add a great deal to your enjoyment.”

“I suppose it does. Shall we begin? I’m not in very good form. It’s a long time since I danced. I’ve been envying Standish there. He’s a splendid waltzer.”

She was silent. She had leant herself to the swinging ease of his step, the firm clasp of his arm. The air of the Soldaten-Lieder waltz was in her ears, and some-

thing vague and strange and delightful set this dance apart from all those that had preceded it. He, too, looked down at the shining head, with its glittering coils of hair, the color coming and going in the fair cheek, and felt suddenly that life had changed, and the word "woman" had become a personality for the first time in his life.

## CHAPTER V.

“HAS the fated fairy prince put in an appearance yet?” asked Nora laughingly. The two girls were sitting by their bedroom fire, brushing out loosened tresses in that semi-abandonment of dressing-gown hours so dear to feminine friendship.

It was three weeks after Mrs. O’Neil’s dance, and in those weeks there had been scarcely a day that Derrick Mallory had not met them in walk or ride, or dropped in at afternoon tea-time in the autumn dusk, excused by some message from his aunt, who saw a pretty bit of match-making ready to hand.

Lyle brushed the shining tresses more vigorously  
“Why do you ask?”

“For the very good and sufficient reason that two and two make four—if one chooses to count. There can be little doubt of the attraction that brings a certain gentleman to the Bank House so often, or makes him so attentive to Sir Anthony, whom by rights he should regard as an interloper. That’s what we generally do. Sell our heritage to a stranger, and then hate him forever after for obligin gus with his money to stave off impending ruin.”

“You don’t suppose that Mr. Mallory takes anything but ordinary polite interest in us—in me?” questioned Lyle, as she busied herself over a parting that seemed particularly difficult to make.

“Oh, of course not. Ordinary interest is just the

sort of thing that brings a man out all weathers, that makes a daily meeting imperative, and hothouse flowers and fruit a quite trifling attention."

"My dear Nora——"

"My sweetest Lyle, don't put on that serious face to me. It won't do, my dear. I've had too many experiences not to know the real thing when I see it. Derrick Mallory fell in love with you the first night he saw you at his aunt's. I never saw a more hopeless case. Why, he doesn't even seem to know any other girl exists when you're in the room!"

The cheek that was plainly visible between the soft waves of hair wore a very becoming flush now.

"Nora, do you really think——"

"My dear, I do. And any one must be blind who can't see that the man adores you. Of course, you disguise your feelings better. That is why I asked is it a case of the fairy prince—at last?"

"How can I tell?" said the girl softly. "A few weeks are such a short time—to mean all one's life."

"Yes," said Nora, with sudden gravity. "Short enough to be long, if one isn't sure. I think you might be sure, Lyle. Derrick Mallory is so different from most of the men we've met; so earnest—so true. Neither of you take life lightly."

"He is—just what you say. But, Nora, there's never been anything—not a word that I—that any one could interpret as meaning more than friendliness. Naturally, he takes an interest in us because of the Hermitage; but that's all."

"Well, it may be all at present, but it won't be all much longer."



Lyle sighed softly. "I am very well content," she said. "I don't want to have to decide. I couldn't dream of leaving my father for—well, for years to come. And you see, Derrick has to return to India."

"Yes, in six months, worse luck! I wonder if anything will have changed for us, Lyle, before those six months?"

A momentary silence fell between them. The thoughts of both were busy with vague, sweet possibilities that neither could have put into words. Lyle Orcheton had not as yet dared to confess the secret of this growing attraction. She could not assure herself that it was love—the love that makes or mars life, that robs girlhood to enrich its after-womanhood; that is sweet, painful, incomprehensible; that steals in like a thief opposed to lawful authority, and hides its treasure with a guilty pride in its possession, at once shamed and proud and defiant. She only knew that Derrick Mallory was more to her than she had ever dreamt a man could become, and how or why he had become so in this brief space of time she was unable to say.

Also, another secret was troubling her, which loyalty forbade her to reveal, and which she marveled Nora had not discovered for herself. This was the subtle homage of Jasper Standish. So subtle was it, so delicately conveyed, that it rendered her defenseless. She could not oppose or resent what was never openly acknowledged. A hint, a look, a whisper, these were vague things to wake such uneasiness and dislike as she felt for this man, but they were about her like a breath—a cobweb—something to disdain or brush aside, yet impossible to avoid. Then, too, her father had taken

an unaccountable fancy for the man, and showed an equally unaccountable dislike to Derrick Mallory.

Lyle did not guess that his mind was being slowly poisoned against her undeclared lover by the man who coveted his place. Sir Anthony heard stories of wildness, extravagance, gambling habits, that filled him with alarm, and made him ostensibly cold and imperious to any friendly overtures on Derrick's part.

It was impossible for the young man not to feel this coldness and avoidance. A curt greeting, a frigid handshake, a scarcely disguised indifference to his presence, these gave chilling encouragement to his newly dawning hopes. Lyle, it is true, was always the same gracious and lovely divinity he had crowned as love of his life from the first hour of their meeting, but Lyle was young and rich, and her father's idol. He could not press a suit which that father seemed bent on discouraging.

So matters looked black for the prince and princess of Nora's fairy tale, and her concern and interest in them perhaps helped to blind her to the undercurrent that was at work in her own affairs,

That special night they talked more gravely than they had yet done, drawn together by some prescience of dawning trouble that each recognized for the other.

"Do you know," asked Lyle at last, "if Derrick Mallory is really very poor? Father says he is, and also that he is deeply in debt. I wish——" she stopped abruptly, but the sympathy in the eyes so near her own, unlocked her lips. "Oh! Nora, I feel that father does not like him. I wish he did. He seems to be unac-

countably prejudiced against him. Why, I cannot imagine."

Nora drew the lovely head, with its fleece of golden locks, against her shoulder.

"Dear," she said, "I didn't want to discourage you, but I have noticed the same thing. Sir Anthony, who is so genial and kind to every one, is unaccountably distant to poor Derrick. He was almost rude to him yesterday. If I were you, I think I should ask the reason. Perhaps he fears losing you: it may be jealousy of a new rival. He has been the "only one" so long. My old dad is more philosophic. He has never taken my flirtations seriously to heart. He knows he will have to lose me some day."

"Oh, I could not ask him?" exclaimed Lyle. "It would look so—so strange. I must only hope that time will overcome this prejudice. There can be no real reason for it. Have you heard any stories to—his discredit?"

That pronoun gave away the situation most innocently. Nora smiled under the veil of hair she was curling and twisting with idle fingers.

"It depends," she said archly, "on what you consider discredit. He did gamble a good deal—once. Long ago that was, before he went out to India. Of course we know nothing of his life out there. But then, what do girls ever know of men's lives? We have to take them on trust. Our own instincts are all we have to guide us. No wonder marriage is a lottery, as they say. Who can tell if it's a prize or a blank they're drawing until it's too late to change!"

"And love—what of that?"

“It is a dream in a sleep, I often think. And it lasts just so long as no one wakes—the dreamer.

Lyle was silent. She was standing on the threshold of life; standing, waiting, holding out hopeful hands to some beautiful dream-god in the land of shadows beyond. But where he might lead her and what she was to find, when the light of day should sweep the shadows away and show her that land beyond, she knew no more than a child knows.

For this is Life. A dream first, then a fever and delirium peopled with phantasies, then a cold, empty space in which we blindly grope, praying dumbly for a little love, a little peace, a little rest, ere we sink back again into the shadows whence we came.

\* \* \* \* \*

Their talk that night drew the girls still closer together; wakened in each heart something deeper and stronger than ordinary girlish friendship.

The first hint of trouble is always a test to any nature. It has to face the experience that others have tasted and found bitter; it shrinks involuntarily from the ordeal, and turns eagerly to any sympathy.

Into the charmed circle of these young lives had penetrated the first chill breath of such trouble. They clung to each other with a vague fear that was not to be explained, but of which they were conscious. They could not put it into words—yet. But the time was not far off when words would do little to lessen it.

Lyle sat on for long after Nora had left her; sat on, her eyes gazing into the fire, her chin resting on her hand, seeing in glowing ember and leaping flame a

hundred fanciful pictures. And always among them moved one figure, and always, looking back at her, were two eyes, very tender, very earnest, very sad. And as they met her gaze she could feel her heart beating with a strange mixture of joy and fear.

“He does care!” she whispered. “Oh! I know that, by what I feel myself. And yet there is something—something that holds him back, that seals his lips. Oh! I wish I knew! I wish I knew! I do not think I should be afraid.”

## CHAPTER VI.

THE County Inspector sat in his little office study, gazing with moody brows at the rows of figures in a leathern pocket-book. His handsome face was not pleasant to look at. He shut the book with a vicious snap, and tossed it into a drawer of his writing-table, which he shut and locked.

His official room was in the barracks; but here at home he reserved this little dingy study for other sorts of business. It was only furnished with a leather-topped writing-table, some chairs, an old mahogany book-case filled with musty volumes on law and sport, while a gun rack and some hunting-crops ornamented the walls. Above the mantelshelf was a small oval mirror in a wide gilt frame, and below it was a medley of pipes, cigar cases, and tobacco jars.

As he turned from the table and began slowly to pace the small room, his eyes caught the reflection of his face and its expression in the glass. He paused abruptly, scanning lowered brows and somber eyes, and the cruel mouth which the soft mustache but half concealed.

“What a murderous brute I look!” he muttered.  
“Not much there to charm a girl’s eyes.”

He rested his elbows on the low mantel, and gazed long and earnestly at that face of his, of whose every good point he was fully conscious. He was an excessively vain man, and numberless feminine conquests

had but added fuel to that glowing fire of personal self-appreciation. Vanity and avarice were indeed the ruling passions of his nature, though he called the one pride and the other ambition. After a long and earnest scrutiny he again turned from the glass and commenced that restless pacing.

“I’m in a cursed hole, there’s no doubt about it,” so ran his reflections. “It’s not only the girl, but the money. Two thousand—and only another month to get it! If I could pay off half, they’d renew; but where on earth am I to lay hands on a thousand? It might as well be fifty! Devil take my cursed luck! When I backed Shamrock, I thought he was as sure as the bank, and——”

He stood quite still, as if some chance word had set him off on a new train of reflection. But the reflection could not have been pleasant, for cold drops of sweat started from his brow and his lips twitched and paled.

“Powers above! I never thought of that. It might be done. Of all living men I’d be the last to come under suspicion. My position gives me the run of the place as well as the investigation afterwards. And I could always pay it back again, once I was straight. Sir Anthony’s rich. The girl will have everything. I could win her over, though she’s no great liking for me as yet. But Nora——”

Again his brow darkened.

“To give her the go-by, after as good as making love to her—well, she won’t be the first girl who’s been thrown over. She’ll soon console herself. If only she’d keep a silent tongue to the other. The devil’s in it with their friendliness. ‘As fond as two sisters,’

people say. A deal fonder, I'm thinking. Sisters can keep their own secrets friends can't—not women folk, that's the curse of it."

A light tap at the window startled him. He went forward and drew back the curtain. The night was very dark. A faint rain was falling.

"Is that you, Mickey?" he asked sharply

"It is, yer honor. I've a wurr'd for ye."

"Jump in then."

The lad obeyed, and vaulted lightly from sill to floor as if well used to the process.

"Well?" questioned Standish sharply.

"Yer honor told me to kape me ears open if ever wurr'd av Donovan's farm bein' sold came my way."

"Yes."

"Sure, thin, it's to be sold immaydiate, an' a man from Limerick's buyin' it. A rich draper who's tired av city life, an' mad to be a gintleman farmer. It's throe for ye, sir, as throe as Eve ate the little apples."

"How did you hear it?"

"I'm not goin' to say more thin yer payin' for," said the youth doggedly, his eyes glancing sideways at the handsome face before him. "There's at laste five shillings due to me now, an' divil a ha'penny I've seen av it. Whin I gets that, I'll be after tellin' ye more, maybe. It's meself has learnt the name av the purchaser, an' the day whin the money's to be paid over."

A curious gleam shot from Jasper Standish's eyes. He drew a handful of loose silver from his pocket and threw it on the table.

"Take that, and be d——d to you for a thief of the world! Now—go on."



The boy seized the money eagerly, and proceeded to tie it up in a ragged strip of handkerchief which he took from his throat.

“It’s the whole bizness yer honor’s wantin’?”

“No—cut it short. As long as the selling is decided I only want to know the date, and how the purchase money is to be paid.”

“Sure there’ll be grand work over that, what with lawyers an’ witnesses an’ all; an’ Donovan, he’s goin’ out to his son in Ameriky. He’ll be lookin’ out for a property there, so I’ve heard.”

“You’re quite sure about the farm?”

“Sure an’ sartin’ be me own four fingers.<sup>1</sup> I heard ivery wurrd av the matter by rayson av bein’ in Bartie Meagan’s public-house, an’ shammin’ slape whilst they was makin’ the bargain. Mighty close it was to be kept, so they said. Divil a wurrd to be breathed to the naybors. They thought ’twas heavy wid the drink I was, yer honor, an’ never took no manner av notice. But ye may take me wurrd, the bargain’s struck, an’ sorra a way out av it.”

“That will do,” said Standish quietly. “Now be off with yourself and keep your tongue in your mouth, or it will be the worse for you. If you get drunk and blab before I give you leave, there’s that poaching affair waiting for you. Remember I’m only staying my hand.”

“Sure yer honor’s not manin’ to be hard on a poor lad that’s thrown on the wurrld, like meself. I’ve sarved ye well, an——”

“That will do, I tell you. Go!”

<sup>1</sup> The sign of the cross.

If Jasper Standish had seen the vindictive face that looked back at the window a moment later, and heard the muttered curse that followed it, he might not have felt quite so easy respecting this half-witted tool of his. But he was blissfully unconscious that Mickey Doolan had an independent mind of his own, and was becoming deeply resentful of the treatment he received from his employer.

“Now what’s his rayson for wantin’ to know about Donovan’s farm unbeknown to Donovan?” ruminated the boy as he picked his way home over fields and puddles through the now fast-falling rain. “’Twould have been mighty aisy to put his question to thim as is consarned in the matter instead of setting me list’nin’ an’ papin’ at kayholes an’ sich like. But, indade, it’s the quare ways Mister Inspector has wid him. Now I’m jist axin’ meself if this bit av information will be av any sarvice to the English lady? Maybe she could make some sinse out av it, an’ if there’s another half-crown to be got for that same, Mickey’s the boy to git it. I’ll jist be hangin’ about the Bank convaynient tomorrow morning, an’ see if I can git a wurrd av her at all. I’m none so fond av Mister Standish that I’d mind sarvin’ him a thrick wan av these days. It’s many a cuff an’ a kick an’ a curse I owe him, an’ I’m not appreshiating thim sort av wages. It’s a fule he thinks I am, but there’s fules as is wiser than thim as thinks thimselves wise.”

And to the tune of this philosophy he got home and ate his supper, regardless of his father’s curses and his mother’s laments over the “vagabone” of the family.

As for Standish, once the boy had gone he drew a

chair up to the fire, poured out a glass of whisky, lit his pipe, and indulged in reflection.

What ideas ran riot in his brain, what plot weaved itself from such seemingly important information as Mickey Doolan's, were not betrayed by outward sign. His face grew dark and evil. He drank deeply, and only seemed more morose and evil-looking with each replenished glass. It was close on midnight before he rose and extinguished the lamp.

"A month!" he said, and glanced at the drawer which held that hateful heap of obligations. "Well, many things happen in a month. I might even find myself a rich man—in a month."

He stumbled up to bed and threw himself down, dressed as he was, and fell into the heavy, senseless sleep of intoxication.

It was well Nora Callaghan could not see him then. And yet had she done so, the pang that would have rent her girlish heart might have cured that girlish infatuation, and saved her from worse sorrow and worse suffering in the time to come.

As days glided into weeks, the staff of workpeople at the Hermitage proved that wonders could be done, even in a country averse to the folly of making unnecessary haste over anything while a year holds 365 days.

The rooms grew beautiful and habitable. The grounds were cleared of all encumbering weeds and brambles, the lawn was smoothly rolled, the walks freshly graveled, the straggling roses pruned and trellised, and all the wealth of autumn flowers left to bloom in beds and borders.

“We shall be in before Christmas, after all,” said Lyle, gayly, to her father, as they paid their almost daily visit of direction and supervision. “The servants could be here next week when the furniture comes. The house looks perfectly livable now. A few good fires is all it wants. Our rooms are quite ready. We shall only really need the hall and your study at first.”

“You seem very anxious to get in, child,” said Sir Anthony, smiling at her eager face. “I must say, I scarcely expected such satisfactory results. If you are sure the rooms aren’t damp, I don’t mind how soon we settle. The hotel is not very comfortable, and we are trespassing too long on the hospitality of the Calaghans. When shall I send for the servants?”

They were to have their old butler and cook from England, and Lyle was to engage others in the town. After some discussion, it was arranged that the next week would bring the house into sufficient order for the domestics to put in an appearance, and after informing the foreman of this decision, and begging him to proceed with the remaining work as speedily as possible, the father and daughter rode home.

As they passed the Gray Lodge, Jasper Standish was coming out, also mounted. Sir Anthony greeted him cordially, and told him of his recent decision.

“I’m delighted with the house,” he went on. “It didn’t look very promising at first, but upon my word I think I’ve got a bargain.”

“There are a good many similar bargains to be had in this distressful country,” said Standish, keeping his little blood mare close to Lyle’s chestnut. She had

scarcely looked at him. He felt piqued and annoyed.

Her coldness added zest to his pursuit of her. It was new to him to meet with repulse from anything feminine.

“The sooner we are neighbors, the happier for me,” he said, softly, in a little averted ear.

It was not turned to him in any sort of response, and the girl's eyes remained fixed on the road before her. She was never so cold or so disdainful as when Jasper Standish was by her side. There seemed to her something treacherous in his pretended homage, his ever-ready compliment. The very slightest touch of the whip sent the pretty chestnut curvetting restlessly.

“Heartsease isn't used to another horse so near,” said Lyle, falling into a quick trot, which brought her ahead of her companions.

“Yet I've seen one horse as close to her side as I was, and she showed no displeasure,” muttered Jasper savagely.

The only answer to this ill-bred remark was the changing from trot to gallop. He had perforce to stay beside Sir Anthony.

“Let her go ahead,” said that gentleman; “it doesn't matter. My sober old gray has kept the little mare at a footpace almost. I'm glad I've met you, Standish. Why, we shall be next-door neighbors, so to speak. You must drop in whenever you can. A hand at cards, or a little music, you know.”

“You are most kind. I needn't say how I shall value such neighbors. By the bye, Sir Anthony, what's

happened to young Mallory? I heard he'd gone to London. Is that so?"

"He's not here, at all events," said Sir Anthony, "And I for one am not sorry. A man with such a history behind him is not safe company; and scoundrels are generally fascinating to women, especially young and romantic women. I am just beginning to realize a father's responsibilities, Standish. They're pretty heavy, let me tell you."

"But Miss Orcheton——"

"Oh, Lyle is good and dutiful and loving enough, I grant; but when a man's getting old, and realizes that he'll be left in the lurch for sake of some young sprig with a handsome face and empty pockets, why,—he's apt to regret that Fate has left him the double responsibility of a widower's lot."

"You're not a bit too old to change that lot, and halve the responsibility," laughed Jasper encouragingly.

"Oh, my dear sir, thank you—no. That's not in my line at all. A man at my time of life doesn't take kindly to new faces, new rules, new ways. I'm perfectly contented as I am, if only Lyle didn't give me a twinge of anxiety now and again. I'm not ambitious for her to make a grand match. I'd sooner she made a happy one. But it's a terrible thing for a girl to sacrifice herself to an infatuation."

"I hope you've no reason to fear such a thing on Miss Orcheton's part?"

"Not positively. Only Callaghan gave me a hint, and I didn't quite like it. A rather constant visitor; and it certainly wasn't Miss Nora he came after.

That's one reason I'll be glad to have my own house, and choose my own company."

With all Sir Anthony's good-nature and absent-mindedness, there was mingled a little strain of obstinacy. He had taken it into his head that the quondam owner of the Hermitage was not a desirable acquaintance. He had come into property, and gambled it away. That was how he looked at Derrick Mallory's position and misfortunes. He never took into consideration that the said property had been heavily encumbered at the time of such inheritance, that it had been quite beyond Derrick's means to keep up the place, or play the *rôle* of landed proprietor where so much would be expected of him. The old baronet only looked at the main facts of the case, and ignored all those that served to excuse it.

The last thing on earth he would have wished was that Lyle should become attached to what he termed "a penniless spendthrift"; and the fact that she was becoming interested in that young man was quite enough to alarm him. The sudden departure of Derrick to London was, to him, a very fortunate coincidence. He only wished he might be detained there until they were fairly settled at the Hermitage. It would be easier then to show him that his acquaintance was not desirable.

Jasper Standish gathered these facts with little difficulty. It seemed to him that for once Fate was playing into his hands, and smoothing the path on which his feet were set. Before him gleamed the star of ambition. A wealthy marriage was all he needed. He saw himself as magistrate and landowner;

a wealthy man ; a man of social and political importance.

Nothing stood between him and the realization of such ambition but a girl's whim. Stay! Yes—one thing. He thought of the figures in that pocketbook. He thought of the hours of grace growing less and less. He must prove to his creditor that he was soon to be the husband of an heiress, or furnish himself with means to pay this claim.

His brow darkened. He almost hated the old man babbling so cheerfully at his side ; but more than all he hated the girl who rode there in her insolent grace before his moody eyes—the girl who was so necessary to his schemes, and had that day thrown at his feet the glove of feminine defiance.



## CHAPTER VII.

A FEELING at once hurt and proud, yet holding depths of unsuspected pain, was asserting itself in Lyle Orcheton's heart. To have received such silent worship, such unmistakable devotion as Derrick Mallory had shown, and then be left alone, facing an unexplained absence, an unuttered confession—it was a trying ordeal.

In later years a woman learns to be less sensitive than in the first dawn of exacting youth. Her dreams are less crystalline, her imagination less poetic. She has suffered disillusion but learnt patience. She no longer rushes off at a tangent because her lover has omitted a duty or committed a trifling fault. Absence is excusable; silence may possess virtues of discretion. She can afford to wait for explanation instead of flying into a whirlpool of emotion, or a cataract of tears by way of relief. But this wisdom comes only with years and knowledge and a wider comprehension of poor humanity's limitations.

It had not come yet to Lyle Orcheton or to Nora Callaghan. They were both suffering in their respective fashions, and the fact of such suffering shut the door of confidence on feelings that had seemed delightful in the first dawn of acknowledgment. They pretended to be as light of heart, as full of enjoyment, as

eager in anticipation, as they had once succeeded in being without need of pretence.

“If he is not what I thought him, well—let him go!” was the secret thought of each, and in a hundred little words and ways they conveyed to each other that after all men were absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of life: not absolute heroes of romance. It might be possible to place them on too lofty a pedestal, dower them with too rich a burden of virtues.

But each young heart ached for that assurance, and smiles were less frequent and the laughter held a forced note of mirth, instead of its former spontaneous ring.

There is nothing harder to act than happiness when it has fled—unless, indeed, it be sorrow before it is realized. But sympathy can help the latter, whereas nothing—neither sympathy, nor good fortune, nor friendship—can create anything but a false model of happiness, once the real thing is destroyed. Yet they played their parts very bravely, and no one guessed that life was temporarily out of tune for both.

Sir Anthony was engrossed with artistic designs; with burrowing and searching for quaint and old-fashioned furnishing. He saw no change in Lyle. If anything, she seemed more eager, more talkative, more brilliant than of old: a still more charming and sympathetic companion than she had always been.

He was blissfully content. It seemed to him that he had found a very pleasant anchorage for his failing years. He enjoyed the genial companionship of Tom Callaghan, with that appreciation of qualities in another that we ourselves lack, which is an excellent basis for friendship. To play chess or take a hand at

cards of evenings with the genial bank manager and his cronies, to listen to his Irish stories, to drink his excellent Irish whisky, had become quite an established custom now. The one drawback to his life at the Hermitage would be the greatly increased distance that would separate him from the town, and would render these evenings occasional instead of nightly pleasures. However, he would not mar present enjoyment by anticipating future abstinence. Tom Callaghan, as he was generally called, had introduced him to many of the neighboring gentry, and Mrs. O'Neil had done the same with regard to the county.

However, Sir Anthony found no society so much to his taste as that of Tom Callaghan himself, and his old crony and schoolmate, Dr. Kelly, who lived in a quaint red-brick house in the middle of Slancy Street, and was the most popular as well as the most skilful practitioner in the district. "Doctor Dan," every one called him. Indeed, so universal was the cognomen that Sir Anthony also found himself employing it.

Dr. Dan was a true son of Erin, rollicking, good-natured, fond of a spree, and fonder still of a good story. His wife was somewhat of an invalid, and rarely went from home; but Dr. Dan was free of every house in the county or district under his charge, and the very sight of his beaming jovial face and merry blue eyes was "as good as physic any day," to quote popular opinion.

It wanted but two days of that month to which Jasper Standish was looking forward with growing desperation. His affairs had not improved in one particular. He had not been able to meet or secure Lyle Orcheton's

attention, and he dared not ask her father for a loan under present circumstances.

He was spending the evening at the Bank House, having been invited by the manager to drop in and take a hand at whist with Sir Anthony and Dr. Dan. In the hopes of a *tête-à-tête* with Lyle he accepted.

The two girls, however, retreated to their own sanctum as soon as the cards appeared. There was some feminine mystery of dressmaking going forward, with which Jane Grapnell was helping her young mistress. They had been invited to a dance on New Year's Eve at Mrs. Brady O'Neil's, which necessitated alterations in previously worn gowns, far too fresh and pretty to be discarded, yet labelled with that terrible "worn before" which seems as "Anathema marantha" to minds feminine.

At ten o'clock Mr. Callaghan announced that he must break up the whist party.

"The truth is," he said, "I'm a bit behind with some work. My clerk's had a sharp attack of pleurisy and I've had to do everything single-handed. They're to send me another from the head-office to-morrow. So for my credit's sake I must get the work ready to-night. A couple of hours will do it. This was market day too, and I have a lot of money to lock up in the safe and see to. That fellow Donovan, who sold Ballygar Farm, would insist on cash payment and kept me until after closing time, counting it out and examining it like an old woman, till I was sick of the fellow."

"Donovan? Oh, yes! He's off to America, I'm told," said Dr. Dan. "He kept that little business of

his mighty secret. A queer close file he is, though. I suppose he made a good thing out of it, Tom ?”

“He did, indeed, and he was as frightened as a child about his money. Didn’t dare take it home for fear he’d be robbed and murdered. There’s a lot of queer characters about just now, he says.”

Jasper Standish was bending over the fire to light a spill for his pipe. He kept his back turned to the speakers, but a curious steely glitter came into his eyes.

“So there are!” he said. “A troublesome gang who’re giving me a lot of bother. They seem to be everywhere at once. There were three robberies last week.”

“Well, at all events, old Donovan’s money’s safe enough,” laughed Tom Callaghan.

“Ah! then, Tom, if it’s work that’s claiming you I’ll be off,” said Dr. Dan. “I as good as promised to look in on young Sullivan’s wife. Twins to-day. I have to pass their shop on my way home. I suppose the young ladies are after their beauty sleep. Faith! they’re wise. Good night, Sir Anthony. May I never have worse luck or a better partner than I’ve had to-night. No, Tom. Don’t you be coming to the door. It’s a devil of a night. Dark as Erebus and raining fit to drown cats. It’s glad I am I haven’t your journey before me, Jasper, my boy! Good night all!”

Sir Anthony rose, and made his adieux as cordially but less noisily. Tom Callaghan escorted him to the door. The hotel was scarcely five minutes’ distance.

The night was all and worse than Dr. Dan had declared it. A storm of rain and sleet blew in as the door opened. The street without was dark and full of

pools and ruts. The lamps made faint blurs and shadows that were scarcely deserving of such a description as "illuminating."

The bank manager closed the door with a shiver and came back to the dining-room. Jasper Standish was still in the same position, gazing into the fire.

"Come and have another glass of whisky, Standish, before you face the elements," said his host genially. "Are you riding home to-night?"

"Yes. I left my mare at Moriarty's. She'd cast a shoe; and he promised to keep her there till I called."

"It's an awful night."

"Oh, I've got my mackintosh," he answered indifferently, as he poured out the whisky with a somewhat unsteady hand.

There was a curious look of repressed excitement about him, and he drank the copious libation of strong spirit at a draught. Tom Callaghan glanced at him with some wonder. He had never seen the cool, handsome Inspector do such a thing in all his previous experience.

"I was thinking, if you don't mind, Mr. Callaghan, that I'd like to go round with you and see that the—the premises are really secure," he said, as he put down his glass. "I've often thought that door opening into the lane was none too safe."

"You mean from my private room?"

"Yes."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear fellow! Safe as—as a bank, I was going to say. Come and see for yourself. It has bolts and chain."

“Burglars and desperadoes have made short work of such defenses before now, Mr. Callaghan.”

“Are you trying to frighten me?”

“Not at all. Only you may be sure that the news of all that money being lodged with you is well known. Donovan had his own fears, evidently. I’ll tell you what. I’ll send one of my men to keep special guard round the place. I must pass the barracks, you know, on my way home.”

“It’s very good of you, Standish, but, upon my word, it’s not the least bit necessary. This is not the first time, by a good many, I’ve had large sums of money lodged here. Besides—the safe would defy burglars. They can’t open it, and they certainly can’t remove it. However, you come along with me and I’ll prove your fears groundless. Oh! just one moment. I’ll see if the servants have gone up-stairs, and give the girls a hint not to be scared if they hear me in the dead hour of the night groping my way to bed.”

He laughed again and went out into the passage and then up the stairs. Jasper Standish heard his pleasant cheery voice speaking from the landing to Nora, and telling her he had to be in the Bank for a couple of hours. He heard, and his heart began to beat with quick, feverish throbs. His hands were so tightly clenched that the nails pressed into the palms and he was unconscious of the pain.

“Is it the devil that’s behind it all, or a stroke of luck for me?” he thought.

Then the brisk footsteps sounded on their return. The door opened.

“Now, Standish, I’m at your service. This way.”

“ Shall I put out the light ? ”

“ No, leave it. Every one's gone to bed. Maybe I'll need a drop of whisky when I come back. ”

*When I come back!* Jasper's heart stood still, then galloped on with quick, mad beats.

“ If you ever do ! ” he whispered.



## CHAPTER VIII.

A PAVED passage led from the house into the Bank. It was small and insignificant enough compared with its important brethren of London, or Cork, or Dublin. Behind the counter was the clerk's desk, and beyond that the manager's room, in which stood the safe secured to the floor. Mr. Callaghan put down the candle he carried, and then lit the gas. Outside the rain beat against the window, which was protected by iron bars.

"You'll find it cold here without a fire," said Jasper, glancing at the gray ashes in the grate.

"So I shall, my boy," said the manager ruefully. "I ought to have had it laid ready for lighting. No matter, I'll put my office coat on atop of this."

He went over to the peg on which hung a warm, thick coat of gray frieze, and took it down.

"I left the books here ready," he went on, approaching the table, "but first I'll lock away that money. You said you wanted to look at the fastenings, Standish. Do, while I'm at the safe. Then I'll let you out at the other door before I set to work."

"I—I suppose I could not help you?" hazarded Jasper.

"My dear fellow, every cobbler to his last. Book-keeping and petty cash accounts aren't learnt by instinct. I do hope that clerk of mine will pull round soon. He is such a smart fellow, and knows his busi-

ness thoroughly. What are you looking at? Nothing wrong about that window, is there?"

"A pane of glass cracked, that's all. Do you mind my having the candle here a second?"

"Not at all. Take it."

He passed it across the table, then took his keys out, and opened the drawer of his writing-table.

"Poor old Donovan!" he chuckled. "He was mighty frightened about this money of his. It's a good sum too. But there's no customer like your retired tradesman."

Jasper made no answer. He heard the jingle of the keys, the clink of coins in little leather bags, as Mr. Callaghan had put them in, the rustle of paper notes those dirty troublesome pound notes beloved of the Irish. A mist swam before his eyes. His hand shook so violently that the candle almost dropped. A swirl of rain and sleet beat against the windows. It sounded to him like a summons. If his brain would only clear—if he could only think of a plan. There lay the money so near. The very sum he needed to stave off ruin and exposure, and that damnable voice whispering in his ear—"Your chance at last!"

Should he take it? If he could frame any excuse to get Callaghan out of the room—but then he didn't know the right keys. And it would be known he had been there. No; that would not do. Was there no other way? Stun him suddenly—creep up behind him while he was at the safe. Yes, that was better. No fear of detection. The window? It was high up. It looked out on a small side-street or lane. No one could see. He cast a furtive glance at the white head

bending over the lock ; another second and it would be opened. A second ! His thoughts whirled. The mist was red now—red and thick, closing round him. The voice had changed. It was imperative. “ What do you fear ? Who will ever know ? ” it whispered. “ Who would ever suspect you ? Take your chance. You’ll never get such another.”

“ How am I to do it ? ” He had lost command of himself now. He seemed no longer Jasper Standish as he had known and thought of Jasper Standish, but a cold relentless evil soul, dealing out the last moments of a doomed life ; with no pity for its age, or its harmlessness, the suffering of others, the ruin to itself. He looked at the clock. How time had raced since the first chance words of this unconscious victim had fired a train of thought within his murderous breast !

Again that chink of the money. The manager was putting it away. If once the safe were locked he might never be able to open it. If——

There must be no “ if.” It was too late for scruples now. He turned. The mist cleared from his eyes ; he saw on the table a large file weighted with bills and papers. The hook was sharp.

A stride—a blow—a heavy fall. The hook had crashed through the skull of the unconscious man. He fell beside the open safe, the blood spouting up in a stream of crimson, dyeing the floor on which he lay.

\* \* \* \* \*

The calmness of desperation seized the murderer. Now the deed was done he must avoid all chance of suspicion. It must seem to have been a crime com-

mitted for sake of robbery—as it was. He put the little bags of gold and silver into his pockets, avoiding the notes in case of detection. Then he lowered the gas, and went over to the window. A pressure, and the broken pane yielded, the cold rain swept in. Next he tried the bars. One alone was loose and moved beneath his fierce strength. With a desperate effort he wrenched it from its place and laid it on the floor within the room.

Surely that was enough. The open safe, the scattered papers, told their own tale. Now he must get away and make good his story for to-morrow. There was no chance of discovery. He would call at the barracks and send a constable as special guard, telling him Mr. Callaghan was working late in the Bank to account for the light.

How clear his brain felt. How easy it was now to plot and plan. And how easy it would be to avert suspicion. He had only to offer his own evidence ready-made for the occasion. The resident magistrate was a harmless, convivial old gentleman, greatly addicted to hot punch and whist playing. There was nothing to fear from him.

Now to unlock the door and get away.

The door leading into the private portion of the Bank premises was closed but not locked. He debated a moment as to whether it was advisable to leave it so, or give the first discoverer in the morning the trouble of breaking it open.

Precaution was safer. He crossed over and locked it. Then he let down the chain and unfastened the stiff bolts of that other exit. It creaked horribly in

the stillness, as it swung back. Mr. Callaghan had rarely used it. Indeed there seemed no reason for its being there at all.

Standish did not think so apparently, as he crept out into the darkness and stood listening intently, his breath suspended, his ears strained to their utmost. All depended on this moment. Should any one be passing, should he be seen coming into the main thoroughfare from this passage, his careful schemes might yet be of no avail.

He drew his soft felt hat down over his brows, and turned up the collar of his mackintosh. The wind howled dismally through the dark street, the sky above was black and starless, the rain fell in straight close sheets, through which the fierce gusts scurried at intervals. It was an awful night. Little chance of any one being abroad whom necessity did not drive to it. Yet still he hesitated and listened.

Suddenly he started. What was that? A soft patter of bare feet echoing on the pavement. Would they pass or turn down here? They halted. His straining ears held every other sense submissive for one hateful moment. Then the patter continued down the street. They had not turned into the lane, where he crouched amidst the shadows dark and thick and ominous, as would his own fears be from this night forward.

The fox may escape pursuer by fleet foot and wary eye, the hunted beast may turn and rend its dauntless hunter, but to the human creature stained with crime and forever haunted by the phantom of discovery there is neither refuge nor defiance possible. The terror that pursues him from the first hour of his guilt is one that

eye cannot evade, nor foot outspeed. He can kill life but he cannot kill that terror of himself, and that threatened vengeance which is set by an invincible Power above men's deeds, so that let the world judge of them as it may, they shall never escape the doom they have recklessly challenged.

The day was to come when Jasper Standish would acknowledge this; when to have killed memory with one blow, as he had killed that harmless, kindly life, was the one boon he craved, and craved in vain.

\* \* \* \* \*

Early the next morning the Inspector was roused from a heavy sleep, the sleep of intoxication, by a loud knocking at his door. He opened bewildered eyes and gazed around. He had had bad dreams; his head ached, his mouth was dry and parched. What had he dreamt? What had happened? Half-dazed and scarcely awake, he lifted himself up and demanded the reason of the summons.

“Will yer honor make haste an’ come down?” said the voice of his old servant. “There’s two men from the barracks as is wantin’ to see ye immaydiately. It’s a terrible business. Murder, they sez.”

Murder! His face blanched. Was this his dream, or was the dream the result of a deed of desperation? How his head ached! What a fool he had been to drink so much. Just when coolness and skill would be required.

“I’ll be down in two minutes,” he called out, then sprang out of bed and looked at his clothes where they lay in a huddled heap.

On the cuff of his shirt was a crimson stain. He grew cold and sick as his eyes fell on it. Blood! Good heavens! how came it there? Why had he not noticed it before?

Muttering a savage oath he seized the shirt and thrust it into one of the drawers of his chest. He hurried on some garments and went downstairs to interview his men.

They were in his little study. One was the constable he had ordered to keep watch on the Bank as he passed the barracks on that mad gallop home, the previous night.

The story was soon told. The man had seen or heard nothing suspicious, and had been relieved on his beat at six o'clock. It was then pitch dark and still raining, but the wind had abated. He wondered that the light in the dining-room had been left burning all night, but thought that was the concern of the inmates. He had not gone down the lane, but once or twice had thrown the light of his "bull's-eye" into its silent darkness. The storm was so bad he had been thankful to shelter under the portico of the principal entrance between the intervals of his march to and fro.

The second man then took up the tale. He had only been up and down the street once, when the door of the private entrance opened, and a female figure ran out and signaled him. It was the housekeeper. She seemed agitated. She said she had gone into the dining-room and found the gas burning. It was so unlike her master's methodical habits that she remembered immediately his message to his daughter—he had some work to do, and would be in his office till midnight or

later. Thinking that perhaps he had fallen asleep she went down the passage and tried the communicating door. It was locked. Then, unable to control her uneasiness, she ran upstairs to her master's room. The door was ajar. She looked in. The room was empty, the bed undisturbed. Really alarmed now she rushed out to summon the policeman. He accompanied her to the door opening into the Bank premises. It was locked on the inside. He shook it, knocked at it in vain. It defied strength, and no notice was taken of his summons.

Jasper Standish made rapid notes in his pocket-book.

The housekeeper had then suggested trying the other door leading into the lane. They went there. He tried the handle, and, to his surprise, the door opened readily. They were in the manager's private office. One glance showed there had been a robbery. Papers were scattered about, chairs overturned, the safe open.

A scream from the housekeeper brought his eyes to the floor. She was kneeling down, supporting the head of her master. It was covered with blood. He was stiff and cold.

Then Standish spoke for the first time. "Dead?" he asked hoarsely.

"Murdered!" answered the constable.



## CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE scene met the eyes of the Inspector when he entered the Bank half an hour later. Already some whisper of disaster had spread through the town. A couple of policemen were standing in front of the building, and a crowd of people were jostling, pushing, questioning, and exclaiming in various keys of inquiry and horror.

In the office, where the constable had first discovered him, lay the body of the genial, kindly manager, who in popular parlance had been "iv'ry one's friend an' niver the hard wurrd for anybody." Alas! No word, hard or soft, would ever pass those silent lips again.

Dr. Dan, who had been summoned, was examining the wound. The sharp hook had pierced the brain. Death must have been instantaneous. He looked up as Standish entered.

"Good God! this is horrible!" he exclaimed. "To have left him last night jovial, laughing, cheery, and be summoned to see—this!"

It seemed in no way strange to him that the Inspector should look pale and unnerved, or shrink from touching that inanimate form. So few hours—and such a tragedy!

"It must have been done for robbery. Look!" continued the Doctor, pointing to the disordered room. "That's how it was found. Villain's work indeed.

See that broken window and the bar? There must have been a struggle. Well, that's your work, Standish. I suppose we can remove him now?"

"Yes, of course," said Jasper hoarsely, glancing around at the faces of the housekeeper, the young servant, and the "bhoys," who made up the establishment.

"I shall require you all as witnesses," he added sharply. "But first take the—body—away. Lay it on his bed. There will be an inquest, of course. Does his daughter know?" he asked suddenly.

"No, sir," said a quiet voice, unlike the brogue that was reveling in smothered gasps of horror round the room. The Inspector looked at the speaker. He saw a pale, set face, the dark fire of somber eyes, features rigid and impassive.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is Jane Grapnell. I am the housekeeper."

"You can't keep the matter from Miss Callaghan. She must know," he said. He remembered the woman's face. He had seen her sometimes on the occasion of his visits. "Break it as gently as you can."

He turned away. Why did the woman look at him so? And where had he seen a face resembling hers? She woke some unpleasant memory, but he could not trace it to its fountain-head—yet.

He busied himself with his note-book! Would they never remove that stiff and silent figure? He felt sick and faint, as his glance fell on the white face in its awful stillness, and the open eyes that seemed as those of an accuser.

He made a sign to one of his men. The women drew back. Dr. Dan lifted the white head, where the hair lay clotted and massed with oozing blood. The Inspector shuddered as he moved aside to let them pass. Not for untold gold could he have raised a hand to help in that ghastly task. His wild frenzy of blood-thirst and desperation had worn itself out. He was only conscious now of horror and of dread. A dull, numb sensation paralyzed his faculties; always before his sight floated that mist of blood.

He sank down on a chair and covered his eyes with a shaking hand. He tried to pull himself together. An awful ordeal lay before him. It would never do to betray weakness or fear. Why did that woman stare at him so? What was she waiting for?

As the sad procession moved out of the room he seemed to regain his composure. He took down a description of the room, the state it was in, the instrument with which the deed had been committed, the names of the servants. Then he shut up his book, and approached the safe. The keys were in the lock; some notes and some small bags lay upon the shelves; He closed and sealed the door, and did the same with the drawer of the writing-table.

As he finished, Dr. Dan returned. The Inspector dismissed the servants and the policemen, then turned to the distressed and anxious practitioner.

“You saw him last,” said Dr. Dan. “My God! To think of our all walking coolly away, and this—to happen!”

“I left him here,” said Standish calmly. “I examined the fastenings, and spoke about that window

being unsafe. He only laughed. There are his books, you see. I wonder if he did any work?"

"It was that cursed Donovan business," muttered the Doctor. "He was an avaricious old miser, and every one disliked him. You may be sure it got about that he had brought his money here. There were plenty to watch him. But—the devils!—to take this honest, harmless life! By all the powers, if you don't make some one swing for this, I'll know the reason why."

"You may trust me to do my best," said Jasper calmly. "The motive is plain enough. Of course we cannot tell how much money has been stolen, but I suppose his clerk could."

"He's very ill, it's impossible for him to attend to anything."

"The new one then; he was to come to-day. Surely, from the books——"

"If the books had been made up. Don't you remember what poor Tom said? He had to work at them; he had been kept all day, paying and receiving money."

"Well, I know nothing about banking. But there would be sure to be entries somewhere of the sums received."

"I suppose so. My God! it's terrible. I can't realize it. What am I to say to that poor girl, and what will she do now? Poor Tom! I know he never saved a penny. His income was none too large either. Ah! faith, it's a sad day for us all; friends and relatives. My heart aches, Standish; we were boys together; friends always. And it's not as if he had died as I've seen men die: the gentle sleep—the parting word——"

He walked to and fro, the tears starting to his eyes and rolling down his cheeks. "A bitter blow—a bad day for me and all who loved him. To think of the cowardly trick! Struck down without a warning, for the basest motive that ever made man criminal."

Standish rose somewhat suddenly. "I can do nothing more here," he said harshly. "I've taken notes of all that's necessary. I must see about the inquest next."

"The inquest! See about the murderer—d——n him!" shouted Dr. Dan furiously. "By all the saints, I feel as if I could choke the life out of him myself, if only I found him."

"Of course I'll attend to that also," said Jasper. "The gang that I suspect won't be hard to find. You can trust me, Doctor. He was—my friend, too."

The pallor of his face, the trembling lip, the unsteady voice, were to the unsuspecting Doctor as evidence of emotion, not of guilt.

He wrung his hand in answering sympathy. "Do your best, Standish. God forgive me for saying it, but I'll not rest in peace until the ruffian is discovered. I'd spend my last penny to bring him to justice."

\* \* \* \* \*

Dr. Dan remained behind to see Nora. She awoke at her usual time in blissful unconsciousness that anything had happened, that this day on which her sleep-filled eyes opened was to stand for all her life a black and awful landmark, a day from which all peace and joy of youth should flee, never more to return.

Lazily she made her girlish toilet, wondering if Lyle

was awake, wondering if a certain strange dream that haunted her memory was in any way prophetic. She had dreamt she saw a solitary magpie perched upon a stone, and as she looked the stone turned to a cross, and the cross seemed gleaming white above a grave—a grave set solitary and apart on a wide desolate moor. Then while still she stood and gazed, the bird of ill-omen flapped its long wings and rose with a strange cry; it hovered above her head, circling round and round. She tried to frighten it away, but it always returned. Then with one last desperate effort she waved her arms and the bird's wings dropped and changed to a uniform she knew only too well, and the beak and head became a face and the body a figure, and she was looking into the cold smiling eyes of Jasper Standish.

Like all the Irish, Nora had a fair share of superstition. She went over the old distich her nurse had been wont to sing of the prophetic magpie:—

“One for sorrow, two for mirth,  
Three for a marriage, four for a birth.”

One for sorrow! Did her dream mean sorrow! But then she had not actually seen the bird, only dreamt she was seeing it. Perhaps that——

A sharp rap came at the door. “Miss Nora, are you dressed?”

“Very nearly, Jane. What's the hurry?”

“Dr. Kelly is below, Miss. He wants to see you.”

“To see me? Whatever for? Isn't dad down?”

“No, Miss.”

“Well, tell the Doctor I'll be with him in five minutes—if it's so very important. He won't mind about my hair.”

A few moments, and she was facing her old friend, laughter on her lips and in her eyes.

“Why, Dr. Dan,” she said, “what on earth do you mean by bringing me down at this time of the morning? Doctor!” catching sight of his agitated face. “What’s the matter? What’s happened?”

He held out his hands and drew her near him. He had known her when she was a little child. “My dear,” he said pitifully, “be brave, be calm. I have bad news for you, Nora.”

“Father—he’s ill,” she cried quickly.

“Very ill. There’s been an—accident.”

She drew away, her face slowly whitening beneath the presence of fear.

“Tell me!” she whispered. “He’s not—dead?”

There was only silence. She felt herself answered, and gazed round in bewilderment, her limbs shaking.

Dr. Dan put his arm around her. “He is happy and at rest. Try and think so. It will be terribly hard to bear—at first.”

Then he broke down. A hoarse sob choked back even sympathy and tenderness. “Oh, child,” he cried, “I loved him too. And all I would have done for him I will do for you. Only, I can’t help you, I can’t comfort you.”

“How was it? Where?” she cried in a passion of entreaty. “Why wasn’t I there? You might have called me. He would have surely wanted to see me. Oh, dad! Dad!”

“Ah! hush,” he murmured pitifully. “It was not illness, it was not accident. Some dastard villain

broke into the Bank last night and robbed it, and your father——”

“Murdered?”

Her voice was only a whisper. The shock had dried her tears. She was conscious of a vague horror that seemed to freeze her blood and hold her in an icy grasp.

Suddenly she swayed; a strange little cry broke from her quivering lips. He caught her in his arms and laid her gently on the couch.

Then a quiet figure stole in and knelt beside her. “Leave her to me—now,” said a pleading voice. He stood aside. It was Jane Grapnell, who loosened the wrapper and chafed the cold hands, and applied all necessary restoratives.

“It is only faintness,” she said, “and it won’t save her from what is worse—what is to come.”



## CHAPTER X.

It was late that evening before Jasper Standish left his office and rode home. He had had a busy day. No arrest had been made, but whispers of suspicion were abroad.

A murder so cold-blooded and brutal awoke universal indignation. It was the theme of conversation, the subject of every possible surmise. It interfered greatly with business and trade generally ; everything, in fact, except the public-houses, for much talk is dry work, and "glory be !" not unfrequently ends in a "glass of porter," or the "laste little dhrop," as restorative and consolation.

Every sort of rumor found tongue, and found credence. But how or whence one whisper stole from lip to lip, and was repeated with bated breath and shuddering horror, no one quite knew.

"'Twill be sure to come out at the inquest," they told each other, and ominous shakes of the head followed ; and Mrs. McGee assured Bridget Mooney that "'twas nothing more than she'd been expectin'. No good iver came out of sich close-fisted, tight-lipped manners, not to spake av thim as were too grand to spake the civil wurrd to their naybors."

Mrs. Mooney opined it was "a judgment on thim as weren't satisfied wid their own payple and own folk,

but must needs be havin' strangers and heretics to do for thim."

Altogether the gossips had a rare time of it that day, while the new clerk sat in the deserted office and sent and received telegrams, and interviewed the Inspector, and came to the reluctant conclusion that Mr. Callaghan had been more than a bit careless over accounts, for he could trace none of the money that had been paid in the last day or two; and of Donovan's there was no proof, not even a memorandum.

It was little wonder that Jasper Standish looked fagged and worn when he reached his home. He flung himself out of the saddle, and bade the stable-boy give the mare a good feed—she might be wanted again that night. Then he went in to his dinner, though eating seemed but a sorry pretense. In the middle of his meal a thought struck him. It blanched his cheek and set his nerves quivering. "Fool! fool! And I've been away all day, and that drawer unlocked!"

He started to go up-stairs, then sat down again. Above all things, he must avert suspicion. How did he know that old Moll Murtagh was not a spy? There was no trusting these cursed gossips. He finished his dinner, drinking only one glass of whisky to steady his nerves. He would need them of steel to-night.

Calling to the old woman to clear away, he went up-stairs to his bedroom, taking the lamp with him. He threw a rapid glance round. Yes, of course, the old busybody had been there, "tidying up," as she called it. He shut the door and drew down the blind. Then he opened the drawer into which he had thrust that blood-stained shirt. None was there!

He stared aghast at the open space, littered with ties, collars and handkerchiefs, but there was nothing else. Vain to turn and toss article after article. It was too large to escape notice. Some one had been to that drawer and removed the shirt. With curses dire and deep he closed it again.

Perhaps he had made a mistake. It might not have been the top drawer into which he had thrust it in the confusion and terror of that morning summons. He pulled out the next. There were shirts in plenty there, but all fresh, unsoiled, immaculate. Not one had been worn since the iron of the laundress had smoothed them. The next—no, not anything but socks and vests, arranged with old Moll's careful tidiness. Who had touched that shirt? In a sudden rage he strode to the door, but, with his hand on the knob, something seemed to whisper caution. If he showed anxiety, asked a question, the old crone might get suspicious. Supposing she had but taken it to wash, and he made a fuss, what would she think?

He turned back, and sitting on the edge of the bed, leant his head on his hands in dazed and desperate perplexity. What a trifle it seemed! And yet men had gone to the gallows for just such a trifle. Just such a foolish, unconsidered incident had formed before now the first link in the chain of condemnation.

To pass the matter over as unimportant would be best. A cut finger would account for it. But then, the finger should have been bandaged all this day. It was too late now to pretend an accident.

“I'll take a look round to-night, after the old fiend

has gone to bed," he said to himself. "If she has only taken it to wash, it'll be sure to be hanging up in the kitchen. But, d—n it! I was forgetting; she sleeps there."

He raved and cursed at the triviality of the thing, and his own impatience in face of that triviality. As yet, not a spark of suspicion had fallen in his direction. But that was only natural; the people would as soon suspect the chief magistrate of the county as they would one so universally esteemed and popular as its inspector. Still, he must make an arrest or two, if only to give them something to cackle about. There must be no lack of zeal on his part while the deed was fresh in every one's mind and tripping off every one's tongue.

"That sour-faced devil will do for one," he reflected. "She'll be watched pretty closely, and she must know it too. I can make out a good case of suspicion to begin with, and she's none too popular here."

He rose and went over to the glass. Already it seemed to him there was a change in his face—something sinister and furtive; and in his eyes lurked fear.

"I must be on my guard," he muttered. "Once the inquest is over I shall breathe freely again. Fortunately, the matter is almost entirely in my hands."

He took out his note-book and went carefully over point after point. The coroner was a great ally of his. It would be quite easy to direct his questions. No one could tell how long he had lingered behind the others on that night. He had frankly confessed his reason for staying; also declared Mr. Callaghan had let him out at that side-door leading into the lane. His horse

had been waiting. The time between his leaving the Bank and reaching Moriarty's would be asked. He had all that ready. Then he had called at the barracks purposely to carry out that tale of anxiety. And Sir Anthony and Dr. Dan could prove that he had warned the manager of the robberies committed by what was called the "Foxy Gang." It was composed of three men, all red-haired. They always wore masks. No one had been able to recognize their faces.

He drew a deep breath, and put the book back into his pocket. He came to the conclusion that he would say nothing about the shirt. Best not to notice its disappearance.

As he turned from the glass, a sudden tap came at the window. He started, and the cold dew of that fear that would henceforth be his shadow broke over his face. He stood motionless, staring at the white blind. The window was shut; the night was very still. What could have made that noise?

He thought of the old laurel tree without. Perhaps some stray branch had blown against the pane. Yet, no, there was not wind enough to stir a bough. Should he open the window and look out? He felt for once in his life that he had not the courage to do it. He shrank from gazing into the darkness. A guilty conscience is never free from superstition. He felt himself pursued by a ghostly vision—a phantom whose icy breath could chill the blood, and make courage weak as water.

He seized the light, and left the room. There was work before him to-night; a battle to be fought; a wily foe to be bested. He would need all his strength

of nerve, all the cunning of his brain. The price for which he had bartered his soul's peace must be paid to save his honor in the sight of men.

His honor! He could have laughed at the ghastly mockery of that word. He, who before the sight of God and man, had forfeited all right to such a thing!

\* \* \* \* \*

The light streamed out from the hall. His man was walking the little mare up and down. The sky was dark, save for a few stars glittering amongst drifting clouds. Jasper sprang to the saddle, and his cloak fell round him.

“Shall I be waiting to stable her, sor?” asked the man, touching a greasy cap.

“No; I may be late. There's no knowing. Leave the lantern as usual.”

The man ran forward and opened the gate. “It's not to the town he's going, anyway,” he said, as he watched horse and rider. “Sure, an' it's a mighty lot av quare bizness he's been afther lately—night-times too. I'm sorry for the poor blayguards whin he does catch thim. 'Tis a purty murderous timper Mister Standish can lay hands on, whin he's crossed any ways!”

Then he went back into the warmth of the kitchen and the “bit av supper” awaiting him. Neither master nor man had glanced up at the old laurel tree with its spreading branches; neither had seen a small impish face peering down through the screening leaves.

That tree was just outside the bedroom window of Jasper Standish. One long crooked bough was rustling now in the silence of the deserted garden. Yet there was no wind.

## CHAPTER XI.

TRAGEDY had suddenly crashed upon the peace and joy of an innocent household.

About it moved the calm erect figure of the English housekeeper; on her face a strange stillness, in her eyes a fierce light, Amidst all the turmoil and confusion of that awful time she alone had been composed and helpful. Shrieks, wails, tears, exclamations had passed her by as a summer storm passes over some strong and stately tree. Such unnatural want of feeling did not tend to increase her popularity.

“Indade, and she’s the strange woman, Biddy,” said old Katey Mulcahy, as she and Biddy Murphy performed the last offices when the inquest was over. “’Twas the quare things as came out about her this day. Ah! glory be!—it’s not meself ’ud care to be in her shoes. ’Tis the brand av suspicion that’s laid on her by ivery word she said, an’ the clever tongue av Mister Standish didn’t want for manin’. Wasn’t that so, Biddy, machree?”

“Thru for ye it was, Katey woman. Sure ’tis a strange time we’re havin’ here, and not a taste av anything comin’ the way av us ayther. Jist ‘do yer work and be off wid ye.’ Many’s the times we’ve watched an’ worked together, Katey *agra*, an’ steadied the pinnies on the eyes av the blessed corpse (the

heavens be their bed this night), and in all thim times narra a one that husband or widdy or orphan wudn't be sayin', 'Biddy, dacint woman, it's yerself that's needin' the little dhrop to kape up yer strength an' yer sperrits this blessed day.' An' that's the throe wurrd I'm spakin', as yerself can bear me witness, Katey Mulcahy."

"Dade, thin, I can. It's not Miss Nora's fault, the darlin'. It's jist worn out wid grief an sorrow the poor orphan is, as inyone could see wid half an eye in their heads. An' the English young lady—she's too grand to be troublin' about the likes av us. But it's that stuck-up housekapin' hussy that's to blame in the matter. A mighty tight hand over the kays she has, Biddy. An' it's niver a dhrop or sup she puts to her own lips save in the matter av tay or water, so Sally told me."

"An' Sally's the truthful gurl, as I've good cause to know, for isn't she my brother-in-law's only child, an' a rare handy little craythur, an,' oh, the wonderful cook! 'Twas jist cryin' her two eyes blind she was in the kitchen. She'll niver git sich a place agin, she says—God forgive meself, I was near quarrelin' wid her mother once for lettin' her go to sarvice whin I'd the chance av gettin' her into as tidy a bit av bizness as ye'd want at the dhraper's in Tallow Street. But 'twas sarvice she was bent on, an' sure Sally thought herself a quane intirely wid twelve pounds a year and Miss Nora givin' her the caps an' the aprons. Mother av Heaven! 'tis a sad day for us, as I was sayin'."

A sad day indeed. The forerunner of many days, sadder and more troubled, yet to follow.



The examination at the inquest had led to the expected and only possible verdict—"Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

Old Donovan had been like a raving lunatic over the matter; though the receipt given him by the deceased man was sufficient to prove he had paid in the money received for his farm.

The "Foxy Gang" seemed to have disappeared entirely. No trace could be found of them. Dr. Dan offered £50 and Sir Anthony £100 for information or discovery of the criminal.

A new manager had been hastily appointed, and the premises were being carefully examined in view of extra security. The door leading into the lane was to be bricked up, the window re-barred. But all these precautions could not restore the dead man to life, or throw any light on the dark mystery of his tragic end.

Dr. Dan bore Nora off to his own house, and Lyle went back to the hotel. The gloom and horror of the tragedy rested over the little town like a heavy pall. Perhaps somewhere among them the murderer stalked unknown. Perhaps at shop, or stall, or bar, some of that fatal "blood money" was being passed or exchanged. Dark suspicions were at work, and as the gloomy winter nights drew in the talk at every fireside and in every cabin for miles around was of the bank manager's murder.

Meanwhile, Nora Callaghan, crushed and heart-broken, remained under Dr. Dan's kindly care. Her father had left no will, but as she was the only near relative he possessed, she would have what little money there was, and all his household belongings. Lyle

Orcheton insisted that her friend must henceforth share her home, and the girl consented for a time to do so. She was quite unable, in the first shock of grief, to think or act for herself in any matter.

It was while rumor was at its height, and popular prejudice running amuck against common sense, as is not unfrequently the case, that the young English lady suddenly astounded the town and gave the gossips fresh food for talk. She announced that she had engaged Jane Grapnell to be her housekeeper at the Hermitage.

The news created quite a stir. Never had tongues so wagged and whispered. Never had gossips so toothsome a morsel of scandal to chew and digest. Mrs. McGee held perfect levées on the strength of it, and Sally, the Bank servant, was suddenly the most desirable of all domestics. Everything she knew and could tell of Jane Grapnell was sought, treasured, and repeated. Every trait of that unfortunate woman's character was received with significant glances and ominous shakes of the head, and muttered "The likes av that"; "Ah! glory be, 'tis she has the black dhrop in her heart;" and various other expressions familiar to this frankly critical nation.

"Can any good come out of—England?" was the popular query. Every one had known that letting the Hermitage to English folk would mean bad luck, and if poor Mr. Callaghan, the good honest gentleman, had only kept to Irish servants and made Miss Nora keep to Irish ways, why never a taste of this bad work would they have had.

So ran the tide of popular opinion, all unguessed by

those so discussed and criticized. Jane Grapnell herself was the least suspicious. A woman carrying a dark secret in her heart, burdened with a trouble that she must fight against single-handed was not a woman to concern herself with village gossip or idle stories, or vague hints dropped by the curious.

She thanked Heaven on her knees when Lyle Orcheton offered her the place of housekeeper at the Hermitage. She had strong reasons for wishing to remain in this part of Ireland, and it might have been difficult to procure a situation in a good family. The matter was simplified by Lyle's offer, and she was duly grateful. Besides, she would not be separated from her beloved Miss Nora yet awhile.

So while tongues wagged and heads nodded, she took no notice of these mysterious signs of public opinion. She had far more important duties to occupy her time; far deeper concerns to fill her mind than what Mrs. McGee said, or Bridget Mooney thought, or Sally the cook babbled over the teacups.

Trivialities that are all-important to small minds, possess no concern at all for those preoccupied by grave and critical interests. If Jane Grapnell's head was still held high, if her eyes were averted from prying glance and meaning nods, it was only because she really noted nothing of their significance. Her days were given up to the care of her young mistress. At night she slept in her room, for Nora's nerves were in such a weak and over-strained condition that it was impossible to leave her alone.

The cook and housemaid at Dr. Dan's were both Irish, and had all the superstitions and prejudices of

their race and class. They liked Jane no better than their neighbors of the town liked her, and when she came into the kitchen made no secret that her company was less desirable than her room.

One evening, about three weeks after the murder, Jane went downstairs to get some milk for Nora. She had to pass through the kitchen on her way to the pantry. It was vacant. One of the servants was having her "evening," the other had been sent out with some medicine from the surgery, that was wanted in a hurry.

Jane glanced round. It was the first time she had found it tenantless. She brought the milk in, and put it on the table while she looked for a glass.

As she stood, holding open the cupboard door, a short quick rap came at the window. She glanced in its direction, but the blind was down and she could see nothing. Wondering if it meant summons or signal she approached and raised the blind. A small impish face looked in at her. She unlatched the window and opened it.

"Who's there?" she demanded.

"Sure thin, don't ye know me?" piped a thin voice. "Mickey Doolan it is; an' it's thrying to git spache av ye these last ten days I've been. I've something to tell ye. Whin can ye come out?"

"Can't you tell me now?"

"It wud take too long intirely. Can ye come to the little wood beyant the town? 'll be there on the shtroke av midnight."

"Is it really—important?"

"Important! By the saints, it's life and death and

damnation it's manin'; an' no name I'll be spakin' but *one ye know*. Him as ye tould me to watch!"

"I'll be there." Her voice shook with eagerness. "Twelve o'clock, is it?"

"That same. Don't let inyone know yer out, or ivery soul in the place will git wind av it by to-morrow's noon."

"Trust me. Now go."

She closed the window and went back to the kitchen.

"If it should be!" she cried fiercely; her eyes aflame, her cheeks one burning glow of excitement.

"Oh! if only one end of the thread comes my way, the rope shall yet be spun that I have sworn to knot round that villain's throat!"

## CHAPTER XII.

ONLY when she returned to Nora's bedroom did Jane Grapnell remember the difficulties that lay in the way of keeping her promise. If the girl was wakeful or restless, she would not be able to get away unobserved.

True, there was the sleeping draught Dr. Dan had prescribed for these fits of insomnia. She might give her that. She must. At whatever cost, she must learn what Mickey had to tell her.

She glanced anxiously at Nora. Wide-awake, feverish, tossing from side to side. No signs of slumber. She resolved to administer the draught at ten o'clock. It generally gave six hours of deep sleep. Dr. Dan was averse to her taking it often, for fear the habit would become habitual. But Jane felt that the situation was too important for scruples.

She was well aware now of the ways of the household. She knew she could get out through the back entrance quite easily, and by taking the key let herself in again.

At ten o'clock she gave the medicine, measuring it carefully into the girl's glass of milk. It was perfectly tasteless, and Nora suspected nothing. In less than an hour she was sound asleep, her breathing calm even as a child's

Then Jane changed her skirt for an old black cloth one, put her boots ready to carry in her hand, slipped a box of matches into her pocket, and sat down to wait with what patience she could till all the house was quiet. The servants went up to their room shortly after ten o'clock. Dr. Dan, when he was at home, as happened to-night, usually retired about eleven. She heard him bolt the front door, and then come up to his own room on the other side of the landing.

In half an hour she must leave. The wood Mickey spoke of lay just on the outskirts of the town. It was waste ground—an ill-drained, dark, uncanny spot, shut in by trees, thick with weeds and brambles. She could reach it with quick walking in twenty minutes, but her impatience was so great that she resolved to start at the half-hour. She drew a screen round the little low chair bedstead on which she slept, and put the shaded night-light on the mantelpiece. If Nora should wake, she would not know that Jane was not in her usual place. The lemonade and barley water were on a little table by the girl's bed. As a rule she never called Jane up at night, but attended to herself. Surely this night of all others she would not need her services.

Wrapping herself in a shawl, which she drew Irish fashion over her head, Jane softly opened the door. All was quiet. She listened for a moment before venturing down-stairs—not a sound anywhere. Softly she stole across the landing. Her stockinged feet made no noise on the carpet. The stairs did not creak as she cautiously descended. On reaching the hall she struck a match, for fear of stumbling in the pitchy

darkness, then passed swiftly along to the door that led to the kitchen. A moment, and she was at the outer door. The key was in the lock as usual; she turned it easily and withdrew it, slid back the bolt and was in the little yard that gave egress to the street.

The night was very dark. There was a threatening of rain in the chill misty air and the lowering clouds. The street was quite deserted. As she listened, she caught the echo of a policeman's tread far up, but she could see no one. With beating heart she hurried on, taking the least frequented thoroughfares.

The distance seemed endless to her impatience, but at last she reached the wood and halted at its entrance.

It was a lonely spot. For the first time a touch of fear chilled her.

To be alone, unprotected, in such a place, at such an hour, held something of risk. Where had the boy meant her to meet him? Surely not in the heart of the wood, under those dark and serried ranks of firs? She started. A low whistle sounded just above her head. In a second a lithe form swung itself down monkey fashion from bough to ground. Mickey Doolan was by her side.

"Whisht! We'll kape here, under the trees," he whispered. "Sure, it's afraid of the very shadows I'm gettin'. Oh, the terrible bad man he is! An' what to do wid him bates me."

"You've discovered something?"

"Missis Grapnell, it's the throe wurrd I'm tellin' ye this blessed night, as I'm a living sowl. He's had something to do with the  
Callaghan  
at the Bank."



She stood still, as if turned to stone. "What are you saying? What proof——"

"Proof, is it? Well, whin the time comes I'm not wantin' for that same. Listen. There's a tree mighty convaynient to *his* bedroom windy. [We won't be naming names.] And now an' agin I've made bould to climb up that same ould laurel, an' take a peep into the room, jist to see what my gintleman was up to, whin he niver dreamt a livin' sowl had an eye on him. Most times I only seed he was heavy wid the dhrink, an' sthaggerin' about the room for all the wurld like a stuck pig. But the morning av the day whin he went off all av a hurry wid his men I happened to be jist lookin' round, an' the ould woman was safe in the kitchin', an' the stableman, sure he was off to get the news, an' I slipped into the house an' up to the bedroom, knowin' it wud be more than iver ould Moll Murtagh cud do to catch me. I looked here an' I looked there—'twas all in the height av confusion, an' something drew me straight to the chest av drawers, an' I opens thim, an' what do I see? As I'm alive an' spakin' this blessed minute, it was nothing less than the fine white shirt he'd been afther wearin' that same night when the poor ould gintleman was sthruck down, an'—whisht! give me yer ear close; it's murderin' me he'd be av he knew what I'm sayin'—*the cuff was all red with blood!* There's for ye. Trimblin' are ye? Well, it's meself was shakin' like the laves above us when I made the discovery. Sez I, 'Mickey,' I sez, 'there's bin bad work here, an' ye've chanced to light on it; an' av ye're wise it's the silent tongue an' the cute brain that'll sarve ye now.' An' I thought av you, ma'am;

an' that it might be worth the matter av a sovereign or two av I tould ye about it, for two heads is better than a single one any day."

"Yes, yes. I'll give you a sovereign to-night. But go on. What did you do with the shirt?"

"I tuk it—though I was mighty feared all the time. I tuk it—an' I hid it in a safe place that I know av. I got out at the windy, an' divil a sowl knows I was near the place, an' himself has nivir axed for me. Not that that's to be wondered at, for sure he's been in a mighty pother over the Bank murder. Now if ye've anither bit av gowld to spare, it's meself can put ye on the thrack av anither av his saycrets. It's a quare thing, an' it bates me intirely how I got hold av it. There's a boy I'm friendly with—a rare *omadhaun*, an' servin' as giniral help to ould Benjy Myers, the miser—him as they sez is a Jew, an' lends money at cint per cint—whativer that manes. Sure he's as mane as the divil, an' the gossoon he tould me he airs his sov'rins in the sun for fear they'd be gettin' light wid lyn by in his chest."

"Yes, yes," she interrupted; "but what of the other secret? I'll give you another gold piece if it's worth anything, I promise you."

"It's this, thin. Mистер Standish owed ould Myers a power av money. Now it's the talk, isn't it, that there was money tuk from the Bank that night the ould gintleman was kilt. An' who'd be likely to take it but thim as naded it, an' *must have it*? Ye can't go beyant that."

She stopped aghast at the sudden light thrown on an act of desperation. Here, indeed, was motive. But

where was proof? A weak woman, a half-witted boy, and at stake the life of a man conscienceless and reckless, with unlimited power and influence at his back. How could they hope to bring this crime home to him?

“If it could be proved that he had the money?” she said hoarsely.

Mickey scratched his head and looked doubtful. “Ah! sure an he’s too cute for that. Anyways, I’ve done my best for ye, ma’am. An’ be the powers ’tis careful ye’ll have to be, an’ saycret, too, for av Misther Standish got a hint av what I’m afther tellin’ ye to-night, ’tisn’t my life, nor maybe yours either, wud be safe from the pains av eternity much longer.”

“You say you’ve buried the shirt?”

“In a wooden box in the ground. It’s meself alone as knows the place.”

“Mickey, we must work together. I’ll pay you well for all that you find out. Besides, there’s the reward. You shall have that too—every penny.”

“Saints in glory! What are ye sayin’, ma’am, at all? The reward? Why, ’tis the richest man in Rathfurley I’d be. All that money! *Wurrah deelish!* It’s surely drammin’ I am.”

“Hush!” she said cautiously, for in excitement he had raised his voice. “For Heaven’s sake be careful. Keep guard on your tongue night and day.”

“Sowl av Saint Peter, ’tis lock an’ kay will be on me lips from this blessed night—an’ to-day’s Friday. God betwixt us an harm!”

“You may well pray that,” she said gravely. “We’ve a dangerous man to deal with, and God alone can prove the right and punish the wrong. It’s not

his first crime, Mickey. Maybe it won't be his last. Now I must go back. How can you let me know if you find out anything more?"

"I'll watch the ways av it. Trust Mickey Doolan, ma'am. It mustn't be known as we're matin' each other."

"No, no. Next week I'm leaving the doctor's to go to the Hermitage with Miss Nora."

"Sure, there'll be convayniences there more than enough. Ah!—musha—the blayguard! Little he's dramin' that the poor *omadhaun* he's kicked an' cursed this many a day is on the thrack av his evil ways. I wudn't have the sins av thim on me sowl for the wealth av the three kingdoms!"

He crossed himself hurriedly, and then disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

The night had grown darker. A fine soft rain was falling. Jane drew her shawl closer, and hurried out of the wood and back to the town.

She was trembling with agitation. The awful discovery on which she had stumbled usurped her mind to the exclusion of all else. Mechanically she took her way up the long straggling street, tripping over rough stones or stumbling into pools and mud. The rain fell faster, the clouds darkened overhead. Before she reached the doctor's house she was wet through.

With shaking fingers she unlatched the gate, and groped her way to the back door.

It was not easy to find the keyhole in that inky darkness, and her cold hands slipped over the surface of the wood. At last she got the key into place,

turned it, and stood within. As she re-locked the door, a light suddenly flashed in the passage.

“Who’s there?” challenged a stern voice.

She turned hastily; the shawl slipped from her white face. Standing at the end of the passage was Dr. Dan!

## CHAPTER XIII.

AMAZEMENT and consternation were visible on the doctor's usually genial face.

“Jane! Good heavens, woman, where have you been at this time of night? And look at the state you're in!”

The water was dripping from her soaked shawl and her shabby skirt; her boots were heavy with mud and clay. She stood motionless, wondering how she could explain her absence, seeing suspicion and displeasure growing stronger every moment in the eyes fastened on her face.

“I can't explain,” she said at last. “Whatever you think, sir, I can't help it. I had to go out—to meet a friend. It was better no one should know. I took the key to let myself in. That's all I can tell you.”

“This is very extraordinary behavior,” he said sternly. “If you were a young, indiscreet girl, I should know what interpretation to place on it. But a woman of your years, and——”

“And appearance, sir,” she interpolated. “Don't spare me. I have no woman's vanity to be hurt by plain speaking.”

“And appearance, then, must surely be actuated by some very strong motive to lay herself under suspicion. If you cannot justify your conduct to me, I

shall feel in duty bound to lay the facts before Miss Orcheton. I do not consider you a safe person to be in her service. Why have you left your young mistress alone, after my instruction to the contrary? That you are bound to explain."

A piteous look came into the dark troubled eyes. She clasped her hands convulsively. "Oh, sir, for pity's sake don't misjudge me. There's no one I love like Miss Nora; It would break my heart if she thought badly of me. Can't you trust me? You'll know the reason some day; so will she. But now my lips are sealed; I can't speak. It's my life against my silence."

Such truth, such conviction, were in her agonized face and pleading voice, that against his better judgment Dr. Dan felt the woman was at least sincere.

"This is all very queer and very mysterious," he said. "What reason have I to believe you are not doing something—dishonorable?"

"You have no reason," she said very quietly, "only my bare word, the word of a suffering and much-tried woman. Miss Nora would believe me, perhaps even Miss Orcheton; but I must leave you to deal with them. Only,"—and her voice grew firm, and there was that in her face that gave its own testimony to truth—"only, if you turn me from here, if you shut the door of kindness and helpfulness so newly opened, there will be others to suffer, innocent lives sacrificed. My God!" and the firmness broke into agony, "what is there in human nature that one soul won't and can't take another on trust? that it's always ready to believe the worst, if the best stands unproved, for judgment?"

"Faith! Jane, you're right. What is there? I've

got two sides of you before me to-night. One leads to suspicion, the other to trust. If I'm anything of a judge of character—and Heaven knows I've seen plenty, all grades, sorts and conditions—well, I'm inclined to put the trust before the suspicion. I'm sure you love Miss Nora too well to lightly risk dismissal from her service. I'll take your word you were out on no harm; but, mind, no more of this sort of thing. I hate mysteries and secrets. No good ever came of them, nor ever will. Get off with yourself and change those wet clothes, or you'll be ill. It's lucky I came across you, and not one of the servants, or you'd not have got off so easily."

Tears rushed to the woman's eyes; her lips quivered. "God reward you, sir," she said. "You've saved what's more than life to-night; and you'll not find me ungrateful."

She moved on to the kitchen to get a candle. Dr. Dan went back to his own room more puzzled than he liked to acknowledge.

\* \* \* \* \*

All the joyous anticipations with which Lyle Orcheston had looked forward to that "settling down" into the Hermitage had been chilled and overcast by this awful calamity that had befallen her friend.

The happiness and light-heartedness that had been hers so brief a while before, had changed to sorrow. It was a grave and very subdued face that superintended the arrangements of the new home, that directed and watched the gradual change from confusion to order.



In Nora's room many tears were shed at thought of all that had chanced since that pretty chamber had been planned for her visits. It was ready now—draped, curtained, furnished—as lovely and dainty, as perfect taste and loving hands could make it ; ready—and on the morrow Dr. Dan had arranged to drive Nora over. It would be Christmas Eve ; and Lyle had implored that they might be together. It would be sad and melancholy,—a time of memories and reminiscences,—but amidst new surroundings, and ministered to with all the devotion of loving hearts, she hoped the poor girl would suffer less.

The mystery of her father's death preyed on her mind incessantly. She seemed unable to shake it off ; and however a conversation began, it always drifted back to that one point. Indeed, the awful tragedy had cast a gloom over the whole town and neighborhood. Mrs. O'Neil had postponed her New Year's Eve party. She could not "fancy a dance," she said, "without her two favorites being present." She had been to and fro to the Hermitage to help Lyle during these last few days of "fitting up," so purely the prerogative of feminine hands. Workmen had been dismissed. All was finished save a few trifling details that were left till over the New Year.

Mrs. O'Neil and Lyle Orcheton stood before a blazing fire, contemplating the room on which such loving thought had been lavished.

"It is certainly charming," said the genial Belle. "If anything could minister to a mind diseased, and pluck out a sorrow by the roots, it should be surroundings like these. All said and done, Lyle, my dear, you

English can give us points in the way of arranging rooms, whether they're purely feminine like this, or useful and ornamental like the hall, or 'livable' like your dining-room. This is simply perfect."

"Poor Nora!" sighed Lyle. "If only we could rouse her or interest her in anything! It's dreadful the way she broods over her father's death. It seems as if she'd never get over it."

"You must give her time."

"That's so hard to believe. A year is long in passing, though short to look back upon. But I'm keeping you standing. Shall I ring for some tea, and we'll have it here?"

"Do, my dear; it will be delightfully cozy. I ordered the carriage to come round for me at six o'clock. We have the best part of an hour before us for a gossip. I forgot, though, you're not much inclined that way."

Lyle smiled. "But I like to hear you talk," she said.

"We're great people for that, my dear. By the way, I hear you are bringing Nora's housekeeper here. Is that so?"

"Yes," said Lyle. "I am rather fond of Jane; I pity her too. She is a woman who has lived through some great sorrow. I wish sometimes I could break down that iron reserve of hers; but it seems impossible."

"I have a fancy that I have seen her before," said Mrs. O'Neil thoughtfully; "but she always seems to avoid me. She reminds me of—— Lyle, did you ever hear of that little maid of mine who disappeared so suddenly?"

“No. Why do you ask?”

“That woman brings her back to my memory. I was very fond of the girl. I brought her over from England. I treated her more as a companion than a maid. And, quite suddenly, she ran away.”

“Ran away! With any one, do you mean?”

“No; that’s the strange part of it. Had there been a lover in the case, I should not have been so surprised; but she was a quiet, well conducted girl—never a breath of scandal about her. I felt deeply hurt at the time; it seemed so ungrateful.”

“And you say Jane reminds you of her?”

“Of the time I engaged her—of Hester’s mother. I only saw her once. Has Jane a sister, do you know?”

“She has never spoken of any relative, either to Nora or myself. She was housekeeper at the school where we were, and Nora told me she offered to accompany her to Ireland; in fact, seemed anxious to come.”

“Yet she knows no one in the country—has made no friends. I should like to talk to her, Lyle, if I might.”

“Certainly. When? To-day she is not busy, I know. Shall I ring and ask her to come up here?”

“I wish you would, my dear; an unexplained mystery is so uncomfortable.”

Lyle smiled. “I am beginning to understand Irish people,” she said. “I’ll ring for tea, and send a messenger to Jane at the same time.”

The room was dusk, save for the firelight, when Jane Grapnell entered it. Her eyes fell on Mrs. O’Neil lying back in the deep, cozy chair, and her colorless face

changed to a sickly gray hue. She stood by the door, her hand on the handle.

“You sent for me, miss,” she said.

“Yes, Jane; Mrs. O’Neil wishes to speak to you.”

“I have been telling Miss Orcheton that you reminded me of some one I had seen long ago—in England,” said Mrs. O’Neil. “Of course, it may have been a relative. Have you a sister there?”

“No, madam,” was the brief response.

“Do you know any one of the name of Sands?”

“No one.”

“Ah, then I must have made a mistake. I once had a maid of that name, a great favorite of mine. Her mother—— But never mind. It can’t possibly interest you, as you have no sister, you say.”

“This—this maid, madam, she has left your service?”

The words fell stiffly from the stiff lips. The woman seemed to speak only by a strong effort.

“Oh, yes, long ago. It was a great disappointment to me. I have never found any one to suit me so well.”

There was a moment’s silence, Lyle poured out a cup of tea, and handed it to her visitor.

“Shall Jane light the lamp?” she asked

“Not unless you wish. I like this dusk.

The housekeeper had advanced into the room. She paused half-way between the door and the table on which stood the lamp. The red glow of the fire touched her white face, and showed her eyes strained and anxious. She looked if she longed to speak of something in her mind.

“ You need not wait, then, Jane,” said her young mistress.

But the woman did not seem to hear. She went forward, fidgeted with the shade of the lamp, the matches, altered a chair, and then, crossing to the window, rearranged a fold or two of the lace curtains.

Lyle watched her with some surprise. There was a change in her manner, something altogether unusual in her loitering movements, her seeming inattention.

“ Did you not hear me, Jane ?” she asked.

The woman started, and left the window.

“ I—I beg your pardon, miss. I thought perhaps—— I mean, would Mrs. O’Neil like to ask anything more ?”

“ There is nothing more to ask,” said Mrs. O’Neil. “ I suppose I made a mistake in thinking you were related to Hester, or could tell me anything about her.”

“ No,” said Jane, in a cold, steady voice, “ I can tell you nothing.”

“ I am sorry,” said Mrs. O’Neil, turning her head towards the fire. “ One does not like to lose sight of an old favorite, even if she appears ungrateful.”

“ Ungrateful !” The voice was hoarse and broken, Jane turned abruptly, “ She was never *that*,” she burst out impetuously. “ There are things that can’t be explained, that look worse than they are. It is not fair to judge——”

Then she remembered herself; her profession of ignorance, her denial of Hester. Perplexity and distress showed in her face. Without another word she left the room.

Lyle and Mrs. O’Neil looked in wonder at each other.

“How strange she was!” they exclaimed simultaneously. “I never knew her speak or look like that before,” added Lyle.

“Have you ever thought there was some—some mystery about her?” asked her friend uneasily.

“No. She is very reserved and quiet as a rule. I never saw her display affection for any living soul but Nora. But as to mystery——”

“She is a woman with a secret,” said Mrs. O’Neil. “It may be her own, it may be another person’s. And somehow, Lyle, I felt she was not telling me the truth. I believe she knew, or knows, something of Hester Sands.”

A troubled look came into Lyle’s eyes. “Then why should she deny——”

“Oh, my dear, don’t ask me. Women of her class do strange things sometimes. There may be a family history—not exactly creditable to others, I mean. I am not including Jane; any one can see she has known trouble, poor soul! And perhaps she is too proud to speak of it. Well, no matter. Here I have been chattering away, and quite forgetting one important piece of news. Fancy! Derrick is coming back for Christmas. I had a letter from him this morning.”

Lyle bent a flushed cheek over her teacup. “You must be very pleased,” she said. A sudden constraint had come over voice and manner.

Mrs. O’Neil did not appear to notice it, however. She was fumbling in her pocket for a letter, which she at last produced. “There’s a message for you in it,” she said. “I wonder if I can read it?”

Lyle stirred the fire, and the bright flames illumined the room ruddily.

“That will do,” said Mrs. O’Neil, opening the letter and turning over the first page. “Let me see—um, um, nothing particular there ‘London hateful; fog and cold and snow. My business is finally completed. I’m heartily thankful. I’ll have to go out to India sooner than I expected, but I’ll have a time in the old country first. I trust poor Miss Callaghan is getting over that terrible shock. How is her friend Miss Ly—’ (crossed out, my dear)—‘Miss Orcheton? If you see her, pray give my warmest sympathy and regards. I can understand how she will suffer with and for her friend; her nature is so staunch and tender and true.’ There, my dear, I think that’s all.”

The firelight seemed to cast a particularly warm glow over Lyle’s delicate, clear cheeks; but all she said was, “Thank you. I’m sure you’ll be very glad to have him back.”

“Yes; but I can’t understand about his returning to India so soon. However, I’ll learn the rights of that from his own lips. I’m very fond of the boy, you know, Lyle. I’ve no child of my own, and he’s been as good as a son to me. I used to think once that Providence had treated me badly, leaving me neither son nor daughter to inherit all my money. But that was before I found out that marriage means a mighty lot more than girls imagine.”

Lyle looked at her. The flush had died out of her face, her lips parted as if about to speak, then suddenly closed. Mrs. O’Neil drank off her tea and put the cup back on the silver tray.

“Weren’t you happy?” asked the girl softly.

“I married the wrong man. It was all done in a fit of pique and mad jealousy—a bit of a quarrel, high words, no patience, no waiting, no reason. That’s the way with us when we’re young. Before we know anything of men we set ourselves to judge them. We are too exacting. We haven’t learnt they need excuse as much—and more too—as ourselves. I’m telling you this, my dear, because I think you are rather inclined to be high-handed in the matter of lovers. You want them to come up to a standard of your own. Ah! child, believe me, they never will. If they seem to, it’s only pretense; and pretense is a bad beginning, and worse ending, for love.”

“Why did you marry at all?” inquired Lyle. “Because one man failed you, it was a poor revenge to take another less capable of satisfying your heart.”

“I was a hot-headed fool. Lovers I had by the score, and the best match in the county was Terence O’Neil, the man I married, and the worst was the man I loved. So our quarrel ended badly, and he went into the Army, and was ordered to some awful foreign place—West Africa, I think it was—and from that day to this I’ve never had word or sign from him.”

“But you’ve not forgotten?”

“Ah! my dear, it’s not easy to forget the man who’s made you unhappy. Every tear you shed is a tribute to his power; every regret you breathe is a landmark in the journey that takes you further and further away from him.”

Her bright eyes turned to the fire. Lyle watched her with deep interest. To have lived to forty and yet re-



member one's girlhood, and its vain love—how strange! And how dull and hopeless it made life look to her young eyes, if pain and disillusion were forever its shadow!

She spoke impatiently, a little tinge of bitterness in her voice.

“Why do we—love? Why must we?”

Mrs. O'Neil's suspiciously bright eyes were still fixed on the fire.

“It is unreasonable,” she said softly. “But I suppose we can't help it. I've often asked myself what we do love a man for, and upon my soul, child, I think it must be because he is the one creature who makes us suffer most, and cares least for the suffering.”

“Perhaps he can't understand it.”

“You mean he doesn't realize that he *has* hurt?”

“I mean that women let imagination and emotion play a large part in their sufferings,” said Lyle. “But a man feels only what hurts himself.”

“Well, we're foolish creatures, God knows! But really and soberly, Lyle, I don't believe a man is worth half the heart-aches he occasions. If we could only see him as he is——”

She paused—then laughed softly. “But when we can do *that*,” she continued, “we know him too well to care for him as he would like us to care. I speak from experience. My first wrinkle taught me philosophy. Believe me, child, if it's ever a question of giving way to your feelings, or saving your features the wear and tear of emotions, choose the latter course. Tears and sighs may be a relief, but they don't do an atom of

good. They try your nerves and spoil your eyes, and then the man says, 'How you've gone off!'"

Lyle smiled faintly. "That may be true, but to arrive at that stage of philosophy requires some experience—and some suffering."

"True, my dear, it does. May you never have to go through it. But it's few who escape. Yes, child, I'll have some more tea. Tea and talk—faith, they help a woman to bear a lot of trouble, though it's rather bathos to say it."

## CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE restlessness possessed Lyle on that Christmas Eve. Nora was not to come till the evening, when Dr. Dan would drive her over and stay to dinner.

After luncheon she made up her mind to have a walk through the grounds. It was a mild sunny afternoon, such as often visits midwinter in Ireland; a pleasant interlude between the rain and snow which have preceded, and may succeed it.

Lyle felt the influence of the sunshine in a corresponding brightness of spirits. The gloom of these last miserable weeks was temporarily banished. Her head no longer drooped, her step had its old alertness. She walked swiftly over the trim walks, and past the beds so lately a wilderness of vegetation. She caught a breath of hidden violets from grassy nooks, a glint of scarlet or russet life that had defied storm and clung firmly to bough or stem or undergrowth. The warm air was like a dream of spring, the moss green as an emerald.

As she penetrated deeper into the wood, it seemed to her full of surprises. Gleams of sky and river, peeps of swelling hills, the brown dimness of plowed fields, and everywhere trees—dark firs, glossy laurels, the stripped bare boughs of towering elms, the silvery

bark of stately beech ; beyond all a vista of rosy gloom.

Lyle stood still and gazed up that natural avenue. It was the first time she had been there. It seemed to lead indefinitely away beyond the boundaries of the park. The path beneath was mossy and weedgrown—a track between thick undergrowth that in summer was luxurious with honeysuckle and profligate beauty of wildflowers, ivy, and hedge brier.

She resolved to follow the path and trace it to its furthest boundary. The rough Irish terrier that her father had given her rushed on ahead with frantic glee, scenting rabbits in the brushwood, or giving vent to ecstasies of fury at a squirrel in safe shelter of arching boughs.

She had walked for half an hour before she came to some broken wire fencing, behind which rose a hedge of ill-kept luxuriant shrubs. As yet there had not been time to do anything to the remoter portion of the grounds. The hedgerows were just as they had been in years of neglect, when no one had lived in the house, or cared for the place.

The girl looked about her and then strolled slowly on. Suddenly she came to a break in the neglected hedge, where, hanging on broken hinges, was an old gate. It opened on a patch of waste ground, and beyond that lay a little wooded copse. As she leant her arms on the rails, and surveyed the somewhat dreary spot, she saw a figure come out of the wood.

Her heart gave a quick throb. She felt the blood fly to her cheeks, and then ebb back with a suddenness that made her faint.

There came a quick step ; the gate was opened ; the sound of a voice remembered only too faithfully was in her ears.

“ Miss Lyle, I *am* glad to see you ! What kind fate sent you to this lonely place ? ”

He had used her Christian name, but her heart gave the slip no rebuke. He was holding her hand in both his own, as if to emphasize that gladness which had thrilled his greeting. She was looking back to the eyes that she had told herself would never look into hers again with that untranslatable expression to which she had dared give no name. Yet the expression was there still, intensified by something deeper, more compelling, something that set her heart beating anew, and made the color rise afresh.

She could think of nothing to say. The sunlight waved over the woods, the terrier barked interrogation, the coo of a wood-pigeon fell on the silence, but she could only stand there trembling like a leaf, with her hand closed in that warm clasp, her soul drinking in a rapturous draught of gladness from that deep, yearning gaze that held her like a spell.

“ Oh ! Lyle,” said at last a voice, broken and husky with strong feeling, “ how I have missed you ! how I have wanted you ! I wonder if in all this time you have given a thought to—me ? ”

Where had her anger vanished ? Where had those doubts at his unexplained departure, that hurt pride, that professed indifference all gone ? They melted as snow melts before the warmth of summer suns. The wood-dove’s coo was echoed by another. “ We two ” it

seemed to say, and the echo of devotion gave back again "We two."

"Won't you speak?" pleaded Derrick's voice. "Are you angry with me?"

He was very close to her, and he half released the little hand that was now one tremor of agitation. Then she found voice.

"Angry? no—of course not."

"Are you a little bit glad that I have come back?"

Instinctive coquetry, the defensive weapon with which feminine things love to protect their self-betraying weakness, would have framed a "No" on the trembling lips; but something truer, deeper, more compelling forced "Yes"—so faintly that it was little wonder if a lover's triumph leaped to those devouring eyes.

"Oh! Lyle, do you mean it?—for I love you. My God! how I love you! All these endless weeks I have counted the hours till I could get back; till I could say—— Sweetheart, *you* know what I would say."

She shook like a leaf in autumn storms, but his arms drew her to the warm shelter of his breast.

"I know," she sobbed. "Oh! is it true, is it true?"

"As true as the heavens above; as that you are here, where I scarcely dared dream you ever would be, Lyle."

She looked up. No rose so crimson as her flushing cheeks, no star so radiant as her sweet, shy eyes.

His lips silenced the answer that her parted lips were so glad to speak. A passionate exultation thrilled him at their touch.

“Oh! I am too happy,” he cried suddenly. “It doesn’t seem possible that you should care, should love me. Is it so? You do? Say you do!”

“God knows I do.”

“My sweet!” He caught her to his breast once more.

For the first time in his troubled, stormy life Derrick Mallory knew that he had touched the acme of pure happiness: that neither life nor death could part him from the memory of this one most perfect moment.

Arm-in-arm they paced that moss-grown path beneath the trees, heedless of time, of everything save just the rapture of this newborn joy, the bliss of being together. There was so much to say, to confess, to marvel at. Less for him, perhaps, than for her, seeing that love to a girl’s awakening nature has in it an element of spirituality, untouched by man’s grosser sensibilities.

No chill of warning, no touch of ill came to them. Hope achieved royal heights, on which each saw the other throned. Their love reveled in vague demands and assurances, in prophecies of happiness that knew no boundary. The wonder of it was like a halo about their heads. Lyle saw no mere ordinary mortal in her lover. He had been the first to break into that enchanted garden where fancy had roamed and imagination reveled. He stood to her as the reality of those vague and beautiful dreams, the dearer, the more heroic, the more wonderful because of some faint shadow of past trouble, at whose banishment he hinted, and of the exact nature of which she did not question yet.

And he, looking down at the lovely face, lovelier still in the soft radiance of this new-found joy, felt as a man feels but once—that he was re-baptized in the fresh, pure current of a pure love. On radiant waters his soul floated Edenwards.

He was awed by happiness—the more so because it had seemed almost unattainable so brief a time before.

The distant woods were reddening to sunset, the air had taken the faint chill of departing day, the terrier had uttered many remonstrances at this monotonous promenade, with its interludes of prolonged halts, when Lyle suddenly remembered home duties and expected guests.

“It must be late,” she said; “and Nora is coming. Did I tell you? No. Oh! I am expecting her to-night. Ah! how selfish I am! In my joy I forgot all her heavy trouble.”

“Take your joy, dearest, while you can. I am sure she would not begrudge it.”

“I know that. But, Derrick, I must go home now. And that reminds me. How did you chance upon this spot? Where does that wood lead to?”

“To Aunt Belle’s plantation. Didn’t you know? The house is about a half-mile further on. It was a grand discovery, my darling. Some good angel surely led my feet there to-day. I only arrived this morning, and felt too restless to stay in the house. I dared not call on you so soon—and that reminds me, sweetheart. Why is your father so prejudiced against me?”

“He thinks you were wild and reckless—that you had to part with your inheritance to pay your debts.”



“The latter part is true enough. But it wasn’t my fault. As for being wild (how shyly you said it, sweetheart!), I think I have a very fair record if my character has to stand at the bar of his judgment. I suppose he’s not prejudiced against my nationality? Powers above, Lyle! I’ve forgotten—something.”

The consternation in his tone alarmed her.

“What is it? Oh, Derrick, nothing wrong—nothing you’ve done?”

A curious dusky flush came into his face. His voice was low and hurried.

“Wrong? No. But, Lyle, have you thought? I’m a Catholic. Sir Anthony has rather a prejudice against my faith.”

The girl turned very pale. “I know. Oh! Derrick, will there be trouble about it? Your priests can’t bear marriages with Protestants, and you are right about my father. He is prejudiced. The first thing he asked when I was so friendly with Nora was about her religion. But the Callaghans are Protestants, you know.”

“Yes, dear—and I am not. What will he say?”

Their footsteps slackened. The first shadow of trouble had swept over their promised land. They looked into each other’s eyes and read a new meaning in the tenderness—a something pleading, hopeful, yet touched with fear.

“There must be a way out of it,” said Derrick at last. “Must?—why, there *shall*. We can’t part—you and I—for sake of any prejudice in the minds of others. It’s impossible—now. Why, you’ve grown into my life, child; taken root too deep for me to pluck you out

whatever chanced. I felt you were mine the first hour my eyes met yours. Do you remember ?”

Another interlude, the sweeter for that first shadow on the sunshine of assurance ; then they went on in the gathering gloom, silent and half-afraid.

“ I must see him !” said Derrick at last. “ He loves you too well to make you unhappy. I must persuade him that the obstacle is not insurmountable. All things give way to firmness and determination. Can you be firm, Lyle ?”

“ Try me,” she said softly. “ I would not disobey my father, Derrick, but I could never be false to you, never marry any other man. When he sees that I mean it, I am sure he will yield.”

“ You know him better than I do. Ah ! dearest, our bit of untroubled happiness was very brief, wasn't it ?”

She shivered suddenly.

“ As long as we love each other, life can never be very sad—to me,” she said, but she felt, even as she said it, that an invisible sorrow hovered in the air. Its brooding wings fell with the brooding night ; they rested above her head and shadowed her path.

## CHAPTER XV.

BEFORE the bright fire in her bedroom Lyle Orcheton stood dressed for dinner.

With the glorious prerogative of youth she was absolutely independent of fine clothes, toilet accessories, paint, powder, curling-tongs. Happiness had dowered her to-night with a new and more subtle beauty. The pure tints of her skin, the coils of her burnished hair, enhanced the simplicity of her soft black gown, worn in compliment to Nora's heavy mourning. It was cut square at the neck, and the beautifully-molded throat rose above it in smooth and unadorned perfection. Her arms were bare save for lace mittens which reached to the elbow. One arched foot rested on the fender-bar as she gazed musingly into the fire—a happy light in her eyes, a smile coming and going on her lips.

She had forgotten that temporary shadow in the joy of remembering one splendid moment. Whatever chanced hereafter, nothing could mar that memory, nothing alter its wonderful truth.

The sound of wheels on the graveled drive roused her from her reverie to action. She gave one rapid glance at herself, and then ran down to the hall to welcome the arrivals.

A bright wood fire burned in the open grate, the light of crimson-shaded lamps shed a warm glow over

carvings and tapestry, cushioned lounges, soft rugs, palms, and hothouse flowers. A beautiful, luxurious picture, yet homelike withal.

Nora gave a little cry of delight as she gazed around. "Oh! Lyle, how perfect you have made it?"

She had come to her friend determined not to grieve her with further manifestations of her own great sorrow; determined that this first Christmas in Lyle's new home should bear no shadow of her casting. Pale and thin and worn she looked, but there was a new firmness in the young face, a new tenderness in the lovely eyes.

"Is it like what we planned?" asked Lyle. Then remembering under what different circumstances it had been planned, she hurried on without seeming to notice the quivering lips. "Confess I've worked hard. I sometimes thought it never would be finished in time. There are still lots of unopened cases waiting attention."

"I'll be able to help you now," said Nora eagerly.

"Are you really stronger, better?" asked her friend anxiously.

"Oh! yes. I feel quite well. Only Dr. Dan will dose me with tonics and other abominations."

"Now, Miss Nora, no taking liberties with my name and treatment," said a cheery voice; and the doctor, divested of overcoat and hat, appeared on the scene, followed by Sir Anthony.

Lyle drew Nora down on to a great cushioned Chesterfield, and removed her hat and cloak with loving hands.

"Jane has your dress all ready," she said, "but you

can rest for five minutes. Then I'll take you to your room. I hope you'll like it. Mrs. O'Neil helped me a great deal. She has been so kind."

A sudden memory of some one else closely associated with Mrs. O'Neil brought a wave of rich color to her cheek, but Nora's eyes were less observant than of yore.

"I am sure it will be lovely," she said, with a kiss.

"Have you finished your turret yet?"

"No. I wanted to wait for you."

"That was sweet of you. It's just the very thing I've longed for."

"Dinner will be ready in a quarter of an hour," said Sir Anthony suddenly. "I don't know whether you young ladies have any toilet duties or not?"

Nora rose. "I won't keep you waiting, Sir Anthony," she said.

"I'm dressed, so I'll help you, Nora," added Lyle. And the two girlish figures flitted up the broad staircase, arm linked in arm.

"It's perfectly wonderful! What a transformation!" exclaimed Nora, as they crossed the softly carpeted corridor where every nook held something of beauty in the shape of vase or picture or tapestry. But when Lyle threw open the door of Nora's bedchamber, her cry of rapture ended suddenly in a little sob.

"It is too good of you. Oh! Lyle, what a gem of a room—and all my old treasures!"

It was the sight of those old treasures, most of them gifts from her dead father, that brought a sob to her throat, a sudden mist to her eyes.

But Lyle would have no weeping. "Dear, you must

not give way," she whispered tenderly. "You have grieved enough. Try to think he is safe and happy; that he loves you still; that all is for the best."

"I am trying. Indeed, Lyle, I don't want to cast a gloom on your new life here. Ah! Jane, thank you. Yes, I must make haste. My hair will do, I think. I dressed it before I left."

She dried her eyes, and let Jane remove her dress and boots. Lyle sat down in the big basket chair by the fire, and waited. Nora's black gown was like her own, save for some bands of crape round the skirt and outlining the square of the bodice.

She looked very sweet and fair; the soft, clinging folds just suited her slim young figure, and like Lyle she wore no jewel or ornament.

"But this is all much too grand and beautiful for me," she said, glancing round from the white rugs to the white bed, draped in lace over blush-rose silk, the window hangings and pictures, the toilet-table and wardrobe of white enameled wood, the big cushioned sofa, the pretty combination bookshelf and writing table.

Lyle laughed. "Mrs. O'Neil said it was the most purely feminine room she had ever seen; that it was full of sentiment, and would certainly foster the ideal in your nature."

"It is purely lovable, if that expresses its object."

"It does indeed," said Lyle gravely. "I wanted it to say something of myself and you—of all the pleasure it had given me to arrange it. I hope you will have many happy hours and days here, Nora; at least, I'll try my best that you shall have them."

“You are too good to me, Lyle, dearest. What should I have done through all this terrible time but for you?”

“Hush! We are to have no tears, no sad memories. You’re ready—isn’t she, Jane?”

“Yes, miss. No—one moment.”

And Jane stepped back and gravely surveyed the effects of her handiwork. On the toilet-table stood a bowl of white and pink roses. She took a white one, with its glossy green leaves, and fastened it deftly on the left side of the open bodice. Then she approached Lyle, with a pink one, and did the same.

The girls stood side by side, and looked at themselves. Golden head and chestnut, violet eye and blue, pale cheek and glowing, a fair pair they made. The eyes of the woman who watched them grew dark with regretful memories as she looked from face to face. Perhaps she, too, remembered life’s springtime, and its brief spell of hope and love and all that is joyous.

The sound of the dinner bell recalled them to realities, and they hastened down-stairs. To Lyle’s surprise she saw her father talking eagerly to Jasper Standish.

“Nonsense! You must stay,” he was saying. “Christmas Eve and all. Lyle, make Mr. Standish change his mind. He brought over these lovely flowers for you as a Christmas greeting, and now wants to run off.”

Lyle’s face changed from warmth to coldness. Jasper noticed it.

“I hope you will stay, Mr. Standish,” she said, not too cordially. “And it was very kind of you to bring these flowers.”

She did not touch them, he observed. There they lay on one of the smaller tables—a white fragile mass of Christmas roses, white lilac, and lilies of the valley. She knew he must have ordered them from Dublin. No such blossoms would have been found at any ordinary florist's, and the conservatories of the county were not too well stocked.

“You are very kind,” said Jasper, “and it is too tempting an offer to refuse, if you will add to your kindness by excusing my dress.”

“Of course, of course,” said Sir Anthony genially. “Off with your overcoat and come along.”

Nora Callaghan's face had flushed and paled during that brief colloquy. He shook hands with her now, and murmured a conventional Christmas greeting. Dr. Dan offered his arm to Lyle, and Jasper Standish followed with Nora.

It was an ordeal he would have gladly foregone. His eyes avoided hers, his hand shook nervously as he raised his soup spoon. Fortunately the party was so small that conversation could scarcely be anything but general.

Lyle studiously avoided his gaze and ignored his compliments. She talked chiefly to Dr. Dan, leaving her father to entertain Jasper and Nora. The unexpected appearance of this man whom she so disliked spoilt her anticipated evening. He would stay on, there would be cards, her father would ask her to make a fourth at whist, and she would have to endure that odious presence during the rubber.

Dr. Dan's funny stories fell on absent ears. Pigs and courtships and penances had lost their interest—



temporarily. She was inexperienced as yet in that polite hypocrisy which feigns interest when bored or troubled, or racked with personal anxiety. Her laugh came in at the wrong place, and her brain followed but slowly the windings of an Irish argument, or the geography of an Irish oath.

She noted, however, that Jasper Standish took a great deal more champagne than either of his elders, that his cheeks were very flushed, and his eyes strangely bright. She was thankful when she could give Nora the signal to retire.

They went back to the hall, as the drawing-room was not yet ready for occupation. "We shall follow you soon," called out Sir Anthony. "Lyle, see the card-table is ready. It's a long time since I had a rubber."

"I thought that would be the end of it!" said Lyle, somewhat crossly. "I shall have to take a hand. And you—what will you do, darling?"

"If you don't care about playing, Lyle, I will be the fourth," Nora answered. "I am more used to cards than you, and play a very good game—so dear old dad used to say."

Lyle looked at her with some wonder. Then her heart sank. "It's only because of that hateful man," she thought. "Oh! what can she see in him to care about? The very sight of him chills my blood. I feel he is treacherous—merciless—unsafe. If only I could make her believe it also!"

She little guessed how or in what manner she would make her believe it—still less on what strange current they were even now being swept along to the shores of a terrible and fateful discovery.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“MAY I come in?” asked Lyle’s voice very softly at the communicating door between the two bedrooms.

Nora started from a reverie, long, thoughtful, pain-filled. She was partly undressed, and had thrown on a white woolen gown of Lyle’s providing. The big cushioned couch was drawn up before the fire. There was no other light in the room save that of the glowing flames.

“Yes,” she answered. “I am not in bed.”

The door opened. Lyle stood for a moment on the threshold and gazed around.

“It is just as I pictured,” she said. “If you are not sleepy, Nora, may I stop with you till the Christmas dawn? It is just eleven o’clock.”

“I hoped you would!” said Nora earnestly. “I did not like to ask it. You seemed tired.”

“I am not tired,” Lyle said, and closed the door, and then came forward and sank down on the rug beside the couch. “You lie back,” she said, “and make yourself comfortable. I have something to tell you. It will surprise you, I think.”

Nora looked at her. The firelight played on the curve of exquisite lips parting in a smile of exquisite happiness.

“You needn't tell more than your face does, Lyle,” she said. “He has returned, and you are happy.”

“Oh! so happy,” breathed the girl passionately. “There seems no word, no language to express it.”

Nora's heart gave a little throb of envy. It was not possible to look at that radiant face, that expression of perfect human happiness, and not envy it. For her own heart was heavy, and this evening it had been racked with doubt and distrust.

“I hardly know how to tell you,” faltered Lyle. “I never said anything to you all this time, but I thought he had gone away, not caring. I feared he would never return; and all the time, Nora, he—loved me!”

If Derrick Mallory could have heard the intonation of those two words, he might well have sunk on his knees in humble thankfulness; not to many is it given to receive such wealth of worship and self-surrender as this girl's nature could so royally bestow.

“I always thought so,” said Nora. “It was easy to read. I knew he could explain his absence. What occasioned it?”

Lyle gave a little start. Then she laughed softly.

“I really never asked him. It all came so suddenly. I was walking in the woods and reached the boundary of the park, and he was coming from the other direction and saw me, and then—well, then he told me, Nora.”

“Darling, I am glad for you. I hope you will be very, very happy.”

“I am almost afraid. It seems too good to be true.”

“Nothing is too good to be true for you, Lyle.

Certainly no man. I think it is the other way about. You are too good for him."

"Oh, Nora!" Reproach rang out at such seeming disloyalty. "That is only because you don't know him."

"Do you know so very much more?"

"Ah! but it's so different when one *feels*. Don't you think, Nora, love is a sort of intuition?"

"They say it is a sort of mental and moral blindness."

"That's not kind: not a bit like you, Nora. Oh! I thought you would be so glad, so full of sympathy. If it were you——"

She paused, conscious of a sudden check. Well enough she knew that if it had been Nora's fate to confide an acknowledged love of which Jasper Standish was hero, she could not have feigned much sympathy with her.

"Ah!" said Nora sadly, "if it were I—but it never will be. You say love is a sort of intuition. So is sorrow. I know my fate, dear. It won't be a happy one. But don't let us talk of myself. I want to hear about Derrick. I suppose I may call him that?"

Lyle's eyes turned to the fire again. Her hands clasped themselves around her knee.

"Of course you may."

Then followed a stream of soft raptures, conjectures, hopes. But at last the shadow fell, and Nora saw it. With little difficulty she drew from the halting lips that dreadful possibility—her father's objection, grounded at first on prejudice, then on the difference of religion between the two. What did Nora think?

Nora thought the latter difficulty the greatest. She had lived in Ireland long enough, and had heard enough, too, to give Lyle some idea of how Irish Protestants are hated by priests and people.

“But your father——” began Lyle unthinkingly.

Nora winced. “Dear old dad would have got on much better but for his religion. That’s why he never got a really good appointment. But he couldn’t help being popular wherever he went. Still, you see, he must have had a bitter enemy——” Her voice faltered. Again they had stumbled on dangerous ground.

There was a spell of silence. Presently Lyle spoke again.

“If my father refuses to let me marry Derrick, I cannot go against his wishes, but I cannot help loving him. I shall never marry any one else.”

“That is how you feel?”

“Yes. Isn’t it strange that a man can come into one’s life and alter it all so completely in such a short time, Nora? For it is a very short time. You remember that morning when we rode here and discussed love, and what it might mean, and wondered? And now it has happened.”

“Yes,” said Nora, and her voice faltered a little. “It has happened—for you.”

“Ah! dearest,” said Lyle, with quick sympathy. “forgive me if I seem to forget your suffering. My own happiness seems so selfish—and yet I have no one else to speak to.”

“I am glad you told me, Lyle, but I foresee trouble ahead of all this. Derrick will have to fight the up-

holders of his faith—and you your father's prejudices on two points. Then he has to go back to India soon, hasn't he?"

"Yes, in two months, I think."

"I'm afraid, Lyle, your cloud, though not bigger than a man's hand now, is on the horizon already. But I don't want to discourage you. We must hope for the best. Sir Anthony is so fond of you, he couldn't see you unhappy."

Lyle's face was very grave. Her lips quivered.

"It seems hard," she said, "that the moment one touches joy it vanishes, and sorrow looks at one instead. Isn't it so, Nora?"

"I am only a girl, and very ignorant, and have seen but little of life. But even that little tells me it is so, Lyle."

"It is very hard, and very pathetic,"

"Even when one hasn't quite realized it. Men suffer, women suffer, little children suffer. With one hand we clasp joy, with the other grief. They are twin sisters that cannot be separated. The legend of my country is 'the smile and the tear,' you know."

"True: and I cannot wonder that you are less hopeful than of old. Still, Nora, not all the shadows, not all the fears, can blot out the memory of to-day. In all my life it will stand out, pure, perfect, wonderful. However it ends, I shall be grateful for having known the truth and worth of love."

Nora sat perfectly still.

She had determined she would not give way to emotions. This ache and throb of her own heart should not draw confession of its weakness. But the task

grew harder every moment. Those last words, in their tender confidence, their heaven-lifted folly, their revelation of life's supreme glory, almost broke down her self-restraint.

Beside this love what was hers? Shamed, distrustful, pain-racked—a strain of broken music beside a poem of soulful joy. And yet she loved as deeply, as passionately, as the girl by her side.

But her life was a dream half-broken, restless—a sleep with closed eyes that feared to open. To have said “I love where I am not beloved” would have seemed a shameful confession; yet the shame would have been easier to bear than this self-repression, this damming back of a flood that longed to roll its tideful waters over prudence, hopelessness, restraint, denial, fate!

Why, she asked herself, should love come in guise of devil to some, of angel to others? Why should Hagar of the Desert have nothing, save the sex that claimed them, in common with Sarah of the Tent? The wild rebellion of youth ran riot in her veins. Her friend's exultant happiness showed her own misery in blacker contrast. The one walked in a garden of fragrant glories, the other in a meadow land of blight. For one flowers bloomed, wings unfolded, sunlight showered its golden dower; for the other were gathering cloud, and withered bloom, and gloom of starless night.

“I have tired you,” said Lyle at last. She looked up at the pale face lying against rose-colored cushions: the haunting sadness of the eyes struck her to the heart. She knelt down beside the quiet figure, and put her arms about it.

“Darling,” she said, “are you suffering from what is harder to bear than grief for your recent loss? Won’t you trust me? Is it easier to bear, locked up in your own heart?”

Nora pushed her aside suddenly. Some wild thought of escape—of denial—flashed through her brain. A light from the wood fire flamed up full upon her face—showed its pain, its dread, its awful suffering.

Lyle was horror-struck. “Nora!” she cried.

Then the storm burst. “Why did you say *that*? Why did you? Oh! Lyle, I’m so unhappy! Don’t mind, let me cry. I’m tired out, I think; and to-night—to-night——”

“What of to-night? Dear, don’t fear to tell me. Never sister loved sister more devotedly. Surely you know that.”

“It’s because I know it,” sobbed the distracted girl. “Because you yourself are unconscious of what you have done. You—have taken him from me, Lyle. It is you he loves—you. I saw it to-night if I never saw it before.”

Lyle rose slowly to her feet, pale, and stern, and grave.

“What are you saying, Nora? I—have done this?”

Two slender hands covered the tortured face. The tears streamed down and through that useless protection.

“It is true!” she panted, between her gasping sobs. “Oh! why did you make me say it? The shame is hard enough to bear without that. If it had been any one else but you, Lyle! You don’t even like him—



you never did—you don't want his love, and I—I could go down on my knees and pray for it. I could die gladly only to have had his arms round me—once.”

“Nora! Oh, my dear, stop! You are overwrought. You don't know what you're saying!”

“I do know. I have kept it back so long that I feel as if I should go mad with silence. You can't understand. You are colder—more self-controlled; but when we Irish love, it is desperate. It is life or death—heaven or hell!”

“My dear——”

“You pity me, of course. It's no fault of yours, as I said——”

She sank back exhausted, the sobs coming still in hysterical gasps, her whole slight frame exhausted with emotion.

Lyle looked at her with a sort of terror in her eyes. In contrast with her own love, her own feelings, this torrent of ungoverned and irrepressible passion seemed awful.

There was nothing to say. She hated this man, and—Nora loved him. He had led her on to believe he cared for her, and now chose suddenly to transfer his allegiance. That alone proclaimed him untrustworthy, and yet—Nora loved him!

She sank down on the white rug. Those agonizing sobs rent her very soul.

Then from afar, in the distance, came the sound of bells. Softly, sweetly, they chimed in the stirless silence of the night. Nora's hands dropped from her face. She looked at Lyle.

“The Christmas dawn!” she whispered. “What

a greeting to give it, Lyle! I have always met it with a prayer. To-night—I cannot.”

Her head sank back against the rose-silk cushions. She lay there quite still, with closed eyes, while the bells pealed “Peace and Goodwill towards Men!”

## CHAPTER XVII.

FOR long after she had seen Nora safe in bed, and asleep from sheer exhaustion, Lyle lay awake herself in the adjoining room.

The tragedies of life were facing her rapidly. Only a few months, and the glad, hopeful serenity had vanished. She had faced crime, sorrow, loss, love and now stood as a rival in the eyes of the friend she loved so dearly. It was a bitter truth. But she had heard it spoken, and would have to bear its bitterness for all the time to come.

It was long past midnight. Dismal sobs of wind and rain were in the air, the clock's ticking seemed abnormally loud. It would be morning soon. She would have to rise and face it, carrying a double secret in her heart.

Derrick would not disturb the Christmas serenity by any interview with Sir Anthony. They had agreed to wait for this week, and then the matter was to be laid before him. Knowing what they would have to face, Derrick had begged for one week of peace—one week in which to hold their secret undisturbed—seven little days in which to talk and dream and meet. It did not seem much. Fate could hardly grudge them that.

Lyle covered her aching eyes with her hands and tried to pray, but the words brought little sense of com-

fort. What a tangle it all seemed ! Derrick and herself, and Nora and that hateful man. She shuddered as she thought of the girl's reckless passion, of her words : " When we Irish love it is desperate ! It is life or death—heaven or hell ! "

What could there be of heaven, its glory, its peace, its sanctity, in this love of hers for Jasper Standish ? Even if it were returned, she dreaded to think of Nora's future in his hands, of her faithful, passionate heart at his mercy.

The prejudice she had conceived against Jasper Standish was one of those inexplicable feelings that defy reason. She had distrusted and disliked him from the first. His good looks were only a mask. She felt that cruelty and treachery lurked behind. His covert attentions to herself at once incensed and shamed her. Yet they were so artfully conveyed that it was almost impossible to take any definite stand. She could only avoid, she could not absolutely forbid them.

Worn out at last with conflicting thoughts, she fell asleep. So deep and dreamless was it, that the pretty Irish housemaid who brought her morning tea and prepared her bath stood long by her side, not liking to wake her.

The rain was over. A brisk wind had driven the clouds away. The sun shone through her window as she opened her eyes at last. She sprang up and looked around. A vague sense of something distressful oppressed her, and yet a new and wonderful joy lived in the sunshine, echoed through call and chirp of birds in the ivy round her casements. Then she

remembered, and pretty Molly wondered at the sudden gravity of the beautiful young face.

“Wishin’ you a Merry Christmas, miss,” she said shyly. “And many of them; and long may ye be spared to live and enjoy them in your beautiful home.”

“Thank you, Molly,” she said. “It is very pleasant to hear good wishes the moment one wakes. The same to yourself.”

“Ah! thin, miss, me best thanks, an’ may it be long before I say good-by to ye. Shall I be callin’ Miss Callaghan at all? It’s in the deep sleep she is; so I took the tea back agin.”

“Oh, don’t disturb her!” cried Lyle. “Sleep will do her good. You can take her some breakfast when she wakes up. Is my bath ready?”

“It is, miss.”

“Very well. You can go now, Molly. Any letters?”

“Sure, the post is late on Christmas Day, miss. What wid the weight av cards an’ packages, Shane O’Flaherty the poor boy, can’t be kapin’ his hours reg’lar at all.”

Lyle laughed, and sprang out of bed. The gloom and sorrow of the past night had lessened. She was young; she loved; she was beloved. Fate could not harm her seriously, could not rob her of the joy of memory, the sweets of anticipation. Troubles would end somehow. They must. If one set oneself resolutely to achieve a thing, one was bound to accomplish it.

The black nightmare of those past hours fled before the glorious sunshine, the hopes and joys of the season. Her soul was at peace with all the world, brimming

over with tenderness and good-will. Nature rejoices after storm and stress, so in like manner human hearts rise from sorrow's pressure, and breathe and live once more in the sunshine of hope—the hope that is God's message, that even from the closing gates of Eden breathed its message to forlorn ears, that keeps alive some instinct of courage in bruised and breaking hearts, so that mortals shall not quite despair even when life seems most desolate.

Nora was still asleep when Lyle had finished dressing. She softly closed the door again, and went down-stairs to breakfast.

Sir Anthony's mild face was full of kindness and good-will. As he held her in his arms, and bade God bless her as the treasure of his life, her conscience knew a little pang of remorse.

It was hard to hold a secret from him. It was the first time she had ever done so. "But it won't be for long," she told herself. "Only one little week." Yet could she have foreseen the disasters that that "little week" of secrecy would entail, she would have thrown herself on that kindly breast, and confessed there and then her girlish love.

But the moments of opportunity are rare, and few hands are ready to grasp them.

She withdrew herself from her father's arm, and took her accustomed seat at the breakfast table, explaining Nora's absence while she poured out coffee.

"Are you coming to church with us, dad?" she asked presently.

"Certainly. The congregation is none too large at

any time ; and poor Mr. Harrison will look for us. I thought of asking him back to lunch."

"You'll have to ask his wife also ; and she is a dreadfully uninteresting person."

"I never knew a clergyman's wife who wasn't. Their ideas have a purely personal horizon, bounded on the north by their own special church, on the south by mothers' meetings, on the east by their own official importance, and on the west by the inevitable large family which is a clerical stipend."

Lyle laughed. She felt almost light-hearted. If only she could forget that confession of Nora's.

Sir Anthony seemed in unusually good spirits. He talked more than was usual with him. After breakfast was over he produced two morocco cases, one of which he presented to Lyle. She gave a little cry of rapture. "Pearls ! Oh ! how lovely !"

Reposing on a velvet bed was a necklace of pearls clasped by a single diamond. Just the ornament for a girlish throat, with that pure-tinted, satin skin that Lyle possessed.

"And this is for Nora," said the old gentleman. He showed a similar necklet, only the pearls were smaller. "I know you like to have everything as alike as possible," he said. "Besides, pearls are the jewels of girlhood. I never care to see you wear anything else."

"How dear of you to think of Nora too ! I'm sure she'll be in raptures with this."

"It will be a sad day for her, poor child," said Sir Anthony sadly. "She cannot choose but remember her last Christmas Day."

“It seems the strangest thing to me,” exclaimed Lyle with sudden impetuosity, “that nothing has been found out about that murder. I often think that Mr. Standish doesn’t trouble his head about it. Day follows day, and week follows week, and neither clue nor trace is found.”

“Standish has a clue, but he is too wary to give it away yet,” said her father. “He knows what gossips these folk are. The matter has to be conducted with secrecy and discretion.”

“Oh, of course, you always take his part,” said Lyle somewhat pettishly. “I cannot understand why you like that man so much.”

“I find him excellent company. And he has been most thoughtful and kind in many ways. You have an unaccountable prejudice against him, Lyle.”

“Well, we won’t begin our first Christmas here with a quarrel,” said Lyle lightly. “As I cannot agree with you on this point, we won’t discuss it. I’m going to run up to see Nora. Shall I take the present, or will you give it her yourself?”

“You take it. Girls understand each other. I can’t bear to see her cry.”

And cry Nora did at the thoughtful kindness and beauty of her present, recalling as it did another loving giver, who was laid at rest forever now in the cold earth. Last year he had given her pearls, too—a ring of them, the first ring she had ever worn. “They mean tears,” Mrs. O’Neil had said, when the girl displayed it triumphantly.

Well, they had certainly meant tears for her—bitter,



humiliating, heart-breaking tears. Would these mean the same ?

\* \* \* \* \*

Lyle did not allude to the conversation of the previous night. She felt it best to treat it with the respect of silence. It had been an impulse fierce and ungovernable. Perhaps Nora regretted that self-betrayal as much as she regretted its nature.

The morning sped on. The boredom of the clerical luncheon was over, and Mr. Harrison and his wife had taken their departure. Sir Anthony retired to his study ; Lyle, blushing softly, took a letter from her breast, where it had lain since the post arrived—her first love-letter

Who would not covet girlhood and its faith to be heaven-lifted by such sweet folly !

“ DARLING—MY OWN,

“ If it was no dream—and faith, child, I’ve been asking myself that question ever since—meet me as soon after three as you can at the same place. ’Twill be a hundred years till I see your sweet face again, beloved, and hear you say—— Never mind. I’ll ask you *that* when we meet.

“ Yours only and always,

“ DERRICK.”

Of course she would go. She must tell Nora, but she would understand. A week—and one day had gone—only six remained.

She turned to where her friend was sitting, gazing moodily into the fire.

“Nora,” she said, “I have to go out for an hour or two. Can you amuse yourself? You won’t think me rude, leaving you alone?”

“Of course not. I think I will lie down. I’m very tired.”

“There are plenty of books in my room. Take any you like; or there are all the Christmas numbers on that table beside you.”

“Don’t trouble about me.”

She rose languidly. Try as she would she could not stifle the pang of envy, could not but feel that Fate was dealing cruelly with her.

From the window of her room she saw Lyle speeding like a lapwing over grassy lawn, and graveled path. Soon the trees hid her from those sad and brooding eyes. She turned away and threw herself down on the couch.

“She has everything,” she thought resentfully. “Home, wealth, joy, love. And I—I am bankrupt in all. Oh! it isn’t fair, it isn’t right. If I didn’t love her, I should hate her for robbing me of the only thing I craved on earth.” And then she felt a sudden horror of herself for a thought so unworthy.

“It’s the most miserable Christmas Day I ever spent in my life, and she doesn’t care. All the world now only means—him. Oh! what is coming to me? I feel so wicked, so envious. I seem changing altogether! My mind is a fever, my heart only one ceaseless ache. I seem to lose all control over brain and sense at times. Oh! what an awful thing it is to love like this! I

could kill myself with shame and rage—only I feel that even death would not stamp it out.”

She flung her arms out in wild agony. “If God puts love into our hearts, what can we do! I didn’t ask it, I didn’t want it; but there’s no power left in me to cast it out again. There it is—beating, craving, maddening. Whatever he is, whatever he does, I love him—shall always love him. Oh! Jasper, why can’t you care for me?”

The tears only scorched her eyes—they brought no relief to her aching brain. She followed Lyle in fancy; saw the meeting, blushing face, happy eyes, the shy grace which yielded to a lover’s embrace. And one—once all this had seemed so near herself. Love had looked out of those dark eyes of Jasper Standish, had echoed in the subtle falter of tones love-tuned and beguiling, had given meaning to a hand touch, a warm embrace that held her to his heart for the magic moments of a too brief waltz.

These memories maddened her. Since Lyle had come here all was changed. She had been pushed aside; her beauty, her grace, her worshiping tenderness were of no account.

Where had she heard or read something about a woman driven desperate by unrequited love? Driven to Death’s arms from those coldly indifferent ones of her lover!

“Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.” No fury! Good God above! Was she to be *that*! All the sweetness of her nature turned to gall, its summer prime blighted and laid waste!

She hid her face in her hands. She rocked herself

to and fro in an agony of fear. "Oh! help me, Christ," she moaned. "I don't want to do wrong. Don't let me get hard and bitter and revengeful. If I could be happy just a little while—only a little while—before I die!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE was a false air of festivity about that Christmas night. Sir Anthony was grave and absent-minded. To the old, Christmas is always a time of memories. Nora was pale and weary-looking. Lyle, in her new radiance of happiness, felt almost ashamed of a joy that was apart from them, and tried to subdue her sweet content and hopefulness in sympathy with regrets of the one, the sorrow of the other.

After dinner they sat round the wood fire in the hall, and talked. At least, Sir Anthony talked and the girls listened. But it was a relief to all when ten o'clock sounded, and they were free to part for the night.

“I am not going to keep you up chattering,” said Lyle, as she stood on the threshold of Nora’s room. “You need rest; and, indeed, I don’t mind telling you I had very little sleep last night. When you are stronger and better we will have another talk. At present it is bad for you, and only selfish of me. Promise me you won’t sit up thinking. Just go straight to bed and sleep. You’ll feel all the better to-morrow morning.”

“I’ll do my best,” said Nora. “I must confess I feel tired, awfully tired. Jane is coming up to do my hair and undress me,” she added. “Shall I say good night now?”

They kissed each other, but Lyle felt something was lacking in the caress. The old spontaneous tenderness had gone from it. "Poor darling! no wonder she is unhappy," she thought regretfully. And then she closed the door and went into her own room.

She had so much to think of. All the wonderful gladness of that afternoon—all the tender speeches of her lover, all the hopes of the golden future that was to be theirs. She blew out the candle at last, and then, actuated by some impulse to gaze at the same sky, the same moon, on which his eyes might then be gazing, she crossed over to the window and drew aside the blind and looked out. The moon was almost at its full. It shone on leafless trees, on glistening grass; the shadowy path which yesterday had led to such undreamt-of happiness.

As she stood looking out, she saw a figure cross the level patch of sward and flit under the trees to that same avenue.

It was a woman's figure.

Lyle felt that discipline was being relaxed in some way. The servants were all supposed to be in bed by half-past ten at the latest. Certainly, even if upon this occasion owing to Christmas festivities, they had no right to be out of doors.

"I wonder who it was?" she thought. "Not Molly—she is short; the figure was tall. I must tell Jane about it. Dear me! I hope there won't be trouble in the servants' hall, with this half-English, half-Irish establishment. I wonder why none of them like Jane. Perhaps she is too strict. However, this sort of thing will never do."

She dropped the blind. The figure was out of sight. There was a sweetheart in the case, no doubt. Her heart gave a little throb. It must be hard not to be able to see your lover when you wish. No wonder maid and man took the law into their own hands occasionally. Still, she must give Jane a hint in the morning.

\* \* \* \* \*

A dismal, wet morning followed that genial Christmas Day. The steady downpour gave no hope of cessation. Lyle felt correspondingly depressed. She would not be able to get out. One day of the promised seven would be lost. How hard it seemed!

Nora came down to breakfast. She looked wan and wretched. She had not slept, she said.

“I tell you what we’ll do,” said Lyle suddenly; “we will set to work on my turret-room. I’ll have a fire lit at once, and Jane shall help us. At least, you needn’t work. You can sit down and watch me.”

Nora brightened up at the suggestion, but declared she was not going to sit down. She was perfectly able to work, and would like it.

“Well, I’ll just go to the housekeeper’s room and give my orders, and then we can begin.”

It was only when given those orders that the memory of the preceding night occurred to Lyle.

“Oh! by the way, Jane,” she said, “I saw one of the servants going across the park last night. It was nearly eleven o’clock. Surely——”

She stopped abruptly, startled by a sudden look of alarm on Jane Grapnell’s face. It was gone in a moment, but certainly it had been there. Yet why should

she be alarmed? It was no fault of hers. "Perhaps," she said, "you know who it was?"

"I—yes, miss, I think I do."

"Well, you must see it does not occur again. It's not safe, as well as not right. If the girl goes out, she must leave some door open. I thought you or Woodman went over the house the last thing. Who went over it last night?"

"I—was the last, miss."

"Didn't you notice anything?"

"No, miss."

Lyle thought her manner rather strange, but let the matter drop, and made her request about the turret-room. Jane promised to come as soon as her morning duties were over, and Lyle ran off, all eagerness and excitement, to the scene of her forthcoming labors.

A housemaid, was kneeling by the fire, which did not seem inclined to burn. It was no other than Honora Mooney, who had secured the place after all.

Lyle stood a moment looking at the confusion. Furniture was there but none of it in its proper place; books stood in piles on the floor, as they had been taken out of packing cases, pictures were carefully stacked on tables and window seats, but none as yet graced the walls. The room looked gloomy and uninviting in its disorder, and the rain beat heavily at the quaint leaded casements. The view without was blurred and misty, and Lyle gave a little shiver as her eyes turned to the smoldering flame.

"It's damp the place is, miss," said the girl apologetically. "I've been on my two knees this blessed hour, tryin' to light the fire."



“I think it’s going to burn up now,” said Lyle, with forced cheerfulness. “By the bye, what’s your name? I haven’t seen you before. You’re the under-housemaid, I think?”

“I am, miss. An’ it’s doin’ my best I’ll be to suit yer ladyship. Honora Mooney’s me name. Me mother has a bit av a shop in the town beyant. Molly an’ I is friends from schooltime, an’ she spoke up to the house-keeper for me, an’ I came in the night before the Christmas Eve.”

“Then who was it, Molly or you, who ran out last night across the park; I suppose to meet a young man?”

The girl looked astonished. “Indade, thin, it wasn’t me, miss. That’s not the sort av thing I’d be doin’ any day. Besides, it’s Phelim McGee, the dacint boy that’s gardener here to his honor, that I’m kapin’ company with, an’ no call to be runnin’ after him at sich hours, seein’ as how I’ve me own evenin’, and Sunday after Mass.”

“Perhaps it was Molly,” suggested Lyle, thinking what a lot Irish servants had to say beyond plain “Yes or No.”

“Indade, thin, axin’ yer ladyship’s pardon, it could not have been Molly, for she an’ I are sharin’ the same room, an’ we was both in bed an’ dramin’—lastewise she was snorin’—by half-past ten o’clock last night, seein’ as we was up at daylight for first Mass before doin’ a stroke av work.”

Lyle felt a little puzzled. The cook was the only other possible delinquent. But the cook was a staid and portly person of forty years of age at least. Be-

sides, she hadn't been long enough over from England to have a "follower" yet, even were she minded that way. Also the figure she had seen did not in any way resemble Bates. It had been tall, slight, and active. She remembered the quick step—the rapid passage over the open space into the shadow of the trees. Certainly it was very odd. She wondered if the girl was speaking truth. She had heard that Irish servants considered that in no way a binding obligation if they took service with a Protestant family. The priest would always absolve them in the matter of a "little bit of a lie" to a heretic.

There seemed a mystery about this simple fact, and she did not like it. Some one had certainly left the kitchen regions and been in the park between half-past ten and eleven o'clock the previous night. Should she let the matter drop or pursue it further?

"Will yer ladyship be needin' me any more?" inquired Honora, giving a last touch to the blazing logs. "The housekeeper said I was to bring dusters an' a sweepin' brush, an' there they are."

"No, thank you," said Lyle. "I shall not need you. Mrs. Grapnell will help me."

The girl curtsied and withdrew. At the same moment Nora entered. She looked more cheerful, and like her old self. She had tied a big holland apron over her black frock, and was evidently bent on work. Lyle banished the subject of the truant in the park for the time, and the two girls commenced their labors. It was about half an hour before Jane joined them, and the three did wonders with the room before the luncheon bell rang.

“If we go on with it this afternoon,” said Lyle, after a hopeless glance at the still pouring rain, “it will be finished by evening. We will have afternoon tea up here, Nora, to celebrate the occasion. Jane, you must be tired. You’ve done all the hard work.”

“Isn’t it quiet up here !” said Nora. “A perfect Sister Anne’s turret.”

She went to the casement and opened it. “You can see for miles and miles. It’s lovely ! Why”—she drew back suddenly, the paleness of her face suffused with a blush. “Lyle, there’s a visitor ; some one riding up the drive.”

“Not Mr. Standish again !” exclaimed Lyle, with impetuous wrath.

Nora made no answer, only left the room.

Jane’s eyes met those of her young mistress.

“You don’t like him either, miss ?” she said in a low voice.

“Indeed I don’t, Jane. I wish he wouldn’t come here so often.”

“Oh ! Miss Lyle, if you only knew—if you could make Miss Nora believe——”

“Believe what, Jane ?”

The woman wrung her hands in a sort of impotent despair.

“Believe that he is a villain, a liar, and—worse.”

“Worse ! What do you mean ?”

“It will come out some day ; it’s bound to come out ; but he’s so cunning and so strong, and proofs are difficult. But oh, Miss Lyle, if you could only keep her away from his evil influence till the time is ripe, till the truth can be spoken !”

“I—I can’t imagine what you mean, Jane. You must explain. But I can’t wait now ; I shall be late as it is. This afternoon you must tell me your reasons for speaking against Mr. Standish in this manner.”

She threw off her apron, and ran down-stairs to wash her hands before going to the dining-room.

“So I’m not the only one who distrusts you, Mr. Jasper,” she said to herself. “Oh ! if only it wasn’t too late to save my darling from your evil influence—if only she hadn’t learnt to care !”

\* \* \* \* \*

Jasper Standish was telling Sir Anthony that he had called on an important matter. That easy-going gentleman was a little disconcerted.

“Leave it until after luncheon,” he said. “What a day for you to be out !”

“Oh, I never mind weather,” said the Inspector. “It wouldn’t do.”

A few minutes later Nora entered. She explained that Lyle would be down presently. She had been arranging her new room. They sat down to table. It was an informal meal, and no one waited for any one else if inclined to begin. The soup was finished and removed before Lyle appeared. She excused her unpunctuality, and with a very frigid handshake to Jasper took a seat opposite to him.

“How does the sanctum go on ?” inquired her father. “I must tell you, Mr. Standish, that my daughter has chosen a very queer-looking room in the turret for herself. It is to be workshop, study, boudoir. A mysterious resort for feminine employ-

ment and feminine confidences. I am not to look at it until it is complete. When will that be, Lyle?"

"By this evening."

"You have worked hard," said her father, in surprise.

"The room in the turret?" said Jasper eagerly. "That is the room with the secret stairway. Have you discovered it?"

Both girls looked at him in surprise.

"No!" exclaimed Lyle. "I never knew there was any other staircase but that leading from the upper corridor."

"There is, though, and a queer history enough is attached to it. I've been down it myself when the house was untenanted. I'll show it you if you wish, Miss Orcheton?"

"I hope it's safe. Where does it lead to?" asked Sir Anthony.

"To an underground passage; and that goes through the park till you reach a sort of cave—a rocky hollow, near the river. It is said that a very pious friar of the order of St. Francis used to dwell in it."

"How strange!" exclaimed Lyle, deeply interested. "Oh! you must show me the way. I can't think where the staircase can be. The walls look so solid."

"Well," said Sir Anthony, "when we've settled our business, Standish, you can play guide to the mystery. But be careful. Those old passages and stairways are sometimes unsafe."

"This stair is of stone," said Jasper.

"How came you to discover it?" asked Lyle.

He smiled—that cold, faint smile she so disliked.

“My business, Miss Orcheton, sometimes leads me into strange places and strange scenes. I had reason to suspect a criminal was in hiding here. In my search I came across that secret door. I persevered until I found out how it was opened.”

“And did you find the miscreant?” inquired Sir Anthony.

“No ; he escaped.”

“Lyle looked up from her plate—looked him full in the face, and saw his eyes droop before her steadfast gaze.

“You seem to have a way of letting suspected offenders escape, Mr. Standish,” she said.

## CHAPTER XIX.

It was fated there should be no discovery of the secret staircase that afternoon. Whatever the nature of Jasper Standish's communication to Sir Anthony, it was one that seemed to overthrow all other plans. He had been nearly an hour in the study when Nora's keen ears caught the sound of horse's hoofs on the gravel, and rushing to the window, she saw the retreating figure of her fickle lover. White as death, she turned to Lyle.

"He's gone!" she exclaimed.

Lyle, busy with an effective bit of drapery and a carved Cairo screen, asked vaguely—"Who?"

"Jasper—Mr. Standish!" said Nora faintly. "I thought he was coming here to show us the secret door."

"He certainly said so. Perhaps he hadn't time. Never mind, child, another day will do, unless we can find it for ourselves. What do you say, Jane? Shall we try?"

"I think if one person has found it, another surely may," answered Jane gravely.

"How it rains!" exclaimed Lyle disappointedly, going to the window and looking out with love-lorn eyes at leaden sky and dripping trees. "No sign of clearing up to-day."

She turned and looked at the room. Suddenly a cold, chilling wave seemed to flow over the pleasant glow and excitement that had actuated her labors hitherto. She remembered that feeling which she had spoken of to Nora when first she had stood in this room—the feeling that some great unhappiness, some great sorrow, would befall her there. Was it already on its way? She felt tired and faint, and sat down on the window seat.

“I think I’ll do no more to-day,” she said. “After all, there’s plenty of time. There may be other wet days.”

As she ceased speaking, a knock came to the door, and Molly’s voice was heard.

“If ye plaze, Miss Orcheton, Sir Anthony wishes to see ye in his study at once, if ye’ll be so good as to step down.”

Lyle rose, rather bewildered. “Yes, of course. I’ll go down directly.”

She met Jane’s eyes. They looked prophetic; but she said nothing.

“It will soon be tea-time,” said Lyle, with forced cheerfulness. “Get it ready, will you, Jane, by the time I return, and let us have some lights. The room looks gloomy.”

Then she went slowly down the stairs, wondering what her father’s summons could mean.

As she opened the study door she saw him sitting in his big leather armchair by the fire.

“You wanted me, dad,” she said cheerfully.

He turned and looked at her. There was something so stern and reproachful in his gaze that her heart



sank, and she felt the blood ebb slowly from her face and lips.

“What has—happened?” she asked faintly.

“Not much, I suppose, in your eyes,” said Sir Anthony, with a sternness she had never yet heard in his voice; “only that I have discovered your deceit—that I have found my only child, whom I so loved and trusted, has been false to both the love and trust.”

“Father!” she cried.

He looked at her still. There was no anger in his glance, only a sad, stern hopelessness.

“False!” he repeated. “But all your sex are that. Why should I expect you to be different?”

“What do you mean? Of what do you accuse me?”

“Of deceiving me,” he said. “You have been secretly meeting, love-making, with a man whom you know I personally dislike and disapprove of. You have made your name a byword among village gossips.”

“Father,” she cried again, “it’s not so. I can explain——”

“Silence! and hear me out. Explanation should have come from your lover’s lips, had he a spark of manliness or honor. Instead of that he persuades you to secrecy—induces you, my daughter, a girl I thought so proud, to meet him in the woods as any village trull meets her boorish swain.”

“This is all misrepresentation,” she said. “The truth is this, and I am not ashamed of it: I do love Derrick Mallory, and he loves me. I have met him but twice. He is coming here to speak to you and ask

your consent. We did but wait until the Christmas holidays were over. Who has maligned us? Who has told a tale that sounds false and unworthy? Our love knows but two days' acknowledgment. I have not purposely deceived you."

"I say you have. You had no right to see or meet this man without my permission or my knowledge. His character bears no stainless record. He is immoral—extravagant—reckless. He is no fit husband for you, and he knew it; else he would have asked your father's sanction before persuading you to commence a clandestine intrigue."

"Oh! dad," sobbed Lyle passionately, "what are you saying? Those are not your words, your thoughts! Some one has been traducing him—filling your mind with resentment. Derrick is not what you say. He has been unfortunate, I grant; but every one knows his debts were not of his original incurring. The property was encumbered. He was poor, and burdened with an expensive heritage. He sold it to clear himself, got a foreign appointment, and went away. That is the truth!"

"The truth!" scoffed Sir Anthony. "Yes—the sort of truth with which a man fills the ears of a romantic girl. What other stories has he told you? What other loves and fancies have filled his thirty years? Why did he rush off to London so suddenly? What kept him there so long? Has he told you that?"

"I can trust him perfectly," she answered, with paling lips.

"Trust him! You—a baby—a mere schoolgirl

who knows nothing of life, of the world, of men! I haven't patience with such romantic nonsense."

"Why are you so dreadfully prejudiced against Derrick?" she asked. "At least you might do him common justice. Hear his story from his own lips—don't take him on second-hand testimony."

In her heart she knew who had done her this evil turn; the reason of that long interview in the study.

"I intend to see him," said Sir Anthony grimly. "Have no fears about that. I shall send for him, and ask an explanation of his most ungentlemanly conduct. No reason can excuse a man for placing a young girl in a false position, and in a place like this—where gossip is second nature."

Poor Lyle! He cheeks were scorched with shamed, insulted pride. To have her innocent and beautiful love-dream rent asunder by coarse misrepresentation almost deprived her of words or self-defense.

But suddenly courage returned. She had some one now to depend on—some one who would fight her battle for her. It would be all right when Derrick explained. At present her father was angry, and unable to judge calmly of the situation. To-morrow all would be different.

She drew up her slight young figure. Sir Anthony watched her uneasily. He had made up his mind that this man was not the right husband for her, and, like all seemingly easy-going and careless individuals, he could be very obstinate when he chose, especially when he had conceived a liking or a prejudice.

He liked Standish, and he disliked Derrick Mallory.

That was the sum total of the whole matter. Lyle's wealth should not go to this impoverished Irish *roué*, as he chose to call him—of that he was determined. It was only a girlish flirtation; it must be nipped in the bud. Like many of those "set in authority," Sir Anthony had yet to discover that there is strength in the young sapling, and a pertinacity in the coming blossom that can defy even parental "nipping."

That outburst somewhat surprised him. The look of the hurt young face gave him an uncomfortable feeling of playing the tyrant. He was confronted by something outraged and accusing, instead of the culprit he had thought to arraign. But he was determined to hold his position. He averted his gaze, and said coldly :

"There is nothing to be gained by further discussion. I will write to Mr. Mallory to-night, and ask an explanation of his conduct. But do not expect that such explanation can alter my opinion. As for sanctioning any engagement between you, that is out of the question. There is not only the difference of position—you are my heiress, and he but a needy fortune-hunter—but also the bar of religion. He is a Roman Catholic. A marriage with him would entail troubles needless to enumerate under present circumstances. The whole affair is impossible. As for love—the fancy of a girl for a man she has only met some half-dozen times, and of whose character, nature and habits she is entirely ignorant, is not worth the name. This is only a piece of romantic folly, and I confess I am surprised and disappointed in you, Lyle."

The young, sweet face grew very white.

“I am sorry we look at the matter so differently,” she said. “I assure you, father, it is no light thing to me or to Derrick.”

“It is pure folly!” he repeated.

“I think not,” she answered gently. “We are in deadly earnest, as you will find. My faith in him is as great as my love. Whatever happens, I shall never care for any other man, or marry one.”

“I am not asking you to marry any other man. I only say you shall not marry this one. When I see him, I will tell my objections and my reasons. I expect you to be guided by both.”

“I cannot disobey you, of course,” she said, very low. “I must only trust that time will soften your prejudice. When you find we are both true and steadfast and determined, you will be convinced this is not ‘pure folly,’ as you called it a moment ago.”

“It will take a good deal to convince me of that,” he said curtly. “I want to save you from yourself, and from the after consequences of a girl’s romantic fancy. I shall spare no pains to do it. I have said all.”

The tears rushed to her eyes. So kind, so generous, so loving, he had always been, and, now to speak like this! To so misunderstand her at life’s most critical moment! There was a pause. He averted his eyes and looked into the fire. She lingered, hoping he might speak again, but his attitude offered no encouragement to remain. Silently she turned away and left the room, feeling sick and shamed and wounded to the quick.

As she crossed the hall a loud ring pealed, and the

butler went to open the door. She hurriedly drew aside. "Not at home," she whispered.

She was afraid it might be Mrs. O'Neil, or some other visitor. She could not, dared not see any one to-day. She had no spirit left for conventionalities.

As she shrank back in the shade of the *portières* she heard a voice speaking that sent every pulse in her body throbbing.

It was the voice of Derrick Mallory!

## CHAPTER XX.

LYLE uttered a faint cry ; then, regardless of dignity, rushed across the hall, and faced a dripping figure holding disappointed parley with Woodman.

“ It’s you, Derrick ? Oh ! how lucky ! Come in at once.”

The dignified butler looked quite at a loss to comprehend such extraordinary conduct, but his young mistress waved him aside. Derrick took off his mackintosh and followed Lyle into the warm and dusky hall. Woodman retired to his own regions.

“ Oh ! Derrick,” cried Lyle impetuously, “ thank God, you’ve come ! I have just had an awful scene with my father. Some one has seen us meeting in the woods.”

“ Seen us ? ”

“ Yes ; and told him.”

“ What did he say ? ” asked Derrick,

“ He accuses you of being dishonorable, and is even now, I think, writing to forbid your calling or seeing me ever again ! You must go to him. You must explain. Say I would not let you speak before. Oh ! it’s all my fault, and he is so angry. I never saw him so angry in my life.”

Derrick looked at her in grave bewilderment. He

did not like to have the ground cut from under his feet in this prompt manner, to be suddenly placed in a false position, and have to face its consequences.

“Who can have seen us?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” said Lyle, crimsoning at the recollection of her father’s words; “but I can give a very good guess at who has told this story. I am sure it was Mr. Standish.”

“Jasper Standish!” Derrick’s brow darkened. “What concern is it of his?”

“I hate him!” exclaimed Lyle passionately. “I am sure, too, he would do me an ill turn if he could. He was with my father an hour this afternoon. Then I was summoned to his study, and, as I said before, he spoke to me as he has never spoken in his life. Oh! Derrick, you’ll be patient with him, won’t you, for my sake? Some enemy has been poisoning his mind against you, but when he knows you, when he sees you are in earnest, he will give way. We may have to face opposition, even parting; but so long as we are true, nothing can alter our present position—can it?”

He looked at her sadly. “My darling, it grieves me to have brought trouble on you so quickly. I knew your father was not very cordially disposed towards me, but I did not think it was as bad as you say.”

“What made you call?” asked Lyle.

“I thought a formal visit was preferable to not seeing you at all. Can I see Sir Anthony?”

“I will ask him,” said Lyle.

She was feeling a little hurt and sore. He had given her no lover’s greeting: had not even seemed to remember it. The first chilling touch of life outside



her charmed circle had pressed upon it already ; nothing would ever be quite the same as on those two blissful days when they had been all the world to each other.

She turned to go, when Derrick's voice called her back. He held out his arms, and she crept into their fond shelter, and with a little sob laid her head upon his heart.

“ Ah! dear,” he said, “ I feared this. We were too happy. I knew something must happen. But not so soon. Still, dearest, we must be brave. We must fight our battle as best we can. If the worst comes to the worst, it is only a question of waiting till you are of age. Then no one can prevent you marrying me if you choose.”

“ Not even your priests ? ” she asked hesitatingly. “ Father seemed to think——”

She felt his arms relax, and, drawing herself away, saw that his face looked pale and troubled.

“ I . . . I forgot. Let me see him, Lyle. Best get it over. It's an ordeal, but I have faced—worse.”

She was to remember that expression hereafter, and interpret it for herself. Now it passed her ear, leaving no definite meaning behind it.

“ Come, then,” she said, and led the way to where the tapestry *portières* fell between hall and study.

She knocked at the door, and her father's voice bade her enter. She turned the handle and went bravely in. He was still sitting in the same chair, almost in the same position. The fire had died down, a shaded reading lamp lit the long room but dimly.

“Father,” she said, “not five minutes ago Mr. Mal-lory chanced to call. He wishes to speak to you.”

Sir Anthony turned a surprised and very haughty face towards the bold intruder. He bowed coldly.

“Leave us, Lyle,” he said. “If your presence is necessary, I will summon you.”

With one look of pity and encouragement at her lover’s face, the girl went softly away, closing the door behind her.

She forgot about tea, about the two awaiting her in the turret. All her thoughts were concentrated on that momentous interview as she sat or paced to and fro in the dim-lit hall, waiting in agonized suspense its issue.

Woodman lit the lamp in the outer entrance, and the wax candles in the brass sconces. He felt something was amiss, and gave a pretty accurate guess as to its nature. Being a confirmed misogynist himself, however, he only put it down to “young folk’s foolishness.”

Slowly the moments passed! What was happening? What were they saying?

Hope sickened and died out of her heart. She felt that trouble was at hand. She had come to a sudden block in the path of existence.

At last she heard the study door open. She stood perfectly still, her heart throbbing painfully, her eyes strained. Derrick came towards her. One look at his white, set face was enough.

“Your father wishes to see you,” he said.

An icy chill ran through her whole frame. She asked no question. There was no need. Blank de-

spair sat on clouded brow, and brooded in hopeless eyes.

In some blind, unconscious fashion she crossed the space, and he stood aside and held the door open for her to enter.

Sir Anthony was standing by the table. As she advanced he looked up, and his face grew less stern and forbidding.

“Lyle,” he said, “I have a very unpleasant duty to fulfil, and I want to do it as briefly as possible. Mr. Mallory has done me the honor to ask for your hand. I have no fault to find with what he says of his position, or his prospects. If I considered him a suitable husband for you, they would amply satisfy me, for your own fortune would enable you to live as you have always been accustomed to live. Mind, I said a suitable husband. But I do not find him *that*. I will give you my reasons. First comes the, to me, insuperable bar of difference of religious faith. Marriage is one of the Sacraments of the Romish Church. Marriage with one of a different faith entails stipulations and conditions that are both humiliating and objectionable. Am I not right, Mr. Mallory?”

Derrick bowed. His face was ashen white; his hands grasped a chair-back as if to stay their trembling.

“I have a book here,” continued Sir Anthony, “which explains the principal dogmas of this Church. My opinions may be prejudiced, doubtless they are; but on this point of marriage between what is termed a heretic and a true believer there is a great deal of truth. It would suit similar instances of dissimilar

faiths. That is objection number one, and Mr. Mallory has no argument that can confute it.

“Then comes the second, and it is one with which I will allow you to deal for yourself, Lyle. It relates to his moral character, and is of vital importance to your future. You are young, a mere school-girl, whose knowledge of men is founded on romances, novels, and girlhood’s dreams of the other sex. These are very, very far from realities. Mr. Mallory is unfortunately the descendant of a family renowned for their gambling proclivities and their infidelities to women.

“It is not his fault. I am not blaming him, and had I had satisfactory proof that in his own case these hereditary traits were not visible, I might have taken a more hopeful view of the future. But he has no record to show that would enable me to take this view. No, sir, don’t interrupt—yet. After I have said all I intend to say, you can make good your case, if you wish. Now, Lyle, looking at the matter from a common-sense point of view, I foresee a very troubled and disastrous future out of such unpromising materials.

“But this is not all. . . . I am going to pain you, I fear; but if your lover can justify himself in your eyes, that pain will be short-lived. On first meeting you, Mr. Mallory paid you rather marked attentions; sufficiently so to attract notice in a place like this and lead to remark. Suddenly, without word or reason, he left the place and went to London. Did he give you any reason for doing so?”

Lyle raised her white face and looked at Derrick.

“Why should he? There was no necessity.”

“There was necessity enough after he had led you to suppose he cared for you. But, to continue. When he returned, after an interval of nearly two months, did he allude to this absence or its reasons?”

“No,” she said faintly, and with an appealing look at Derrick’s downcast face and quivering lips. “I asked for none.”

“Naturally. I know your nature. You are very proud, very trustful. You would never seem to claim by right what was not offered you spontaneously. Well, ask him now. I—know the reason. I shall know if he tells you the truth. I will leave you to learn it from his own lips. If after that you still wish to marry him, I can only say I have greatly misjudged your strength of character. Mr. Mallory, I will wish you good night. Our interview has been most unpleasant, but do me the credit to confess it was not of my seeking.”

With a distant bow he left the room, and the two standing on either side of the oak table looked at each other with sudden terrified questioning.

Then with the impulse of desperation Derrick crossed to Lyle’s side and threw himself on the rug before her, clasping her with a passionate strength.

“My dear,” he cried, “oh, what can I say? I meant to tell you always—always. Fate has forced my hand cruelly in this matter. Lyle, whatever you think, whatever I may appear, I did love you from that first hour our eyes met! But when I found how dear you were getting, I knew I had a duty to perform before I could speak, before I could dare to ask for your love. Oh! how can I tell you? You will never believe that

I was true in heart and soul. How I raged, how I cursed folly, indolence, indifference, whatever it is that drives a man to place himself in a false position! Oh! Lyle, you are so young, good, so pure—how can I make you understand?”

His voice broke.

She drew herself away from his clinging touch; a chill as of ice seemed to rest on her heart and slacken its wild beats.

“I think I—understand,” she said slowly. “There was some one else?”

He made no answer. For one long torturing moment their hearts throbbed in a silence of unbroken misery. Then he slowly rose to his feet, and placed her in the chair where Sir Anthony had been sitting. He hardly dared look at her face, it was so altered, so woful, so aged.

“Lyle,” he said, “I could wish you were less pure, less proud, less innocent. It is not a pleasant story I have to tell you—it never could have been. Though I hoped when you knew me better you would judge me more tenderly. Briefly, it is this. When I came home from India, there was on board the steamer a—a woman—who represented herself as a widow. We were much together. I cared nothing for her, save as a man cares for a companion who amuses or interests him. But she—well, never mind details. There are things a man can't say about a woman who professes to care for him. There was the usual drifting, the sentiment of moonlight and idle hours. I only found out later that she was no widow. She had a husband, though he was an incarcerated madman. With regard to herself,

she was but an adventuress—a swallow who lived on men's summers. I found it necessary to throw off her would-be shackles peremptorily. But for a time she contrived to make my hours and days very unpleasant.

“When I met you, Lyle, I resolved there should be an end. I went up to London for that purpose, and after some difficulty managed to shake myself free of her. But how could I tell you—how explain? By some means your father has heard of this. Perhaps through the same kind friend who brought him word of our single tryst. He thinks I am immoral, untrustworthy; that I do not love you. Oh, Lyle! Lyle!”

She had not spoken a word. By no look or sign had he any intimation of what that confession had meant to her, till suddenly he met her eyes. But in that moment something seemed to have been cast out of her life, and the effort at casting it aside left her faint and sick. It was only a girl's faith, a girl's innocent belief. Nothing much in a man's eyes, nothing much in a woman's when she has drunk of the waters of experience and known them bitter. But much, all, everything, to a nature as yet untried. That first hearing of another's name coupled with his own seared her soul with a lightning flash of agony. He had been the one and sole god of her worship, but she—she was only one of many to him.

All youth's hope and credulity died within her. She only thought of herself as rivaling some one less fair perhaps, less capable of chaining a man's fancy; but still only—rivaling. She was not all, she had never been all to him, even in those days and hours she had loved to recall as pregnant with meaning. It was all

wrong, all a mistake. Her father had indeed been wise when he read this man's character.

As his voice rang out, sounding her name with imploring passion, she felt stung and outraged. The conflict of faith with its first misgivings was all of which she was conscious.

She rose to her feet.

"It is a shameful story," she said. "If you have any sense of right, of honor, go to her. Go to the woman who believed in you. I want no second-hand vows, or kisses, or—love!"

Her voice broke. Her eyes were cold and wrathful still, but the effort to speak, to put into plain words her broken faith, was beyond her.

He rose too, and laid one hand against the table, leaning heavily on it.

"Do you mean it?" he asked. "Can you so misjudge me? Is your love worth no more than this?"

"Your own words have been your judge," she said. "You are not what I thought you. You—never were."

A hot shamed flush rose to his brow. "I am rightly punished," he said bitterly. "I might have known. No reed so brittle to lean upon as a girl's faith. She has no pity, no comprehension of any sin that seems to hurt her own vanity."

"If you think that," she said proudly, "you have learned your lesson in a false school. There is nothing more to say."



## CHAPTER XXI.

“MY child,” said a tender voice.

Lyle lifted her head from her arms. It had been resting there from the moment that a closing door had seemed to her like the falling of cold earth on a coffin lid. Behind, lay death and desolation.

Her father was standing beside her. The old love was in his eyes, the old tenderness in his voice.

“It is hard for you, my dear,” he said, “very hard ; but it would have been a thousand times worse to brave—later. Some day you will be glad it came when it did.”

He stood looking sadly at the agonized young face. It is hard enough for a parent to learn he has been supplanted, but it is harder still when he finds that the usurper is unworthy.

A little wan smile touched her lips. “If it was bound to come,” she said, “I am glad it has happened now. I need not expect—anything more.”

“My child,” he said sadly. “My poor child !”

She was trembling like a leaf, but her eyes were tearless. “You were quite right, dad,” she said. “I was headstrong and foolish. I thought myself so sure. I am rightly served.”

“The worse you can think of him the better. He is an unprincipled scoundrel. No doubt, bad as his confession was, it was not half as bad as the real case.”

“It was bad enough,” she said slowly. “I should not like to think it—worse.”

She half rose, but he saw she was too unnerved to stand, and put her gently back into the chair.

“Sit down, child,” he said gently. “You are not fit to face others yet. I wish I could comfort you, Lyle ; but no one in this world can play the part of Providence to even the dearest thing they love. Every heart knows its own bitterness and must bear its own burden. I wanted to save you from disgrace, perhaps ruin in the future. I could not ease the blow, save by letting him deal it.”

She did not speak.

“I have heard many things about Derrick Mallory,” he went on, “but as I so plainly discouraged his visits, I had no immediate fear of—what has happened.”

“You are in no way to blame,” she said. “It was I myself all through.”

“You are very young,” he said sadly, “and you had no mother to watch over, or advise you. A father, however dearly he loves his child, cannot follow the windings and turnings of her fancy or her heart. I tried my best to save you, but it was too late even then.”

“Yes,” she echoed ; “it has been too late for a long, long time.”

“Now that you have learned his unworthiness,” continued her father, “you must summon all your courage to help you in forgetting him. Fortunately his time in this country is short. He has to return to India.”

He saw her shiver involuntarily. His eyes grew dark with anger.

“A man who takes a human life,” he said, “suffers the due punishment of his crime; but a man who comes into the fair garden of a girl’s young heart, tramples it, withers it, destroys it, he can go scot free!”

She hid her face in her hands in a sudden paroxysm of grief. “Only yesterday I was so happy. I thanked God that it was possible to be so happy, and now it can never come again—never.”

He let her cry unrebuked. Grief was more natural than that stony calm.

At last she dashed the tears aside. “To think,” she said, “that I could have pained you for sake of—him. Forgotten our long years of love and confidence. Oh, dad, how wise you were—how wise!”

“Yet you do not feel inclined to thank me. Ah! child, I know, I know. It is hard to bear at first.”

“I will stay with you,” she said brokenly. “It is the best place for me.”

“God knows I have no desire that you should leave me,” he said fondly. “My home is yours for all your life, if you wish.”

“I will go to my room now,” she said presently; “for to-night I would rather see no one—just be by myself. You will excuse me at dinner?”

“Yes, if you feel you would rather be alone. But brooding and thinking won’t make it easier to bear, my child.”

“Only to-night,” she said, and looked at him with eyes whose pitiful misery stabbed him to the heart.

“I did it for the best,” he told himself. “For the

best. He was to blame. He could not defend his own conduct. I left him to do it, and he failed."

She put his arm aside and stood up. He thought with a bitter pang how all the lovely youth and hope had gone from her in this one hour, and could have cursed the man who was the cause. But words were unelless, and curses too. They mended nothing, altered nothing.

In the mills of Pain the hearts of all are ground—some to powder, some to chaff; some are bruised, and some are crushed forever. For stronger than Love and Life and Joy is the hand of Fate—and none can master or withstand it.

\* \* \* \* \*

After that first shock and agony of disillusion a dull calm settled upon Lyle. She told Nora that her father had for good reasons refused his consent to any engagement with Derrick Mallory; that all was over between them. Nora was only half-satisfied, but she did not like to press for reasons that were rigidly withheld. Lyle could not betray his unworthiness to a third person. It was humiliating enough to know it herself.

Between the two girls, who had been so devoted, and so happy in their innocent friendship, a strange silence and coldness crept. Each had her own sorrow to combat, her own secret to guard. Suddenly they had reached a point where neither could be of any help. There were no more confidences in their rooms at night, none of the laughing jests and tricks of old. But the days lagged wearily, and on both young hearts lay the burden of unuttered pain. Their eager hands, out-

stretched to the roses in life's garden, had been filled with thorns instead.

Sometimes in those dreary days, when the snow or the rain fell and the wind moaned drearily round the old house, Lyle would go up to her turret and gaze sadly down that leafless avenue, where her feet had sped so gayly and unconsciously to meet her doom. She had no heart now to finish her pretty "Sister Anne's Chamber." She would move listlessly to and fro, or sit idly gazing into the fire, trying to believe life would go back to its normal condition; that her "fated fairy prince" would soon be only a memory; that those two blissful days were part of a dream from which she had been roughly awakened; that love was a delusion and a snare. It could be well dispensed with.

And all the time that she shut her eyes to aught beyond that important circle of personal unhappiness, events were happening around her so fateful and so tragic, that in after years she asked herself how she could have been so blind as not to see them.

The bad weather had kept all visitors from the Hermitage. Even Mrs. O'Neil had not ventured out.

She scribbled a note to Lyle, saying she was confined to her room with a severe cold, and asking her to come and see her if she could spare an hour; but Lyle shrank from going near the house. She could not face the ordeal of a chance meeting with Derrick, and she was not sure whether he had left Ireland. She wrote sympathizingly, but excused herself from going over on account of indisposition.

So the days drifted on, each seeming a week in

length, till they reached New Year's Eve. Sir Anthony was a little weary of the melancholy evenings. No one would play or sing, no friend dropped in for a hand at whist or nap. They had seen nothing of Jasper Standish, and Dr. Dan wrote that he was at his wits' end to cope with the sickness raging in the little town. Workmen came to and fro, completing and furnishing and decorating the unfinished rooms, and in the daytime Sir Anthony demanded Lyle's help and advice as much as possible in order to distract her thoughts. But for the long winter evenings there was no distraction save what they could give each other.

Nora's bright spirits seemed to have vanished. She was pale and listless. Her eyes were heavy, and their dark circles spoke of sleepless nights. Now and then she would try to shake off this despondent frame of mind, but the effort was plainly an effort. The laughter was forced, the jests were mirthless.

On New Year's Eve, Dr. Dan came over. He was shocked at the change in his pretty ward. She looked but the shadow of her old bright self, so thin and pale and spiritless. But like every one else he put the change down to grief for her father, and the horror of his tragic fate.

Meanwhile strange rumors were spreading through the village as to that fate, and murmurs as to the Inspector's laxity in the matter of arrest were rife on every occasion.

“Sure an' is it kilt an' murdered in our beds we're to be, an' niver a sowl the wiser?” was an observation that reached Jasper's ears more frequently than he liked.

The reward was stimulating energies, and he was perpetually receiving information of suspicious events or appearances, but he dismissed them peremptorily. Yet to all intents and purposes he was much occupied, and though he seemed to keep his own counsel, there were not wanting hints of meaning on the track of his footsteps.

“When the time comes,” he would say in answer to queries or demands.

“An’ whin that’ll be, not all the saints in glory can tell us,” muttered the gossips.

New Year’s Eve found the Inspector in his gloomy little study, once more busy with that private notebook. The window was closely curtained: he had turned the key in the door. The fire blazed brightly, and his un-failing comforter, the spirit bottle, was on the table by his side.

He shut the book with a vicious snap, and leaned his head on his hands, trying to follow out a plan of reasoning.

“Will it be safe—yet?” so ran his thoughts. “The links fit pretty closely, but there are not enough. If I show my hand too soon, the game will be lost. I must secure myself first before I make a move. Now, that weak pretty fool is the only buffer between me and the blow that may come my way. I render two weapons powerless if I use her against them. That proud English minx is not to be fooled, and her old father is not the sort of man to win over to my schemes. I have no hold on him. True, I’ve parted her from her lover. Fool! Ah! twice and treble fool that he was to have won the love of a girl like that and let her slip

through his fingers. Had she cared for me, I'd have held her against everything—the whole world—herself included.”

He drank a tumblerful of the potent spirit by his side, and then began to pace the room restlessly, talking half-aloud.

“Crime! Who talks of crime? A man must needs serve his own necessities; it is no crime to put away that which stands between. If it were, then every ruler, every general, every statesman would be a criminal. To live, we must destroy. Only the strong are fitted to survive. Place and power fall only to the adventurous. No good thing is gained without struggle, or kept without strength. All life shows it. It is the scheme of the universe. The Creator takes life as relentlessly as he gives it. The wheel of destiny rolls ever on and on, crushing all that is in its way. Man but follows its example, save where cowardice forbids.”

The blood flushed his temples. He threw back his head and laughed aloud.

“If this succeeds, all will go well. Promotion follows, then fortune. It is a daring scheme, but its very daring will serve my ends. The case will seem to fail for just one tittle of evidence. The law will be satisfied, the tongues will wag so furiously that she can never hold up her head again. To be guilty in all but the actual verdict of guilt is enough to ruin her. She will face her own condemnation. My zeal and my discretion will have accomplished their purpose.”

Again he drank. Again the blood mounted to his head, fired his veins, thrilled him with wild, fierce resolve.



## The Sin of Jasper Standish. 191

So the Old Year left him—wicked of heart, evil of purpose—triumphing with unholy joy over the weak and helpless—weaving schemes that should wreck and ruin innocent lives, trampling under foot all scruples and all fear.

So the New Year found him—dazed and drunken and evil still, while through storm and stress of the dying night the bells pealed out their message to his unheeding ears.

## CHAPTER XXII.

“THERE’LL be bad work this year, Norry girl,” said pretty Molly, the housemaid. “Divil a bit av luck for any av us.”

“Glory be! What’s happened, thin?”

“Arrah, didn’t that red-haired imp av a Mickey Doolan cross the threshold the first thing as the door was opened? An’ that fule av an English cook knew no better than to laugh whin I tould her ’twas the worst av luck. He came wid a letter, he said, and wouldn’t go till he’d delivered it. There’s for you now! An’ who do you think the letter was for? Tell me that!”

“How should I know, Molly? Not for you, nor me neither. An’ as for the young ladies——”

“Ah! musha, young ladies. What would the likes av thim be wantin’ wid that thafe av the wurld—Mickey! Ah! may he die an’ give the crows a puddin’ for this day’s bad luck. No, gurl, it was Mrs. Grapnell he was wantin’ spache wid, an’ sure she was down-stairs in two shakes av a lamb’s tail whin she heard it, an’ out in the garden they were colloguing for iver so long, an’ she’s comin’ in all av a trimble an’ white as the driven snow, an’ not a word good or bad did she spake. Only up to her room an’ shut herself in. That’s just what happened now! Make the best ye can av it.”

“It’s little best any av us can be makin’ av thim as lives in this house,” said Honora. “Sich gloomy faces, an’ shtrange ways, an’ now the ill-luck to come on thim all as soon as they’ve set foot in the place. Sure an’ indade it’s sorry I am I listened to me mother’s perswashins an’ tuk the situation. Less money an’ pleasanter company would suit me better any day. An’ the strict rules, an’ always that English cook forgettin’ about the fish av a Friday, an’ sayin’ it’s the housekeeper’s fault. Musha! A pretty housekeeper! A face as sour as a crab-apple.”

“That’s thrue for ye. Only that the wages is good an’ paid regular, an’ the work aisy enough between the two av us, it’s meself wouldn’t care to put up wid it a month longer.”

“There’s the bell, Molly : an’ the tay not wet. Sure ’tis you are yer mother’s own spit for gossip. Be off wid ye, or ’tis gettin’ notice an’ not givin’ it ye’ll be.”

Meanwhile, in her own room Jane Grapnell was sitting before a small table. A pile of paper lay before her, covered with her neat small handwriting. Her hand shook visibly as she added page after page, but she never paused. She wrote with a feverish energy, as if against time, and her face was indeed what Molly had described it, “white as the driven snow.”

When she paused at last, the clock was striking eight. It was her breakfast hour, and habits of discipline are not lightly broken. Rising from the table, she blotted the sheets and locked them into a small leather portfolio, with a key which she wore round her neck, attached to a fine silver chain. That done, she enclosed it in a large sheet of paper and sealed it

securely. Holding it in her hand, she looked round the room as if she sought a hiding-place.

The search was vain. A strange, hunted look came into her eyes.

“I daren’t leave it here,” she whispered half-aloud. “If there’s a search, he might keep it. There’s no trusting such a villain.”

Her eyes fell on a white fleecy shawl lying on a chair. It was one of Nora’s. She had brought it there to mend. Snatching it up, she threw it over her arm, so as to conceal the box, and left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nora was the first to enter the breakfast room on that New Year’s morning. On the table beside her plate lay a letter. As she saw the writing, a wave of color came into her pale face. Something of the old brightness and light shone in her eyes. She snatched it eagerly.

First fell out a card. A simple thing enough, only a wreath of violets and the stereotyped greeting. But the sender’s name was on it, and her heart thrilled at sign of remembrance. Enclosed was a thin slip of paper, on which was written something. She read it, her face one blush of delight, then thrust it hastily into her pocket, as she heard Lyle’s voice without. She entered with Sir Anthony.

Nora turned to greet them. They both looked wonderingly at her changed face, and Lyle recognized once more the old impetuous warmth in her kiss, the old girlish ring in her voice.

“Something has happened. You’ve had good news?” she said, smiling at the bright face.

“Yes; the best of news, and of luck—remembrance from a friend I thought had forgotten me.”

“Ah! cards,” said Lyle listlessly, looking at a pile for herself. She did not open them, only pushed them indifferently away, and began to pour out tea.

The sun was shining at last after that dreary week of rain. The air was once more balmy and spring-like. Life was alert in the world without; the blue of sky and river wore a lovely radiance through the yet leafless trees.

“You must go out to-day, both of you,” said Sir Anthony. “You’ll lose all your roses cooped up in the house day after day. Order the horses, Lyle, and have a good gallop.”

She glanced at Nora.

“I should love it,” said the girl, with subdued eagerness.

“Very well,” agreed Lyle. “I will order the horses to be brought round after breakfast. That will give us nearly three hours before lunch.”

“There’s a meet at Mount Urris, isn’t there?” said Sir Anthony presently. “You could ride over and see them throw off. It’s only five miles from us.”

Again Nora’s face flushed and paled. How Fate was playing into her hands to-day!

“I was thinking of that,” she said. “I haven’t seen a meet this season. Do you ever mean to hunt, Lyle?”

“Father doesn’t wish it,” she answered indifferently.

“No,” said Sir Anthony. “If I had half a dozen daughters it would be different. I don’t want to tempt Providence, and prevention is better than cure

when there's a risk of broken necks and arms. I never could bear to see women in the field. They spoil men's sport, and don't get much of their own."

"It's rank heresy to say that in Ireland, Sir Anthony," said Nora. "Women pride themselves on their horsemanship, and to be 'in at the death' is a feminine proverb."

"That may be. I don't like it, and I won't allow Lyle to hunt as long as I have any authority over her."

The subject dropped, and as soon as breakfast was over Nora ran up to her own room to see about her habit—in reality, to read over that treasured scrawl which had seemed to lift her to sight and sense of happiness once again.

Once swung into the saddle, and cantering gayly down the drive, her sense of exhilaration reached its height. Lyle could not understand her gayety. Yet even to herself came that feeling of pleasure born of a good mount, the brisk rush of cool, sweet air, warm sunshine and youth. The reaction after long days, sleepless nights, tear-filled hours, was a relief for which she was duly grateful.

True, the relief was but temporary, but who is not thankful for the lull of pain in an aching nerve, though the visit to the dentist still lurks in the background?

The horses were fresh, and required management, so the girls did not waste time in talking. They arrived at Mount Urris in time to see a goodly array of red coats, top boots, and riding habits; also a multitude of vehicles of all sorts and conditions.

Then suddenly it dawned upon Lyle that Derrick might be there. She had not thought of the possi-

bility, but now it flashed across her, and made her rein in her horse in a manner at which she showed strong disapproval.

At that moment a cheery voice called out her name, and she found the remonstrating forelegs of Meteor close to the low phaeton of Belle O'Neil. Wrapped in furs, and husky of voice, that lady had been unable to resist the temptation of such a gathering as this. Half the county favored the Mount Urris meets.

"I was just wondering if you'd be here," she exclaimed. "A nice friendly neighbor you are indeed! Never been to see me, and there was I shut up between my own four walls the best part of a week, and not a soul to speak to—save Derry. And you know, or will know some day, that a man is none too fond of putting his nose in a sick room. Well, here I am, though, and I as good as told Dr. Dan that he might save himself the trouble of saying 'No,' for I'd made up my mind. Are you going to follow, Lyle?"

"No," she said, thankful for the restlessness that made Meteor prance and curvet till her face and voice were under control. "I only rode over with Nora to see them throw off."

"Derrick's about somewhere," continued Mrs. O'Neil, "mounted on a perfect devil of a horse, too. Blackskin they call him, and, faith! he is black; and an eye—you should see it, Lyle—rolling fire set in ebony. I'm terrified at the brute; but he's a fine jumper—would take anything."

She looked about. "I can't see him anywhere," she said. "I expect Derry keeps him out of the crowd. Where's Nora? I thought she was with you."

Lyle glanced round. She could not see her friend anywhere. "I don't know," she said.

"Ah, there she is, talking to Mr. Standish," exclaimed Mrs. O'Neil. "That flirtation has hung fire a bit lately. Ah! poor girl, though, I was forgetting that sad story. Lyle, my dear, isn't it most mysterious that no word can be got as to the man who did that murder? The last time I was talking to Jasper Standish I said so to him. And what do you think he answered?—and there was a meaning with it too, or I'm no judge. 'Don't be too sure,' he said, 'that it was a *man* who did it.' Now, wasn't that queer? What do you make of it?"

"I think, candidly, that Mr. Standish has given himself very little trouble to discover who committed it, whether man or woman," said Lyle coldly. "But it seems highly improbable that any one but a man could have done it. Think of the strength needed; the broken window, the fallen bar!"

"I said that to him. Those were my very words, and he answered me straight that the window could have been broken and the bar loosed from its socket, inside the room, as easily as outside."

Lyle started. "What an extraordinary thing! Does he mean any one in the house? But that's impossible."

"My dear, crimes are often committed by just the last person we think could possibly commit them. I don't know what Jasper meant, but 'twas very strange. Ah, there's Derry, edging along outside of the crowd. I think he's coming this way."



Lyle's heart gave a quick, sickening throb; her hands grew suddenly nerveless.

"I think," she said hurriedly, "I'll go and see after Nora. We shall meet again, Mrs. O'Neil." She turned her horse, and rode away, leaving Mrs. O'Neil in a state of surprise at such an abrupt departure.

But Lyle had no intention of joining Nora. She did not wish to see or speak to Jasper Standish. Her one idea had been to evade Derrick. She carefully avoided the vehicles, steering Meteor in and out of the noisy, excited crowd, the plunging horses and garrulous drivers.

Arrived at a point of vantage, she glanced carelessly round. Ah! there he was. The blood raced through her veins. The mere sight of that tall figure, that proudly poised head, made her feel faint and dizzy. Pride was up in arms, but then fell down abased. She had not forgotten that brief joy, that too sweet dream.

Now to the memory was added a touch of jealousy bitter and torturing. He was beside a woman, re-adjusting the reins, bending slightly forward in the act. Every movement of his hands and turn of his head seemed to send red-hot pincers into her heart. She was nothing to him any longer—cast out of his life, disregarded, perhaps forgotten.

She loitered there in the background, wishing Nora would end that long colloquy with Jasper Standish, hoping that Mrs. O'Neil would not take it into her head to tell Derrick she was present. Not that it would matter—they were parted forever.

Presently there was a stir. She caught sight of the hounds threading their way in an eager, straggling pro-

cession. Horses pricked their ears, riders settled themselves more firmly in saddle. Those who meant business looked alert, and drew away from the crowd.

Lyle, unconscious what was meant, let her horse go pretty well as he wished. She had some vague idea that Nora would join her as soon as the hounds were in covert.

Suddenly there came a cheer, the crack of whips, a blare of that music from the hounds' throats so dear to the huntsmen's ears.

The sound of a horn thrilled out on the air, and a cry of "Forrad! Forrad away!"

Before she had time to think what it all meant, or what she was to do, Lyle felt the reins wrenched from her careless hands. Meteor had decided that inaction at such a moment was impossible. She was conscious of flight, swift and easy, through the air, of dark specks to right, to left, in front of her, of trees racing by in headlong fury, of a broad white band streaming along dark fields and furrows. She grasped the reins instinctively, but, knowing the horse had "got his head," left further proceedings to his own discretion.

A sort of delirium swept over her.

Sky and field and trees intermingled. Everything seemed mad and wild with motion. The madness touched herself; she could have laughed aloud. The blood ran riot through her veins, the sunlight flashed, the wind whistled. Brown shadows came and went; they were passed in flight, she scarce knowing what they meant. On and on, swifter and swifter, till suddenly a dull thud of hoofs beat close to her side. Nearer and nearer they came. The black satin coat

and outstretched neck of another horse was in line with Meteor's head.

She thought of those words, "rolling fire set in ebony."

A voice, whose tones set every nerve throbbing, sounded at her ear. "Turn, if you can," it said. "There's a nasty bit over the next fence."

Then a hasty exclamation, "My God! Lyle, is it you? *Can't* you turn?"

"No!" she gasped breathlessly, conscious only of the impatient movement with which Meteor tore at the curb as her hand closed on it.

"Then let him go. Follow me, and trust to Providence."

She saw the big hunter shoot on ahead, going straight as an arrow for that blackthorn hedge, beyond which might lie—anything. Somehow, it didn't seem to matter now.

Meteor, stimulated by example, followed on those flying hoofs. She shut her eyes involuntarily. Her knees clenched tight about the pommel, and for the first time since that headlong race began her hand grasped the saddle. Her loosened hair fell like a cloud about her. She felt that now familiar rise; then—a stumble, a quick scrambling effort, and—peace!

Wearied with the last supreme effort, Meteor slackened pace, then stopped; his flanks heaving, his breath pumped through crimson nostrils by long-enduring lungs.

She swayed in the saddle, and all grew dark before her. But through the mists of failing senses she heard a voice low in her ear:

“Thank God, you’re safe! What a feat! Whatever made you attempt it?”

What she answered, or if she answered at all, Lyle never knew. Derrick leaped from his hunter, and was by her side just in time to catch her nerveless figure as she fell forward.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

LYLE found herself resting against a scarlet coat, in a quiet field. The two horses were quietly cropping grass a few yards away. For some moments she could remember nothing. Then it all rushed back—that unintentional run with the hounds, the last leap, the warning voice.

She sat up dazed and giddy. Her brow was wet; so were her lips and the front of her habit. A silver hunting flask lay beside her on the grass. She met the anxious eyes of Derrick Mallory, and staggered to her feet one crimson glow of shame.

“What in Heaven’s name possessed you to do such a mad thing?” he asked sternly. “It’s a miracle you weren’t killed. Not a woman in the whole field could take that leap. It’s just about as much as a big jumper like Blackskin there can do. And I thought you never hunted.”

She laughed hysterically.

“I didn’t come here of my own will. . . . My horse started with the others, and I simply could not stop him.”

“You were wise not to try.”

His eyes turned from her face to the stiff-fence and the wide ditch beyond. Then a chill, embarrassed silence fell upon them both.

“You’re losing your run,” she said presently.  
“Pray go on. I’m all right now ; I can go home.”

“Have you any idea where you are ?”

She glanced round. “No, but I can ask.”

“I shall put you on the road,” he said coldly. “I can’t overtake them now, and, however unpleasant my company may be, I can’t allow you to go all those miles by yourself. Besides, you can’t cross-country now, and you’re quite ten miles from home.”

She made no remonstrance. Her will seemed suddenly weak, like her body. She was even conscious of a little thrill of pleasure at the masterful tone ; conscious, too, that for one half-hour to have him near her, hear his voice, meet his eyes, was worth more than that perilous gallop and its risky termination.

“We’d better breathe the horses a bit,” he continued.

He stooped for his flask, and she suddenly became conscious that her bodice was open at the throat, that she was hatless, and her hair streaming about her. With a hot, painful blush she begun to twist up the shining coils.

He studiously averted his eyes, but when the task was completed he handed her her hat.

“It fell off at that last jump,” he said.

She fastened the elastic. Her hand shook. She felt weak and strange.

“May I offer you some more brandy ?” asked Derrick. “I could not get more than a drop down your throat when I tried, and you’re awfully shaken.”

She tried to say “No,” but it was a feeble attempt, and ended by her seating herself once more on the grass. He poured out some into the little cup, and handed it

to her. She took it meekly, and the faintness passed off.

“Rest there awhile,” he said, more gently than he had yet spoken. “I’ll go and catch the horses.”

When she had rested and recovered, he mounted her on Meteor, and opened a gate in the field that led into a long, winding lane. It was so narrow that the horses could scarcely walk abreast, but had it been twice as narrow or twice as long, Lyle felt she would not have uttered a complaint.

They were very silent.

Her thoughts flitted to and fro—sometimes sad, sometimes resentful, but quite unable to regain that standpoint of hurt and angered feeling which had prompted her dismissal of an unworthy suitor. She wondered vaguely if he had suffered during this past week—if to him had fallen sleepless nights, long, hateful hours; dreariness, hopeless unrest.

The silence was becoming embarrassing. Their thoughts trenched on a subject too difficult for speech, and every furtive glance meant danger. She tried to battle against this foolish consciousness. She had no wish to wear her heart-break openly, and yet there seemed no way of pretending forgetfulness of what had been.

Pride came to her aid. She spoke of her hunting adventure as lightly as if it had been a morning gallop; but he checked the lightness sternly.

“I didn’t know it was you till I overtook you,” he said, “And when I looked at your horse and thought of what he had done, and what lay before him, I never expected to see you alive. Don’t make a jest of it”

—his voice shook slightly—“I thought I had faced everything that could mean feeling, but that moment showed me—I had not.”

Their eyes met. It would have been hard to say which face was the whiter of the two. Her heart whispered—“He has not forgotten”—with a sense of triumph, and then of shame at that triumph.

He went on relentlessly. “You dealt me a fencer, Lyle, and I went from you wounded to the core of my heart; but in sight of that danger I forgot all, even the pride of manhood. I would have died a thousand deaths to save you the risk of that one moment.”

The falter in his voice set every pulse thrilling as she had never thought they could thrill again. But she kept silence. Her voice might be traitor to dignity, and that thrill break its coldness.

“I never hoped to see you again, or to speak to you,” he went on in low, nervous tones. “But you’ve haunted every hour of my life, if that is any satisfaction to you. I suppose you were right in your judgment, but women ought to be merciful. Though scores of lovers sigh for you, Lyle, you’ll never win a truer love than that you’ve thrown away in a moment of pique and pride.”

“I wanted truth,” she said. “I held nothing back from you.”

“You should have had it, child; but how could I explain, with love for you hot on my lips? I had room for no other word or memory.”

“It is too late to speak of that now.”

“I know. But I leave here to-morrow. In a week I sail for India. You need not grudge me one hour



whose memory can go with me in my loneliness. It will be loneliness indeed, Lyle—and only a week ago I thought it would all be so different.”

“To-morrow?” she echoed faintly, and some shadow of that loneliness seemed to fall over herself.

“Yes. I can’t stay here. It is martyrdom. Women can sit and brood over troubles. It is one of their luxuries of sentiment. But a man can’t. It would drive him mad or desperate, especially when the trouble is of his own bringing. This last week—— But why talk of it? It can’t alter anything, and you—wouldn’t care.”

She bent her head over Meteor’s arching neck. Not care! Oh, if only she didn’t!”

“I’m not sorry,” he went on presently, “for this chance. I left you with hot anger in my heart. I had no right, perhaps, to be offended, but we Irish are not responsible for our temperaments, and I felt stung and hurt. I think we hardly knew how angry we were, Lyle. But now after this meeting I’ll go away at peace with you and wishing you happiness and better luck than I could ever have brought you. I wonder whether I am asking too much, but I’d give ten years of my life to hear you say, ‘Derrick, I forgive you.’”

He saw her lip quiver, and the pallor of her face frightened him. Was it possible she did love him, only pride stood between them, an invincible barrier?

“Don’t say it out of pity,” he said hoarsely. “You misjudged me once. I don’t wish you to do it again. Say it because you mean it; because you are the same Lyle who came to my arms with such sweet graciousness and made me her slave forever; because you are the

only woman I ever really loved ; because if you could see my heart you would know how foolish was your causeless jealousy ; because there you are rooted, sovereign and queen of all that's left for life, filling it with memories that you can't alter and I can't prevent ! Say it for these reasons or—keep silence.”

She thought he must hear her heart's loud throbs, but they were not all of pain or pride in that moment. Something of exultation mingled with them.

She had recognized her power.

She could make him plead and suffer, and remember. That other woman could scarcely rival her now.

“ You don't speak,” he said again. “ Very well ; I won't ask for a word you don't mean, but I never dreamed you were so hard, Lyle.”

“ I am not hard,” she said proudly, “ only to forgive isn't—possible. You have laid a burden on my heart that all the years to come will scarcely lighten. All men will seem false to me when I remember you.”

“ If you had learned the lessons of life,” he said, “ you would not call my actions by such a harsh name. The drifting fancies of a man do not affect his heart. The one woman he loves is the only loadstone that can really draw him.”

Lyle turned her white face away to hide the gathering tears. She knew she forgave him, but it was hard to say it. Her heart was weak as water to his pleading. She felt its power had in no way relaxed. And now it was too late. Part they must, there was no help for it. It was easier to keep up the pretence of coldness and of pride than yield and break down, and suffer again all that she had suffered.

Her calmness was so like indifference that he believed it less a mask than a reality. As the lane widened he drew his horse aside, and let her ride on in front of him.

When they reached the open road, she stopped. "I know the way now, and I need not trouble you to come any further."

"Your road is mine also," he said curtly. "I shall keep you in sight, unless you absolutely forbid it."

"I could scarcely do that," she said quietly, "if our ways are the same."

"For a little while. For the last time, Lyle."

She made no answer, but he saw her lids droop, and caught the sudden quiver of her lips.

"It is too late for happiness," he said; "but don't let us part in anger. Life after to-day will be hard enough without that added to it."

So they rode on side by side, speaking now and then in toneless, even voices, yet making no haste to shorten the distance that lay between them and a last "good-by."

It seemed to Lyle that she must have dreamed of those other impassioned farewells as she stole a look at the stern coldness of his face. Had his hand ever sought hers tenderly, his eyes claimed look for look with a lover's pleading; his lips——

She drew herself up suddenly. Her thoughts must not stray over ground so dangerous. All *that* was over forever. They were drawing near to the gulf of silence and separation that no love might bridge with hope.

They drew rein involuntarily at the cross-roads.

Here there was no longer excuse for his escort. She was within two minutes of her own gates.

The tired horses drooped their heads. She saw him shift the hunting crop into his left hand, leaving the right free. A spasm of heart-sickness shook the forced composure from her face and bearing. She was after all only a girl, and life's lessons are bitter.

"Good-by," he said, under his breath.

A little gasping sob caught hers.

"Good-by, Derrick."

"Oh! Lyle, Lyle," he cried passionately, "you *do* care—you can't go back on what has been. Your heartache answers mine, though it can't be as hard to bear. Are you sorry it has ended—like this?"

"Yes," she said sadly. "Nothing will ever seem quite the same. One can't give love and take it back at will."

"That's true enough," he said moodily. "It's but a poor starved future I have to face. I think sometimes I shall never see this country again."

"At least," she said, "you will live—not stagnate."

He laughed somewhat bitterly.

"If it's life to feel one is minus a limb, dead to peace and content, haunted by a memory that fills one's days and dreams! That's about what it means to me. But I'll make no more moan over it. You have acted as you thought best. Even had it been otherwise, had I been the faultless being you desired, we should never have broken down your father's opposition.—Best so!"

He held out his hand. It was ungloved. Some impulse prompted her to draw the white gauntlet from her own. Palm touched palm, close pressed and loth

to part. Suddenly he raised the warm white wrist to his lips and kissed it with lingering sadness. Then he released it, looking all his soul into her tear-filled eyes.

“God bless you—always,” he whispered.

The hand fell numb and loose to her side. She saw him wrench the rein, turn.—The lonely road was not more desolate than her heart as she realized he had gone from out her life forever.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

LYLE was in her room and changing her habit when she suddenly thought of Nora. She called her name, but there was no answer. She threw on a dressing-gown, and opened the communicating door between the two rooms. Nora's was empty.

"I wonder what has detained her? Surely her horse didn't bolt also," she thought as she returned and finished her dressing. She felt sick and bruised and weary, but she knew it would be better to put in an appearance at the luncheon table than to let her father hear a garbled version of her hunting adventure. There was no need to mention Derrick Mallory's name.

As soon as Lyle was dressed she rang her bell and inquired of Molly whether Miss Callaghan had returned. The answer was "No"—when separated from the usual formula of circumlocution indispensable to all Irish replies. Lyle began to feel alarmed.

She went down-stairs and related her story. Sir Anthony was full of consternation. Nora's absence increased his uneasiness, and he was full of self-blame for a suggestion that had been so unexpectedly disastrous.

"You ought to have had the groom," he said.

"My dear dad, twenty grooms could not have prevented Meteor's bolt," she answered.

“Where was Nora when you last saw her?”

“Talking to Jasper Standish.”

“Oh! then she’s all right. He would be sure to look after her.”

“You seem to have great faith in Mr. Standish?”

“Why should I not? I’ve never had any reason to suspect his probity.”

Lyle was silent. Her head was aching violently after the excitement of the morning. Her heart kept it company. Conversation was an effort.

Luncheon was over, but still came no signs of Nora. Sir Anthony at last despatched a groom to see if he could ascertain what had delayed her. Lyle went to her own room to lie down. She felt utterly prostrate; the pain in her head was so intense that every movement was agony.

It seemed as if hours passed. Everything was vague and dim, bounded only by heart misery. Then a soft tap at the door roused her. She heard Nora’s voice speaking.

“Lyle, I’ve come back. I’m all right. Your father said you were anxious.”

“Come in,” she answered feebly.

The girl obeyed the summons. She was still in her habit, but even in that dim room the radiance and glory of her face struck Lyle with sudden wonder.

“How happy you look!” she said enviously.

“Perhaps I am. But never mind me. What’s this about yourself? Did Meteor really go after the hounds?”

“Yes—whether I would or no.”

“You weren’t thrown, Lyle, or hurt?”

“No—very nearly, though. He took that big jump by Aylmer’s Field. I had no idea what it was like till I was over. Then he had had about enough.”

“It’s a mercy you weren’t thrown,” exclaimed Nora. “But why are you lying down?”

“I have a racking headache.”

“Then I won’t talk to you. Just lie quietly there till tea-time. Shall I order it up in my room?”

“Do, dear. Then I can sit there in my dressing-gown.”

She sank down again amongst the pillows, and Nora withdrew. Lyle fell into a heavy sleep, or stupor, the result of pain and fatigue, and when she awoke the room was dusk. Through the open door she caught the gleam of firelight and lamplight, and rising from the bed she joined Nora.

“The tea is not made; I was waiting for you. I did not like to disturb you. By the way, Lyle, do you know where Jane is? Molly says no one has seen her since this morning.”

“How strange! Perhaps she went into the town to order things.”

“It doesn’t take six hours to do that.”

“No. It is rather—odd.”

“Well, at any rate, she can’t be on a runaway horse,” said Nora, laughing. “Molly says she was carrying a small bag; but she told no one where she was going.”

“Oh, she’s all right. She will be home before long,” said Lyle. “Now what were your adventures this morning? They seem to have improved your spirits.”

“I? Oh! I am so much happier, Lyle. I was



wrong about—about what I thought and said of Jasper and—you. He has not really changed.”

Lyle looked at the sweet, happy face, and her heart sank.

“I wish he had,” she said to herself, but she kept silence. Nora’s cheeks were glowing. Hope’s starshine filled the violet of her eyes.

“I don’t know how I could have been so stupid,” she went on—too happy for discouragement. “But it’s all right now; I shall never distrust him again.”

“Are you so sure?” asked Lyle, putting down her cup, and looking with sad wonder at the girl’s changed face.

“Yes.”

That one simple affirmative meant everything.

“Answer me truly, Nora; are you going to marry Jasper Standish?”

“Not yet. . . . Not for a long time. When he has a better position and a little more money——”

“He has asked you?”

“He conveyed as much as hints can convey. Oh! Lyle, I wish I was rich like you. I would give him everything I had in the world.”

“You can better test his worth without riches, Nora.”

“I don’t wish to test it. I am quite content to believe in it. It distresses me, Lyle, that you are so prejudiced. You only. Sir Anthony likes him, so does every one in the county. I cannot understand why you don’t.”

“Well, my darling, if you vouch so strongly for his merits, I must try and conquer that prejudice. It

need not make you unhappy. It is my own misfortune that I don't believe in men."

"Or in love?"

"No—it is a false thing. It means—too much—or too little."

"That is to say, you have found it disappointing?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

"I was afraid of it," said Nora gently. "But I did not like to ask. Derrick is going back to India—I heard so to-day."

"He told me himself."

"But you never spoke to him; at least, not when I was there."

"I did not wish to speak to him. It was all owing to that hunting freak of Meteor's."

She related the incident briefly. Nora gave it astonished attention.

"Poor fellow!" she said at last. "I think you are rather hard on him, Lyle. We must take men as they are—not heroes or gods, but ordinary flesh and blood, made up of good and bad just like ourselves. Why should one human being expect perfection of another?"

"Because it is best to look for the highest, and natural to want it in one we love."

Nora was silent. Well enough she knew that her ideal was very far from being the highest—that he fell miles below Lyle Orcheton's standard of manly perfection; but she asked for nothing better than what he was, or seemed.

She poured out some more tea, and drank it silently.

"Do you know," she said at last, "Mrs. O'Neil has

asked me to stay with her for a week or two. She says it is so lonely—and will be more so when her nephew leaves.”

Lyle started. “Are you going?”

“If you don’t mind,” said Nora. “I would like to stay there for a week. She is such an old friend, and so kind.”

“Dearest, you must do exactly as you please here, or I shall be most unhappy. And indeed I’m not very lively company for you, or any one, just now.”

“Oh, Lyle, it’s not that. You and I are not at the stage of friendship when we need to entertain each other. But she has been ill and dull and moped, and begged me so hard—.”

“When do you go?”

“To-morrow, if you are sure you won’t mind being left alone for a little while. We can still see each other nearly every day.”

“Yes, of course. And I must finish my room, and take up my music again. It’s a long time since I practised.”

“Indeed it is. You’ve been neglecting everything of late.—Lyle!”

“What is it?”

“I’ve just remembered. We never found that secret staircase, did we?”

“No-o,” said Lyle faintly.

She thought of the day when its history had been discussed. How much had happened since!

“Would you like to find it?” continued Nora.

Lyle shook her head. “No. I have lost all in-

terest in it. Have you ever thought how strangely my presentiment about that room came true, Nora? The very first day I was arranging it sorrow overtook me, as I felt it would—and ever since, trouble has followed trouble.”

“You have never been well or happy, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“But, Lyle, it may not end with this. You have said very little to me, but I suppose it is your father’s opposition that is the barrier?”

“One of them. There is a worse—and I can’t speak of it.”

“I think I know—another woman, is it not?”

“It is common gossip, no doubt,” said Lyle bitterly. “I might have expected it.”

“But are you quite sure? If it weren’t true——”

“It is true. He could not deny it.”

“It is very hard. I do not think you, of all people, deserve it. But perhaps you will not always care like this. There are other men worthier, more suitable.”

“Oh! Nora, Nora, ‘with a little hoard of maxims preaching down,’ a—broken heart, shall we say? Only mine is not broken. Hurt and sore, I grant, but it will recover. It *must* be possible to forget in time if one tries very hard.”

“Yes; if we really try.”

“I shall try—and succeed. In a year it will be all quite different.”

“A year?” Nora shook her head somewhat sadly. “Not if I know anything of you, Lyle.”

“Twelve long months. Fifty-two weeks. Oh! a

great deal can be conquered in that time. I shall try, as I said."

She bent down and held her hands towards the fire, as if suddenly cold. Her eyes fell on the wrist Derrick had kissed. The blue veins showed through the white skin where his lips had lingered.

"And it all meant nothing!" she cried suddenly. "Nothing—the faith, the hope, the waiting—those long, anxious weeks! Nothing!"

From the standpoint of recovered hope, Nora uttered cheering prophecies. They fell on heedless ears. They seemed to belong to a time Lyle wanted to forget. To-morrow he would be gone out of her world, her life. How long before he would be out of her heart also!

She sank back in her chair in a somewhat wearied attitude. Nora looked at her with soft compassion.

"If I were you," she said, "I would not come down to dinner to-night. You look as white as a ghost, and your eyes tell you are in pain. Isn't your head better?"

"A little. It is at the dull stage of aching. I really think I will take your advice. Tell dad I have a splitting headache after this morning's escapade."

"I'll send you up some dinner."

"I couldn't touch it."

"Some soup?" pleaded Nora. "It's all nonsense giving way like this. You'll be ill; and what good will that do to any one!"

"Very well," said Lyle, "you don't mind my taking possession of your room in this fashion?"

"Mind!" Nora laughed and pulled the big chintz-

covered Chesterfield over near the fire. "Just you lie there and don't move, while I dress. And after dinner I'll come up and sit with you. Oh! by the bye, I must ask Jane to do my packing."

"And I'll lie here and watch it. You'd better dress, dear. It only wants half an hour of dinner time."

She lay there amidst the soft cushions, wearied and spent. The acute stage of mental and physical suffering had been reached. It was the hour of the ebbtide, and the strain and stress relaxed. Her eyes closed. Nora thought she slept, but it was not sleep—only exhaustion.

Molly brought up soup and wine, and she took both, and felt the better for them.

The girl hovered round the room as if anxious and yet reluctant to speak. At last she burst out: "Av ye plaze, miss, I think I ought to tell you that Mrs. Grapnell has been away wid herself the whole av this day, an' no wurrd to inyone; an' that's not all, miss. There's been a policeman watching the house since an hour before dark, an' not five minutes ago Mister Standish, the inspector, rode over an' asked to see the master, an' the two av thim are in the study. It was bizness av the greatest importance he said, an' the master left his dinner an' wint to him; an' axin' yer pardon, miss, I'm afraid something has happened, for 'twas mighty grave and stern he looked. And whin he passed into the study—Mister Standish, I mane—I happened to be passin' by the door, an' I heard him whisper to the man outside. Sure, Miss Lyle, as I'm a livin' sowl this minnit 'twas 'handcuffs' was the wurrd!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

STARTLED and amazed, Lyle sat up and looked at the girl. At the same moment the door opened, and Sir Anthony entered. He bade Molly leave the room, and shut the door on her reluctant exit.

“Lyle, my dear,” he then said, “something extraordinary has happened. Mr. Standish has come here to arrest Jane Grapnell on suspicion of the murder of Nora’s father.”

Lyle gazed at him in wide-eyed incredulity.

“Arrest Jane! What an idea! Why, she was devoted to Mr. Callaghan.”

“She seemed so; but I am bound to tell you, my dear, this woman has a very strange history. I’ve only heard a small portion, but that’s queer enough. It appears that while at Dr. Dan’s, and also during the short time she has been here, she was in the habit of going out at night—it is supposed to meet—— Why, Lyle, what’s the matter?”

For Lyle had given a sudden start. She remembered that mysterious figure crossing the park, and the after-discovery that it had been none of the younger servants.

“I—I can’t believe it,” she said. “Jane suspected of murder—impossible!”

“Standish makes out a very strong case. It is a horrible thing to happen here. Have you any idea where she is, by the way?”

Lyle grew very pale. She thought of Jane’s strange absence all day—unasked, unexplained. Yet faith clung to the poor hunted creature.

“She went into the town, and has not yet returned,” she answered. “Where—where is Mr. Standish?”

“In my study. The house has been watched all day.”

She rose unsteadily. Her temples throbbed violently at the movement.

“I should like to see him,” she said. “I will come down. Remember, father, Jane is not a mere servant. Nora and I have known her from our schooldays. I can’t believe she could have done such a thing. It is a ridiculous charge. I should say it could not hold ground—that it was made to screen some one else.”

“That is an absurd and unreasonable idea,” said Sir Anthony sternly. “You women are so illogical.”

“It may be illogical,” said Lyle; “it is also intuition. I would stake my life on Jane’s honor and Jane’s innocence.”

“There can be no use in your seeing Mr. Standish,” continued her father. “I only came up to ask if you could give us any information as to Jane’s whereabouts?”

“I cannot.” Her lips closed firmly. “And I would not if I could,” she said in her heart.

“Very well, I will tell him.”

He turned away, when the door suddenly burst open, and Nora entered in a whirl of excitement. “Lyle!”



she cried. "Oh! Sir Anthony, surely it's not true! It's like a wild dream. Jane, my faithful old Jane, accused of murdering my father? Impossible!"

She burst into a flood of tears. Her whole frame was shaking.

"Hush! my child, hush!" said Sir Anthony kindly. "After all, accusation and conviction are widely different things."

"Oh! but the shame—the disgrace!" sobbed Nora wildly. "They will cling to her always. And she has never been liked, never been friendly with the people here, and not one will have a good word for her! Oh! surely, surely this can be stopped. I can't bear it. It is too horrible!"

Sir Anthony looked deeply distressed. It was not the first time that he had found himself wishing he had never come to Ireland. Nothing but disaster and ill-luck had befallen him since he had bought the Hermitage.

"Try to calm her, Lyle," he said. "I must go down to Standish. This affair cannot rest, and Jane's flight makes it more suspicious."

He hurried from the room. Nora fell weeping into Lyle's arms. This sudden shock had brought back all the horror of that terrible time when she had faced her first grief. Everything else was forgotten. The two girls cried, discussed, and argued, while Sir Anthony and Jasper Standish were below, interviewing the other servants and trying to gain additional evidence as to the cause of Jane's hurried departure.

Molly's story of red-haired Mickey's visit, and the letter, seemed to disconcert the Inspector visibly.

“How did she come to know him? Has he been here before?” he inquired.

“No, sir,” answered the girl.

“But she seemed to know him,” added Honora Mooney.

Jasper dismissed them and shut up his note-book.

“The affair’s going to give us some trouble,” he said to Sir Anthony. “That boy Doolan is a half-witted, good-for-nothing vagabond. The fact of his knowing this woman is not to her credit.”

“I wonder what was in that letter?” said Sir Anthony thoughtfully.

“With your permission I will make a search of her room,” continued Jasper. “There may be evidence to be found there.”

“Shall I accompany you?”

“No, thank you, I would rather go by myself. But I’ll take my man as witness.

Sir Anthony returned to the deserted dining-room. All appetite for dinner had vanished. What a miserable New Year’s day it had been! He bade Woodman give him some wine and remove the dishes, and sat on there alone and dispirited awaiting Jasper’s return.

One look at the Inspector’s face showed him there had been more discoveries.

“You have found something?” he questioned anxiously.

“I am sorry to say so, Sir Anthony.”

He opened his hand. In it glittered a small gold coin. “Look at that,” he said.

Sir Anthony fixed his glasses and stared hard at the money. “A sovereign!” he said.

“ Yes ; but do you see that mark on it ? ”

Jasper pointed to a tiny mark scratched on the surface.

“ It looks like a letter,” said Sir Anthony.

“ It is a letter—the letter ‘ D.’ I ascertained from Donovan, before he went out to America, that ten of the gold pieces he paid into the bank that day of the murder were marked with his initial. He had saved them up as profit from some bargain, and scratched the letter “ D ” on them to celebrate his good luck. He put them in with the other money. Sir Anthony, this was found in a corner of one of the drawers in the chest in Jane Grapnell’s room. It may have escaped from her purse and rolled there ; probably it did. In her hurried flight she took all the money she had, but this piece lay between the paper and the wood of the drawer. It is one of the ten marked pieces paid into the bank by Donovan.”

“ Good God ! You don’t say so ! ”

“ I do. I must. The case looked black enough before. It looks worse now. I must issue a warrant for the arrest of this woman, and have it telegraphed all over the kingdom. But she has had a good start. She may be on the way to America,—California,—anywhere ! ”

“ Yes, of course,” faltered Sir Anthony.

“ Well, in any case, I needn’t take up any more of your time. I’ve locked up everything in her room and taken the key. You will see no one goes there.”

“ Of course. It’s an awful thing, though, Standish—an awful thing to have happened here, just as I thought we were comfortably settled.”

“It is awful ; but it can't be helped.”

“It's a great shock to poor Nora. She was so attached to Jane. Upon my soul, I can't credit her guilt. It looks so impossible.”

“If crimes didn't look like that, very few would be brought home to the real culprits. The more impossible, the greater the likelihood. That is the ground I have gone upon.”

“And all that dreadful business will be raked up again. And I suppose you'll be wanting me to give evidence ?”

“Indeed I will.”

Sir Anthony's brow clouded. “I wish to Heaven,” he said, in a low, troubled voice, “that I'd never come to this country. Some evil fate has been dodging my steps ever since. There's always some trouble or unpleasantness, and I so hoped for peace at last. Lyle is ill and altered, Nora Callaghan's life is shadowed by this tragedy, and I myself am brought into it all by the fact of unconsciously harboring the suspected person under my roof.”

“It is hard,” said Jasper Standish sympathetically ; “but justice must be done, Sir Anthony, and it doesn't stand aside because of discomfort to others !”

He left then, and Sir Anthony went up-stairs to talk the matter over with Nora and his daughter.

\* \* \* \* \*

A sense of gloom and ever-deepening horror brooded over the Hermitage.

Nora had gone to Mrs. O'Neil's, and Lyle was left much alone. All the delight and hope with which she had looked forward to settling in Ireland had

vanished. These months seemed like years added to her life. She fulfilled her duties mechanically, taking up the housekeeping herself, for she had no desire to replace poor Jane. No trace of her had been found. How she had accomplished that flight so secretly and hastily was a mystery. Suspicion looked black against her, and yet Lyle's faith never wavered, even when Nora's was shaken.

Derrick had left on the second, as he had said. She knew it by receiving a small packet on that morning, containing a spray of shamrock and the one word "Farewell."

She locked them away in a tray of her jewel case, the only mementoes of her brief love dream.

Brief indeed it had been, but with a resolution and submission that had little of girlhood left, she put it from her into that sad vault that meant the past.

"There is one comfort," she told herself, "I shall never suffer like this again. I could not. They say a first grief is always the hardest to bear. After that shock of disillusion, it is no longer an agony to think of the seas between us. The fear of meeting him is at least over. To wake up in the morning and know he is gone is almost consolation."

But the consolation was a very poor one. It did not bring the old light to her eye, the joy to her face. It could not restore the ringing gladness to voice and laugh. Sorrow had taken its heavy toll. The life of girlhood was gone. She had faced the ignominy of self-deception. It seemed to her that the shame of it had turned her heart to stone.

Yet she did battle bravely, and threw herself into

active life as far as was possible. Brooding and tears could never restore that fallen idol to its pedestal. When she had recognized that fact, she was more unhappy but less intolerant.

Nora had been gone about a fortnight when one night she went up to her room a little earlier than usual. Her father was busy over some literary work, and usually spent the evenings in his study.

The moon was flooding the pretty bedchamber with radiance. A small wood fire burned in the grate, for the rooms at the Hermitage were always more or less chilly. Lyle looked out on the park, and saw the distant river lying like a silver mirror between its dark banks, the belt of laurels and holly, the shadows of the leafless elms upon the grass.

As she stood at the window there flashed back to her mind the memory of that night when she had seen that flitting figure pass under the shadows of those same trees.

Had it been Jane? And whom had she gone to meet? The dreadful story came back to her. She traced it step by step. It had come to a full stop now. Jasper Standish had failed to discover his desired victim. Nothing on earth could shake Lyle's belief that Jane was a victim, destined to be the scapegoat of another's misdeeds, until such time of her innocence or that other's guilt should be proved.

To-night she could not get away from her memories of this strange, sad, reserved woman; unpopular because of that sadness, unloved because of that reserve. That some great sorrow burdened her life Lyle knew, though of its nature she was entirely ignorant.

She turned away from the window at last and let the curtains fall.

The fire leaped suddenly up, and one ray of light shone on a chintz-covered dress ottoman standing at the foot of the bed. It held Lyle's evening dresses, and as her eye followed unthinkingly the flash of light, she noticed that a fragment of lace was hanging out between the lid and the floor. It was an unimportant matter, so unimportant that unless Lyle had been inately tidy of habit she would not have troubled her head about it. As it was, she lit the candles on the mantel-shelf, and then, going over to the box, lifted the lid to put the lace back in its place.

It had caught in the latch of the ottoman. But for that fact Lyle would not have knelt down and pushed back the lid. So do trifles make up histories.

Kneeling there, she looked at the dress lying on the top. She remembered it was the very dress she was to have worn at Mrs. O'Neil's party. She remembered also that Jane Grapnell had been working on it the night of Mr. Callaghan's murder. The whole of the events of that night flashed back to her. How much had come and gone and happened since that dress had been laid aside, forgotten in the horrors of after events!

She had hoped Derrick would have returned for that party. She had been secretly anxious that the gown should be very pretty and very becoming. Now the pearly gleam of satin and lace came as an added shock in an unexpected moment. She felt the scorch of tears in her eyes as she laid the strip of lace back in its place. There was the needle and cotton, just as Jane had left them.

She drew the needle out.

As she did so, something rustled and cracked. Lyle felt among the filmy folds of lace and satin, and drew out a sheet of ruled paper. It was the sort of paper used for exercise books. She looked at it curiously. It was folded like a square envelope, and addressed to herself. In surprise she opened it, and saw it was covered with fine, small writing.

Rising hastily, she went over to the light and began to read it.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

THIS is what Lyle read :

“ DEAR MISS LYLE,—

“ I am writing this in great distress and in great terror. I cannot explain more. I have a powerful enemy, and he is dogging my steps and watching my actions. The time is not yet ripe, or I could turn the tables on him ; but the day will come, and until it comes I throw myself on your mercy. Do not, I pray of you, believe what is said of me, and will be said of me when it is known I am gone. For go I must. If I stay here, he will deprive me of freedom, and without freedom I cannot act. It may be months, it may be less, before I can bring my proofs to bear against this enemy. In those months what may not happen ! That is my dread ; that is why at all risks I write to you.

“ At the bottom of this dress box of yours I have placed a sealed packet. I dared not leave it in my own room for fear it should be searched. May I beseech you to keep this safe until I claim it, *unless one thing should happen*. That one thing which I so greatly fear and can so weakly guard against, is the event of Jasper Standish proposing to, or marrying, Miss Nora. If such a thing should happen, or appear likely to happen, you must open the packet. I must risk everything, even death, to save her. I know I can trust you.

“My time is short ; I have to leave here within an hour. I am going to put this letter in your dressing-table drawer, where you will be sure to find it. I shall——”

The letter broke off. There was no signature, no date, and it had not been sealed, not even placed in an envelope. Lyle gazed at it, white and trembling. It was as if some one had suddenly risen from the dead and confronted her. The writing looked like Jane Grapnell’s, though somewhat smaller and more cramped than her usual caligraphy in account books and orders.

The letter was unfinished. Something must have happened to prevent her carrying out her intention. Lyle could only suppose that some hidden interruption had prevented her sealing it ; that, afraid to put it open in the dressing-table drawer, she had slipped it into this box, knowing that the moment Lyle went there for any of her evening dresses she would find it.

But what was that about a packet ? About Nora and Jasper Standish ? Again she perused the small, cramped writing. A thrill of horror ran through her. Whatever the woman meant had been realized. Nora was ostensibly engaged to this man, who was hounding down a defenseless woman—this man whom she had always distrusted, who had proved himself fickle and untrue !

Nora and Jasper Standish ! What could it mean ? Not that he—Jasper—had been concerned in the crime !—that to save himself—— Her brain reeled at the awfulness of the thought. No, it could not be. He was bad, unprincipled, but surely no fiend out of hell itself could have conceived an outrage so diabolical.

She sank into a chair, the letter clenched in her trembling fingers.

What must be done? Keep Jane's secret, yet save Nora? It seemed impossible. Only too well she knew the strength of the girl's infatuation. Nothing short of absolute invincible proof would convince her that this man was unworthy, and worse than that, perhaps. A criminal—reckless, diabolical, blood-stained.

The moments passed, and she could only sit there saying over those words, yet conscious all the time that Nora must be saved at any cost. She put the letter down and went over to the box. She lifted out the dresses, the lace, and silken petticoats one by one. Underneath lay the sealed packet of which the letter spoke. The wax had made blood-red splashes on the paper, as if a hurried hand had used it.

She took up the packet. It was square and heavy and loosely wound round it was a thin silver chain, to which a key was attached.

"A box!" thought Lyle. "Ought I to open it? She says, 'If such a thing should happen, or appear likely to happen . . .'" But it *has* happened. I cannot prevent it now. Yet she is not married to him; there may be something here to save her. Surely that was what Jane meant."

Perplexed with doubts, she looked again at the sealed packet, then put it down on the floor and replaced the dresses in the ottoman. That done, she crossed over to the door and locked it. Then she drew her chair up to the fire and once more read the letter. As she finished it a look of resolution flashed over her pale face.

“God knows, Jane, I don’t want your secrets,” she half whispered, “but if another life is in peril I must risk all.”

She broke the seals and tore off the paper. A flat leather portfolio lay before her. She opened the lock with the key attached to the silver chain. The case was full of papers, in single sheets closely written on one side, and tied at the top of the pages with red tape. This kept them together so that they could easily be read.

Lyle saw that every page was numbered. It was evidently a thoughtful and methodical record, put together for a purpose. She made up the fire and glanced at the clock. It was only ten.

Then she commenced the task of reading those closely covered sheets.

“I am writing this story of a woman’s suffering, for two purposes. One is to relieve my own brain from its pressure of trouble, the other to keep ever fresh and green in my memory the vengeance I have sworn on one man.

“I do not know the man yet, but I shall know him. I do not even know where to seek him, but I shall find him. There never yet was a resolute will that failed to gain its purpose and mine is resolute as rock, and neither time nor chance shall alter it.

“Partly to keep the facts in my memory, partly to leave some vindication of my actions behind me in case of accident or ill fate, I write these records. I began them on that awful day when all my life turned to

despair, when the news came from the prison that—she—was dying.

“I never was a lovable woman or an attractive woman ; the heart hunger of my life was not one to be satisfied by man’s love, or woman’s friendship. Yet I married. There is no need to confide to these pages why or whom I married. I was badly used, hardly tried, and soon forsaken for a fairer face. But Providence understood a woman’s need when He made us mothers, and with motherhood came to me my first happiness, and my first consolation.

“My little girl was very delicate and frail. So much the more need had she of me and I of her. I worked hard. I was a good needlewoman, and the big shops gave me regular employment. I and my little one were never separated. At last a great stroke of luck overtook me. An old widower living in Wales, rich and somewhat eccentric, engaged me as housekeeper. I told him I was a widow and could not leave my child. He allowed me to have her with me.

“Years of peace and prosperity came then. I was perfectly content. My little Hester was educated at the village school, and grew up strong and healthy and beautiful. Plain and homely as I was, my child blossomed into beauty that any lady might have envied.

“When she was about sixteen a rich lady traveling through Wales stopped at H—— and saw her. She was an Irish lady, very pleasant and homely, and she wanted to engage Hester as her maid. The girl was a beautiful worker, besides being quick and handy and adaptable. She was delighted at the idea of going into

service, of seeing life, for the lady traveled about a great deal, she told us, and finally I was persuaded to let her go for a year.

“I had letters from her from time to time. She always wrote in good spirits. She was happy and well. Her mistress was kindness itself.

“Just about that time my master fell ill, and I was much taken up with nursing and attending to him. His illness was brief, and he died. In his will he left me a sum of three hundred pounds for my services. I was surprised. I little guessed then the need I should have for that money.

“When the funeral was over, the servants dismissed, and his heir had come to take possession, I began to remember the long time that had elapsed since HESSIE had written. I looked at the address of her last letter, and found she had left Ireland, and was somewhere on the French coast. I wished she had been nearer, for I could have gone to see her. However, she said she would soon be coming to England, so I had to content myself with writing and telling her of my good fortune. I also sent her ten pounds as a present. The rest of my money I invested, and after a short holiday I looked out for another situation. I succeeded in obtaining one without much difficulty, for my late master's name was well known, and his written testimonial was only too kind and flattering to my poor abilities.

“I had received only a short letter from my daughter, gratefully acknowledging the money, but giving no further information about herself. I was with one of the county families of H——, Llewellyan by name.

I had a very easy and very comfortable place. We were some distance from the town. News traveled slowly and posts were few.

“One morning I opened a local newspaper of some days old, and glancing at the contents I saw that a woman had been arrested and imprisoned for child murder. It seemed so shocking and so awful a crime to me that I could hardly bring myself to read it. When I did, my first horror gave way to pity.

“The girl was very young, only seventeen, they said. She had crossed over in a little barque from the French coast to Holyhead. Arrived there, she had made her way on foot to the little village of H——. She had gone to a farmhouse and asked for a night's rest, which had been given her. That night her child was born—a little sickly, premature creature. The farmer's wife attended her, and next day she declared her intention of pursuing her journey. She said she was going to friends only a few miles off. She seemed a little light-headed and queer, the woman thought, and she tried to dissuade her from getting up. Finally the girl agreed to wait there another day.

“That night, however, she must have dressed herself and got out of the house. She was found wandering about near the river at dawn next morning. The child was not with her, and as she seemed ‘queer,’ the men who found her took her to the police station. She gave no name, and was sent to the workhouse.

“The suspicions of the matron led to inquiries, and she was traced back to the farmhouse. They asked what she had done with the infant, but she denied ever having had a child. She was then brought up

before the magistrates, and accused of having made away with it. Search was made, and the body was found in the river close to the bank—dead. She obstinately denied it was hers, or that she had killed it. The case was remanded, and she was committed to prison. Badly stated, these were the facts.

“I put the paper down with an uncomfortable feeling. The age of the accused girl was the age of Hester. A coincidence, but one that left behind it a sense of sadness and discomfort. I wondered what lay behind the story. The old, old tragedy of woman’s wrongs and man’s deception? I wondered also whether the girl had any friends. I took up the paper again, and looked at the concluding notice. She was to be tried at the assizes. They opened the following week. I made up my mind to be present, and hear the story as it would be told in court.

“I write calmly of this now. Death is calm, so, I think, is despair. It is despair that helps me to put into written words the sorrow that has been worse than death to me. The fewer words, the easier the task. I went to the court. I saw the prisoner brought into the dock—a slight, frail creature, with bent head and downcast eyes. The head was lifted, the eyes looked in terrified question at the cold crowd of men and women.

“*They were the eyes of my own child. . . .*

“They said I fainted—fell like a log from my seat. I don’t know. I called on death, but my time had not yet come.

“Let me hasten on. There are some griefs no words can paint; such grief was mine. I will only say I went



to the prison day after day. I paid every farthing I had for her defence. I pleaded as one pleads for life for some clue to this awful tragedy. She still maintained that she had had no child. It was plain her mind was unhinged, and the lawyer could only build her defence on that one foundation.

“I wrote to the lady with whom she had lived in Ireland. She answered that Hester had left her suddenly without notice or warning, saying she was summoned by me. That was two months before I had received her letter saying she was going to France. There was no trace of her at the place named in that letter. She would not say where she had been. It was a poor case, and my heart was filled with agony and terror as I saw how it went against her. I had no hope—no more had her counsel.

“The day came, the last day. I heard the verdict—guilty. There was a recommendation to mercy at the end of it. They bore me home out of court senseless. She still seemed totally unmoved.

“For weeks she lay in prison while the recommendation was being considered. I was allowed to see her, but never alone. Each time she seemed to me a little paler, a little thinner, a little more frail. I could not weep, I could not grieve. I was glad to think that death might seize her before that last horrible indignity should befall her. At last she was too ill to be in her cell, and was taken to the prison infirmary. There she died.

“I swore on her dead body that I would find her betrayer, if I had to search the world through for him.

“They gave me her poor clothes, and a little worn

Testament that had lain in her bosom. Nothing more. No letter, no scrap of writing. With these I had to work my way to the vengeance I had sworn. For that purpose alone I lived.

“My first difficulty was money. Almost all my three hundred pounds had gone to pay lawyers, and gain for her some poor comforts or kindness in that awful time of imprisonment. I took another situation, changing my name so that I should not be identified with this awful tragedy. I worked hard, I saved every penny, and then began my quest. The person I employed, however, at length came to a dead wall in his discoveries. He had had all my money, and left me with only one clue. I resolved to follow it up myself.

“Instincts are strange things. What prompts us to like one person and dislike another? What drew me to Miss Nora, and made me love her as I had loved no one but my ill-fated child? I cannot tell. What made me turn cold and faint the first time I ever set eyes on Jasper Standish? What made me shrink from him as one shrinks from some loathsome and corrupt thing? Again I cannot tell. Both these facts are true. The reason of them is still unexplained.

“When Miss Nora was leaving school, she asked me to come to Ireland with her and be her housekeeper. I went gladly—the more so as I knew that her home was in the country where my daughter had lived, the place but a few miles from the town where Miss Nora’s father was bank manager. I had been very patient. Now it seemed to me that Fate was playing into my hands. I might find out the truth at last.

“I have said that I felt a curious antipathy towards

Jasper Standish, the county inspector. He was a handsome man, a popular man, a great friend of Mr. Callaghan's, and a great admirer of Miss Nora's. Yet—I hated him. Above all, I hated to see him beside her. His every look and touch seemed to me a desecration of her innocent girlish grace and beauty. Perhaps it was that hatred that set me on the track of discovery.

“I watched him furtively, as one watches an enemy. I bribed the services of a rough, half-witted Irish lad, who was his spy and creature. I made him mine. Where his master gave him ha'pence, I gave him silver. Instead of kicks and oaths, he had kind words. He would do anything for me, and I knew I could nowhere have found a more useful tool. No one knew that I had any communication with him. I used to meet him secretly at night, and never twice in the same place.

“On two occasions my absence was discovered: once by Dr. Dan, when I was staying there after the murder, and once by Miss Lyle, shortly after we had all come to the Hermitage. But she did not recognize me. She thought it was one of the younger servants. Who would have suspected plain, middle-aged, ill-favored Jane of midnight assignations? I incurred Dr. Dan's suspicions. He has distrusted me ever since. He little knew for what purpose I was working.

“I come now to the dread and awful discovery I have made respecting this man—Jasper Standish. I come to the reason of his secret animosity towards me. I come also to the reason of my terror lest Miss Nora's girlish fancy should become something deeper. (Pray God that it may not!) My heart grows cold with deadly

fear as here I put down in written words the suspicion that before long I mean to turn into accusation, and to build up which I have been watching, waiting, working so patiently :—

*“ I believe Jasper Standish to be the murderer of Mr. Callaghan ! ”*

## CHAPTER XXVII.

LYLE gave a faint, horrified cry. The papers dropped from her hand and lay upon the floor. The room seemed chill and full of shadows. The fire had died down while she had been occupied in reading; the candles on the mantel-shelf burned low in their sockets.

She looked about her with a sudden dull wonder, asking dumbly why this horror had been thrust upon her; why, suddenly, all peace and joy of life had passed from illusion to tragedy; why that coveted experience had brought so much in its train of woe and gloom and desolation; why she should be the chosen recipient of these confidences; that it should fall to her lot to crush Nora's heart with a suspicion so hateful; that her own instinctive dislike to Jasper Standish must suddenly arraign and condemn him? All this rushed dimly and confusedly over her, and made her senses reel and her heart grow faint.

She replenished the fire. A horror of the darkness and loneliness came over her. That man who had sat at her father's table, touched her hand, whispered odious and enamored compliments in her unwilling ears—that man—a murderer!

She thought of Nora's ignorance, Nora's peril, Nora's

love. It was too awful, seen by the light of these written records. Every love-word, every kiss, every look were tainted with a new horror. There was no time to be lost.

Then she remembered there was more to read. She lit fresh candles, and picked up the MS. from the rug where it had fallen. Once more she set herself to read those close, cramped lines.

It was no easy task to decipher them. It was a harder one to connect hastily jotted fragments. Notes of meetings with Mickey, scraps of conversations he had overheard, the story of the blood-stained shirt, of Jasper's midnight ride to the old Jew miser, of his drinking bouts, his seeming terror of loneliness or darkness. Then came the story of suspicion against herself, and Mickey's warning and her sudden flight.

There it ended, only at the bottom was written :

“ I shall not be far. I cannot leave until my task is accomplished, until I have the proofs complete, and Jasper Standish is caught in the net of his own setting.”

“ *I shall not be far !* ” Lyle repeated the words mechanically. Not far ! Then Jane had not left the country—perhaps not even the neighborhood. Where could she be ? Who would give her hiding-place ? Bills were out everywhere, offering reward for her arrest. Far and wide the rumor had spread, that, if not actually the criminal, she was implicated very deeply in the murder of the bank manager. The story of the marked money was on every tongue. Sir Anthony himself believed in her guilt.

Not far ! Lyle's heart grew sick with fear. What

new horrors might not happen, what fresh discoveries might not be made?

She looked at those closely written sheets with ever-growing terror. That they were in her keeping, that she must guard them, conceal them, use them perhaps at some future time, filled her with apprehension. Her eyes sought a hiding-place, but no lock seemed secure enough, no receptacle safe enough to hold that incriminating story.

She remembered at last that in the turret room among her collection of art treasures was a little inlaid cabinet—a thing of many drawers and complicated locks. She resolved to put these papers in it. The keys hung on her chatelaine, quaint, tiny things of brass and steel.

In the morning—yet why wait for morning? Why not hide them at once?

She rose. A clock in the distance struck one. She had spent three hours over the perusal of Jane's confessions. Every one in the house must be in bed and asleep long since.

She hurriedly removed her dress, and wrapped herself in a soft cashmere dressing-gown, slipped her feet into velvet slippers, and taking the candle in her hand, opened the door and looked out. All was dark and quiet. Shaking with nervous fear, she flitted across the carpeted corridor, and up the stairs.

At the door of the turret room she paused, overcome again by that chilling sense of terror which had visited her the first time she had entered it. Her hand turned the handle.

The door was locked, and the key was on the *inside!*

She stood there as if unable to believe her senses. Had the key been without, as usual, she could have believed some one had turned it for security ; but there was no key to be seen. Many days had passed since she had been in the room. Was it possible one of the servants had locked it, and removed the key ?

As she stood there, cold and motionless, asking herself these questions, her strained ears caught a sound. It was the sound of sustained and regular breathing in the room—the breathing of a heavy sleeper. Almost paralyzed with terror, her knees gave way, and she sank on the mat before the door. Some one was in the room—asleep. In her new position her ear was close to the keyhole. She heard the sound distinctly.

The candle was on the floor beside her. She still held the leather case containing the MS. in her hand. Quite suddenly she heard the soft pat-pat of her little terrier's paws on the staircase behind her. He ran up to her side, and the sense of his presence seemed to bring back her courage.

She pointed to the door, and he put his nose to the crack below, and sniffed two or three times. Then he wagged his tail reassuringly, and looked at her. That wag and that look were eloquent of meaning. Whoever was in the room was no stranger, or no house-breaker, otherwise the dog would have barked.

It was a mystery, certainly ; but a mystery she must wait for the morning to explain. She patted the dog softly, and rose from her knees somewhat unsteadily. In doing so she lurched against the door ; the handle rattled. At the same moment a half-subdued cry came from within.



“Who’s there?” it said.

Lyle’s heart beat like a sledge-hammer. It was Jane Grapnell’s voice!

Jane Grapnell must be in that room.

She cried her name softly. “Don’t be afraid, Jane. It’s I—Lyle.”

There was the rustle of a dress across the floor, a hand upon the key, a whisper.

“Miss Lyle, is it you, really?”

“Yes, Jane, yes. What are you doing in that room at this hour of night!”

The key turned; the door opened. Lyle was looking at the pale, worn face of her lost housekeeper. Jane drew her in, closed the door, and again turned the key. She took the light from the girl’s trembling hand and set it on the table. Lyle sank into a chair, and looked at her for explanation.

“You are wondering how I came here. Ah——”

She drew a quick breath. Her eyes had fallen on the leather case clasped in Lyle’s hand.

“You have read it. You had to read it?”

“I found it to-night. I brought it here to hide. I was afraid to trust it anywhere in my bedroom.”

“Then the necessity has arisen?”

“Nora is engaged to Jasper Standish. She told me with her own lips.”

Jane’s face grew ashy gray, and she caught at the table to steady herself.

“Already!” she whispered faintly. “Already! Oh, what can I do? The time is not ripe; the trap not baited.”

“Are you sure of what you say—here?” asked

Lyle. "It is an awful charge to bring against any one."

"I am as sure as that I live; but I can't prove everything yet."

"And you are hiding, and a warrant is out against you, and yet I find you locked up here, in my room. How did you get here unobserved? How have you lived these three weeks?"

"Ah! forgive me, Miss Lyle. I can only trust to your mercy. Look."

She crossed the room, went up to the wall, and touched a panel. To Lyle's amazement it slid back, and showed a wide space. She rose and looked down.

It was the stairway of which Jasper Standish had spoken.

"There?" gasped Lyle. "Do you mean to say you have lived there?"

"Yes. You see this little sort of recess? I brought some rugs and shawls, and here I used to sit. At night I came out and used your room. You may remember you have not entered it since Miss Nora went away."

"But what did you do for food?"

"I took the liberty of visiting the larder now and then. Bread and water and a little cooked meat were enough for me. If I wanted exercise, I lit this lantern and walked up and down the stairway. It leads to a long, narrow passage, like a tunnel. It is lined with brick. The end of it is a sort of cave close to the river."

"Good Heavens! But Jasper Standish knows of

this secret passage. He might have searched it—have found you at any moment.”

She turned her white face to Lyle. “How does he know of it?”

“How can I tell? Perhaps he discovered it accidentally; he said he was searching for an escaped criminal. How did you discover it yourself, Jane?”

“The day Miss Nora and you were fixing up the room. You said you were coming back to tea, if you remember, and we waited a long time. At last Miss Nora went to look for you. I was here alone. I was dusting the panels, and I rubbed this one rather hard. It moved. I then found there was a spring. It looked only like a bit of the carving on the panels. I pressed it, and it flew open. I took a light and looked down, and saw what a safe hiding-place it was. I tried the opening from the inner side, and found it answered easily. Then I closed it up again. I meant to tell you, but so many things happened, and you were in trouble, and Miss Nora sick, and I put it off.

“When I got word of what this villain intended, when I saw that my liberty was threatened, the idea came to hide here and throw him off the scent. He would never think I was remaining in the country, still less that I had a spy of his own to report to me.”

“You still see Mickey? You trust him?”

“I had to, miss. I met him in the cave. He does not know where I come from. That secret is too dangerous to let out.”

They were back in the room now. Lyle told of her terror at discovering the locked door and hearing the heavy breathing.

“It is the first time for many nights I’ve slept, miss,” she said humbly. “I had no right to be here, but it was so cold and damp in that cell.”

“It’s awful to think of it,” said Lyle with a shudder; “but what are you going to do, Jane? You can’t remain here always. Some one might discover you. Think of the risk you ran, going down to the kitchen to get yourself food.”

“I know, miss. I often wondered the dog did not bark and alarm the house; but he never did, and I never met a soul.”

“How long do you think it will be before you have your evidence complete?”

She shook her head sadly. “It’s hard work and slow work.”

Lyle told her then of the search in her room, and the discovery of the marked piece of money. “Of course he put it there himself,” she added. “But think how cleverly he planned it.”

Jane started. The blood rushed to her pale face.

“Miss Lyle,” she said, “I don’t believe there was any marked money at all. He knows Donovan’s safe out of the way, and no one likely to call him as witness. He just invented that to ruin me. Perhaps he’s been a little too clever, and over-reached himself.”

“It is an awful business, Jane, however we look at it. And I must tell Nora. She is not here now. She is staying at Mrs. O’Neil’s. I will go over the first thing to-morrow morning—to-day, rather, for the whole night has gone. Jane, you must use this room, and I will see that no one enters it except to light the

fire. Always turn the key, and I will pretend to lock it on account of some painting I'm doing. Then every night I'll bring you supplies enough for the day. You'll be perfectly safe, unless——”

Her eyes went to the secret panel—“Unless he takes it into his head to search that entrance. But I hardly think he will. If he did, it would be from the other side—the cave. How would you know? Could you possibly escape?”

“I must bring my rugs and things in here,” said Jane. “I should be certain to hear footsteps or voices a long way off if I happened to be in the little chamber. I could slip in here.” Her eyes turned from side to side. “You would not allow him to search this room, Miss Lyle?”

“Certainly not. But supposing I was out? I should not even know he was here, if he entered that way.”

“No, miss, of course not. Well, he could but arrest me. I must trust to Providence.”

Lyle shivered. There was a moment's silence. Then she went to the little cabinet and placed the leather case and papers in one of the drawers and locked it.

“I shall have to show these to Nora,” she said, “but I shall say nothing of your being here, Jane. She is so infatuated with this man that she might betray your secret. And now I'll go back to my room. Remember you may trust me to the death.”

“God bless you, Miss Lyle. I always knew you were true as steel.”

The tears rushed to her eyes. She took the girl's

slender hands and kissed them humbly. Lyle's own eyes were wet with sympathy.

The revelations of this night had been a series of mental shocks. She felt unnerved and unstrung; and the morrow had yet to be faced, and it would bring another ordeal. Something told her that that, too, would be terrible, would wring her heart and test her courage.

She had lost her lover; was she also to lose her friend?

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

FROM restless sleep and troubled dreams Lyle Orcheston woke to bright sunshine and to—memory.

At first she could hardly realize that the events of the past night were absolute facts. They seemed too fantastic and unreal. But as she lay there, watching Molly's movements about the room, the whole strange story came back again : the discovery of the letter, the sealed packet, the turret room and its occupant, and the peril to Nora. She sprang up hastily and made her toilet ; then, going down-stairs, ordered her horse to be brought round within an hour.

Sir Anthony was surprised to find her at the breakfast table in her habit. She explained that she was in haste to see Nora on a matter of importance, and was going to ride over as soon as breakfast was finished.

Before leaving, she ran up to the turret room. The door was unlocked. She entered, closing it carefully behind her. Then she lit the fire, which was laid ready in the grate, and, going over to the secret door, knocked gently.

“Are you there, Jane ?” she asked.

“Yes, miss,” was whispered back.

“I am going now to see Miss Callaghan,” said Lyle. “You will be quite safe here. No one is likely to come. If the door is locked, they will think I locked

it. You will find tea and sugar in the cupboard, and I have brought up a jug of milk and some biscuits. You must be perished with cold. Will you come out now?"

The panel slipped back, and Jane entered. She looked worn and ill, and half-starved. Lyle's heart ached at sight of her.

"You poor soul," she said pityingly. "I hope this will soon end."

"You can't hope it more than I do, miss," said Jane huskily.

"Bring in your rugs," said Lyle, "and throw them on the couch. Now, if we push that bookcase against the panel, no one can open it without making a noise."

It was a dwarf bookcase of carved oak. They moved it into place, and Jane agreed to fill it with the heaviest volumes scattered about the room.

"I will come as soon as I return," continued Lyle. "I will always give two taps at the door, pause, and then a third—so." She rapped on the table. "Don't open to any one else. If any of the servants come, which is most unlikely, they'll find the door locked and will go away. Now make yourself some tea, and be as comfortable as you can. This is better than your voluntary prison, at all events."

"May God bless you, Miss Lyle. I'll never forget your kindness."

Tears rushed to her eyes as the girl pressed her hand and then left the room. She turned the key, and went back to the fire, thankful for the warmth and companionship of it.

Lyle mounted "Meteor," and rode off on her errand



to Nora with a sinking heart. The fresh, sweet air, the glitter on grass and leaf, left no glow on her face, or hope in her heart. A crushing sense of misery, of the vileness and wickedness that lurked beneath Nature's smiles, were all of which she was conscious.

She was told Nora was in, and dismounting, gave her horse to one of the men. "I shall be here about an hour," she said.

Nora came to her in the sunny little boudoir which was Mrs. O'Neil's favorite room. She looked startled when she saw Lyle's face.

"Has anything happened?" she asked quickly.

Lyle kissed her gravely. "Yes; I have something very serious to tell you. We must not be interrupted. Is there any chance of Mrs. O'Neil coming in?"

"Hardly. She is not up yet."

"Sit down there, and please, dear, don't interrupt. It is a long story, but I will try to make it as short as possible."

Nora sat down. There was a look of apprehension in her face, at which Lyle wondered. Its roses and baby dimples, and charm of smiles and blushes had faded into something hard and resolute that seemed scarcely allied to girlhood.

She took a seat facing the window, and looked straight out at an elm tree, whose newly budding branches were a herald of spring.

Lyle began her story.

As simply, as shortly as possible she told it. The face before her whitened into ghastliness.

"I don't believe it! I don't believe it!" came in a cracked, husky voice from Nora's white lips. "The

woman is mad to accuse him of such a thing. His position, character, everything—give her the lie. Grief for her daughter has turned her head.”

“I will tell you something, Nora,” said Lyle, in a low, pained voice, “something that I did not breathe even to Jane. Mrs. O’Neil once had a favorite maid called Hester. ‘My little Hester,’ she called her. She told me about her once. This girl left her suddenly, without giving any reason. She learned afterwards that she was in some dreadful trouble. What happened must have happened while she was here at Rathfurley. One of her fellow-servants told Mrs. O’Neil that she knew the girl used to meet, secretly, the County Inspector. He had just been newly appointed.”

The young face grew almost fierce; the lines hardened round the pale, set lips.

“It is all false—all! I don’t believe it”

“Nora!” cried Lyle. “Is it that you *won’t* believe? For Heaven’s sake try and conquer this infatuation before it is too late. Think if the proof is at hand, if link by link the chain of evidence is completed—if Jasper Standish murdered your father for that money——”

The cry that burst from Nora’s lips was so awful, the livid face so full of terror, that Lyle shrank back in her chair aghast. Wild hands beat the air in frenzy, the slight young form was convulsed.

“It’s not true!” she screamed again. “I tell you it’s a lie—framed by spite—a lie! My father——”

She sprang to her feet and flung herself across the floor, raving incoherently. Lyle bent over her, horri-

fied at this frantic outburst. She lifted her on to the couch, and emptying some water from a flower vase, bathed her temples and chafed her cold hands. The girl's senses came gradually back. She grew quieter, save for tearless, convulsive sobs that shook her from time to time. Lyle tried to loosen her dress at the throat, but she clutched it so tightly that it was impossible. Then as suddenly as the paroxysm had seized her it died away. She sat up and looked at Lyle.

“If it's false,” she said, “I'll never forgive you. If it's true, it's too late to save—me.”

“To—save you?” gasped Lyle.

“Yes. Look!”

She wrenched hooks and eyes and buttons with ruthless fingers. The madness of passion and despair rang in her voice and flashed in her eyes. She seized the ribbon at her neck and held it out. At the end of it hung a plain gold ring.

Lyle shrank back as though some horror were pursuing her. “Dear God in heaven! Not *that*, Nora. You're not married?”

“I was married yesterday to the man you call my father's—murderer.”

Stunned and half-stupefied, Lyle sat there—absolutely speechless. Her temples throbbed, but all thought seemed crushed and paralyzed. She could only sit staring at the figure on the couch, with its eyes hidden from sight, and one quivering hand still holding out that ring.

Married! Married to Jasper Standish! The warning had come too late. One day,—only twenty-four

hours,—but years could not have meant more, or saved less. One day! Had her eyes caught that scrap of lace a little sooner!

But what use to talk of “if’s” now? The blow had fallen. The worst had happened. It was no longer Nora, her girlish friend, whom she could save, with whom she might plead; it was Jasper Standish’s wife.

Suddenly Nora lifted her head and shook back the loosened hair.

“Oh! I hate you!” she cried. “And I hate Jane! Yesterday I was the happiest, proudest girl in all the country round. To-day what have you and your hateful story made of me? I was to join him in Dublin—he is even there now, waiting for me. Do you hear? Waiting for me! And I daren’t go. I mustn’t go. True or false, I must abide by its issue. Oh! I wish I had died yesterday when I was so happy.”

Lyle’s heart went out to the poor stricken girl. Had she not suffered too? Had she not also learned the lesson of a man’s unworthiness? But beside this burden, her own looked light. A mistake is not a crime.

Then a pitiful wail broke forth, and Nora hid her face in her hands, and rocked herself to and fro.

“Oh! dad, if you could only speak—if you could only tell us,” she moaned. “You called him friend; he was with you that last night.”

She broke off, and looked again at Lyle. “You forget,” she cried. “He went to the barracks on his way home; he sent a special man to guard the bank. Would he have done that if—if—— Oh! I can’t say it. It is too awful!”

“It is—awful,” said Lyle faintly. “For your sake, Nora, I could hope he is guiltless. You have faith in him, he loves you, he has married you. No one, save a fiend incarnate, would have made the child of his murdered victim his wife.”

But even as she said it a thought flashed through her mind. A wife cannot give evidence against her husband. Jane loved Nora devotedly. Nora was her own special friend. What better buffer could he have chosen to parry the blows of chance, to close the mouth of suspicion, than this helpless girl? Who, as she herself had said, would credit any one, short of a devil incarnate, taking to his arms and heart the child of the man whose blood stained his hands and cried still for vengeance on his guilty head!

“What to do!” moaned Nora again. “What to do. I can’t think, I can’t act. Oh, Lyle, pity me, help me. I think I shall go mad, or kill myself.”

“I do pity you, Nora, with all my heart and soul I do; but you have thrown everything and every one aside for this man’s sake. You have given him the chief and only right over you. What can I or any one do for you—now?”

“I loved him so!”

“Where were you married? Perhaps——” The sudden eagerness of her voice gave quick translation to an unuttered hope.

“It is quite right. You need not think that. I am responsible to no one. We were married at the registrar’s——”

“And afterwards?”

“I came back here. He went to Dublin on business. I was to join him there.”

“Was the marriage to be a secret?”

“No. From Dublin I would have written.”

Lyle's face took back its look of hopelessness.

“Then nothing can be done. The moment Jane is arrested she will tell her story and bring her witnesses. There is the shirt with its blood-stained cuff, the Jew to whom he owed that large sum of money, and who received it next day; Mickey Doolan, who has been his jackal and spied out his secrets. Jane herself——”

“Where is Jane?”

Lyle started. She had determined not to divulge the secret of her hiding-place.

“From her letter I should say she was still in the country,” she answered evasively. “It is almost impossible she can conceal herself much longer.”

“If I could see her——” cried Nora. “She is fond of me. She would not desire my unhappiness.”

Lyle stared at her in amazement. “You surely would not compromise matters? Go to this man as his wife while even a shadow of suspicion hovers over him? Nora, you would never know an hour's peace.”

Nora wrung her hands in agony.

“What have I ever done that I should be tortured like this? It is too hard, too cruel.”

The tears streamed down her face. The eyes that looked up at Lyle were eyes of desperation.

“What to do?” she cried, looking from side to side like a hunted animal. “What to do? And he is waiting for me in Dublin.”

“Telegraph that you are ill—that you can't come.

I will take it to the station as I go home, And, Nora, you mustn't stay here. Either come back to us or go to Dr. Dan."

"I will come back to you," she said. "It doesn't matter—nothing matters now. My heart is broken!"

She fell back on the cushions of the couch like a dead thing.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

To her dying day Lyle Orcheton felt she should never forget that awful time.

What she telegraphed to Jasper Standish was only truth, for Nora when she arrived was in a high fever. Lyle sent for Dr. Dan, but said nothing of the marriage. It must come out, she knew, but at present it seemed wiser to keep it secret.

Indeed, she was too terrified and bewildered to think calmly, and adopted the prudent course of saying nothing that was not absolutely necessary.

“She has had some mental shock,” said Dr. Dan, as he felt the racing pulse and looked at the flushed face, and listened to the pitiful moaning that never ceased. “She only returned to-day, you say?”

“Yes. She was staying with Mrs. O’Neil for a fortnight. I know—I have reason to think that she has had bad news of—some one for whom she cares very much.”

“I thought so. A love affair. And it wouldn’t be hard to fix upon the other side, or I’m no judge of appearances. Well, my dear young lady, what’s to be done? She is in for a sharp attack of fever. I can only hope it won’t touch the brain. She will want careful nursing and incessant watchfulness. I’ll send you in a good capable nurse. We must trust to Provi-



dence and youth and a good constitution for the rest, but the poor child has been sorely tried. She really never got the shock of her father's death."

After he had left, Lyle, stole up to the turret room and gave the signal.

"The worst has happened, Jane," she said. "I was too late. She has married him. The shock of your story and accusation nearly killed her. I brought her back here. Dr. Dan fears brain fever."

Jane's face grew rigid. "Married! Married to that villain! God help the poor child! Oh, Miss Lyle, if I had only warned her, only spoken in time!"

"She is absolutely infatuated with him. She refused to believe a word of what I told her. Jane, what is to be done now?"

"There is only one thing, only one. I must give myself up. He is in Dublin, you say? I will go to the magistrate and tell my story. Then—I must take my chance."

"Oh! Jane," cried Lyle, panting with fright. "The risk—have you thought of it?"

"In those long, solitary hours I have thought of everything. Besides, you ought not to harbor me, Miss Lyle. You are making yourself my accomplice in the eyes of the law."

"I can't think, or advise, or judge," cried poor Lyle desperately. "My brain seems dazed."

"It has been too hard on you; but a little patience, and all will be right. I feel sure of that. God does not punish the innocent for the guilty, though He makes them suffer. We have suffered enough, Miss Lyle—I, and you, and that poor stricken child."

“I must go to her now, Jane. I daren't leave her long. The nurse comes to-night. I shall give up my room and take the spare one. That will leave me free to come here unobserved. Do nothing till I see you again; rest, sleep if you can to-night. You will need all your strength, all your courage.”

“God knows I shall, Miss Lyle; but I have come to the end of my patience. In my dreams—and I am something of a fatalist, Miss Lyle—I have always seen him with the rope round his neck, and I am putting it there. I have woven it strand by strand. It is almost strong enough at last.

With those words ringing in her ears, Lyle went down to Nora's bedside. “It is almost strong enough at last.”

“And I blamed Derrick,” she thought. “I called him harsh names, and judged him as though a fault were sin. Sin! My God! Beside this vile wretch, his ver<sup>v</sup> sins seem innocent.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Left alone, and sure now that Jasper Standish was too far away to cause her any immediate fear, Jane set to work to write out briefly and clearly the story of her discovery, her suspicions, her proofs. This document she resolved to take with her to the magistrate. She would leave her confessions in Lyle's care.

It was dusk before she had finished her self-imposed task, and she was afraid to light a lamp. She drew the thick curtains across the windows, and sat down by the fire. Then she took from her pocket the little worn Testament that had belonged to her daughter. It had

never left her day or night since on it she had sworn that oath of vengeance.

She gazed at it now, and thought of a happy school-girl carrying it to lessons and to church, a bright head bending over it in the firelight, conning favorite texts. With tear-filled eyes she opened the tiny book and turned over the pages, as she had often done before. The print was small, the paper very thin. Here and there on the margin of texts would be marks or initials. In the dull glow of the firelight Jane could scarcely decipher them. Hester had had a trick of marking or scoring passages that were favorites in any book she used, and this little Testament was full of such marks.

As Jane's fingers mechanically turned the leaves, she came to one where the writing was infinitesimally small. It ran down one side of the page. She would have thought nothing of it, if a vivid tongue of flame had not chanced to leap out from the fire at the same moment and light up a word at the end of the sentence. The word was "Standish."

Jane's heart gave one suffocating throb. She held the page close to the little spurt of flame, but the writing was so fine she could not read it distinctly. Yet that one word stood out, and letter by letter she spelt it to assure herself there was no mistake. The tongue of flame died down, but now her mind was wholly set on deciphering that writing.

She gently stirred the coals to brightness, but the closeness of the lines and the wavering light made reading a hard task for sight that was none of the best. At last she remembered that among the things Lyle had unpacked and left scattered about was a large

magnifying glass. She carefully laid the book down at that open page and began to search. Before long she found it. The fire burnt now with a steady glow. Kneeling on the rug, she applied the glass to the writing, and read as follows :—

“ . . . In peril of my life. He swears to murder me if I ever breathe his name. Yet on this very book he swore to marry me. If I could reach England. . . . If—Jasper Standish——”

The writing broke off at the end of the page. In a frenzy of anxiety Jane turned the next leaf. Nothing. Then slowly, one by one, she parted and scanned them. At the foot of another page came some more :—

“ My mother—if I could only reach her ! But not even she must know the truth. . . . No proof, he says. No one would believe—a disgraced—friendless—woman. . . . Has God no pity ? . . . ”

That was all. All Jane's patient search could discover no more. As far as she herself was concerned, it was enough. She knew now why she had instinctively shunned and disliked Jasper Standish. She could imagine in what bonds of shame and terror he had held her poor frightened and deceived child.

She thought of the distraught, half-dying creature whom his sin had driven into the hands of the law ; of those awful weeks of suspense ; of that death in the prison infirmary, that dishonored grave beside which no love might mourn. She thought—and blind and burning rage throbbed in every pulse and thrilled every sense with but one fierce desire for vengeance.

He was the wrong-doer. He had betrayed this poor child ; he had sent her to prison and to death ; and

yet he lived and was honored and respected, and had prospered. She threw herself on her knees, clasping to her heart the God-sent testimony for which she had prayed so long.

“O Lord of Power and Justice,” she prayed, “let not such crimes escape Thy vengeance. In Thy hands lie the issues of wrong and right, of life and death. Can guilt like this escape the penalty it has defied?”

A storm of sobs mingled with the ejaculations. For the first time since she had set out on her quest she was shaken to the core. She held the clue; she recognized the purpose that had guided her thither. She was poor and obscure and of no account, and she had to face a powerful and relentless foe, yet she never quailed. The proof for which she had prayed and searched so long was here at last before her. Often as she had turned over the leaves of that Testament she had never opened it at that one place, never noticed those written lines.

They had been revealed to her at the very moment when she had despaired of finding proof as to who had absolutely been the child's betrayer. She looked upon that revelation as a miracle. She thanked Heaven for it. She took it as a sign that she was indeed destined to bring this man's sin home to him, and her failing courage revived.

When she rose from her knees her face was calm, her eyes held a new resolve and a new hope. She thrust the little volume into the bosom of her gown. It was too precious to be trusted anywhere out of her own possession. Then she carefully folded together the statement she had prepared for the magistrate,

To-night she was to meet Mickey Doolan. To-night he had promised to bring the shirt with him. She slowly paced the room, going over her story bit by bit. Mickey was uncertain, and easily terrified. She had taken down his testimony carefully. He had promised to swear to it when called upon, but she wondered whether he could be depended on. Everything now hinged upon the strength of her case, and her ability to persuade the magistrate to grant a warrant for the arrest of Jasper Standish.

She was running great risk, she knew. She would be detained—imprisoned, perhaps. She did not know the power or extent of the law, but at any risk to herself the truth must be told. Jasper Standish was in Dublin. If his room was searched, if incriminating evidence could be found there, the case was clear. But she had to face the difficulties of suspicion cast on herself; of his popularity and power in the county; of the possible refusal to grant a warrant; of her own immediate arrest.

She felt faint and giddy. She knew she would need all her strength, all the coolness of brain and heart. She was to meet a foe ruthless and unscrupulous, who had shown himself without conscience or remorse. She had to save Nora from his clutches. She had to avenge her child's dishonor, her master's cruel murder.

That last thought steadied her.

She needed food and rest. She must compose herself, keep her self-control at any cost. So much was at stake now. Life, honor, justice, all in one weak woman's hands. Jasper's power and Jasper's treachery would be arrayed against her. The keeping of his

secret meant the safety of his own neck. He would hesitate at nothing.

Her only chance lay in being first in the field—in persuading the magistrate to grant that warrant while her enemy was away in Dublin.

## CHAPTER XXX.

THE night closed in dark and misty.

Lyle stood by Nora's bedside, watching her with anxious eyes. The nurse had come and was putting everything into regulation sick-room order. Dr. Dan had administered a sleeping draught, and it was just beginning to take effect; the restless head lay quiet, the fevered eyes were closed, the quick breathing was growing calm.

Lyle moved noiselessly across the room. "If she sleeps to-night," she whispered, "there is hope she will escape brain fever, is there not?"

"Yes, Miss Orcheton," said the woman cheerfully. "But perhaps in two hours she'll wake, and it will all commence over again. I shall watch her all night."

"I don't feel as if I could sleep," said Lyle. "If you hear me about in the night, don't be surprised. I am fearfully anxious."

"Do you occupy the next room, miss?"

"No; but I am on the same floor. I will come to the outer door and listen. If all is quiet, I shall know she is sleeping. I won't disturb you."

"I may need you. If she should be violent—sometimes they are."

Lyle shuddered. Poor Nora! Great indeed was her



punishment; awful would be her suffering when she woke again to consciousness.

She left the room and went to her newly-chosen one at the end of the corridor.

There was a bright fire burning. Her dressing-gown lay on the chair. She put it on and unloosened her heavy hair and began to brush its gleaming silken length. At one o'clock she was to go to Jane in order to receive her last instructions. At daybreak Jane would leave the turret room by the secret door, and make her way by a circuitous route to the magistrate's house. She had to evade detection or pursuit. It was important no one should see her leave the Hermitage, or arrest her on her way to Mount Urris.

To Lyle the time seemed endless. She tried to read, but her eyes scanned only meaningless words. She went to the window and leaned out into the misty coolness of the night. Neither star nor moon was visible. The trees stood like shadowy sentinels on either side the avenue where her glad feet had once sped to Derrick. Derrick! Her heart throbbed as she thought of him.

Had he been but what she thought him, how she could have trusted his strength and asked his help! But he was far away now, and the joy of her life had gone with him.

How hardly Fate had served Nora and herself! Their dream of "fairy princes" had turned out a tale of demons and disappointments. Through no enchanted vale had their feet glided, but rather through dark forests of trouble and terror and disaster. A few golden hours, and then all succeeding ones had

seemed weighted with lead. A few happy days, and the months and years to come all shadow and loneliness and heart-sickness!

She leaned her head on her hands and cried silently for sheer misery. The heavy clouds above seemed no darker than the clouds about her own life and Nora's. Poor unhappy Nora! Her fate was the worst. No wonder she had asked so pitifully what had she ever done that she should be so tried. No wonder her brain and strength had given way beneath a shock so terrible.

She dried the falling tears and turned away from the window. The house was very silent now; every one had retired to rest. She glided softly down the thickly carpeted corridor, and listened at the door of her own room. All was still. Evidently Nora had slept on. The nurse's fears were as yet unrealized.

Once more she returned to the fireside and tried to read. It was midnight now. Another hour to be passed—another hour of waiting and imagining.

The night had grown colder, or else her fears had chilled her blood. She went to the wardrobe and took down a long dark cloak and threw it round her. Surely she might venture now.

Again she paused to listen.

Not a sound anywhere, Darkness and stillness kept watch with her. Nothing else.

Like a shadow she stole along the corridor and reached the stairs. Again she paused. A low faint whine reached her ears. She glanced down and saw her little dog sitting there. His ears were pricked, his eyes glanced up the narrowing stairway that led to the turret room. She listened intently, but all was still.

“Come, Tim,” she whispered, and the little creature followed her silently.

She reached the door and gave the signal. There was no answer. Again she knocked. Neither sound nor movement from within. She tried the handle, and to her surprise the door opened. She entered the room. Her own candle was the only light. The fire had died down; it was dark and solitary. Evidently Jane had not returned from that meeting with Mickey.

Her eyes went next to the secret entrance. The book-case was pushed aside, and the panel half open. The little terrier sprang suddenly forward, laid his nose to the ground, and gave a low, uneasy whine. She called him back, and he came obediently, but his eyes and ears spoke of distress, and that soft whimper of remonstrance broke from him again.

Lyle tried to stir the fire into life, and bent down, feeding it with wood and paper. The ruddy blaze leaped up, and she held her cold hands to its welcome warmth.

Suddenly a sound startled her. She sprang to her feet, her heart beating madly with terror. She heard the sound of flying feet, of panting breath.

A moment, and a figure rushed in, slamming the panel behind it.

It was Jane. Her face was white as death, her eyes were scared and wild.

“Pursued!” she panted.

It told Lyle all. Quick as lightning she opened the door. “Go to my room,” she whispered. Then closed it and blew out the light.

A hurried knocking came at the secret panel, then a heavy blow.

“Who’s there?” demanded Lyle.

The answer came in the voice she expected, the voice she dreaded. “Open!” it said. “Open in the name of the law!”

She stood there rooted to the spot. Movement and speech were impossible. There came a crash, a rush of cold air, the splintered panel flew back, and she was face to face with Jasper Standish. He held a lantern in his hand. Jane had dropped it in her hurried flight. The light flashed on Lyle, on the dark cloak, its hood encircling her white face, on the anger and defiance in her eyes.

The Inspector staggered back a step, and then looked from her round the room.

“You!” he said. “Was it you I followed?” and a brutal oath escaped him.

Lyle looked at his flushed face and wild, savage eyes with a sudden terror of her own helplessness. He had evidently been drinking heavily. It was no pleasant situation for any girl alone, far removed from assistance, at this hour of the night, with a man whom she knew to be conscienceless, criminal, desperate.

“What brings you here?” she demanded, trying bravely to keep the fear of her heart from her voice. “What do you mean by this intrusion?”

“I’ve reason to suspect you’ve some one hiding here,” he said. “She has slipped through my fingers before; she shan’t escape now. I saw her.”

He paused abruptly. Lyle’s sarcastic smile cut short his words.

“Are you quite sure who it was you did see, Mr. Standish?” she asked. “This is my room, and if I choose to use that staircase, I fail to see what right you have to prevent it, still less what right you have to follow me.”

He looked at her with lowering eyes, with reluctant admiration and baffled rage commingled.

“*You!*” he repeated. “You, the proud Miss Orcheton! You use this entrance for private assignations!—for I saw the man as he ran off, mind you. A pretty scandal! A fine tale for the country! Either you tell me whom you’re screening, or I’ll give this news to the gossips to-morrow morning, if only to pay you out for your airs and insolence to me!”

All Lyle’s pride and spirit rose to arms at that insult. The mask was off at last. The man stood out in his true colors, and with something of relief she snatched at the chance that revelation gave her.

“I have no doubt,” she said, “that you are capable of doing that or anything that would injure or traduce a helpless woman. But you have no weak fool to reckon with now, Mr. Standish. I am a different type from Nora Callaghan or—Hester Sands.”

That shot went home. Ghastly fear looked out of his face, the lantern fell from his shaking hand. Lyle still held the matches with which she had rekindled the fire. She struck one, and lit the candle on the table. He tried to recover himself, but his agitation was plain to see.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said, stooping for the lantern.

“I think you do,” she answered, and her courage

revived. "The woman you are hunting down is the mother of Hester Sands; and you are Hester Sands' murderer."

He recoiled as if struck by a blow. Of all accusations he had expected, of all dangers for which he was prepared, this accusation and this danger he alone had overlooked. That old sin, that long-forgotten passion, had sprung into life to face and condemn him in the very spot where his guilty assignments had been made—where his false vows had been uttered.

Lyle was unconscious of that—unconscious of the use to which this room had been put, unconscious why that sense of misery and tears and unhappiness had haunted it and impressed her. But the guilty face, the lurking glance that seemed to seek confirmation of that charge amidst these changed surroundings, told a tale of their own.

He looked at the girl who had braved him, and into his eyes leaped a fierce devouring light.

"You shall prove your words," he said, "or by the heaven above——"

She drew close to the door with a sudden swift movement. Her hand was on the latch.

"If you move or threaten," she said, "I will alarm the house. The butler sleeps close at hand, the nurse, who is watching your unfortunate wife, is awake, within call. I am not afraid of you, Jasper Standish."

The cruel light in his eyes changed to an unwilling admiration. She looked so dauntless and so fair in her girlish defiance. Half-sullenly he retreated, and stood leaning with one hand on the table that stood

between them. As he so leaned, his eyes fell on the papers Jane had compiled.

“My wife!” he repeated. “Do you know that? Is she here?”

“Yes. I brought her back to-day. She is ill—dangerously ill!”

“And she has told you all—of course?” he sneered.

“Yes.”

His eyes fell again on the papers. He saw they were addressed to Sir George Ffolliott, of Mount Urris.

“What are you going to do?”

“I shall not tell you.”

Again that evil look flashed, again his lips parted and closed on a muttered oath.

To be baffled, opposed, defied by a helpless girl at once roused his worst instincts and his worst fears. How much she knew, or how she had learned his secrets, puzzled him. Whether she was screening Jane, whether it was Jane or herself he had followed he could not decide. That her innate hostility against himself had suddenly flamed out at such a moment was not surprising. He knew she had always hated him, but now he was her friend's husband. She must not be allowed to forget that.

“Nora is here, then,” he said sullenly. “And you, I suppose, have done your best to traduce me; but she is mine now, and no one can take her from me. As for what you mean by that reference to another woman, or why you are making yourself an accomplice of your guilty servant I am unable to imagine. Accusation is not proof——”

“Not yet,” she interposed. “But the proof will follow.”

The cold sweat broke out on his brow, his hand went involuntarily to his breast pocket, his lips whitened.

Then in a flash the hand was withdrawn. She saw a revolver pointed at her head. She knew now that she had driven him to bay, that her life would not be worth a moment's purchase if she showed a sign of fear.

“If you move,” he said hoarsely, “if you open that door or give a cry for help, I'll shoot you!”



## CHAPTER XXXI.

LYLE ORCHETON stood perfectly passive, facing that little murderous barrel. He was desperate enough to carry out his threat, she felt sure, to add yet another crime to his list; clever enough, perhaps, to make some story of accident cover this one, since no witness could possibly give him the lie.

Her life hung by a thread, and she knew it; yet no flutter of fear stirred her pulse. Her hand rested on the handle, as it had rested from the moment when she had defied him. Calmly, fearlessly she looked at his evil face, his outstretched arm. Her heart had only room for one thought, "Poor Nora!"

Seeing her so motionless, Jasper came nearer, covering her still with that little deadly barrel. Her heart-beats quickened. The silence was so intense that a low, faint growl at her feet came to her ears as startingly as a thunderclap. Whether Jasper heard it or not she could not tell, but in another moment the little terrier had leaped forward and caught him by the leg.

"Call him off!" he shouted; but ere Lyle could speak the handle was wrenched from her hand, the door burst open from without, and as she fell forward, propelled by the shock, there rang out a sharp report.

A thud, a heavy fall, and all was darkness.

Half-stunned, she raised herself on her knees and

stared into the gloom. A dark figure lay motionless by her side. She could hear the growling of the dog, blows, oaths, then silence."

"Jane," she cried; "is it you, Jane?"

There was no answer. Half-paralyzed with terror, Lyle groped her way to the fireplace, and stirred the dying embers. Then she lit the candle again, and approached the motionless figure. It was Jane. She lay on her face, her arms outstretched. Lyle tried to raise her, and turned her on her side. The blood was pouring from a wound, and in terror Lyle tried to discover it. She heard steps approaching. A voice called out. It was the voice of the nurse. Lyle shouted back, and the woman ran up the stairs and entered.

She uttered a cry of horror. "I thought I heard a pistol shot."

"Yes; this woman has been shot," said Lyle. "For God's sake help, and don't ask questions."

The woman knelt down and rapidly tore open the dress and linen, all soaked with blood. In doing so, she touched the little Testament, Jane had thrust into her bosom.

"That's saved her," said the nurse, drawing it out. "The bullet's glanced aside and struck her in the shoulder. See, miss?"

She wiped away the streaming blood, and Lyle, faint and sick and overwrought as she was, did her best to help her. There was warm water in the little kettle by the fire, and the nurse bathed and dressed the wound. By that time Jane had recovered consciousness and opened her eyes. They assisted her to the couch and laid her down. Utterly spent and exhausted, Lyle

sank into a chair unable to speak. The nurse glanced around and noted the shattered panel.

“What was it, miss?” she asked. “Robbers?”

Lyle laughed hysterically. “The police,” she said, “in discharge of their duty. This is one of the little surprises of—Ireland.”

The woman saw she was overwrought.

“Let me get you some wine,” she said. “You look scared to death.”

“No; help me to my room, and then bring her,” said Lyle, summoning all her resolution. “I have been frightened, but I shall be all right directly.”

When she reached her room she remembered the unprotected state of the turret now the panel had been broken; also that those important papers were there. Mastering her weakness and her fears, she sent the nurse down to the dining-room for some wine, and as soon as she was gone, returned once more to the room.

She seized the little cabinet. At the same moment she remembered the papers Jane had written and prepared for the magistrate. They had been on the table. She had noticed them when she put down the candle.

They were gone now.

Jane still lay on the couch with closed eyes, white as death. She could understand or answer nothing. It was useless to question her. Taking the little cabinet in her hand, Lyle returned to her bedroom. She had only time to place it in the wardrobe when the nurse entered.

Lyle was thankful now for the stimulant. It steadied her nerves and brought back her strength. As she recovered, she told the woman briefly what had

happened. Of Jane's concealment, of the pursuit, of how she had held the man at bay, as it was important the housekeeper should not be arrested until she had seen the magistrate, of her unexpected return, and the shot.

The woman looked bewildered. She had read in the papers of the Bank Murder, also that a woman was accused of it. She could scarcely credit that she was under the same roof as that notorious person.

"But is she guilty, miss?" she gasped at the first pause in Lyle's hurried recital.

"As guilty as you or I," cried the girl indignantly. "The real criminal is trying to shield himself behind his accusation of her. Had she been able to act as she intended, he would have been arrested to-day. Now, God knows how it will end—what she will have to endure!"

She dropped into a chair, and hid her face in her hands, trying to calm herself, trying to think what was best to do.

Should she take up Jane's task? Should she go to Mount Urris with the first gleam of daylight and lay this statement before Sir George Ffolliott, the magistrate. Then she remembered the papers had gone—that she had learned nothing of the purport of Jane's last interview with Mickey Doolan. It was scarcely possible that Sir George would have a warrant issued against so important a personage as the County Inspector without very strong proofs.

Her brain was in a whirl. So much had happened. Events had followed in such tragic and rapid succession, it was little wonder that calm judgment was for a

time suspended. Yet action of some sort was imperative, and she felt there was not an hour to lose.

Jasper Standish knew that Jane Grapnell was here, knew that Lyle had been guilty of concealing her. He had stolen those papers, and would be aware of her intentions. His first act would certainly be to have Jane arrested. In her critical condition the result might be fatal. Lyle attributed unknown powers to the arms of the law, and saw feminine helplessness in its iron grasp—powerless.

At last she lifted her head. "You have left Miss Callaghan all this time!" she exclaimed.

"She was sleeping soundly," the nurse answered.

"Could we possibly get the housekeeper into this room?" asked Lyle again.

"I think so, miss. She has recovered from the shock, and is conscious. We must be very careful, for fear of the wound bleeding, that is all."

"I cannot leave her there," said Lyle. "The panel has been broken, and any one who knows the outlet into the grounds could get into the room that way."

"I will just give a look at Miss Callaghan and then come back," said the nurse. "Between us we could get her down, I think."

"I will go to her now," said Lyle, "and prepare her."

"Take the wine with you, miss; she will need it."

Jane was quite conscious, but very weak. Lyle gave her the wine and told her of her plan. It was to ride with all possible speed to Mount Urris and lay the case before Sir George, entreating him to have Jasper Standish arrested on suspicion.

“He never will—now,” said poor Jane. “Those papers give the case bit by bit up to to-night. You cannot possibly put it as strongly or as clearly.”

“I have your confessions. Shall I take them?”

“Yes, miss, I forgot. They will be some help.”

“And to-night, Jane?” asked the girl eagerly. “Did you learn nothing? What about Mickey? What about the shirt? Have you got that?”

“Yes, Miss Lyle. When I found I was being followed, and I rushed in here and you sent me down the stairs, my first thought was that. It’s in the box, as Mickey brought it, in the spare room where you were.”

“I never noticed it. Where?”

“The corner between the dressing-table and the window. Take care of it, miss. It’s our only hope now.”

“I’ll see about it at once. Now, Jane, one effort more. I can’t leave you here. I’m going to put you into the room where I was to sleep. You must get to bed, and keep as quiet as possible. I fear the police will be here before I return from Mount Urris. But surely they would not dream of moving you, ill and wounded as you are. I’ll send one of the stable men for Dr. Dan as soon as my horse is ready.”

She looked at the clock. “Four o’clock already! How the time has flown! It is quite dark still, but I must risk it. I daren’t delay. He would have to ride to the barracks. We may baffle him yet.”

“God help us, miss. I fear we’ll get the worst of it.”

“Here’s the nurse now,” said Lyle. “Come, Jane

—slowly—carefully. That's it. Lean on us, and don't move that arm whatever you do."

"What's that by the panel?" asked the nurse suddenly.

Lyle turned and looked, then gave a little heart-broken cry. It was the body of the little terrier, stiff and dead. She took it in her arms. The tears she had not shed for terror or weakness or pain burst from her eyes now as she saw the glazed eyes and motionless form of her brave little defender.

"If I owed you nothing else, Jasper Standish," she cried fiercely, "I owe you this. A better life than your own."

She laid the brave little body gently down on the rug, then shook the tears from her eyes and turned away. There was something in her face now that might have made even Jasper Standish quail had he seen it.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

THROUGH the chill gray dawn, heavy with clouds, obscure with mist that the yet unrisen sun had not scattered, Lyle Orcheton rode as one rides when life or death is at stake. There could be no more halting, no more indecision. The gauntlet of defiance had been thrown and the lists entered—woman against man, patience against cunning, weakness against power. An unfair match, yet she did not quail.

“The right must win,” she told herself. The right—that only.”

Oh, to be first in the field—to gain one powerful friend to her side! But she dared not dwell too hopefully on success, dared not flatter herself that her enemy was to be circumvented by a girl’s wit.

Mile after mile was passed. She would soon be there. She was almost in sight of the lodge gates. At that moment some one sprang out of the hedge she was passing, and her horse shied violently. Steadying him with the curb, she called out angrily to a ragged unkempt figure to get out of her way. The uncouth object held up a warning hand. She drew rein.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“Miss darlin’, a wurrd. It’s the good luck as I’ve seen ye. Are ye for his honor beyant at the big house?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“Bekase ’twas some one else I was expectin’.



be ye know. Her as I mate promiscus wid the news av matters.”

“Yes—yes!” she cried impatiently.

“Maybe ye’re on her errand?”

“Well?”

“Thin I sez this to yer ladyship. Him as we don’t name got sight av me—Mickey Doolan, at yer sarvice, miss. An’ sez he, “Be off this same instant,” he sez, ‘to the barracks and tell thim to sind over two men within an hour,’ he sez.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Well, miss, not to be particular to a minnit, it might have been the matther av an hour or two. But divil a bit I went, miss. And niver a sight av a purlis officer will be at the Grey Lodge for my sinding.”

“God bless you!” cried Lyle convulsively. “You’ve saved a life, perhaps, Mickey. You won’t be sorry for this day, I promise you.”

“Sure an’ I knew yer ladyship would be the ginerous binefactyer. The dew av Heaven lighten yer purty face, an the swate good luck to ye.

“But if Mr. Standish——”

“Whisht, miss! Don’t be namin’ no names.”

“If *he*,” continued Lyle, “gets tired of waiting and goes himself?”

“Ah! thin, there’s a little matther av lameness betwixt his horse an’ meself; not to mention, savin’ yer ladyship’s prisence, that ’twas the whisky bottle an’ himself as were the best av company whin he sent me off. An’ if I know inything av that same gintleman, it’s not aisy partin’ company av that sort. So just set yer mind aisy, miss, an’ tell the good lady that same.”

“ You’ve taken a weight off my mind. But I can’t waste another minute. Come round to-night and ask for me.”

“ Faith an’ I will, yer ladyship, wid all the pleasure in life. God’s blessin’ go wid ye, and may yer errand prosper.”

She dashed on again, hope in her heart. If she was first, if Sir George would only believe her, if he would come and take Jane’s depositions, all might yet be saved.

The lodge gate swung open—she was cantering up the drive. Another moment, and she was before the great house. There was no sign of life. The blinds were down, the doors closed. She dismounted and rang the bell. It sounded loudly on the stillness of the sleeping household. It seemed to Lyle as if no one would ever answer it.

Again she rang. After what seemed endless waiting the chain rattled, bolts were withdrawn, and a sleepy-eyed, astonished man-servant opened the door.

He showed her into the library, unclosed the shutters, and told her Sir George would be down “immay-diate.”

The genial magistrate knew her but very slightly. He looked his astonishment when she told her errand, putting it as briefly and concisely as possible.

“ A warrant to arrest the County Inspector? Impossible, Miss Orcheton! You must be making some grave mistake.”

Patiently she went over her story; but she was quite unable to convince Sir George of Jasper Standish’s guilt.

“My dear young lady, do think of what you are saying,” he urged. “Mr. Standish holds a responsible position. He is highly esteemed and respected; and you accuse him of murdering a friend of his own—a harmless, kindly old gentleman, whose hospitality he had just shared; of murdering him for the base motive of robbery. Pray, pray think of what an awful crime you accuse him. I cannot accede to your request without very much stronger evidence than you have laid before me. Your informant is a woman half-crazed by long brooding over a wrong her daughter suffered——”

“At this man’s hands!” interrupted Lyle.

“That, pardon me, is supposition, not proof. This woman is herself suspected of the crime of which she accuses him, and has been hiding from justice. The fact of her being concealed in your house, Miss Orcheton, is a graver matter than you suppose. As witness she offers the evidence of a rascally ne’er-do-weel who has been playing the part of spy, and she confesses he has stolen and hidden all this time his chief proof—the blood-stained shirt. But that means very little. A scratch—a wound—would have occasioned the stain. As for the reason you give for such a crime—robbery—it is preposterous, my dear young lady!”

“You forget the money owing to Benjamin Myers, the Jew,” said Lyle, “the money paid the night after the murder.”

Sir George smiled. “Ah! Miss Orcheton, you should never have bothered your pretty head with crimes and penalties and legal affairs. You’ve let your feelings run away with you out of pure sympathy for your housekeeper. I am sorry I cannot offer you any

assistance. She is under suspicion. She will have to be arrested and answer this charge at the proper time and place. If she is innocent, she has nothing to fear. The law will give her all possible assistance."

"I beg your pardon," said Lyle hotly; "that is just what the law will *not* do. As for having nothing to fear, how often innocent people suffer for legal mistakes and legal prejudices! To be poor and friendless and accused, with a merciless enemy at the back of it all, is by no means an enviable or a safe position. The law has made mistakes often and often. It is slow to confess them, and slower to amend them. The law may make mistakes again. This woman is as innocent as I am myself, but she has to deal with a cunning and powerful antagonist. I told you of the outrage last night. Had that shot killed her, who would have been responsible? What could the law have done then to help or avenge her wrongs? Mr. Standish intruded on my own private room, threatened me, and then fired at Mrs. Grapnell the moment she entered. No doubt he will say he did it accidentally. He can't prove it was in the execution of his duty, for she made no resistance; he gave her no time. Besides, why did he not arrest her on the spot? Instead he rushed away through the secret entrance, taking with him the very papers Mrs. Grapnell had prepared for you."

Sir George began to feel uncomfortable.

"Do you wish to accuse Mr. Standish of trespass and violence then?" he asked. "That, of course, you can do, and he must answer the charge. But I refuse to grant a warrant for his arrest on your present proofs."

"Then I will go to some one else."

Sir George smiled compassionately.

“ My dear young lady, take my advice and let wiser heads than yours settle this business. Where is your father? Why does he not appear in the matter? It does credit to your warm heart and your kindness that you have taken it up so enthusiastically, but to come to me with such a story and expect me to act upon it—well, as I’ve said, I cannot do it. No magistrate would consent to what you ask.”

Lyle looked at him helplessly. She had never expected such a refusal. The situation was critical. Jasper Standish was a powerful foe, and she and Jane had shown their hand plainly at last.

She seemed to have come to a deadlock. The magistrate’s refusal left Jasper free—gave him all the power, the time, the means for securing his own safety and for complicating matters with regard to Jane. The proofs on which she relied seemed less convincing after Sir George Ffolliott’s contemptuous disregard of their importance. Jane once imprisoned and arraigned as a criminal lost the strength of her position, and became merely a discredited or revengeful victim.

Could the law be depended on to set her right? Would it fathom suspicion and make every possible inquiry, and aid, not impede, her steps? She had always appeared to hold it in wholesome dread. The memory of her outraged child, martyred by its strong powers, condemned to an awful death while her moral murderer got off scot free, was a memory that gave her scant belief in moral justice.

To stand up in face of day and her fellows, and publicly accuse Jasper Standish of the bank manager’s

murder was a very different thing from standing in the prisoner's dock with her own innocence to prove and her own character to vindicate.

The patience of years, the toil and struggle and endurance that had stamped her face and hardened her nature, these were all to be of no effect. Her child had suffered indignity—she would have to suffer the same; her child had known the taint of prison, the lash of shame, the horror of suspense, and she would know them too. By the same hand the mother and the child were led to the same fate—the one innocently, the other blindly.

Death had saved the one. What would save the other?

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

SLOWLY and wearily Lyle Orcheton rode home. For the first time in her life she was in a position where youth and enthusiasm are made to look foolish—where stern logic faces an unproved conviction, where faith and trust meet with no encouragement.

She did not like the position. The glow and fervor died out of her heart, and chill despondency reigned in their place. To her truth seemed plainly intelligible. To eyes accustomed to stern facts it had not even the presentment of truth.

She had no hope of saving Jane from arrest. Whether she could be removed or charged in her present condition remained to be seen. But no doubt, considering the gravity of that charge, she would not be allowed to remain at the Hermitage. A leaden weight seemed to rest on the girl's heart. She threw the reins to the stableman, who was watching for her, and dismounting, went listlessly into the house.

The servants were up. Every one was alert and excited. Sir Anthony met her in the hall. "Why, Lyle," he exclaimed, "where have you been?"

She sat down wearily and told him. He listened with alternate indignation and horror to the accounts of the past night. The nurse had told him something, and Dr. Dan, who was still with Jane, had done his

best to unravel the skein of complications. Lyle's story made all plain.

His anger was extreme. So were his regrets for the folly he had displayed in taking a place that had brought him nothing but trouble and misfortune since he had become its owner. Lyle had never seen him so angered and disturbed.

When he heard of her errand to Sir George, he was still more incensed.

That his daughter should mix herself up in an affair so scandalous, so disgraceful, so full of awful possibilities, drove him well-nigh distracted. He was violently thrust from peaceful hours, from his studious life, his placid enjoyment of all that soothed mind and body. Instead of it he found his house invaded by police, covered with notoriety, and scandalized by the accusation of harboring a suspected murderess! There seemed no vocabulary strong enough to express his sentiments, and no sentiments forcible enough to convey his feelings.

Lyle listened silently. No doubt she had been foolish and imprudent; no doubt she had let her heart lead instead of allowing her head to judge. No two people looked at the same thing in the same way. It was hopeless to argue. She had done all she could do. The situation had turned from passivity to action; now she could only stand aside and wait.

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The time of waiting was not long. Events marched with startling rapidity, once given the impetus of discovery. Jasper Standish had marshaled facts for his



own purpose ; the time was at hand for action, and he seized it. The arrest of Jane Grapnell and her appearance before the magistrate enabled him to present a case strong enough and suspicious enough to terrify Lyle, and to still further exasperate Sir Anthony.

He proved that Jane had been up when he left the Bank House the night of the murder. He had heard Mr. Callaghan speaking to her. He had then gone to the manager's room to inspect its security, and finally left him sitting there at work over his books. He stated that he had warned Mr. Callaghan of the insecurity of that broken window, and of his intention to send one of his own men down on special guard. This had been done, and completed his evidence so far as the events of that night were concerned.

Then came the evidence of Jane's fellow-servant as to her secret ways and odd habits ; of Dr. Dan as to that night he had met her returning secretly after an absence she refused to explain ; the finding of the missing and marked money ; her flight and her concealment. The means by which Jasper Standish had traced her to the secret passage of the Hermitage were plausibly told. The discharge of his revolver was, he declared, an accident. The dog had flown at him, and his hand being on the trigger, the shot was fired without purpose or premeditation.

This was a weak point on which Jane's counsel scored. There seemed no reason for a revolver being in his hand. A helpless woman was no formidable opponent.

Lyle, when her time came, gave very damaging evidence as to the events of that night in the turret,

and Jasper felt that his case suffered considerably. Notwithstanding all this, however, the magistrate sent it for trial ; and poor Jane, ill and weak, was taken to the county jail to await that ordeal. Needless to say, the town reveled in all this. Every sort of story was rife, and Mickey Doolan would have been a hero could he have been found.

Sir Anthony, annoyed and disturbed as he was, could not but yield to Lyle's passionate entreaties, and the best available counsel was procured for Jane. To him Lyle confided the housekeeper's story—the betrayal of her daughter, her meetings with Mickey, and his acquaintance with Jasper Standish's doings. Unlike Sir George, this gentleman thought the case against the Inspector a very strong one. Bit by bit he pieced it together like a puzzle map.

“If we could find that Jew, and ascertain that Standish was in difficulties, that he owed money, that the same was part or wholly paid on the night succeeding the murder, if amongst that money was a single piece of those ten he says were marked, we should have him. But, remember, Miss Orcheton, the greatest prudence and secrecy are imperative. I shall take care to have him watched, for fear he should escape before the trial. You see, it had become absolutely necessary to make some one responsible for the crime. He selected the weakest and most unpopular of those under suspicion. His case against Jane Grapnell is strong, but only strong enough to put her out of the way, so that he may gain time for his own security. She has to await her trial. He knows as well as I do that no jury would convict her on such evidence, but

that the shadow of guilt will lurk about her, and in a measure render her powerless. I can see his game is to pretend she was an accomplice of this ne'er-do-weel Doolan, who has so mysteriously disappeared. He will make it appear that he broke the window, and got into the manager's room, that they shared the plunder, and that he has gone off leaving her to bear the brunt of discovery. The doctor's evidence was very damaging. The servants at your father's also spoke of her secret goings out at night. We cannot be too careful not to show our hands. But, before the trial comes on, Jasper Standish will try to leave the country. He has gained his point. He has had some one arrested, accused, and half condemned by popular prejudice. He has thrown off suspicion from himself, and, with all due regard to my countrymen, Miss Orcheton, I should be sorry for this poor woman if she had to be tried by a jury from Rathfurley. No one seems to have a good word for her there."

"No," said Lyle. "She was a reserved, proud woman. She carried in her breast a terrible sorrow and a terrible purpose. That sort of woman does not readily make friends."

"Well, rely upon me to do my best. The case promises to be a big sensation, and I am sure I can promise you that whoever suffers the penalty of the law, it won't be Jane Grapnell,"

This conversation took place in Dublin, where Sir Anthony and his daughter had gone.

Nora remained at the Hermitage, still in the charge of the nurse. Brain fever had been averted, but the shock and grief through which she had passed had left

her utterly prostrate, and Dr. Dan was seriously alarmed about her. She could not endure to hear Jasper Standish's name mentioned; it sent her into a paroxysm of nervous terror that ended in hysteria. So weak, so broken down was she, that Lyle almost despaired of her reason.

Jasper had not confessed to their marriage, and Lyle made no mention of it. She waited for his assertion or claim, but neither were forthcoming. Sometimes she thought Nora must have fancied it; but then the recollection of that ring—of the night in the turret when Jasper Standish had corroborated the statement—would flash back to her mind, and she thought with mingled pity and dread of the awful fate that lay before the unfortunate girl.

As soon as she had placed Jane's confession in her counsel's hands, and told him the whole facts that had come to her knowledge, she and Sir Anthony returned to Rathfurley.

There was nothing more to be done until the time came for the trial, only she had the satisfaction of knowing that Jasper Standish would be watched, and that Mickey Doolan was being privately searched for. All that was in human power to do to save Jane she had done. Now she could only wait and hope.

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Slowly, wearily, the days drifted by, and with untiring patience and unwearied devotion, Lyle watched and tended Nora.

It nearly broke her heart to see the change in her. The bright and lovely girl, who had been so courted

and admired, was now but a poor frail shadow, filled with nervous terrors, haunted by perpetual dread. Her face was drawn and anxious. Instead of its old bloom, it wore the painful expression peculiar to troubled youth—an expression pitiful to see.

“Don’t worry about me, Lyle,” she said one day, when her friend had been urging her to come out for a little while—out to the sunshine and the spring’s budding glories, and the new life waking in the sad old world—the life that is the promise of hope, and keeps hope alive in hearts that might otherwise despair.

“Don’t you worry,” she went on. “I am not going to die; no such luck. And I shall bear it. I have brought it all on myself. But I can never have faith in anything again. I have lost all I cared for, all but you; and you will go too some day—it is only natural—and then I shall be alone, always. If I were a Catholic, I should enter a convent. Oh! the peace and the comfort of such a retreat when life has shown its hollowness and worthlessness!”

In vain Lyle tried to combat this depression, and rouse her to some hopefulness again. Dr. Dan advised change of scene—an entirely different life amid new surroundings; but, until Jane’s trial was over, Lyle could not bring herself to leave Ireland. And nothing would induce Nora to go away without her.

So the days came and went, long and hopeless and dreary, weighted with anxiety, destitute of all the mirth and brightness of careless girlhood.

Jasper Standish never came now to the Hermitage. Why he did not claim Nora was a perpetual puzzle to Lyle. She feared some deeper scheme of villainy lay

beneath his unaccountable silence. The mixture of bravado and far-sighted cunning with which he had presented his case, and turned the tables on Jane and herself, had proved he was no ordinary foe. Bravado would have to be met with stern purpose. Cunning with strategy.

She was not allowed to see Jane, but Barry Roach, the solicitor engaged by her counsel, took cheering messages from time to time. He came frequently to the Hermitage, and held long consultations with Lyle. Sometimes he saw Nora ; but it had been agreed that the name of Jasper Standish was never to be mentioned before her.

As the daughter of the murdered man, and the one person most interested in bringing the criminal to justice, he naturally took a great interest in the frail, suffering girl. It seemed to Lyle sometimes that the interest was growing into something warmer and deeper than mere business warranted.

In any case, no one yet had been able to lift her mind from out its heavy darkness as could this genial, sympathetic solicitor.

His cheery voice, his ugly, rugged face, always won a smile of welcome from her pale lips. He brought a breath of the outer world into her seclusion, and it was he who at last persuaded her to leave the house and walk, leaning on his strong arm, under the new green leafage of the trees. Lyle noted all, and her heart grew warm with gratitude towards him. He was so manly, so strong, so full of kindly thought and sympathy, that sometimes she wondered why he had taken up a profession that certainly was not calculated to

give any man a great belief in the virtues of his fellows.

However, the fact of his interest in Nora, and of his power to rouse her from her long despondent attitude to all in and about her life, was enough at present. The sapling was only bent, not broken. The flower crushed by rough hailstones may still revive, and lift its bruised beauty in the warmth of sunlight. She hoped and prayed that that first fierce, unworthy passion had burned itself out—that the very violence of her grief had exhausted its sources. It is not natural to the young to sorrow long. If the sorrow is violent, so also is the reaction.

Watching the girl's languid footsteps pacing to and fro under the trees, noting the kindly face bent down to her, the strong yet gentle arm supporting her, Lyle smiled, half sadly, half hopefully.

"Who knows?" she said, and sighed—and yet looked again and smiled. "Who knows?"

Perhaps she thought of possible consolation in time to come.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. O'NEIL, returning from a visit to the Riviera, was greeted by the news of recent events. She drove over to the Hermitage at once, and saw Lyle and heard Jane's story.

"Then she *is* Hester's mother? Why did she deny it? If she had told me her suspicions, I might have helped her."

"I think," said Lyle, "she had determined on finding out this man's guilt in her own way. Naturally she wished to hide her story. It would have been an added shame had it been made public."

"Do you remember that afternoon when I questioned her, and her denial? Oh! if she had only confessed, I would have been her friend through all. Poor Hester! poor pretty child! What an awful fate!"

Her eyes filled with tears. "I shall always reproach myself. I ought to have looked after her better. But there was something of the mother's reserve in her. One never seemed to get sight into her heart."

"This fiend managed it, at all events."

"The greater his sin," exclaimed Mrs. O'Neil with passion. "Oh! Lyle, I can't bear to think of it. A prison grave, and that bright, lovely creature. No wonder it broke her mother's heart."



“Her courage has been wonderful,” said Lyle sadly ;  
“but now she has to face a new tragedy.”

“And Nora—how is she? May I see her?”

“You will find her awfully changed. Sorrow has followed sorrow, and shock, shock. She is quite broken down.”

“I must try and cheer her up. Dear, dear! how much has happened! She won’t have to appear at the trial, Lyle?”

“Thank goodness, no. She could never face such an ordeal.”

“My dear, you’ll be hating Ireland after this. There’s been nothing but misfortunes for you since you came here. They always said the Hermitage was an unlucky house.”

Lyle’s lip quivered. She turned away.

“It was I who persuaded my father to take it,” she said, “and assuredly some malignant fate has dogged our footsteps ever since. When I think that only a year ago we were two happy, ignorant girls, dreaming as girls dream, hoping as girls hope, and now——”

“Don’t cry, dear, don’t. Remember my philosophy. Things will get better. The clouds are bound to roll away in time. Come, Lyle, show a brave face, and trouble will slink away. You are young. You have a future. I have only a past. But I can laugh still. I won’t allow that life is over, even when one’s heart is almost broken.”

“That is your happy temperament,” said Lyle.

“Perhaps. But take me to see Nora now. Oh! what a fool I was to encourage that man’s attentions! If I had only dreamed——”

The tears rose to her kindly eyes. She followed Lyle in silence.

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It was the first day of the trial of Jane Grapnell, accused of the murder of Thomas Callaghan, bank manager of Rathfurley.

The crucial hour had come at last. The long suspense was over. A sad, worn woman faced that crowded court, those curious, excited, unsympathetic faces, and, looking from them to the judge in his stately robes, the jurymen in whose hands lay her fate, uttered calmly and distinctly her denial of the charge —“Not Guilty.”

A momentary silence followed. Then came a rustle of papers, a flutter of leaves, as reporters and barristers settled themselves to business. The counsel for the prosecution rose to open the case, and amidst breathless silence laid his facts before the court.

He commenced by saying that the prisoner was charged with the murder of Mr. Thomas Callaghan, of Rathfurley, on the night of Nov. —th, 188—.

He thought that the evidence would clearly show the murder had not been premeditated, but that the motive of the accused was robbery, and discovery had led to a violent assault that resulted in death. The accusation as made before the magistrate's court was then detailed and the same witnesses called upon.

Of these, Jasper Standish was the principal. He looked pale and nervous. His eyes were bloodshot, and his trembling lips and the tremor of his hands told a tale of dissipation. He never looked at the prisoner while giving his evidence, which was identical with

what he had previously sworn before the magistrate. He was cross-examined by Jane's counsel, and various weak points scored against him.

Then came Dr. Dan with his statement of Jane's unexplained absence, and the servant's account of Mickey Doolan hanging about the place to get speech with her.

Lyle was called upon last, and her coolness and straightforwardness made a great impression. Her account of the incidents in the turret room, the revolver, and the flight of Jasper Standish, who stated he had come there to arrest Jane, utterly confuted the testimony of the Inspector himself.

He had made a great blunder. He had subpoenaed her as witness on his side, to prevent her giving evidence for the defense. But her evidence went so dead against his story that it only weakened his case. In vain the prosecution tried to shake her statements, to confuse or bewilder her. They made the most of Jane's concealment being known to her, of the setting her "ferocious" dog at the Inspector, of her attempts to prejudice the magistrate. But with all this they could not do away with the impression she had made. The case against the accused ended for that day, leaving every one in a state of indecision as to what the result would be.

Dr. Dan, Sir Anthony, and Lyle were staying at the hotel. Nora had not been required, and remained behind at the Hermitage, where Lyle had promised to telegraph accounts of the trial each day.

There was a long and serious consultation that night over the forthcoming complications. Lyle and her

counsel had almost won Sir Anthony over to their belief in Jasper Standish's guilt. Dr. Dan remained severely neutral. The man had been his friend, had always shown himself liberal, convivial, good-hearted. It seemed impossible he could have committed a crime so dastardly.

Till long into the night they sat and talked it over, sometimes hopeful, sometimes despondent. When Lyle rose at last and bade them good-night, the barrister looked earnestly at her troubled face.

"I can work it over the second day," he said, "but 'pon my faith, Miss Orcheton, it's a bad look-out for us if we can't lay hands on that young scamp Mickey Doolan by the morning of the third."

Jasper Standish left Dublin by the last train that night. He was ignorant of the fact that he was being watched, or that the small, inoffensive-looking individual who had got into the next compartment had been following his movements for many weeks with great interest.

When he reached the little station, he got into a car and drove to his house. He had a purpose in view. Nora was alone at the Hermitage now. He had resolved to see her.

The detective called another car. There was a brief colloquy, and a curious shock-headed individual, with a slouched hat almost concealing his features, undertook the job of keeping the foremost car in sight, with suspicious alacrity.

During the drive there was a good deal of conversation between the "jarvey" and his fare. It showed that this was not their first meeting, and the boy

displayed a powerful interest in the events of the trial.

They drove cautiously, not wishing the leading vehicle to discover they were following. At a special place the second car drew up, and the fare got down. The driver fastened his horse to a post, and gave him his nose-bag. Then the two figures left the road and entered a wood, through which twisted a narrow little foot-track evidently well known to them. It ended in sight of the County Inspector's house. Arrived there, the two figures crouched in the shadow of the bushes and waited silently for events.

"There's the light, sor," whispered one of the watchers. "Ah! bad cess to that ground glass av the windy panes. 'Tis divil a sight av inything one gets. I've tried it often."

"Stop here till I return," said the other. And he glided cautiously forward to where a little patch of light shone through the window on to the ragged grass that was by courtesy styled the lawn.

But as the boy had said the glass baffled inspection. As he stood there, however, the man suddenly noticed that the window was not perfectly closed at the top. This left a tiny aperture between the window and the sill, and by kneeling down so that his eyes were level with the opening he could see a certain portion of the room.

The Inspector must have been unusually preoccupied not to have noticed this aperture. When the detective caught sight of him within the room he was occupied in examining some papers that he had taken apparently from an open drawer. These he tore up one

by one, then approached the fireplace and threw the fragments among the ashes. The fire had gone out, but apparently that did not concern him. The old woman could not read. She would light the fire next morning with these scraps of paper.

He next went to a cupboard and took out a bottle and glass. He poured out nearly a tumblerful of raw spirit, and drank it off without troubling to adulterate it with water. Then he commenced to talk. His words were rapid and incoherent, and the listener could not make sense out of them. Sometimes he laughed—the meaningless laughter of the inebriate. It was evident that the strong spirit was affecting him.

He put his revolver in his pocket, locked the drawer from which he had taken the papers, and then eyed the bottle once more as if doubtful whether to test its soothing properties. Finally he locked it up.

“Better not,” he muttered. “I’ve a stiff lot of business before me. I must keep a steady hand and brain.”

Seeing that he was about to leave the house, the detective crept quietly back to the shelter of the bushes. He whispered a warning to his companion, and the two again followed on his track as he took a short cut across the intervening grounds that lay between the Lodge and the Hermitage.

“He’s for the big house,” whispered the carman. “Sure an’ what’s that for? Isn’t ivery one av the family away? What does he want there at all, at all?”

Jasper made a sudden turn towards the river. Here he paused, and they watched him light a dark lantern.

“It’s the cave he’s goin’ to. Saints and angels, what’s takin’ him there?”

“What cave?” asked the detective.

“The Holy Hermit’s—God rest his sowl. It’s there the saycret way is where he followed the lady, as came out in the first trial. Now, glory be, what are we to do wid ourselves, sor? I’d not be afther followin’ him through that same tunnel av a place, not for a hundred pounds I wouldn’t. He’s a desprit man is Mister Inspector, and handy wid his pistol shots too!”

“I shall follow him,” said the detective. “I have a revolver. You needn’t fear.”

“Ah! but it’s meself has no great likings for bullets flyin’ about me head. Axin’ yer pardon, sir, couldn’t ye be lavin’ me to wait convaynient here till the matter’s settled between yer two selves comfortable?”

“No, you must come too,” said the officer sternly. “I may need you as a witness, as well as help. Recollect, you’re under the orders of the law.”

“Sure an’ yer honor knows I’ve bin like wax in yer hands iver since you found me out, an’ mighty clever you was about that same, an’ it’s a great man you’ll be, I’m thinkin’. So lade the way, yer honor, an’ it’s Mickey Doolan won’t be far off, seein’ as we’re the best av frinds, an’ no occasion in life to quarrel over a small matter av this sort.”

“It’s dark as pitch: I can’t see the light,” whispered the detective presently, as they groped their way through the tunnel, which seemed to slope upwards.

“He’s got a long start av us. Whisht! I hear his steps.”

They paused and listened. They could hear a heavy tread echoing through the distant passage.

Very slowly, very cautiously they crept on till they came to a stairway. Here they again paused to listen. There was no sound of footsteps now, but a faint flicker of light stole down from above, and showed the steep stone stairs mounting upwards like a ladder. Not daring to move or speak, they crouched in the darkness and heard the sound of heavy blows on wood. The panel had been boarded up by Sir Anthony's orders, and the old mode of entrance rendered impossible. No one slept at this side of the house, as Jasper had taken care to assure himself.

He succeeded at last in forcing an entrance, and taking a lantern, disappeared into the turret room. Softly and slowly the detective and Mickey followed. They caught sight of him as he flashed the lantern cautiously towards the stairs that led into the corridor.

Not till the light vanished did they venture to creep into the room. There was a faint gleam of moonlight through the window, and by its light they managed to grope their way across to the door. The staircase was dark, but the detective made cautious progress step by step until he reached the next corridor.

A whisper from Mickey stayed his feet, and both listened intently. Afar off in the silence of the night came a woman's cry of terror. They followed its direction. Door after door they passed. All were shut, all was silent within.

Another flight of stairs, another corridor. Again they listened.

A sound of voices guided them. They reached a



door. A light streamed from beneath. The sound of a voice low and threatening reached them. They remained without—motionless, intently listening. The detective's hand stole forward. He turned the handle softly. It was evidently locked within. The tones of the voice rose to a louder key.

“I tell you I must have the money. You know where Sir Anthony keeps it. You must fetch it.”

A woman's voice, faint with terror, pleaded. It was drowned by brutal oaths.

“Tell me the place, and I'll fetch it myself. There's no time to lose. I want to get off before daybreak. You and your friend, curse her, have made it too hot for me. Now, are you going to do what I ask?”

“Jasper, I cannot : I'd sooner die.”

“Then tell me where's the safe? I've no time to hunt the house. Library or dressing-room?”

“Dressing-room,” she said faintly.

“Which way?”

“Through that door, into the next room, across the corridor, and the last on the right-hand side.”

“You're not tricking me? Your life shall answer for it if you are.”

“It is the truth.”

Coldly, despairingly, the words fell. It was for this she had made shipwreck of youth's beauty and hope—for the sake of a ruthless villain, who had neither honor nor heart; who had never loved her, who had only made her a tool to serve his purpose, and screen his crimes.

She cowered back among the pillows, white as they. She heard his brutal laugh as he turned to the door,

and the sound of his retreating steps fell upon her heart as earth falls upon a closed coffin. With a shudder she closed her eyes. She was near fainting with terror, but something seemed to control her failing senses, and she strove to overcome that deadly weakness.

At that moment a low tap came at the door, and a voice spoke.

“Open in the name of the law!” it said. “I am in pursuit of a thief. He was here a moment ago.”

She sat up in bed too frightened to speak. A second demand followed the first. Still she was silent.

Give him up? See him humiliated, captured in the act of robbery? She could not do it. He was her husband. She had loved him blindly, devotedly. She must make one effort to save him.

“Wait there,” she cried boldly. “I am in bed. I will open the door in a minute.”

Then she sprang out of bed, snatched up a dressing-gown, and sped like the wind across the intervening rooms. She caught him as he was about to force the little safe where Sir Anthony kept such cash and securities as he did not care to put in the bank.

“Fly, Jasper!” she cried entreatingly. “The police are here. They have tracked you.”

He turned his white face to her—the face of a coward and criminal. She shuddered at its awful ferocity and its yet more awful fear.

“Go!” she implored. “Another moment and you will be too late. Listen!”

A sharp, imperative rap echoed from the room she had left. He saw there was no time to lose.

“Keep them back, or there’ll be murder,” he said with a brutal laugh. Then he flung open the door of the room and concealed himself behind the wide chintz draperies of the bed. She saw what he meant, and flew back to admit the detective and Mickey.

“You were a long time,” he said suspiciously.

“I had to find my dressing-gown ; but a safe takes a long time to open.”

“Is that the way ?”

“Yes,” she said breathlessly.

They hurried on. She waited, her heart beating wildly. She knew Jasper’s plan now.

It happened as he had supposed. They saw the lantern and the skeleton keys, the open door, and ran down the stairs, taking the lantern with them. Jasper rushed from his hiding-place, through Nora’s room, and up the staircase to the turret. He locked the door behind him, and with all speed made for the secret passage, dashed down it, through the tunnel, across the grounds, back to the Lodge and the stable where his horse stood ready saddled.

He led it out, mounted, and while the detective and Mickey were hunting and searching the great rooms and passages of the Hermitage he was off and away across country, flying for his life.

He knew his horse. Nothing to be hired or borrowed could match it for speed and endurance. His plans had long been laid for such an emergency. He had a fair start, and yet he urged the spirited animal with voice and spur. It did not like such treatment, and showed signs of temper.

Jasper was by this time utterly incapable of self-control.

Semi-intoxicated, maddened with rage, and pursued by a sudden strange frenzy that led him to fancy pursuit was close at hand, he struck the animal brutally with his whip. It reared and nearly unseated him, then sprang like an arrow from a bow across the long level road. The thunder of its hoofs seemed to its rider's ears like the sound of other hoofs gaining on him. The blood raced madly through his veins and coursed through his brain. It was more mania than drunkenness that now possessed him.

Faster and faster they flew.

The moon's pale gleam made the hedgerows like one continuous thread, the stars whirled giddily above him, sky and earth and shadowy trees turned into a blurred mist. The foam from the horse's nostrils lay like flakes of snow tossed here and there, its sides were red and torn where the cruel spurs still pressed.

On, still on, he urged the half-maddened creature. Across country now, taking fence after fence in flying leaps that seemed to race and touch the clouds, and meet a hundred other strange and rushing objects. On, still on, with the thundering hoofs behind and the paling sky above. On, till with a wild cheer he called on earth and heaven both to join in that mad flight, and cheat pursuit that meant the hangman's rope about his neck.

On, till with a plunge, a gasp, a crash of broken bars came sudden darkness, and horse and rider lay bleeding and unconscious side by side.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

AFTER a prolonged search the detective came suddenly to the conclusion that Jasper had doubled on them and escaped. Groping about in dark rooms and unknown passages was not lively work. He called to Mickey, and told him his conviction.

“I’ll go back,” he added, “to the Lodge. We may catch him there, though I doubt it. He’s had too good a start.”

Mickey’s explanations and suggestions were plentiful, but the detective was in an ill-humor, and paid scant attention. If it had occurred to his mind that Nora had any interest in the man, or could have connived at his escape, he would have questioned her. As it was, he left the Hermitage by the proper entrance, and made his way to the Gray Lodge as speedily as the darkness permitted.

When they reached it, he paused a moment wondering whether to effect an entrance without ceremony, or rouse the servant and ask for Jasper. Mickey saved him the trouble of a decision by pushing up the window of Jasper’s little office, and flashing the light of the lantern around. It was dark and deserted.

The boy sprang in, and the detective followed. His eager glance took in every detail of the room. Then, with sudden remembrance of its occupant’s recent em-

ployment, he went to the fireplace and collected all the torn papers he had thrown there.

The drawers of the writing-table were locked. He did not trouble to force them. It was hardly likely the astute Inspector would have left incriminating evidence behind him.

They then proceeded to search the house, terrifying the old woman, who was asleep in the kitchen, and who could or would tell them nothing of her master's affairs. His bed had not been disturbed, but there was nothing in his room to show intention of flight.

After a brief search, they next proceeded to the stables. Mickey knew both the horses, and drew conclusions.

"Sure an' he's gone, yer honor, safe enough," he exclaimed. "An' 'tis Lightnin' Flash he's taken. An' devil a baste this side the county can bate him for speed. We might as well be gettin' to our beds, sor, now. It's little chance we have av seein' anythin' but a clean pair av heels."

"You're sure the two horses were here to-day?"

"This same blessed morning, sor, they was there, the pair av thim; an' the master away the whole av the day. Sorra a sowl in the place as would dare to touch thim. But there's Dan somewhere about. In the loft, maybe. We might be axin' him a question as to the ways av it."

The detective smiled contemptuously. "The ways av it" were plain enough. "He's got off, no doubt," he said. "The question is whether to pursue him, or wait till the morning and set the wires to work."

"If it's a race yer honor's manin', I'm yer man,"

said Mickey joyfully. "Sure an' I'd take the little mare as soon as look at her, an' divil a bit av saddle or stirrup I'm wantin'."

The man eyed him doubtfully. "How are we to know which road he's taken?" he said. "Besides, Mickey, it's a desperate man you're after. He's taken life before now."

"Yer honor might give me that bit av a pistol yer havin' so handy, an' 'twill be shot for shot av he's after tryin' that game wid me. You'll not be needin' it yerself, an' ye can take the car an' drive into the town, an' be settin' thim wires to work as ye was spakin' av, as soon as the day breaks. Faith, it's not far off that same. Am I to go, yer honor?"

"Yes, but be careful. He's likely to make for the coast. He'll get off in some little vessel. He'd know the liners and steamers would be searched."

"Faith, an' I'll be careful. It's none too fond av that gintleman I am: I give ye me wurr'd av that."

"Track him, but don't come up with him," continued the detective. "Wire me if you have news, and go to the nearest police station and inform them this man is under arrest for murder. You'll be no use single-handed."

Mickey promised joyfully, then saddled the little mare, and rode off on the track of his enemy.

"Mind," came the last warning, "the day after tomorrow, the third day of the trial, you're to report yourself. You'll be wanted as witness."

"Troth an' I'm not likely to forget it! It's long enough I've been waiting my turn. Begorra, whin I get it an' say me say in the open court, it's the black

face av him will be lookin' as white as a pennorth av curds in a sweep's fist !”

And with a wild “hurroo” to the astonished chestnut, he dashed off along the road that Jasper Standish had taken.

\* \* \* \* \*

The second day of the trial was of more importance to all concerned than the first.

Jane Grapnell looked paler and more anxious as she entered the dock, and her eyes turned to where Lyle was seated beside Sir Anthony, as if she sought some reassuring sign. Lyle smiled in sympathetic recognition of that anxious inquiry. But her own mind was far from easy.

Jane's counsel opened his case with a long introduction, and then proceeded to call witnesses. He seemed to play into the hands of the prosecution and to force prolonged cross-examination on every little point. The court adjourned for lunch. It was impossible the case could arrive at summing-up point that day.

In the afternoon the defense called up Jasper Standish for cross-examination. After an interval it was announced that that important witness was not in court. He had been telegraphed for, and an answer had just come to hand.

He was not at Rathfurley.

Affairs came to a standstill. There was a hurried consultation of barristers, solicitors, and counsel. The defense suggested adjournment until the missing witness was discovered. And so ended the proceedings of the second day.

When Lyle returned to the hotel, she was informed



that a lady was awaiting her in her sitting-room. She ran hastily up the stairs, and found Nora there. One look at the agitated face told her something had occurred.

“What is it?” she asked breathlessly.

“Jasper—is he here? Did he appear to-day?”

“No,” said Lyle. “He was called upon, but no one knew where he was. Has anything happened, Nora? Do you——”

“Yes; I know something. He came to the house last night, Lyle, by the secret way. I woke up to find him in my room. He wanted money; he threatened to kill me if I would not tell him where Sir Anthony kept his. I had to tell him, Lyle.”

“Nora! Oh! my poor dear.”

“That isn’t all. He had scarcely left me when there came a knocking at the door. The police had tracked him, and demanded admission. Lyle, I could not help it. I rushed down and warned him. I helped him to escape.”

She wrung her hands helplessly. The tears were streaming down her face.

“And he got off?” asked Lyle.

“I don’t know. I heard no more. The officer searched the house, and not finding him, left. I lay awake all night in terror. As soon as the servants were up, I rose. The safe had not been touched, so that last crime was spared him. But your room had been broken open, Lyle.”

“That fatal turret?”

“Yes. The new panel was smashed to pieces. I told the servants to send to the barracks, and when the

man came I explained that the house had been broken into, and begged that some one might be left to guard it while I came here to tell Sir Anthony. There is a policeman there now. The Irish servants were terrified out of their wits. Lyle, what has happened to Jasper? Has no one heard anything?"

"I believe not. I am expecting Mr. Roach and Mr. Galloway, Jane's counsel, this evening. They may have heard. It's very extraordinary, Nora. Why has he run off like this?"

"He must have been watched. The other side know the story. He said that you and Jane had made the place too hot for him, and he was going abroad. Oh, Lyle, he looked so awful, and he was half mad with drink!"

She hid her face in her shuddering hands. In her heart Lyle rejoiced. Disillusion might mean salvation.

She trembled with excitement. This was no mean triumph. She had befriended Jane to good purpose, and between them they had forced their adversary's hand. Surely now the prosecution would fail, Jane's innocence be declared, and Jasper Standish would stand in the dock where he had placed a helpless woman.

It was terrible for Nora, but then no one knew that fatal secret. It might never be known.

She tried to soothe the poor girl, and took her to her bedroom to remove her hat and cloak, and persuaded her to lie down and rest. Then she returned to see if Sir Anthony had yet come in. He was there with Barry Roach, and was occupied in reading a telegram. Lyle shook hands with the solicitor.

“I have strange news,” she said eagerly. “Nora is here. She says that this man, Jasper Standish, broke into the house last night and attempted to rob my father’s safe.”

Sir Anthony let the telegram drop. “What?” he exclaimed.

“He came to rob you previous to leaving the country,” continued Lyle. “He was interrupted by the police, but escaped. She knows nothing more. Now, father, will you believe me? If he were not guilty, would he have acted like this?”

The old baronet took her hand and pressed it gently. “Forgive me, my dear. I was an obstinate old fool. You were right all the time. But he has escaped justice, even as he escaped suspicion. Read that.”

She took the flimsy paper which he handed to her, and read as follows:—

*“Standish found dead—thrown from horse. Body at police station. Middleton. Wire instructions.*

*“Doolan.”*

Lyle gave a faint cry. “Dead! And Mickey sent this? Mickey found him?”

“Yes. The young rascal has been acting amateur detective under the guidance of James Marlitt, a man we had from Scotland Yard. Marlitt wires that he traced Standish to the Hermitage, lost him, found he had taken a fleet horse and gone off. This boy went in pursuit. You see what he says.

“Dead!” faltered Lyle once more. “With all his sins, all his crimes—oh! thank God, Nora is safe at last.”

“Nora? Why, what has she to do with it?” exclaimed Sir Anthony.

“She was married secretly to Jasper Standish. He persuaded her to it in order that she might not be a witness against him. It has nearly killed her since she found out his villainy.”

“My God! how awful! What possessed the girl \_\_\_\_\_”

“It is all over and done with now,” said Lyle, stealing a glance of sympathy at the pale face of Barry Roach. “Don’t blame her, dad. He was a very fascinating man. Nora was so young, and quite at his mercy. Besides,” she added hurriedly, “it was no sort of a marriage. He neither claimed nor acknowledged it. She told me, and I brought her home.”

“That was when she fell ill?”

“Yes,” said Lyle.

“Poor girl! Poor deluded child! Still, she might have told you, Lyle.”

“Dear father, ‘mights’ and ‘ifs’ won’t alter things now. Thank God that death has spared her further horrors. She will recover; she will forget. It has been an awful experience.”

The rugged, kindly face of the solicitor told of his sympathy with such an experience, but he said nothing. Lyle understood his silence, and changed the subject skilfully. Presently, when she had ordered tea, she went up to Nora.

Very gently she told her the news of Jasper’s death. The girl took it with strange calmness. She had suffered so much, and borne so much, that her powers of endurance had reached a climax.

“He has been spared a worse fate, and I a worse shame,” she said.

Then she covered her face with trembling hands, and Lyle saw her lips move. That worthless life was not worth a girl’s forgiving prayer, but as her gentle pardon followed it to another world, something of peace and rest fell on the aching heart that breathed it.

She looked up at last. In spite of the change of these last awful weeks, it seemed to Lyle that her face wore a look which seemed to belong to the old girlish days. Involuntarily her arms went round her in the way that had belonged to those old days also.

“You have come back to me,” she said softly; “and I shall never fail you, Nora.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The last day of Jane Grapnell’s trial was a day to be long remembered in the county; a day to make journalists rejoice, and be as rain after long draught to the gossips’ tongues; a day the like of which had never been known since Barney O’Gorman had roasted his grandmother as a witch in a sudden fit of pious hilarity; the end had been somewhat disastrous for the grandmother—and Barney.

There was a stir, an excitement, about the very opening of the court. The crowd that tried for admission trebled its previous number.

Lyle’s face was radiant, her father’s very grave. The defending counsel, Mr. Galloway, looked serenely triumphant. The proceedings to-day meant a big sensation, and no small fame for himself. Jane, who knew nothing of what had transpired, yet gathered hope from her first glance at her staunch friend.

After the usual preliminaries, Mr. Galloway called his first witness, Mickey Doolan. Jane started and changed color as she heard the name, and her eyes looked half-fearfully, half-doubtfully, to the little box where the witnesses appeared. Yes, there was no doubt about it: the shock head, the impish face, the furtive glance—it was Mickey. He had been found. Her case was sure now.

Her heart throbbed so violently that she could scarcely stand as she thought of all that his discovery and his evidence meant. Her brain whirled dizzily, and for a moment the faces and figures swam mistily before her eyes. With a great effort she recovered herself, and sank into the seat provided for her. Then, with tear-filled eyes and straining ears, she gave her attention to the proceedings of the court.

As no pen could do justice to Mickey's phraseology, his quaint terms of speech, and his general content with himself in the position of a celebrity, it is sufficient to say here that his testimony to Jane's innocence was conclusive.

He told the story of their first meeting, of the odd bargain between them, and how he had since watched the "quare doings of Mister Inspector Standish."

Then came the question as to that morning after the bank manager's murder, and his discovery of the blood-stained shirt, which now semi-historical garment was at last displayed in court, and created the expected sensation.

Step by step the story went on, and plainer grew the proofs that whoever was guilty it could not be Jane Grapnell.

A fierce fire of cross-examination brought out Mickey at his best. If he was a spy, well, what was the "gentleman from Scotland Yard?" If one statement was to be discredited, why not the other?

The court roared, the prosecution looked foolish, and long before the brilliant and forcible summing-up of the defence, the verdict was a foregone conclusion.

Pale, and calm, and resolute, Jane Grapnell sat there and heard it all. Her heart swelled with gratitude and triumph. The battle had not been to the strong, nor the race to the swift. Endurance and patience and courage had fought their way through every difficulty. Her child's wrongs were at last avenged!

\* \* \* \* \*

The summing-up of the judge was a mere formality, but Jane had to be released by a verdict before the new accusation could be brought forward. The present inquiry was concerned with the establishment of her innocence, not with the proofs of another person's guilt.

The judge gave it as his opinion that the present prisoner should never have been placed in the dock at all—that no proof as to her committal of this brutal murder of an inoffensive and beloved master had been brought. A few suspicious circumstances certainly went against her, but these had now been explained by the last witness. He sent the case to the jury with perfect confidence in their verdict; there could be no doubt that that verdict would coincide with his own opinion.

The jury, without leaving the court, arrived at their

decision. The usual question was asked, and the foreman answered, without a moment's hesitation, "Not guilty, my lord."

There was one long-drawn breath of relief, a faint cheer instantly suppressed.

But Jane heard nothing more. The long tension of nerve and strength snapped at last. She fell forward like a log into the arms of the warder. Then she was carried out, amid a murmur of sympathy, to await the formality of release, while the detective laid before the court his evidence of the guilt of Jasper Standish.

The fragments of paper were the I O U's he had released from old Benjy Myers. The Jew had confessed to the receipt of the money the night after the murder. Among his hoarded treasure still lay the marked pieces, of which one had been placed in Jane's drawer at the Hermitage.

But the story that set her free had no sequel of justice on the wrong-doer. He had to face a higher tribunal, to receive from a sterner Judge the sentence of his sin.



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

A POOR, broken-down wreck of womanhood came out of that ordeal. Her hair had turned snow-white in those days of agony and suspense. She had known how awful a thing it is to stand in the Shadow of Death ; how the brain reels, and the heart grows sick, and reason totters on its throne. She had faced the ordeal her child had faced, and gone down into depths as deep and well-nigh as hopeless.

Yet the oath sworn over that child's death-bed had been unavailing. Never once had she accused Jasper Standish, as she had meant to accuse him. Never once had they stood face to face, as she had determined they should stand, while with relentless hand she pointed to his name in that blood-stained Testament.

In a totally different manner, and by totally unexpected means, she had worked out this man's awful fate. It seemed as if Heaven had chosen her as the instrument by which his crime should be detected and his sin against Hester avenged.

Had he not directed his animosity against her helplessness, she would only have been in the position to prove him guilty of her daughter's betrayal, on moral grounds. The law would have given her no aid there. The law would have inflicted no penalty on the mur-

derer of innocence. But his instinctive dislike of her and her instinctive distrust of him had been the standpoint from which a mutual antagonist had battled for vengeance and for justice.

Jane Grapnell came out of prison a free woman, a blameless woman, whose life's purpose was achieved, but a woman of shattered nerves and broken spirit, whose feet were set on the path of sorrow, and by that path would tread their feeble way to the gates that close on life. No love, nor care, nor kindness could make amends for those years of silent agony and unflinching purpose.

With the accomplishment of that purpose, the brave spirit seemed to break down at last. She had saved Nora from a worse fate than that of her own child, and Nora's love and devotion repaid her with unflinching tenderness; but the shadow had already fallen, and no hand could lift it.

Not six months from the day when she had faced that dreaded sentence, when her life had hung on the verdict of men prejudiced and unfriendly, yet keenly critical of justice, Jane Grapnell was laid to rest in the little burial-ground of Rathfurley; and those who had once blamed her for pride and reserve dropped kindly words now over the heart they had done their best to wound.

To hurt the living, and give useless pity to the dead, that is the way of life.

Rathfurley does not stand alone; it has its counterpart the world over, even as poor Jane has hers.

\* \* \* \* \*

As soon as he could persuade the girls to leave

Ireland for change of scene, Sir Anthony took them abroad.

They traveled slowly and enjoyably, taking their fill of novelty and beauty, and rejoicing in them with youth's recovered buoyancy—a chastened and tempered buoyancy, but still one that gave life a new zest, and could cast aside the shadows of sorrow for longer and longer periods.

The wonder of cities that had made history for the world, of art treasures garnered through centuries of change, of towering mountains snow-crowned in lonely majesty, of magic lakes and somber palaces, of peopled yesterdays contrasted with the reality of modern to-days—all these appealed as nothing had ever appealed to girlish romance and intelligence.

Their minds embraced the strangeness of unimagined scenes, and reveled in idylls made eloquent by every peasant's face and every mountaineer's call. It was all so new, so beautiful, so strange; and the bruised and broken flowers in the garden of their hearts, raised drooping heads once more to the sunshine of hope, and the dew of blessed peace.

Sir Anthony noted the change with serene content. He found Lyle a more sympathetic and intelligent companion, and Nora a sweeter and more unselfish one. They were both dear to him; and his pity for the "adopted daughter," as he called her, had long given place to a very tender affection.

So the months drifted by, happily, uneventfully, and in grateful contrast to that awful year marked tragic from its first month.

The spring found them still loitering in Venice, to

which most mystic and alluring of cities they had paid a second visit. They gave less time to galleries and churches now, and loved better the lingering hours on the lagoons, the red glow of sunset on the Lido, the mystic moonlight when their gondola floated silently over the dark waters of the Grand Canal, and music broke across the air from some hidden garden or lighted balcony above the gray stone walls. To float through rose lights and shadows, and silver gleam of moonlit skies, was entrancing enough, even if the subtle poetry inseparable from such scenes and hours awoke in each heart that thrill of longing which is Nature's call to youth.

Then would Lyle Orcheton's thoughts turn to that day of days when she had said life was perfected in Love; and then, too, would Nora shudder and grow pale at memory of that frenzied passion burned now to cold gray ashes; ashamed and bitterly regretful, yet capable still of proving Love's existence.

They never spoke of their girlhood's romance, never mentioned those false and disappointing fairy princes whose advent they had once believed would ennoble and glorify existence. Alas! it is given to few fairy princes to do that.

The glamour of girlhood and its dreams no longer obscured their eyes, but they would be none the worse women or wives for that forgone illusion.

Sometimes Lyle watched the sky-line, and thought of far-off lands and dividing seas, and wondered if "he" still remembered. Her heart had grown more merciful now to men's faults and failings. She had read and thought, and in a measure lived, since those

days of indignant jealousy. She would have been able now to say those words for which he had once vainly pleaded, "I forgive you, Derrick."

She could also have added, "Because I understand."

But the sky-line came no nearer, and the far seas stretched their tossing width between her longing and his despair; and she realized slowly, yet by sure degrees, that love may outlive anger and outlast hope.

"There will never be any one else," she told herself, "never! I know that. I wish I had been a little kinder when I had the chance."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE spring was fading into summer warmth. A buzz of mosquitoes roused Sir Anthony from placid dreams of the stones of Venice and long blissful hours amidst the storied treasures of ancient palazzos. There was heat, there were odors; above all, there were mosquitoes. It was time to issue marching orders.

The girls pleaded for one week more—only one. They might never come to this enchanted city again, and its spell was strong upon them. He laughed, and grumbled, and agreed, on condition they should go straight to Switzerland. No more dallying. He knew Italy in summer-time. Burning skies, chill nights, drought, stench, flies, and other horrors. The romance would turn to prose. Best leave it while, as yet, it was romance.

The girls had an old and friendly and highly entertaining gondolier entirely at their service. It was owing to his guidance and varied stories of information that Venice had ceased to be for them the Venice of the tourist, and the cockney, and the curious and restless American.

One morning, the first of that promised week, Nora excused herself from going out with Lyle on the plea of letters to write. It was a plea that had come lately with amusing regularity, for the letters generally con-

sisted of one, and that one always bore the same name and address.

It was plain to Lyle that Nora's Irish friend had not forgotten or neglected her, but she made no remark on the subject.

The gondola was waiting at the hotel steps; the patient Tonio was waiting also. Lyle got in, and bade him take her through the Grand Canal and then out towards the islands.

It was a lovely morning, balmy and full of the fragrance of fruit and flowers from the heaped-up baskets of the girls on quay and bridge, and the flat-bottomed "*barcas*" going to and from the Lido. They shot past gondolas, barks, yachts, fishing boats, all the picturesque sea-life that floats from port and quay to the world beyond Venice and its half-forgotten glories. Then relaxing energy, Tonio contented himself with keeping the gondola to its slow and stately motion.

Lyle in her white dress, leaning back among piles of orange and scarlet cushions, made a lovely picture in that lovely scene, and so apparently thought two men leaning over the rails of a large steam-yacht moored in the broad lagoon over which they were drifting.

It was an exclamation from one of them in her own language that made Lyle look up. She saw the face of Derrick Mallory gazing down at her own.

For a moment the shock and surprise were painful in their unexpectedness. She could only stare blindly, stupidly, finding neither words nor greeting.

He recovered himself first, and, bending down, began explanations. Tonio steadied the gondola, and waited. Lyle had to listen. She was too bewildered

to follow all he said—something about a recall to Ireland, a friend and a steam-yacht, and Brindisi.

No doubt it was all very conclusive, but it looked of small account beside his actual nearness, his presence when she had pictured him far away and dwelt on a lifelong separation.

She summoned enough composure to answer a question or two. She gave the name of their hotel and the length of their stay. She bowed a gracious acknowledgment of introduction to the owner of the steam-yacht, a youthful millionaire, with a face somewhat *blasé*, and indifferent to life's good things, of which Fortune had given him more than a fair share.

Then she signed to Tonio to proceed, and the gondola skimmed its way over the sunny water, and in her heart a little bird sang of hope once more.

That one glimpse of him had been as food after long famine. That look with which his eyes had met and spoken to her own was only too eloquent of the forgotten past. True, nothing was altered—or very little. Only herself and her narrow judgment, and her self-bound pride. But, in spite of that assurance, she felt that anything was preferable to that dead wall of silence which had meant a year of her life.

Would he come to the hotel? How would her father receive him? She trembled as she thought of that last scene between them. His name had never been spoken since.

But though she remembered all, and told herself she could not have acted otherwise, her heart thrilled with new warm life. If Fate had sent him back, if he still



cared, if she forgave, surely they might conquer her father's prejudice in time.

She closed her eyes in a blissful dream.

It was so good to feel happy again. So humbled and so content was she, that she could only breathe little thankful prayers, as one to whom a great and wonderful blessing has been sent. The whole world was changed. Air and space and sea and solitude held new delight. Her eyes swept the sky, and her parted lips drank in the buoyant air. The magic of this wonder-city was in her heart and soul for the first time. For Venice is a city of enchantment still, when youth and love and hopeful life float over its tideless waters.

Lyle told Nora of that unexpected meeting, and Nora expressed surprise and "pondered these things in her heart."

The surprise, however, led to eloquent conjectures, explanations, wonderment. What would he do? Would he dare to call after that awful scene with Sir Anthony—after Lyle's own treatment of him?

What Derrick dared and Derrick did was to appear at *table d'hôte* that evening with his friend, and secure a seat almost opposite Lyle and her party. Sir Anthony looked all amazement, but could not avoid recognition of the young man's courteous bow and apparently surprised greeting. When dinner was over, he followed them into the salon, and explained why and how he chanced to be in Venice.

By that time Lyle was perfectly composed; and Sir Anthony, who felt he owed the young man some amends for lending too ready an ear to Jasper Standish's ma-

lignant stories, was his old kind and cheery self. There was much to tell Derrick, too. The awful story of the Inspector's crime; the use that had been made of the secret passage to the Hermitage; the history of poor Jane, and her patient pursuit of this man, and its results.

Then Derrick spoke frankly, yet timidly, of a sudden change in his own fortune. A distant relative, who had only been known to the family as a miser and recluse, had died suddenly, and left his entire fortune to his nephew Derrick Mallory, on condition that he should release the Hermitage from its burden of debt and mortgage, and once more live there as its owner.

"So you see, Sir Anthony, I was bound to have a meeting with you soon or late," he explained. "Of course, I can't turn you out. You have a lease of the place, and have gone to great expense putting it into repair. I must wait your own time and conditions. It's a queer will, and made by a queer individual, who might, had he wished it, have saved the property long ago. However——"

"My dear sir," exclaimed Sir Anthony eagerly, "pray don't consider me at all. To tell you the truth, I should not be sorry to be relieved of my tenancy. I'm not a superstitious man by any means, nor did I ever attribute any special meaning to such terms as 'good and bad luck;' but, upon my soul, since I've lived in Ireland I've become a convert to the theory. Anything like my experience since I took your house, or set foot in your country, could not be found outside the pages of a novel. I shan't be sorry to get back to England again, I can tell you. So you and your law-

yers may arrange as you please to release me, and the sooner red tape and parchment, and 'Victoria by the Grace of God' have settled the business, the more pleased I shall be. As for Lyle——"

He looked round, but Lyle was not there. She had slipped from the room, and followed Nora and the *blasé* young millionaire out into the balcony overlooking the Grand Canal.

It was a favorite resort in the evenings. A crowd of gondolas floated to and fro, some hung with lanterns and filled with singers, who sang Italian melodies to lute, or guitar, or violin. Far and wide over the gliding waters lights streamed and twinkled. The gondolier's calls, the laughter and chatter of voices of all nationalities made endless sound, as the weird "water carriages" passed to and fro.

Above in the deep soft blue of the sky the moon sailed stately and serene, flooding all the scene with a new and magical beauty, relieving that touch of commonplace in the gaudy-colored posts, and the shabby gondolas, and the unpicturesque dress of their owners and occupants.

Lyle stood a little apart from Nora, and watched it all with that new sense of dreamy content that had been with her the whole day through.

"There is Tonio!" said Nora suddenly. "Oh, Lyle, do let us go up and down the canal. It is such a perfect night."

"Do!" said a voice close to Lyle's ear.

She started slightly.

"Sir Anthony is in the reading-room," the voice continued, "and we are friends again; and I have much

to say, Lyle, and you—much to forgive. Is forgiveness less hard ?”

“ I have often felt sorry I refused it,” she said.

“ That is good to hear. If you only knew how that refusal hurt me !”

She was silent—her eyes on the gliding water, her heart throbbing at the old tenderness in his voice.

“ Anywhere else,” he said presently, “ we might be conventional ; but here everything seems to slip by, even the past year’s pain. Lyle, we have met once more. The night holds magic, and hope is in my heart. I dreamed once of you *here* with me. Give me back my dream for one little hour.”

Nora’s head was discreetly turned away. There were two gondolas at the steps. One had been engaged by the young owner of the steam-yacht ; in the other stood Tonio, balancing his long oar with picturesque patience.

A touch on Lyle’s hand, and they were down the steps.

She and he—together once again beneath the shining stars, breathless with a happy silence that neither dared to break. The pain of the old yesterdays was a forgotten thing. Who could be sad, or hard, or unforgiving in such a scene, in such an hour !

Tonio, discreet and comprehending, shot his gondola out of the beaten track into a space of soft, hushed darkness, to which the singing voices floated musically. Derrick drew a deep breath. His hand, warm, yet tremulous with its own audacity, touched that other hand lying idly on the cushioned seat.

“ I am forgiven ? ” he said gently.

“ Yes,” she said, in a shaken voice.

“ Forgotten ? ”

“ No—oh, no ! ” The words came so quickly that he seemed to hear her heart’s throb in their sound.

“ God be thanked for that ! ” he said reverently.

“ If you only knew what I have suffered. Oh, heart, is hope impossible ? Must we again part ? You—dearest thing in life to me, will you make that life an endless joy or an endless regret ? ”

There was silence, save for the melody of a laughing voice, the splash of the moonlit waters.

“ Lyle,” he entreated, “ won’t you speak ? If you send me from you again——”

“ Derrick,” she said suddenly, “ will you swear you never loved—her ? ”

“ Her ? That woman, you mean, for whose sake I lost you ? Never ! As there is a God above to hear me, Lyle—never ! Never for one single moment of my life ! ”

“ And if——”

“ If what, sweetheart ? ”

The little hand trembled in his. He caught a sudden vision of flushing cheek, radiant eyes, a look—

And patient Tonio found the gondola somewhat unevenly balanced for a moment.

\* \* \* \* \*

At last the gossips of Rathfurley had enough to content them ; for the Hermitage came back to its original owner, and the “ luck ” changed for good and all ; and

the sweet young English lady became more and more Irish every day and every year. Had she not whispered in her lover's ear : " Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God ! "

**THE END.**

SEP 8 - 1909







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