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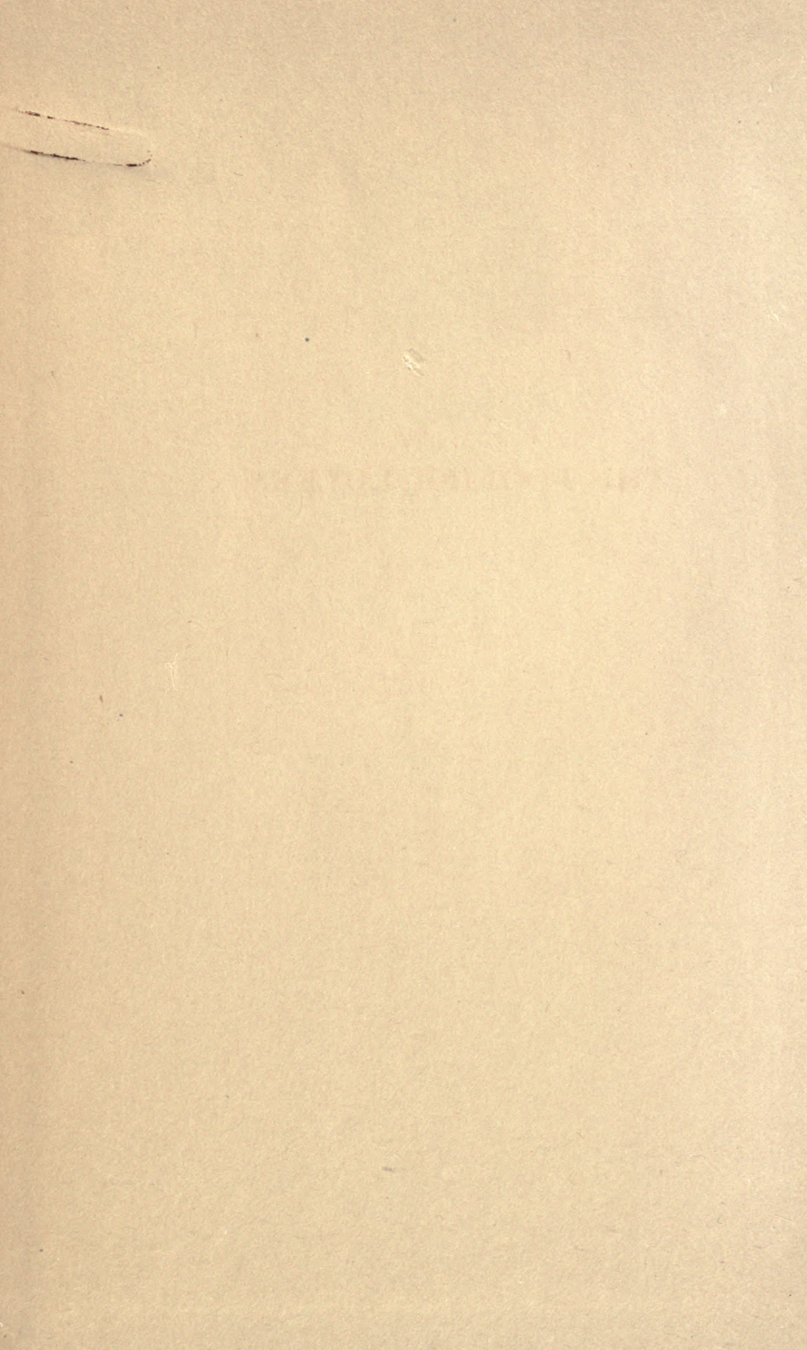

# THE FOOLISH LOVERS

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

*Novels*

Mrs. Martin's Man
Alice and a Family
Changing Winds

*Short Stories*

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Four Irish Plays
Jane Clegg
John Ferguson

# THE FOOLISH LOVERS

BY

ST. JOHN G. ERVINE

Author of "Changing Winds,"
"John Ferguson," etc.

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1920

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TO

MY MOTHER

*who asked me to write*
*a story without any*
*"bad words" in it;*
*and*

TO

MRS. J. O. HANNAY

*who asked me to write*
*a story without any*
*"Sex" in it.*

2039552

# THE FIRST BOOK

OF

# THE FOOLISH LOVERS

Why, 'tis an office of discovery, love!

*The Merchant of Venice.*

Love unpaid does soon disband.

ANDREW MARVELL.

# THE FOOLISH LOVERS

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

### i

If you were to say to an Ulster man, "Who are the proudest people in Ireland?" he would first of all stare at you as if he had difficulty in believing that any intelligent person could ask a question with so obvious an answer, and then he would reply, "Why, the Ulster people, of course!" And if you were to say to a Ballyards man, "Who are the proudest people in Ulster?" he would reply . . . if he deigned to reply at all . . . "A child would know that! The Ballyards people, of course!"

It is difficult for anyone who is not a native of the town, to understand why the inhabitants of Ballyards should possess so great a pride in their birthplace. It is not a large town . . . it is not even the largest town in the county . . . nor has it any notable features to distinguish it from a dozen other towns of similar size in that part of Ireland. Millreagh, although it is now a poor, scattered sort of place, was once of great importance: for the mail-boats sailed from its harbour to Port Michael until the steamship owners agreed that Port Michael was too much exposed to the severities of rough weather, and chose another harbour elsewhere. Millreagh mourns over its lost glory, attributable in no way to the fault of Millreagh, but entirely to the inscrutable design of Providence which arranged that Port Michael, and not Kirkmull, should lie on the opposite side of the Irish Sea; and every Sunday

morning, after church, and sometimes on Sunday afternoon, the people walk along the breakwater to the lighthouse and remind each other of the days when their town was of consequence. "We spent a hundred and fifty thousand pounds on our harbour," they say to each other, "and then the Scotch went and did the like of that!"—the like of that being their stupidity in living in an exposed situation. Millreagh does not admit that it has suffered any more than a temporary diminishment of its greatness, and it makes optimistic and boastful prophecies of the fortune and repute that will come to it when the engineers make a tunnel between Scotland and Ireland. Sometimes an article on the Channel Tunnel will appear in the *Newsletter* or the *Whig*, and for weeks afterwards Millreagh lives in a fever of expectancy; for whatever else may be said about the Tunnel, this is certain to be said of it, that it will start, in Ireland, from Millreagh. On that brilliant hope, Millreagh, tightening its belt, lives in a fair degree of happiness, eking out its present poverty by fishing and by letting lodgings in the summer.

Pickie, too, has much reputation, more, perhaps, than Millreagh, for it is a popular holiday town and was once described in the *Evening Telegraph* as "the Blackpool of Ireland." This description, although it was apt enough, offended the more pretentious people in Pickie who were only mollified when the innocent reporter, in a later article, altered the description to, "the Brighton of Ireland." With consummate understanding of human character, he added, remembering the Yacht Club, that perhaps the most accurate description of Pickie would be "the Cowes of Ireland." In this way, the reporter, who subsequently became a member of parliament and made much money, pleased the harmless vanity of the lower, the middle and the upper classes of Pickie; and for a time they were "ill to thole" on account of the swollen condition of their heads, and it became necessary to utter sneers at "ham-

and-egg parades'' and ''the tripper element'' and to speak loudly and frequently of the superior merits of Portrush, ''a really nice place,'' before they could be persuaded to believe that Pickie, like other towns, is inhabited by common human beings.

Ballyards never yielded an inch of its pride of place to Millreagh or to Pickie. ''What's an oul' harbour when there's no boat in it?'' Ballyards said to Millreagh; and, ''Sure, the man makes his livin' sellin' sausages!'' it said to Pickie when Pickie bragged of the great grocer who had joined the Yacht Club in order that he might issue a challenge for the Atlantic Cup. Tunnels and attractive seaboards were extraneous things that might bring fortune, but could not bring merit, to those lucky enough to possess them; but Ballyards had character . . . its men were meritable men . . . and Ballyards would not exchange the least of its inhabitants for ten tunnels. Nor did Ballyards abate any of its pride before the ancient and indisputable renown of Dunbar which distils a whiskey that has soothed the gullets of millions of men throughout the world. When Patrickstown bragged of its long history . . . it was once the home of the kings of Ulster . . . and tried to make the world believe that St. Patrick was buried in its cathedral, Ballyards, magnificently imperturbed, murmured: ''Your population is goin' down!''; nor does it manifest any respect for Greenry, which has a member of parliament to itself and has twice the population of Ballyards. ''It's an ugly hole,'' says Ballyards, ''an' it's full of Papishes!''

Millreagh and Pickie openly sneer at Ballyards, and Greenry affects to be unaware of it, but the pride of Ballyards remains unaltered, incapacle of being diminished, incapable even of being increased . . . for pride cannot go to greater lengths than the pride of Ballyards has already gone . . . and in spite of contention and denial, it asserts, invinc-

ibly persistent, that it is the finest and most meritable town in Ireland. When sceptics ask for proofs, Ballyards replies, "*We* don't need proofs!" A drunken man said, on a particularly hearty Saturday night, that Ballyards was the finest town in the world, but the general opinion of his fellow-townsmen was that this claim, while very human, was excessively expressed. London, for example, was bigger than Ballyards. So was New York! . . . The drunken man, when he had recovered his sobriety, admitted that this was true, but he contended, and was well supported in his contention, that while London and New York might be bigger than Ballyards, neither of these cities were inhabited by men of such independent spirit as the men of Ballyards. A Ballyards man, he asserted, was beholden to no one. Once, and once only, a Millreagh man said that a Ballyards man thought he was being independent when he was being ill-bred; but Ballyards people would have none of this talk, and, after they had severely assaulted him, they drove the Millreagh man back to his "stinkin' wee town" and forbade him ever to put his foot in Ballyards again. "You know what you'll get if you do. Your head in your hands!" was the threat they shouted after him. And surely the wide world knows the story . . . falsely credited to other places . . . which every Ballyards child learns in its cradle, of the man who, on being rebuked in a foreign city for spitting, said to those who rebuked him, "I come from the town of Ballyards, an' I'll spit where I like!"

ii

It was his pride in his birthplace which sometimes made John MacDermott hesitate to accept the advice of his Uncle Matthew and listen leniently to the advice of his Uncle William. Uncle Matthew urged him to seek his fortune in foreign parts, but Uncle William said, "Bedam to foreign parts when you can live in Ballyards!" Uncle Matthew, who had

never been out of Ireland in his life, had much knowledge of the works of English writers, and from these works, he had drawn a romantic picture of London. The English city, in his imagination, was a place of marvellous adventures, far more wonderful than the ancient city of Bagdad or the still more ancient city of Damascus, wherein anything might happen to a man who kept his eyes open or, for the matter of that, shut. He never tired of reading Mr. Andrew Lang's *Historical Mysteries,* and he liked to think of himself suddenly being accosted in the street by some dark stranger demanding to know whether he had a taste for adventure. Uncle Matthew was not quite certain what he would do if such a thing were to happen to him: whether to proclaim himself as eager for anything that was odd and queer or to threaten the stranger with the police. "You might think a man was going to lead you to a hidden place, mebbe, where there'd be a lovely woman waiting to receive you, and you blindfolded 'til you were shown into the room where she was . . . and mebbe you'd be queerly disappointed, for it mightn't be that sort of a thing at all, but only some lad trying to steal your watch and chain!"

He had heard very unpleasant stories of what he called the Confidence Trick, whereby innocent persons were beguiled by seemingly amiable men into parting with all their possessions! . . .

"Of course," he would admit, "you'd never have no adventures at all, if you never ran no risks, and mebbe in the end, you do well to chance things. It's a queer pity a man never has any adventures in this place. Many's and many's a time I've walked the roads, thinking mebbe I'd meet someone with a turn that way, but I never in all my born days met anything queer or unusual, and I don't suppose I ever will now!"

Uncle Matthew had spoken so sadly and so longingly that John had deeply pitied him. "Did you never fall in love with no one, Uncle Matthew?" he asked.

"Och, indeed I did, John!" Uncle Matthew replied. "Many's and many's the time! Your Uncle William used to make fun of me and sing '*Shilly-shally with the wee girls, ha, ha, ha!*' at me when I was a wee lad because I was always running after the young girls and sweethearting with them. He never ran after any himself: he was always looking for birds' nests or tormenting people with his tricks. He was a daft wee fellow for devilment, was your Uncle William, and yet he's sobered down remarkably. Sometimes, I think he got more romance out of his tormenting and nesting than I got out of my courting, though love's a grand thing, John, when you can get it. I was always falling in love, but sure what was the good? I never could be content with the way the girls talked about furniture and us setting up house together, when all the time I was wanting hard to be rescuing them from something. No wonder they wouldn't have me in the end, for, of course, it's very important to get good furniture and to set up a house somewhere nice and snug . . . but I never was one for scringing and scrounging . . . my money always melted away from the minute I got it . . . and I couldn't bear the look of the furniture-men when you asked them how much it would cost to furnish a house on the hire-system!"

He paused for a moment, reflecting perhaps on the pleasures that had been missed by him because of his inability to save money and his dislike of practical concerns. Then in a brisker tone, as if he were consoling himself for his losses, he said, "Oh, well, there's consolation for everyone somewhere if they'll only take the trouble to look for it, and after all I've had a queer good time reading books!"

"Mebbe, Uncle Matthew," John suggested, "if you'd left Ballyards and gone to London, you'd have had a whole lot of adventures!"

"Mebbe I would," Uncle Matthew replied. "Though sometimes I think I'm not the sort that has adventures, for

there's men in the world would find something romantic wherever they went, and I daresay if Lord Byron were living here in Ballyards, he'd have the women crying their eyes out for him. That was a terrible romantic man, John! Lord Byron! A terrible man for falling in love, God bless him! . . ."

It was Uncle Matthew who urged John to read Shakespeare—"a very plain-spoken, knowledgable man, Shakespeare!"—and Lord Byron—"a terrible bad lord, John, but a fine courter of girls and a grand poet!"—and Herrick—"a queer sort of minister, that man Herrick, but a good poet all the same!"—and Dickens. Dickens was the incomparable one who filled dull streets with vital figures: Sam Weller and Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Micawber and Mrs. Nickleby and Mr. Mantalini and Steerforth and David Copperfield and Barkis; and terrible figures: Fagan and Bill Sykes and Uriah Heap and Squeers and Mr. Murdstone and that fearful man who drank so much that he died of spontaneous combustion; and pathetic figures: Sidney Carton and Little Nell and Oliver Twist and Nancy and Dora and Little Dorritt and the Little Marchioness.

"You'd meet the like of them any minute of the day in London," said Uncle Matthew. "You'd mebbe be walking up a street, the Strand, mebbe, or in Hyde Park or Whitechapel, and in next to no time at all, you'd run into the whole jam-boiling of them. London's the queer place for seeing queer people. Never be content, John, when you're a man, to stay on in this place where nothing ever happens to anyone, but quit off out of it and see the world. There's all sorts in London, black men and yellow men, and I wouldn't be surprised but there's a wheen of Red Indians, too, with feathers in their head! . . ."

"I'd be afeard of them fellows," said John. "They'd scalp you, mebbe!"

"Ah, sure, the peelers wouldn't let them," said Uncle Matthew. "And anyway you needn't go near them. They

keep that sort down by the Docks and never let them near the places where the fine, lovely women live. London's the place to see the lovely women, John, all dressed up in silk dresses, for that's where the high-up women go . . . in the Season, they call it . . . and they take their young, lovely daughters with them, grand wee girls with nice hair and fine complexions and a grand way of talking . . . to get them married, of course. I read in a book one time, there was a young fellow, come of a poor family, was walking in one of the parks where the quality-women take their horses every day, and a young and lovely girl was riding up and down as nice as you like, when all of a sudden her horse ran away with her. The young fellow never hesitated for a minute, but jumped over the railings and stopped the horse, and the girl was that thankful and pleased, him and her was married after. And she was a lord's daughter, John! A very high-up lord! She belonged to a queer proud family, but she wasn't too proud to fall in love with him, and they had a grand time together!"

"Were they rich?" said John.

Uncle Matthew nodded his head. "It would be a great thing now," he said, "if a lord's daughter was to take a fancy to you! . . ."

"I'd have to be queer and adventurous for the like of that to happen to me, Uncle Matthew," John exclaimed. He had never seen a lord's daughter, but he had seen Lady Castlederry, a proud and beautiful woman, who seemed to be totally unaware of his existence when he passed by her on the road.

"Well, and aren't you as fond of adventure as anybody in the wide world?" Uncle Matthew retorted.

"Indeed, that's true," John admitted, "but then I never had any adventures in my born days, and you yourself would like to have one, but you've never had any!"

Uncle Matthew sat quietly in his chair for a few moments. Then he drew his nephew close to him and stroked his hair.

"Come here 'til I whisper to you," he said. "D'you know why I never had any adventures, John?"

"No, Uncle Matthew, I do not!'

"Well, I'll tell you then, though I never admitted it to anyone else in the world, and I'll mebbe never admit it again. I never had any because I was afraid to have them!"

"Afeard, Uncle Matthew?" John exclaimed. He had not yet trimmed his tongue to say "afraid."

"Aye, son, heart-afraid. There's many a fine woman I'd have run away with, only I was afraid mebbe I'd be caught. You'll never have no adventures if you're afraid to have them, that's a sure and certain thing!"

John struggled out of his Uncle's embrace and turned squarely to face him.

"I'm not afeard, Uncle Matthew," he asserted.

"Are you not, son?"

"I'm not afeard of anything. I'd give anybody their cowardy-blow! . . ."

"There's few people in the world can say that, John!" Uncle Matthew said.

iii

People often said of Uncle Matthew that he was "quare in the head," but John had never noticed anything queer about him. Mrs. MacDermott, finding her son in the attic where Uncle Matthew kept his books, reading an old, torn copy of Smollett's translation of *Gil Blas,* had said to him, "Son, dear, quit reading them oul' books, do, or you'll have your mind moidhered like your Uncle Matthew!" And Willie Logan, tormenting him once because he had refused to acknowledge his leadership, had called after him that his Uncle Matthew was astray in the mind. It was a very great satisfaction to John that just as Willie Logan uttered his taunt, Uncle William came round McCracken's

corner and heard it. Uncle William, a hasty, robust man, had clouted Willie Logan's head for him and sent him home howling.

"Go home and learn your manners," he had shouted at the blubbering boy. "Go home and learn your manners, you ill-bred brat, you!"

Uncle William had spoken very gravely and tenderly to John after that affair, as they walked home together. "Never let anyone make little of your Uncle Matthew!" he had said to his nephew. "He's a well-read man, for all his queer talk, and many's a wise thing he says when you're not expecting it. I never was much of a one for trusting to books myself . . . I couldn't give my mind to them somehow . . . but I have a great respect for books, all the same. It isn't every man can spare the time for learning or has the inclination for it, but we can all pay respect to them that has, whatever sort of an upbringing we've got!"

It was then that John MacDermott learned to love his Uncle William almost as much as he loved his Uncle Matthew. He had always liked Uncle William . . . for he was his uncle, of course, and a kind man in spite of his rough, quick ways and sharp words . . . but Uncle Matthew had commanded his love. There had been times when he almost disliked Uncle William . . . the times when Uncle William made fun of Uncle Matthew's romantic talk. John would be sitting in front of the kitchen fire, before the lamp was lit, listening while his Uncle Matthew told him stories of high, romantical things, of adventures in aid of beautiful women, and of life freely given for noble purposes, until he was wrought up into an ecstasy of selflessness and longing . . . and then Uncle William would come into the kitchen from the shop, stumbling, perhaps, in the dark, and swear because the lamp was not lit.

Once, after he had listened for a few moments to one of Uncle Matthew's tales, he had laughed bitterly and said,

"I declare to my good God, but you'd be in a queer way, the whole pack of you, if I was to quit the shop and run up and down the world looking for adventures and women in distress. I tell you, the pair of you, it's a queer adventure taking care of a shop and making it prosper and earning the keep of the house. There's no lovely woman hiding behind the counter 'til the young lord comes and delivers her, but by the Holy Smoke, there's a terrible lot of hard work!"

It had seemed to John then, as he contemplated his Uncle Matthew's doleful face and listened to his plaintive admission, "I know I'm no help to you!" that his Uncle William was a cruel-hearted man, and in his anger he could have struck him. But now, after the affair with Willie Logan and the talk about Uncle Matthew, and remembering, too, that Uncle William was always very gentle with Uncle Matthew, even though his words were sometimes rough, he felt that his heart had ample room inside it for this rough, bearded man who made so few demands on the affection of his family, and deserved so much.

John knew that his Uncle William and his mother shared the common belief that Uncle Matthew was "quare," but, although he had often thought about the matter, he could not understand why people held this opinion. It was true that Uncle Matthew had been dismissed from the Ballyards National School, in which he had been an assistant teacher, but when John considered the circumstances in which Uncle Matthew had been dismissed, he felt satisfied that his uncle, so far from having behaved foolishly, had behaved with great courage and chivalry. Uncle Matthew, so the story went, had been in Belfast a few days after the day on which Queen Victoria had died, and had stopped in Royal Avenue for a few moments to read an advertisement which was exhibited in the window of a haberdasher's shop. These are the words which he read in the advertisement:

WE MOURN

OUR

DEPARTED QUEEN

---

MOURNING ORDERS PROMPTLY

EXECUTED

When he had read through the advertisement twice, Uncle Matthew broke the haberdasher's window!

He was seized by a policeman, and in due time was brought before the magistrates who, in addition to fining him and compelling him to pay for the damage he had done, caused the Resident Magistrate to admonish him not merely for breaking the window and interfering with the business of a respectable merchant, but also for offering a frivolous excuse for his behaviour. Uncle Matthew had said that he broke the window as a protest against a counterjumper's traffic in a nation's grief. "I loved the Queen, sir," he said, "and I couldn't bear to see her death treated like that!" This was more than the Magistrates could endure, and the Resident Magistrate made an impatient gesture and said, "Tch, tch, tch!" with his tongue against his palate. He went on to say that Uncle Matthew's loyalty to the Throne was very touching, very touching, indeed, especially in these days when a lot of people seemed to have very little respect for the Royal Family. He thought that his brother-magistrates would agree with him. ("Hear, hear!" and "Oh, yes, yes!" and an "Ulster was always noted for its loyalty to the Queen!" from his brother-magistrates.) But all the same, there had to be moderation and

reason in everything. It would never do if people were to go about the country breaking other people's windows in the name of patriotism. It was bad enough to have a pack of Nationalists and Papists going about the country, singing disloyal songs and terrorising peaceable, lawabiding loyalists, without members of respected Protestant and Unionist families like the prisoner . . . for Uncle Matthew was in the dock of the Custody Court and had spent the night in a cell . . . imitating their behaviour in the name of loyalty. He had taken into the consideration the fact that the prisoner had acted from the best motives and not from any feeling of disaffection to the Throne, and also the fact that he belongs to a respectable family, and so he would not send him to gaol. He gave him the option of paying a fine, together with costs and the bill for repairing the window, or of going to prison for one calendar month; and he warned the public that any other person who broke a window, however loyal he might be, would be sent to gaol without the option of a fine.

Uncle Matthew had turned to where Uncle William was sitting with the family solicitor in the well of the court, and Uncle William had nodded his head comfortingly. Then the warder had opened the door in the side of the dock, and Uncle Matthew had stepped out of the place of shame into the company of the general public. The solicitor had attended to the payment of the fine and the cost of repairing the fractured glass, and then Uncle William had led Uncle Matthew away. Someone had tittered at Uncle Matthew as they passed up the steps of the court towards the door, and Uncle William, disregarding the fact that he was in a court of law, had turned on him very fiercely, and had said "Damn your sowl! . . ." but a policeman, saying "S-s-sh!", had bustled him out of the court before he could complete his threat. And an old woman, with a shawl happed about her head, had gazed after Uncle Matthew and said, "The poor creature! Sure, he's not right!"

The arrest and trial of Uncle Matthew had created a great scandal in Ballyards, and responsible people went about saying that he had always been "quare" and was getting "quarer." Willie Logan's father had even talked of the asylum. Whose windows, he demanded, were safe when a fellow like that was let loose on the town? Uncle William had gone to see Mr. Logan . . . no one knew quite what he said to that merchant . . . but it was evident ever after that he had accepted Uncle William's advice to keep a civil tongue in his head. The Reverend Mr. McCaughan, who was manager of the Ballyards National School, went specially to the house of Mr. Cairnduff, the headmaster of the school, to consult him on the subject. He said that something would have to be done about the matter. The MacDermotts, he said, were a highly-respected family . . . a MacDermott had been an elder of the church for generations past . . . and he would be very sorry, very sorry, indeed to do anything to upset them, but it was neither right nor reasonable to expect parents to rest content while their children were taught their lessons by a man who was both queer in his manner and very nearly a criminal . . . for after all, he had spent a night in a prison-cell and had stood in the dock where thieves and forgers and wife-beaters and even murderers had stood!

Mr. Cairnduff was in complete agreement with Mr. McCaughan. He, too, had the greatest respect for the MacDermotts . . . no man could help having respect for them . . . and he might add that he had the greatest possible respect for Matthew MacDermott himself . . . a well-read and a kindly man, though a wee bit, just a *wee* bit unbalanced mebbe! . . .

"Aye, but it's that wee bit that makes all the difference, Mr. Cairnduff!" said the minister, interrupting the schoolmaster.

"It is," Mr. Cairnduff agreed. "You're right there, Mr. McCaughan. You are, indeed. All the same, though, I

would not like to be a party to anything that would hurt the feelings of a MacDermott, and if it could be arranged in some way that Matthew should retire from the profession through ill-health or something, with a wee bit of a pension, mebbe, to take the bad look off the thing . . . well, I for one would not be against it!"

"You've taken the words out of my mouth," said the minister. "I had it in my mind that if something of the kind could be arranged! . . ."

"It would be the best for all concerned," said Mr. Cairnduff.

But it had not been possible to arrange something of the kind. The member for the Division was not willing to use his influence with the National Board of Education in Uncle Matthew's behalf. He remembered that Uncle Matthew, during an election, had interrupted him in a recital of his services to the Queen, by a reminder that he was only a militia man, and that rough, irreverent lads, who treated an election as an opportunity for skylarking instead of improving their minds, had followed him about his constituency, jeering at him for "a mileeshy man." Uncle Matthew, too, had publicly declared that Parnell was the greatest man that had ever lived in Ireland and was worth more than the whole of the Ulster Unionist members of parliament put together . . . which was, of course, very queer doctrine to come from a member of an Ulster Unionist and Protestant family. The member for the Division could not agree with Mr. McCaughan and Mr. Cairnduff that the MacDermotts were a bulwark of the Constitution. Matthew MacDermott's brother . . . the one who was dead . . . had been a queer sort of a fellow. Lady Castlederry had complained of him more than once! . . . No, he was sorry that, much as he should like to oblige Mr. McCaughan and Mr. Cairnduff, he could not consent to use his influence to get the Board to pension Matthew MacDermott. . . .

"That man's a blether!" said the minister, as he and the schoolmaster came away from the member's house. "He won't use his influence with the Board because he hasn't got any. We'd have done better, mebbe, to go to a Nationalist M. P. Those fellows have more power in their wee fingers than our men have in their whole bodies. I wonder, now, could we persuade Matthew to send in his resignation. I can't bear to think of the Board dismissing him!"

Uncle William solved their problem for them. "Don't bother your heads about him," he said when they informed him of their trouble. "I'll provide for him right enough. He'll send in his resignation to you the night, Mr. McCaughan. I'm sure, we're all queer and obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in the matter."

"Ah, not at all, not at all," they said together.

"And I'll not forget it to either of you, you can depend on that. I daresay Matthew'll be a help to me in the shop! . . ."

Thus it was that, unpensioned and in the shadow of disgrace, Uncle Matthew left the service of the National Board of Education.

John admitted to himself, though he would hardly have admitted it to anyone else, that his Uncle Matthew's behaviour had been very unusual. He could not, when invited to do so, imagine either Mr. McCaughan or Mr. Cairnduff breaking the windows of a haberdasher's shop because of an advertisement which showed, in the opinion of some reputable people, both feeling and enterprise. Nevertheless, he did not consider that Uncle Matthew, on that occasion, had proved himself to be lacking in mental balance. He said that it was a pity that people were not more ready than they were to break windows, and he was inclined to think that Uncle Matthew, instead of being forcibly retired from the school, ought to have been promoted to a better position.

"If you go on talking that way," his mother said to him, "people'll think you're demented mad!"

"I wouldn't change my Uncle Matthew for the whole world," John stoutly replied.

"No one's asking you to change him," Mrs. MacDermott retorted. "All we're asking you to do, is not to go about imitating him with his romantic talk!"

iv

John did not wish to imitate his Uncle Matthew . . . he did not wish to imitate anyone . . . for, although he could not discover that "quareness" in him which other people professed to discover, yet when he saw how inactive Uncle Matthew was, how dependent he was on Uncle William and, to a less extent, on Mrs. MacDermott, and how he seemed to shrink from things in life, which, when he read about them in books, enthralled him, John felt that if he were to model his behaviour on that of anyone else, it must not be on the behaviour of Uncle Matthew. Uncle William had a quick, decided manner . . . he knew exactly what he wanted and often contrived to get what he wanted. John remembered that his Uncle William had said to him once, "John, boy, if I want a thing and I can't get it, I give up wanting it!"

"But you can't help wanting things, Uncle William," John had protested.

"No, boy, you can't" Uncle William had retorted, "but the Almighty God's given you the sense to understand the difference between wanting things you can get and wanting things you can't get, and He leaves it to you to use your sense. Do you never suppose that I want something strange and wonderful to happen to me the same as your Uncle Matthew there, that sits dreaming half the day over books? What would become of you all, your ma and your Uncle Matthew and you, if I was to do the like of that? Where

would your Uncle Matthew get the money to buy books to dream over if it wasn't for me giving up my dreams? . . ."

John's heart had suddenly filled with pity for his Uncle William whom he saw as a thwarted man, an angel expelled from heaven, reduced from a proud position in a splendid society to the dull work of one who maintains others by small, but prolonged, efforts. He felt ashamed of himself and of Uncle Matthew . . . even, for a few moments, of his mother. Here was Uncle William, working from dawn until dark, denying himself this pleasure and that, refusing to go to the "shore" with them in the summer on the assertion that he was a strong man and did not need holidays . . . doing all this in order that he might maintain three people in comfort and . . . yes, idleness! Mrs. MacDermott might be excluded from the latter charge, for she attended to the house and the cooking, but how could Uncle Matthew and himself expect to escape from it? Uncle Matthew had more hope than he had, for Uncle Matthew sometimes balanced the books for Uncle William, and did odds and ends about the shop. He would write out the accounts in a very neat hand and would deliver them, too. But John made no efforts at all. He was the complete idler, living on his Uncle's bounty, and making no return for it.

He was now in his second year of monitorship at the school where his Uncle Matthew had been a teacher, and was in receipt of a few pounds per annum to indicate that he was more than a pupil; but the few pounds were insufficient to maintain him . . . he knew that . . . and even if they had been sufficient, he was well aware of the fact that his Uncle William had insisted that the whole of his salary should be placed in the Post Office Savings Bank for use when he had reached manhood. . . . He made a swift resolve, when this consciousness came upon him: he would quit the school and enter the business, so that he could be of help to his Uncle William.

"Will you let me leave the school, Uncle?" he said.

"I'm tired of the teaching, and I'd like well to go into the shop with you!"

Uncle William did not answer for a little while. He was adding up a column of figures in the day-book, and John could hear him counting quietly to himself. "And six makes fifty-four . . . six and carry four!" he said entering the figures in pencil at the foot of the column. "What's that you say, John, boy?"

"I want to leave school and come into the shop and help you," John answered.

"God love you, son, what put that notion into your head?"

"I don't want to be a burden to you, Uncle William!"

"A burden to me!" Uncle William swung round on the high office stool and regarded his nephew intently. "Man, dear, you're no burden to me! Look at the strength of me! Feel them muscles, will you?" He held out his tightened arm as he spoke. "Do you think a wee fellow like you could be a burden to a man with muscles like them, as hard as iron?"

But John was not to be put off by talk of that sort. "You know rightly what I mean," he said. "You never get no rest at all, and here's me still at the school! . . ."

"Ah, wheesht with you, boy!" Uncle William interrupted. "What sort of talk is this? You will not leave the school, young man! The learning you're getting will do you a world of benefit, even if you never go on with the teachering. You're a lucky wee lad, so you are, to be getting paid to go to school. There was no free learning when I was a child, I can tell you. Your grandda had to pay heavy for your da and your Uncle Matthew and me. Every Monday morning, we had to carry our fees to the master. Aye, and bring money for coal in the winter or else carry a few sods of turf with us if we hadn't the money for it. That was what children had to do when I was your age, John. I tell you there's a queer differs these times between

schooling from what there was when I was a scholar, and you'd be the great gumph if you didn't take advantage of your good fortune!"

"But I'd like to *help* you, Uncle William. Do you not understand me? I want to be doing something for you!" John insisted.

"I understand you well enough, son. You've been moidhering your mind about me, but sure there's no call for you to do that. No call at all! Now, not another word out of your head! I've said my say on that subject, and I'll say no more. Go on with your learning, and when you've had your fill of it, we'll see what's to be done with you. How much is twelve and nine?"

"Twenty-one, Uncle William!"

"Twenty-one!" said Uncle William, at his day-book again. "Nine and carry one! . . ."

In this way Uncle William settled John's offer to serve in the shop, and restored learning and literature to his affection and esteem. John had not given in so easily as the reader may imagine. He had insisted that his Uncle William worked much too hard, had even hinted that Uncle Matthew spent more time over books than he spent over "*the* books," the day-book and the ledger; but his Uncle William had firmly over-ruled him.

"Books are of more account to your Uncle Matthew than an oul' ledger any day," he said, "and it'll never be said that I prevented him from reading them. We all get our happiness in different ways, John, and it would be a poor thing to prevent a man from getting his happiness in his way just because it didn't happen to be your way. Books are your Uncle Matthew's heart's-idol, and I wouldn't stop him from them for the wide world!"

"But he does nothing, Uncle William," John said, intent on justice, even when it reflected on his beloved Uncle.

"I know, but sure the heart was taken out of him that time when he was arrested for breaking the man's window.

It was a terrible shock to him, that, and he never overed it. You must just let things go on as they're going. I don't believe you'll be content to be a teacher. Not for one minute do I believe that. But whatever you turn out to be, it'll be no harm to have had the extra schooling you're getting, so you'll stay on a monitor for a while longer. And now quit talking, do, or you'll have me deafened with your clatter!"

Uncle William always put down attempts to combat his will by assertions of that sort.

"Are you angry with me, Uncle William?" John anxiously asked.

"Angry with you, son?" He swung round again on the high stool. "Come here 'til I show you whether I am or not!"

And then Uncle William gathered him up in his arms and crushed the boy's face into his beard. "God love you, John," he said, "how could I be angry with you, and you your da's son!"

"I love you queer and well, Uncle," John murmured shyly.

"Do you, son? I'm glad to hear that."

"Aye. And I love my Uncle Matthew, too! . . ."

"That's right. Always love your Uncle Matthew whatever you do or whatever happens. He's a man that has more need of love nor most of us. Your da loved him well, John!"

"Did he?"

"Aye, he did, indeed!" Uncle William put his pen down on the desk, and leaning against the ledger, rested his head in the cup of his hand. "Your da was a strange man, John," he said, "a queer, strange man, with a powerful amount of knowledge in his head. That man could write Latin and Greek and French and German, and he was the first man in Ballyards to write the Irish language . . . and them was the days when people said Irish was a

Papish language, and would have nothing to do with it. Your da never paid no heed to anyone . . . he just did what he wanted to do, no matter what anyone said or who was against him. Many's the time I've heard him give the minister his answer, and the high-up people, too. When Lord Castlederry came bouncing into the town, ordering people to do this or to do that, just because the Queen's grandson was coming to the place, your da stood up fornenst him and said, as bold as brass, 'The people of this town are not Englishmen, my lord, to be ordered about like dogs! They're Ballyards men, and a Ballyards man never bent the knee to no one!' That was what your da said to him, and Lord Castlederry never forgot it and never forgave it neither, but he could do no harm to us, for the MacDermotts owned land and houses in Ballyards before ever a Castlederry put his foot in the place. He was a proud man your da, with a terrible quick temper, but as kindly-natured a man as ever drew breath. Your ma thinks long for him many's a time, though I think there were whiles he frightened her. Your Uncle Matthew and me is poor company for her after living with a man like that."

"Am I like my da, Uncle William? My ma says sometimes I am . . . when she's angry with me!"

"Sometimes you're like him and sometimes you're like her. You'll be a great fellow, John, if you turn out to be like your da. I tell you, boy, he was a man, and there's few men these times . . . only a lot of oul' Jinny-joes, stroking their beards and looking terrible wise over ha'penny bargains!"

"And then he died, Uncle William?"

"Aye, son, he died. You were just two years old when he died, a little, wee child just able to walk and talk. I mind it well. He called me into the bedroom where he was lying, and he bid the others leave me alone with him. Your ma didn't want to go, but he wouldn't let her stay, and so

she went, too. 'William,' he said, when the door was shut behind them, 'I depend on you to look after them all!' Them was his very words, John, 'I depend on you to look after them all!' I couldn't answer him, so I just nodded my head. He didn't say anything more for a wee while, but lay back in the bed and breathed hard, for he was in pain, and couldn't breathe easy. Then, after a wee while, he looked round at me, and he said, 'I'm only thirty-one, William, and I'm dying. And oul' Peter Clancy up the street, that's been away in the head since he was a child, is over sixty years of age! . . .' I thought he was going to spring out of the bed when he said that, the temper come over him so quick and sudden, but I held him down and begged him to control himself, and he quietened himself. I heard him saying, half under his breath, 'And God thinks He knows how to rule the world!' He died that night, rebellious to the end! . . . He said he depended on me to look after you all, and I've tried hard, John, as hard as I could!"

His voice quavered, and he turned away from his nephew. "Your da was my hero," he said. "I'd have shed my heart's blood for him. It was hard that him that was the best of us should be the first to go!"

John stood by his uncle's side, very moved by his distress, but not knowing what to do to comfort him.

"My da would be queer and proud of you, Uncle William," he said at last, "queer and proud if he could see you!"

But Uncle William did not answer nor did he look round.

## V

It was understood, after that conversation between John and his Uncle William, that the boy should remain at school for a year or two longer, working as a monitor, not in order that he might become a schoolmaster, but so that he might

equip his mind with knowledge. Mrs. MacDermott wished her son to become a minister. It would be the proudest day of her life, she said, if she could see John standing in a pulpit, preaching a sermon. Who knew but that he might be one day be the minister of the Ballyards First Presbyterian Church itself, the very church in which his family had worshipped their God for generations.

John, however, had no wish to be a minister.

"You have to be queer and good to be one," he said, "and I'm not as good as all that!"

"Well, mebbe, you'll get better as you get older," Mrs. MacDermott insisted.

"I might get worse," he replied. "It would be a fearful thing to be a minister, and then find out you wanted to commit a sin!"

"Ministers is like ourselves, John," Mrs. MacDermott said, "and I daresay Mr. McCaughan sometimes wants to do wicked things, for all he's such a good man, and has to pray to God many's a while for the strength to resist temptation. That doesn't prove he's not fit to be a minister. It only shows he understands our nature all the more because he has temptations himself!"

But John would not be convinced by her arguments. "I don't know, ma!" he said. "If I wanted to be wicked, I'm afraid I'd be it, so don't ask me to be a minister for I'd mebbe disgrace you with my carryings-on!"

Mrs. MacDermott had been deeply hurt by his refusal to consider the ministry.

"Anybody'd think to hear you," she said, "that you'd made up your mind to lead a sinful life. As if a MacDermott couldn't conquer his sins better nor anybody else!"

His mother, he often observed, spoke more boastfully of the MacDermotts than either his Uncle William or his Uncle Matthew.

John's final, overwhelming retort to her was this: "Would my da have liked me to be a minister?"

"I never knew what your da liked," she retorted; "I only knew what he did! . . ."

"Do you think he would have liked me to be a minister?" John persisted.

"Mebbe he wouldn't, but he's not here now! . . ."

"You wouldn't do behind his back what you'd be afraid to do fornenst his face, would you?"

"You've no right to talk to me that way. I'm your mother! . . ."

"You knew rightly he wouldn't have liked it," John continued, inexorably.

And then Mrs. MacDermott yielded.

"You're your da over again," she complained. "He always had his way in the end, whatever was against him. What *do* you want to be, then, when you grow up?"

"I don't know yet, ma. I only know the things I don't want to be, and teaching is one of them. And a minister's another! Mebbe I'll know in a wee while!"

He did not like to tell her that in his heart he wished to go in search of adventures. His Uncle Matthew's imaginings had filled his mind with romantic desires, and he longed to leave Ballyards and go somewhere . . . anywhere, so long as it was a difficult and distant place . . . where he would have to contend with dangers. There were times when he felt that he must instantly pack a bundle of clothes into a red handkerchief . . . he could buy one at Conn's, the draper's . . . and run away from home and stow himself in the hold of a big ship bound for America or Australia or some place like that . . . and was only prevented from doing so by his fear that his mother and uncles would be deeply grieved by his flight. "It would look as if they hadn't been kind to me," he said in remonstrance to himself, "and that wouldn't be fair to them!" But although he did not run away from home, he still kept the strong desire in his heart to go out into a dangerous and bewildering world and seek fortune and adventures. "I

want to fight things," he said to himself. "I want to fight things and . . . and win!"

Mixed up with his desire for adventure was a vision of a beautiful girl to whom he should offer his love and service. He could not picture her clearly to himself . . . none of the girls in Ballyards bore the slightest resemblance to her. Sometimes, indeed, he thought that this beautiful girl was like Lady Castlederry . . . only Lady Castlederry, somehow, although she was so very lovely, had a cold stupid look in her eyes, and he was very certain that this beautiful girl had bright, alert eyes.

There had been a passage of love-making between Aggie Logan and him, conducted entirely by Aggie Logan. She had taken him aside one day, in the middle of a game of "I spy," and had said to him "Will you court me, Johnnie?"

"No," he had replied.

"Do you not love me then?" she enquired.

"No," he said again.

"But I want you to court me," she persisted.

"I don't care what you want," he retorted. "I won't court you because I don't want to court you. I don't like you. You're too much of a girner for me!"

"I'm not a girner," she protested.

"You are. You start crying the minute anything happens to you or if people won't do what you want them to do. I wouldn't marry a girner for the wide world!"

"I won't girn any more if you'll court me," she promised.

"I daresay," he replied sceptically.

She considered for a moment or two. "Well, if you won't court me," she said, "I'll let Andy Cairnduff court me!"

"He can have you," said John, undismayed by the prospect of the schoolmaster's son as a rival.

She stood before him for a little while, without speaking. Then she turned and walked a little distance from him. She stopped, with her back turned towards him, and he

knew by the way her head was bent, that she was thinking out a way of retaliating on him. The end of her pinafore was in her mouth! . . . She turned to him sharply, letting the pinafore fall from her lips, and pointing at him with her finger, she began to laugh shrilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" she said. "I have you quarely gunked!"

"Gunked!" he exclaimed, unable to see how he had been hoaxed.

"Yes," she answered. "I gunked you nicely. You thought I wanted you to court me, but I was only having you on. Ha, ha, ha!"

He burst out laughing. "I that consoles you," he said; "you're welcome to it!"

Then she ran away and would not play "I spy" or "Tig" any more.

He had not told his mother of that passage of love with Aggie Logan. It did not occur to him to tell anything to his mother. His instinct, indeed, was not to tell things to her, to conceal them from her.

vi

If anyone had said to him that he did not love his mother as much as he loved his Uncle Matthew and his Uncle William, he would have been very angry. Not love his mother more than anyone else on earth! . . . Only a blow could make a proper answer to such a charge. Nevertheless his mother was associated in his mind with acts of repression, with forbidding and restraint. She seemed always to be telling him not to do things. When he wanted to go to the Lough with Willie Logan to play Robinson Crusoe and his Man Friday or to light a bonfire in Teeshie McBratney's field with shavings from Galpin's mill in the pretence that he was a Red Indian preparing for a war-dance, it was his mother who said that he was not to do it. He might fall into the water and get drowned, she said, or, he might fall

into the fire and get roasted to death. As if he were not capable of controlling a raft or a bonfire! . . .

He felt, too, that sometimes she punished him unjustly. When the Logans and he had played Buffalo Bill and the Red Indians attacking the defenceless pale-face woman, he had had a fierce argument with Willie Logan about the part of Buffalo Bill. Willie, being older, had claimed the part for himself, and, when denied the right to it, had declared that neither Aggie nor he would play in the game. Then a compromise had been arranged: Willie was allowed to play the part of Buffalo Bill and to slay the Red Indian on condition that John, before being slain, should be allowed to scalp the helpless pale-face woman. He scalped her so severely, by tugging tightly at her long hair, that she began to cry, and Willie, more conscious of the fact that he was Aggie's brother than that he was Buffalo Bill, bore down upon John and gave him his "cowardy-blow." They fought a fierce and bitter fight, and in the end, Willie went home with a bleeding nose, and John went home with a black eye.

Willie had not played the man over that affair. He went to his mother and complained of John's selfish and brutal behaviour, alleging that he had suffered terrible punishment in a chivalrous effort to protect his sister from ruffianly assault; and his mother, a thin, acidulous woman, whose voice was half snarl and half whine, carried her son's complaint to Mrs. MacDermott.

Mrs. MacDermott had not stopped to enquire into the truth of the charge against John beyond asking if it were true that he had pulled Aggie Logan's hair and fought with Willie Logan. John had replied "Yes, ma!" That was sufficient for Mrs. MacDermott, that and the testimony of John's discoloured eye, and she had beaten him with the leather tawse that was kept hanging from a nail at the side of the fireplace. "That my son should do the like of that!" she said over and over again until a cold fury of resentment

against her had formed in his heart. It was true that he had pulled Aggie's hair much harder than he ought to have done, but he had not intended to hurt her. What he had done, had been done, not out of malice, but in the excitement of the game; and it was not fair to beat him so severely for so little a thing as that. He would not cry . . . he would not give his mother the satisfaction of hearing him cry, although the lashing he was receiving was hurting his bare pelt very sorely. She could keep on saying, "That my son should do the like of that!" but he would not mind her. . . .

Then, as if she understood his thoughts and perceived that he was unmoved by her outraged feelings, she had changed her complaint against him. Glancing up at the portrait of her husband which was hanging over the fireplace, she said, "That your father's son should do the like of that!" Compunction came to him then. He, too, looked up at the portrait of his father, and suddenly he wanted to cry. The pale face, made more pale in appearance by the thick, black beard, and having the faded look which photographs of the dead seem always to have, appeared to him to be alive and full of reproach, and the big burning eyes, aflame, they looked, with the consuming thing that took his life, had anger in them, anger against him! . . .

He had not any regret for hurting Aggie Logan . . . he did not believe that he had hurt her any more severely than was necessary for the purposes of the game, and even if he had hurt her, she ought to have borne it as part of the pretence . . . he did not care whether he had hurt her or not, for she was a "cry-ba" at all times, ready to "girn" at anything . . . but he had sorrow at the thought that he had done something of which his father might have disapproved. Mrs. MacDermott, with that penetration which is part of the nature of people who are accustomed to yield to stronger personalities had discovered that she could win

John to her obedience by reminding him of his father; and she used her power without pity. "What would your father think of you, if he knew!" she would say.

She was not a hard or a cruel woman . . . she was very kind and loved her son with a long clutching love . . . but her life with her husband had contained so many disturbances of comfortable courses, thrilling enough at the time, but terrifying when viewed in retrospect, that her nature, inclined to quiet, fixed ways and to acceptance, with slight resistance, of whatever came to her, made all the efforts that were possible to it to keep her life and her son's life in peace. She hated change of any sort, whether of circumstances or of friends, and she loved old, familiar things. The tradition of the MacDermotts, their life in one place for generations and the respect with which they were greeted by their townsmen, gave immense pleasure to her, and her dearest dream was that John should continue in the place where his forefathers had lived, and that his son and his son's son should continue there, too!

And so it was that she was always telling John not to do things. She loathed Uncle Matthew's romances and his talk of adventures in foreign parts, and she insisted that he was "away in the mind" when her son spoke of him to her. She tried to make the boy walk inconspicuously, to keep, always, in the background, to do only those things that were generally approved of. His quick temper, his haste with his fists, his habit of contradicting even those who were older than he was, his unwillingness to admit that he was in the wrong . . . all these disturbed and frightened her. They would lead him into disputes and set him up in opposition to other people. His delight in the story of his father's encounter with Lord Castlederry troubled her, and she tried to convince her son that Lord Castlederry was a well-meaning man, but, as she knew, without success. She

had delighted in her husband's great courage and self-sufficiency, his sureness, his strong decision and his unconquerable pride and independence . . . but now, in contemplation, these things frightened her . . . she wondered sometimes why it was that they had not frightened her in his lifetime . . . and the thought that she might have to live again in contention and opposition roused all her strength to resist that fate. She had lived down much of the dislike that her husband had aroused. It was not necessary now to pretend that she did not see people, that she might escape from the mortification of being stared at, without a sign of recognition; and she would not lightly yield up her comfortable situation. If only she could only persuade John to become a minister! There was nothing in that to frighten her: there was everything to make her feel content and proud.

When she took John to Belfast, she made the holiday, so eagerly anticipated, a mortification to him. While they were in the train, she would tell him not to climb on to the seat of the carriage to look out of the window at the telegraph-poles flying past and the telegraph-wires rising and falling like birds . . . she would tell him not to stand at the door in case it should fly open and he should fall out and be killed . . . she would tell him, when the train reached the terminus in Belfast, to take tight hold of her hand and not to budge from her side . . . she would refuse to cross the Lagan in the steam ferry-boat and insist on going round by tram-car across the Queen's Bridge . . . she would tell him not to wander about in Forster Green's when he edged away from her to look at the coffee-mills in which the richly-smelling berries were being roasted. When she took him to Linden's to tea . . . Linden's which made cakes for the Queen and had the Royal Arms over the door of the shop! . . . she spoiled the treat for him by refusing to let him sit on one of the stools at the counter

and eat his "cookies" like a man: she made him sit by her side at a table . . . an ordinary table such as anyone could sit on anywhere . . . at home, even!

His Uncle William had taken him up to Belfast one market-day, and that Friday was made memorable to him forever because his Uncle had said to him, "Well, boy, what would you like to do?" and had consented, without demur, to cross the Lagan in the ferry-boat. Uncle William had not clutched at him all the time in fear lest he should fall into the river and be drowned, and had allowed him to stand at the end of the boat and watch the swirl of the water against the ferry-steps when they reached the Antrim side. He had said to him, too, "I've a wee bit of business to attend to, boy, that'll not interest you much. Would you like to stay here in the market for an hour by yourself while I go and do it?"

Would he like? . . .

And not one word about taking great care of himself or of not doing this or doing that . . . of keeping away from the horse-fair, and not going too near the cattle. Uncle William trusted him, took it for granted that he was capable of looking after himself. . . .

"Very well, then," Uncle William said, "I'll meet you here in an hour's time. No later, mind you, for I've a deal to do the day!"

And for a whole hour, John had wandered about the market, not holding anyone's hand and free to go wherever he liked! He had walked through the old market where the horses were bought and sold . . . had even stroked a mare's muzzle while some men bargained over it . . . and then had crossed the road to the new market where he smelt the odour of flowers and fruit and listened to the country-women chaffering over their butter and eggs. He spent a penny without direction! . . . He bought a large, rosy American apple . . . without being asked whether he

would like to have that or an orange, or being told that he could not have an orange, but must have an apple because an apple in the morning was good for him. . . .

When he told his mother that night of the splendid time he had had by himself, she said, "You might have lost yourself! . . ." That chilled him, and he did not tell her of the gallant way in which he had rubbed his hand on a horse's side. He knew very well that she would say, "It might have kicked you! . . ."

## vii

It was she who was most particular about the dyeing of his Easter eggs and the ritual of hanging up his stocking on Christmas Eve. She had wanted to go on dyeing eggs for him at Easter and hanging up his stocking on Christmas Eve, even when he was twelve years of age and could not be expected to tolerate such things any longer. He liked the Easter ceremonial better, perhaps, than that of Christmas. His mother would bid Uncle Matthew take him out of the town to the fields to gather whin-blossoms so that she could dye the eggs to a pretty brown colour. Tea-leaves could be used to dye the eggs to a deeper brown than that of the whin-blossoms, but there was not so much pleasure in taking tea-leaves from the caddy as there was in plucking whin-blossoms from the furze-bushes. The Logans bought their Easter eggs, already dyed, from old Mrs. Dobbs, the dulce-woman, but John disliked the look of her eggs, apart from the fact that his mother would not permit him to buy them. Mrs. Dobbs used some artificial dyes which stained the egg-shells a horrible purple or a less horrible red, and John had a feeling of sickness when he looked at them. Mrs. MacDermott said that if the eggs were to crack during the process of boiling, the dye would penetrate the meat and might poison anyone who ate it; and even if the shells re-

mained uncracked, the dye would soil the fingers and perhaps soil the clothes. She wondered at Mrs. Logan! . . .

And on Easter Monday, she and Uncle Matthew and Uncle William would go to Bryson's field where there was a low mound covered with short grass, and from the top of this mound, he would trundle his Easter egg down the slope to the level ground until the shell was broken. Then he would sit beside his mother and uncles, and eat the hard-boiled meat of the egg while Uncle Matthew explained to him that he was celebrating an ancient Druidical rite.

viii

But he loved his mother very dearly when she came to him at night to put him to bed and listen to his prayers. He would kneel down in front of her, in the warmth of the kitchen so that he might not catch cold in the unheated bedroom, and would shut his eyes very tightly because God did not like to see little boys peeping through their distended fingers at Him, and would say his verse:

> I lay my body down to sleep . . .
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
> And if I die before I wake,
> I pray the Lord my soul to take.

and having said that, he would add a general prayer for his family. "God bless my Mother" . . . he always said *"Mother"* in his prayers, although he said *"Ma"* in ordinary talk . . . "and my Uncle William and my Uncle Matthew and all my friends and relations, and make me a good boy for Jesus' sake, Amen. Our Father which art! . . ." Then he would scamper up the stairs to bed, and his mother would hap the clothes about him and tell him to go to sleep soon. She would bend over him and kiss him very tightly, and he would put his arms about her, too. "Son, dear!" she would say.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

### i

WHEN John MacDermott was seventeen years of age and entering into his fourth year of monitorship, his Uncle William said to him, "John, boy, you're getting on to be a man now, and it's high time you began to think of what you're going to do with yourself when you are one!"

"You're mebbe right," said John.

"The next year'll be your last one at the monitoring, won't it?" Uncle William continued.

John nodded his head.

"Well, if I were you I'd make a plan of some sort during the next year or two, for it would never do for you to come to the years of discretion, and have to take to the teachering because you couldn't think of anything else to do. I can see well your heart's not in that trade."

"It is not, indeed!" John said vigorously. "It's a terrible tiring job, teaching children, and some of them are that stupid you feel provoked enough to slap the hands off them! I'm nearly afraid of myself sometimes with the stupid ones, for fear I'd lose my temper with them and hurt them hard. Mr. Cairnduff says no one should be a teacher that has a bad temper, and dear knows, Uncle William, I've a fearful temper! He's a quare wise man, Mr. Cairnduff: he doesn't let any of his monitors use the cane, for he says it's an awful temptation to be cruel, especially if you're young and impatient the way I am!"

"Is that so now?" said Uncle William.

"Oh, it is, right enough. I know well there's times when a child's provoked me, that I want to be cruel to it . . .

and I'd hate to be cruel to any child. There's a wee girl in my class now . . . Lizzie Turley's her name! . . ."

"John Turley's child?"

"Yes. God knows she's the stupidest child in the world!"

"Her da's a match for her, then, for he's the stupidest man I've ever known. That fellow ought not to have been let have children! . . ."

"It's not her fault, I know," John continued, "but you forget that when you're provoked. I've tried hard to teach that child . . . vowed to myself I'd teach her . . . to add up, but I'm afraid she's beaten me. She can subtract well enough . . . that's the queer part about her . . . but she cannot add up. You'll mebbe not believe me, Uncle William, but that child can't put two and one together and be sure of getting the right answer. At first she couldn't add two and one together at all. She'd put down twelve for the answer as likely as not. But I worked hard with her, and I got her to add up to two and six make eight . . . and there she stuck. I couldn't get her past that: she couldn't add two and seven together and get nine for the answer. But if you asked her to subtract two from nine, she'd say "seven" all right! That's a queer thing, now! Isn't it?"

"Aye, it's queer enough!"

"There's been times when I've wanted to hit that wee girl . . . hit her with my shut fists . . . and I don't like to feel that way about a child that's not all there . . . or any child! I'm afraid I'm not fit to be a teacher, Uncle William. You have to be very good and patient . . . and it's no use pretending you haven't. Mr. Cairnduff says it's more important for a teacher to be good than it is for a minister, and he's right, too. He says a child should never be slapped by the teacher that's offended with it, but by another teacher that knows nothing about the bother. He doesn't use the cane much himself, but there's some teachers

likes using it. Miss Gebbie does . . . she carries a big bamboo about with her, and gives you a good hard welt across the hand with it, if you annoy her. I wouldn't like to be in that woman's grip, I can tell you. Some women are fearful hard, Uncle William!"

"Worse nor men, some of them," Uncle William agreed.

"Mr. Cairnduff told me one time of a teacher he knew that got to like the cane so much that he used to try and trip the children into making mistakes so's he could slap them for it. Isn't it fearful, that?"

"Terrible, John!"

"I'd be ashamed to death if I got that way. Oh, I couldn't go on with the teaching, Uncle William. I wouldn't be near fit for it."

"Well, never mind, John. There's one thing, the extra schooling you've had has done you no harm, and I daresay it's done you a lot of good. But you'll have to think of something to do! . . ."

"Yes, I will!"

"Do you never think of anything? Is there any particular thing you'd like to do?"

"There's a whole lot of things I've fancied I'd like to be, but after a wee while I always change my mind. The first time I went to Belfast, I thought it would be lovely to be a tram-driver 'til I saw a navvy tearing up the street . . . and then I thought a navvy had the best job in the world. You know, Uncle William, it takes me a long while to find out what it is I want, but when I do find it out, I take to it queer and quick. I'll mebbe go footering about the world like a lost thing, and then all of a sudden I'll know what I want to do . . . and I'll just do it!"

"Hmmm!" said Uncle William.

"It sounds queer and foolish, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know, John. Many's a thing sounds silly, but isn't."

"It's true, anyway. I've noticed things like that about

myself. It's . . . it's like a man getting converted. One minute he's a guilty, hell-deserving sinner, the way John Hutton says he was, footering about the world, drinking and guzzling and leading a rotten life . . . and then all of a sudden, he's hauled up and made to give his testimony and do God's will for the rest of his life! I daresay I'll drift from one thing to another . . . and then I'll know, just like a flash of lightning . . . and I'll go and do it!"

"That's a dangerous kind of a doctrine," said Uncle William. "It's easier to get into the way of drifting nor it is to get out of it again. And you're a young lad to be thinking strange thoughts like that!"

"I'm seventeen," John replied. "That's not young!"

"It's not oul' anyway. Anybody'd think to hear you, you had the years of Methuselah. I suppose, now, you never thought of coming into the shop?"

"I did think of it one time, but you wouldn't let me! . . ."

"That was when you wanted to help me. But did you never think of it for your own sake? You see, John, you're the last of us, and this shop has been in our family for a long while . . . it's a good trade, too, and you'll have no fear of hardship as long as you look after it, although the big firms in Belfast are opening branches here. The MacDermotts can hold their heads up against any big firm in the world, I'm thinking . . . in this place, anyway. Did you never feel you'd like to come into the shop?"

John glanced about the shop, at the assistants who were serving customers with tea and groceries. . . .

"No," he said, shaking his head, "I don't think I'd like it!"

Uncle William considered for a few moments. Then he said, "No, I thought you wouldn't care for it. Your da felt that way too. The shop wasn't big enough for him. All the same, there has to be shops, and there has to be people to look after that!"

"Oh, I know that right enough, Uncle William. I'm not saying anything against them. They're all right for them that likes them! . . ."

He paused for a while, and his Uncle waited for him to proceed. "Sometimes," he said at last, "I'm near in the mind to go and be a soldier! . . ."

"For dear sake!" said Uncle William impatiently.

"Or a sailor. I went down to the Post Office once and got a bill about the Navy! . . ."

"Well, I would think you were demented mad to go and do the like of that," said Uncle William. "You might as well be a peeler!"

ii

His mind turned now very frequently to the consideration of work other than that of teaching. He made a mental catalogue of the things that were immediately possible to him: teaching, the ministry of the Presbyterian Church, the shop . . . and ruled them all out of his list. The thought of soldiering or of going to sea lingered in his mind for a long time . . . because he associated soldiering and sailoring with travel in strange places . . . but he abandoned that thought when he balanced the tradition of his class against the Army and Navy. All the men of his acquaintance who had joined the Army or the Navy had done so, either because they were in disgrace or because they were unhappy at home. It was generally considered that in joining either of the Services, they had brought shame upon their families, less, perhaps in the case of the Navy than in the case of the Army. In any event, his Uncle William's statement that a MacDermott could not endure to be ordered about by any one settled his mind for him on that subject. He would have to get his adventures in other ways. He might emigrate to America. He had a cousin in New York and one in Chicago. He might go to Canada or Australia or South Africa . . . digging for gold or

diamonds! There was nothing in Ireland that attracted him . . . all the desirable things were in distant places. Farming in Canada or Australia had a romantic attraction that was not to be found in farming in Ireland. He had *seen* farmers in Ireland . . . and he did not wish to be like them!

But, no matter how much he considered the question, he came no nearer to a solution of it.

He would go out to the fields that lay on the shores of the Lough, going one day to this side, and another day to that, and lie down in the sunshine and dream of a brilliant career. He might go into parliament and become a great statesman, like that man, Lord Salisbury, who had come to Belfast once during the Home Rule agitation. Or he might turn Nationalist and divert himself by roaring in the House of Commons against the English! He wished that he could write poetry . . . if he could write poetry, he might become famous. There was an old exercise book at home, full of poems that he had made up when he was much younger, about Ireland and the Pope and Love and Ballyards . . . but they were poor things, he knew, although Mr. Cairnduff, to whom he had shown them, had said that, considering the age John was when he wrote them, they might have been a great deal worse. Mr. Cairnduff had given generous praise to a long poem on the election of a Nationalist for the city of Derry, beginning with this wail:

*Oh, Derry, Derry, what have you done?*
*Sold your freedom to Home Rule's son!*

but neither Uncle William nor Uncle Matthew had had much to say for it. Uncle William said that his father would not have liked to think of his son writing a poem full of sentiments of that sort, and Uncle Matthew went upstairs to the attic and brought down a copy of *Romeo and Juliet* and presented it to him. But Mrs. MacDermott was pleased in a queer way. She hoped he was not going

to take up politics, but she was glad that he was not a Home Ruler!

Sometimes, when he had been much younger than he now was . . . John always thought of himself as a man of great age . . . he had resolved that he would become a writer; but although he began many stories and solemn books . . . there was one called, *The Errors of Rome* in which the Papists were to be finally and conclusively exposed . . . none of them were ever finished. Then had come a phase of preaching. His mother read the *Christian Herald* every week, and John would get a table cloth, and wrap it round himself to represent a surplice . . . for the Church of Ireland was more decorative than the Presbyterian Church . . . and deliver the sermons of Dr. Talmage and Mr. Spurgeon in a loud sing-song voice that greatly delighted Mrs. MacDermott. That, too, had passed, very swiftly indeed, because of the alarming discovery that he was an atheist! He would never forget the sensation he had created in school when he had suddenly turned to Willie Logan and said, "Willie, I don't believe there's a God at all. It's all a catch! . . ."

Willie, partly out of fright, but chiefly because of his incorrigible tendency to "clash," immediately reported him to Miss Gebbie, who had been a teacher even then . . . it seemed to him sometimes that Miss Gebbie had always been a teacher and would never cease to be one . . . and she had converted him to a belief in God's existence at the point of her bamboo. . . .

Then came a time of mere dreaming of a future in which some beautiful girl would capture all his mind and heart and service. He would rescue her from a dire situation . . . he would invent some wonderful thing that would bring fame and fortune to him . . . and he would offer all his fame and fortune to her. His visions of this girl, constantly recurring, prevented him from falling in love with any girl in Ballyards. When he contrasted the girl of his

dream with the girls he saw about him, he could not understand how anyone could possibly love a Ballyards girl. Aggie Logan! . . .

He would come away from the fields, pleased with his dreams, but still as far from a solution of his problem as ever.

iii

One evening, his Uncle William came into the kitchen where John was reading *John Halifax, Gentleman* to his mother.

"I ought to go to Belfast the morrow," he said, "but Saturday's an awkward day for me. I was wondering whether to send John instead. He's nothing to do on Saturdays, and it would be a great help to me!"

John closed the book. "Of course, I'll go, Uncle William!" he said.

Mrs. MacDermott coldly regarded them both. "You know rightly," she said, "that I'm as busy on Saturday as you are, William. How can he go up to Belfast when I can't go with him?"

"I never said nothing about you going with him," Uncle William retorted. "He's well able to go by himself!"

*"Go by himself!"* Mrs. MacDermott almost shouted the words at her brother-in-law. "A lad that never was out of the town by his lone in his life before!"

"He'll have to go by his lone some day, won't he? And he's a big lump of a lad now, and well able to look after himself!"

"He'll not stir an inch from the door without me," Mrs. MacDermott declared in a determined voice. "Think shame to yourself, William, to be putting such thoughts into a lad's head . . . suggesting that he should be sent out in the world by himself at his age! . . ."

Uncle William shifted uneasily in his seat. "I'm not suggesting that he should be sent out into the world," he

said. "I'm only suggesting that he should be sent to Belfast for the day! . . ."

"And what sort of a place is Belfast on a Saturday afternoon with a lot of drunk footballers flying about? He will not go, William. You can send Matthew! . . ."

Uncle William made a gesture of impatience. "You know rightly, Matthew's no good for a job of this sort!"

"Well, then, you'll have to go yourself. I'll keep an eye to the shop, forby my own work! . . ."

John got up and put *John Halifax, Gentleman* on the window-ledge.

"You needn't bother yourself, ma," he said. "I'm going to Belfast the morrow. What is it you want me to do, Uncle William?"

Mrs. MacDermott stared at him for a moment, then she got up and hurried out of the kitchen. They could hear her mounting the stairs, and then they heard the sound of her bedroom door being violently slammed.

"Women are queer, John," said Uncle William, "but the queerest women of all are the women that are mothers. Anybody'd think I was proposing to send you to the bad place, and dear knows, Belfast's not that!"

"What's the job you want me to do?"

"Come into the shop and I'll tell you!"

John followed his Uncle into the shop and they sat down together in the little Counting House.

"There's really nothing that a postcard couldn't do," Uncle William said. "That was the excuse. I've been thinking about you, John, and I thought it was a terrible pity you should never get out and about by yourself a bit . . . out of Ballyards, I mean . . . to look round you. It's no good to a lad to be always running about with his ma!"

"You're a terrible schemer, Uncle William," said John.

"Ah, g' long with you," his Uncle answered. "Here, pay heed to me now, while I tell you. This is what I want you to do! . . ."

He showed a business letter to John and invited him to read it. Then he explained the nature of the small commission he wished him to execute.

"It'll not take you long," he said, "and then you can look about yourself in Belfast. You'll want a few coppers in your pocket!" He put a coin into John's hand and then closed the lad's fingers over it. "It's great value to go down the quays and have a look at the ships," he went on, "and mebbe you could get a look over the shipyard! . . . And perhaps when you're knocking about Belfast, you'll see something you'd like to do!"

iv

In this way, his Saturday trips to Belfast began. He found them much less exhilarating then he had imagined they would be. He inspected the City Hall in the company of a beadle and was informed, with great preciseness, of the cost of the building and of the price paid to each artist for the portraits of the Lord Mayors which were suspended from the walls of the Council Chamber. The beadle seemed to think that the portraits represented a waste of ratepayers' money, and he considered that if the Corporation had given a contract to one artist for all the pictures, a great reduction in price could have been obtained. . . . The Museum and the Free Library depressed him, precisely in the way in which Museums and Free Libraries always depress people; but he found pleasure in the Botanic Gardens and the Ormeau Park. He devised an excellent scheme of walking, which enabled him to go through the Botanic Gardens, then, by side streets, to the Lagan, where a ferryman rowed him across to the opposite bank and landed him in the Ormeau Park. He would walk briskly through the Park, and then, when he had emerged from it, would cross the Albert Bridge, hurry along the Sand Quay, and stand at the Queen's Bridge to watch the crowds of

workmen hurrying home from the shipyards. He never tired of watching the "Islandmen," grimy from their labour, as they passed over the bridge in a thick, dusky stream to their homes. Thousands and thousands of men and boys seemed to make an endless procession of ship-builders, designers and rivetters and heater-boys. But it never occurred to him that there was something romantic in the enterprise and labours of these men, that out of their energies, great ships grew and far lands were brought near to each other. He liked to witness the dispersal of the shipyard's energies, but he did not think of the miracle which their assembled energies performed every day. By this narrow, shallow river Lagan, a great company of men and boys and women met daily to make the means whereby races reached out to each other; and their ships sailed the seas of the world, carrying merchandise from one land to another, binding the East to the West and the South to the North, and making chains of friendship and kindliness between diverse peoples. It was an adventure to sail in a ship, in John's mind, but he did not know, had never thought or been told, that it is also an adventure to build a ship. The pleasure which he found in watching the "Islandmen" crossing the Queen's Bridge was not related to their work: it was found in the spectacle of a great crowd. Any crowd passing over the Bridge would have pleased John equally well. . . .

But the crowd of "Islandmen" was soon dispersed; and John found that there was very little to do in Belfast. He did not care for football matches, he had no wish to enter the City Hall again, he could not walk through the Botanic Gardens and the Ormeau Park all day long, and he certainly did not wish to visit the Museum or the Free Library again. He became tired of walking aimlessly about the streets. There was a wet Saturday when, as he stood under the shelter of an awning in Royal Avenue, he resolved that he would return to Ballyards by an early train. "It's an

awful town, this, on a wet day!" he said to himself, unaware that any town in which a man is a stranger is unpleasant on a wet day . . . and sometimes on a fine day. "Somehow," he went on, "there seems to be more to do in Ballyards on a wet day than there is in Belfast on a wet day!" A sense of loneliness descended upon him as he gazed at the grey, dribbling skies and the damp pavements. The trams were full of moist, huddled men and women; the foot-passengers hurried homewards, their heads bent against the wind and rain; the bleak-looking newspaper boys, barefooted, pinched, hungry and cold, stood shivering in doorways, with wet, sticky papers under their arms; and wherever he looked, John saw only unfriendliness, haste and discomfort. There would not be a train to Ballyards until late in the afternoon, and as he stood there, growing less cheerful each moment, he wondered how he could occupy the time of waiting. The wind blew down the street, sending the rain scudding in front of it, and chilling him, and, half unconsciously, he hurried across the road to take shelter in a side street where, it seemed to him, he would be less exposed. He walked along the street, keeping in the shadow of the houses, and presently he found himself before the old market of Smithfield.

"Amn't I the fool," he said to himself, "not to have come here before?"

For here, indeed, was entertainment for any man or woman or child. In this ancient market for the sale of discarded things, a lonely person could pass away the dull hours very agreeably. The auctioneers, wheedling and joking and bullying, could be trusted to amuse any reasonable man for a while, and when their entertainment was exhausted there were the stalls to visit and explore. He stood to listen to a loud-voiced man who was selling second-hand clothes, and then, turning away, found himself standing before a bookstall. Piles of books, of all sizes and shapes and colours, lay on a long shutter that rested on

trestles; and in the shop, behind the trestles, were great stacks of books reaching to the ceiling. He fingered the books with the affection with which he had seen his Uncle Matthew finger those in the attic at home. Some of them had the dreary, dull look observable in books that have long passed out of favour and have lain disregarded in some dark and dusty corner; and some, though they were old, looked bright and pleasant as if they were confident that the affection which had been theirs for years would be continued to them by new owners. He picked up old volumes and spent much time in contemplating the inscriptions inside them . . . fading inscriptions in a thin, genteel handwriting that had the careful look of writing done by people who were anxious that the record should not offend a schoolmaster's eye . . . and as he read these inscriptions, a queer dejection settled on him. These books, dusty and disregarded, he told himself, represented love and thought that had perished. Doubt and damp pessimism clutched hold of him. At the end of every brave adventure was Smithfield Market. He put down a book which contained an inscription to "Charles Dunwoody from his affectionate Mother," and looked about him. Everywhere, secondhand, rejected things were for sale: clothes, furniture, books, pictures. . . . The market was a mortuary of ambition and hope, the burial ground of little enterprises, confidently begun and miserably ended. Here were the signs of disruption and dispersal, of things attempted but not achieved, of misfortune and failure, of things used and abandoned for more coveted things. John had imagined himself performing great feats to win the love and favour of some beautiful woman . . . but now he saw his adventure in love ending in a loud-voiced auctioneer mouthing jokes over a ruined home. Behind these piles of books and pictures and clothes and furniture, one might see young couples bravely setting out on their little ships of love to seek their fortunes, light-heartedly facing perils and dangers because of the

high hope in their hearts . . . and coming to wreck on a rough coast where their small cargoes were seized by creditors and brought to this place for sale, and they were left bare and hurt and discouraged. . . .

"Oh, well!" said John, shrugging his shoulders and picking up a newer book.

That would not happen to him. If he failed in one enterprise he would start off on another. If he made a fortune and lost it, he would make another one. If the things he built were to be destroyed . . . well, he would start building again. . . .

But the mood of pessimism still held him and he could not bear to look at the books any longer. An unhappy ghost hid behind the covers of each one of them. He hurried out of the market into the street. The rain had ceased to fall, but the streets were wet and dirty, and the air struck at him coldly. He glanced at his watch, and saw that he could not now catch the train by which he had intended to return to Ballyards.

"I'll go and get my tea somewhere," he said, and then, "I don't think I'll come to Belfast again. I'm tired of the town!"

He turned into Royal Avenue and passed across Castle Junction into Donegall Place where there was a shop in which new books were sold. The shop was closed now, but he was able to see books with handsome covers, in the window and he stayed for a time reading the titles of them. There was a bustle of people about him, of newspaper boys and flower girls, bedraggled and cheerless-looking, and of young men and women tempted to the Saturday evening parade in the chief street of the city in spite of the rain. The sound of voices in argument and barter and bright talk mingled with laughter and the noise of the tramcars and carts clattering over the stony street. John liked the sound of Belfast on a Saturday night, the pleased sound of released people intent on enjoyment and with the knowl-

edge that on the morrow there would still be freedom from labour, and as he stood in front of the bookshop, half intent on the books in the window and half intent on the crowd that moved about him, the gloom which had seized hold of him in Smithfield began to relax its grip: and when two girls, jostled against him by the disordered movement of the crowd on the pavement, smiled at him in apology, he smiled back at them.

He thrust himself through the crowd, breaking into a group of excited newspaper boys who were thrusting copies of the *Evening Telegraph* and *Ireland's Saturday Night* at possible purchasers, and walked towards the City Hall, but, changing his mind unaccountably, he turned down Castle Lane and presently found himself by the Theatre Royal. He had never been to a theatre in his life, but Uncle Matthew and Uncle William, when they were young men, used frequently to come to Belfast from Ballyards to see a play, and they had told him of the great pleasure they had had at the "old Royal."

"I've a good mind to go there to-night," he said to himself, as he crossed the street to examine the playbills which were posted on the walls of the theatre.

Mr. F. R. Benson's Shakespearean Company, he read on the bill by the stage-door, would perform *The Merchant of Venice* that evening. The Company would remain in Belfast during the following week and would produce other plays by Shakespeare.

"I *will* go," he said to himself. "I'll go somewhere now and have my tea, and then I'll hurry back!"

He remembered that he had seen a volume of Shakespeare's plays in the bookshop in Donegall Place and that Uncle Matthew had each of the plays in a separate volume in the attic at home. He had read *The Merchant of Venice* a long time ago, but had only a vague recollection of it. In one of the school-books, Portia's speech on mercy was printed, and he could say that piece off by heart. The

Jew had snarled at Portia when she had said "Then must the Jew be merciful!" "On what compulsion must I?" he had demanded, and she had replied, "The quality of mercy is not strained. . . ." The school-book did not print Portia's statement that the Jew must be merciful or the Jew's snarling demand, "On what compulsion must I?"; but Mr. Cairnduff had explained the story of the play to the class and had told them of these two speeches, and John, interested by the story, had gone home and searched through the attic for the play, and there had read it through.

His mind went back to the bookshop. "It must be fine to work in a place like that, with all the books you can want to read all round you," he said to himself while he hurried through Corn Market on his way to a restaurant. He stopped for a moment or two, as an idea suddenly presented itself to him. "I know what I'll do," he said aloud. "I'll start a bookshop myself. *New* books . . . not old ones. That sort of life would suit me fine!"

V

He ate his meal in great haste, and then hurried back to the theatre where a queue of people had already formed outside the entrance to the pit. Soon after he joined the queue, the doors were opened, and in a little while he found himself sitting at the end of the second row. He had chosen this seat so that he might be able to hurry out of the theatre quickly, without disturbing anyone, if he should have to leave before the play was ended to catch the last train to Ballyards.

A boy about his own age was sitting next to him, and this boy asked John to let him have a look at his programme.

"Did you ever see this piece before?" John said to him, as he passed the programme to him.

"I did not," he replied. "I'm not much of a one for

plays. I generally go to the 'Lhambra on a Saturday, but somehow I didn't go there the night!"

"That's a terrible place, that 'Lhambra," said John.

"What's terrible about it?" his neighbour replied.

"I don't know. I was never there. This is the first time I've ever been in a theatre. But I've heard fearful things about that place, about women coming out and dancing with hardly any clothes on, and then kicking up their legs and all. I have an uncle went there once, and when the woman began kicking up her legs and showing off her clothes, he got up and stood with his back to the stage 'til she was done, he was that disgusted."

John remembered how shocked Uncle William had been when he told that story of himself.

"Your uncle must be very easy shocked," said the boy. "I can look at women kicking up their legs, and I don't think nothing of it at all. I like a good song and dance myself. I don't like plays much. Gimme a woman that's nice-looking and can sing and dance a bit, and I wouldn't ask you for nothing nicer. Is there any dancin' in this bit, do you know?"

"I don't think so," said John. "I've never seen the piece before, but I've read it. I don't think there's any dancing in it!"

"And no comic songs? . . ."

"Sure, you'll see for yourself in a wee minute!"

John's neighbour considered. "I wonder would they give me my money back if I was to go to the pay-box and let on I was sick!"

"They'd never do that," said John. "They'd know rightly you weren't sick by the look of you!"

The boy returned the programme to John. "Well, I wish they'd hurry up and begin," he murmured.

The members of the orchestra came through a door beneath the stage and took their places, and the sound of fiddles being tuned was heard for a while. Then the leader

of the orchestra came to his place, and after a pause, the music began.

"A fiddle's great value," John's neighbour whispered to him. "I'm a great hand at the Jew's harp myself! . . ."

The music ceased, the lights were lowered in the theatre and the footlights were raised, throwing a great soft yellow glow on the picture of the Lakes of Killarney which decorated the drop-curtain. Then the curtain was rolled up, and the performance began.

He had been interested by the play when he read it, but now he was enthralled by it. He wished that the boy sitting next to him would not keep on asking for the programme every time a fresh character appeared on the stage and would refrain from making comments on the play while it was being performed. "Them people wore quare clothes in them days!" he had whispered to John soon after the play began, and when Shylock made his first entrance, he said, "Ah, for Jase' sake, look at the oul' Sheeny!"

"Ssh!" said John. "Don't talk! . . ."

"Sure, why? . . ."

"Ah, shut up," said John.

He did not wish to talk during the intervals between the acts. He wished to sit still in his seat and perform the play over again in his mind. He tried to remember Bassanio's description of Portia:

*In Belmont is a lady richly left,*
*And she is fair, and fairer than that word,*
*Of wondrous virtues. . . .*

He could not think of the words that came after that . . . except one sentence:

*. . . And her sunny locks*
*Hang on her temples like a golden fleece.*

He repeated this sentence to himself many times, as if he were tasting each word with his tongue and with his mind, and once he said it aloud in a low voice.

"Eh?" said his neighbour.

"I was just reciting a piece from the play," he explained.

"What were you reciting?"

"Do you remember that piece: *and her sunny locks Hang on her temples like a golden fleece?*"

"No!"

"In the first act? When the young fellow, Bassanio. was telling Antonio about his girl in Belmont?"

His neighbour turned to him eagerly. "I wonder did they just put that bit in about Belmont," he said. "There's a place near Belfast called Belmont . . . just beyond the Hollywood Arches there! Do you know it?" John shook his head. "I wouldn't be surprised but they just put that bit in to make it look more like the thing. What was the piece you were reciting?" John repeated it to him again. "What's the sense of that?" the boy exclaimed.

"Oh, don't you see? It's . . . it's. . . ." He did not know how to explain the speech. "It's poetry," he said lamely.

"Oh" said the boy. "Portry. I see now. Ah, well, I suppose they have to fill up the piece some way! Do you think that woman, what's her name again? . . ."

"Portia?"

"Aye. D'you think she did live at Belmont? Some of them stories is true, you know, and there was quare things happened in the oul' ancient days in this neighbourhood, I can tell you. I wouldn't be surprised now! . . ."

But before he could say any more, the lights were lowered again, and there was a hushing sound, and then the play proceeded.

"Oh, isn't it grand?" John said to his neighbour when the trial scene was over.

But his neighbour remained unmoved. "D'you mean to tell me," he said, "that man didn't know his wife when he saw her in the Coort?"

"What man?"

"That fellow what-you-may-call-him? The man that was married on the girl with the red dress on her! . . ."

"Bassanio?"

"Aye. D'you mean to tell me that fellow didn't know her again, and him only just after leaving her! . . ."

John tried to explain. "It's a play," he said. "He's not supposed to recognize her! . . ."

"Och, what's the good of supposing a thing that couldn't be?" said John's neighbour. "Any man with half an eye in his head could have seen who she was. I wish I'd gone to the 'Lhambra. This is a damn silly play, this!"

John was horrified. "Silly," he said. "It's by Shakespeare!"

"I don't care who it's by," was the reply. "It's damn silly to let on a man doesn't know his own wife when he sees her. I suppose that's portry!" he sneered.

John did not answer, and his neighbour went on. "Well, if it is portry . . . God help it, that's all!"

But John did not care whether Bassanio had recognized Portia in the court scene or not. He left the theatre in an exalted mood in which he had little thought for the realities. Next week he told himself, he would visit the Royal again. He would see two plays on the following Saturday, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. The bills for the following week's programme were already pasted on the walls of the theatre when he came out, and he risked the loss of his train by stopping to read one of them. *Romeo and Juliet* was to be performed in the afternoon, and *Julius Cæsar* in the evening.

He hurried down Ann Street and across the Queen's Bridge, and reached the railway station just in time to catch his train; and all the way across the bridge and all the way home in the train, one sentence passed continually through his mind:

*And her sunny locks*
*Hang on her temples like a golden fleece.*

VI

While he ate his supper, he spoke to his mother and his uncles of his intention to open a bookshop.

"I'm going to start a bookshop," he said. "I made up my mind in Belfast to-day!"

"A what?" Mrs. MacDermott demanded.

"A bookshop, ma. I'll have every book you can think of in it! . . ."

"In the name of God," his mother exclaimed, "who do you think buys books in this place?"

"Plenty of people, ma. Mr. McCaughan! . . ."

"Mr. McCaughan never buys a book from one year's end to another," she interrupted. "And if he did, you can't support a shop on one man's custom. The people of this town doesn't waste their time on reading: they do their work!"

John turned angrily on her. "It's not a waste of time to read books, ma. Is it, Uncle Matthew?"

"You may well ask him," she said before Uncle Matthew could answer.

"What do you think, Uncle William?" John went on.

Uncle William thought for a few moments. "I don't know what to think," he said. "It's not a trade I know much about, John, but I doubt whether there's a living in it in Ballyards."

"There's no living in it," Mrs. MacDermott exclaimed passionately, "and if there was, you shouldn't earn your living by it!"

John gazed at her in astonishment. Her eyes were shining, not with tears, though tears were not far from them, but with resentment and anger.

"Why, ma?" he said.

"Because books are the ruin of people's minds," she replied. "Your da was always reading books, wild books that disturbed him. He was never done reading *The Rights of Man*. And look at your Uncle Matthew! . . ."

She stopped suddenly as if she realised that she had said too much. Uncle Matthew did not speak. He looked at her mournfully, and then he turned away.

"I don't want to say one word to hurt anyone's feelings," she continued in a lower tone, "but my life's been made miserable by books, and I don't want to see my son made miserable, too. And you know well, Matthew," she added, turning to her brother-in-law, "that all your reading has done you no good, but a great deal of harm. And what's the use of books, anyway? Will they help a man to make a better life for himself?"

Uncle Matthew turned to her quickly. "They will, they will," he said, and his voice trembled with emotion. "People can take your work from you and make little of you in the street because you did what your heart told you to do, but you'll get your comfort in a book, so you will. I know what you're hinting at, Hannah, but I'm not ashamed of what I did for the oul' Queen, and I'd do it again, gaol or no gaol, if I was to be hanged for it the day after!"

He turned to John.

"I don't know what sort of a living you'll make out of selling books," he said, "and I don't care either, but if you do start a shop to sell them, let me tell you this, you'll never prosper in it if it doesn't hurt you sore to part with a book, for books is like nothing else on God's earth. You *have* to love them . . . you *have* to love them! . . ."

"You're daft," said Mrs. MacDermott.

"Mebbe I am," Uncle Matthew replied wearily. "But that's the way I feel, and no man can help the way he feels!"

He sat down at the table, resting his head in his hands, and gazed hungrily at his nephew.

"You can help putting notions into a person's head," said Mrs. MacDermott. "John might as well try to *write* books as try to sell them in this town!"

"*Write* books!" John exclaimed.

"Aye, write them! . . ."

But Uncle Matthew would not let her finish her sentence. "And why shouldn't he write books if he has a mind to it?" he demanded. "Wasn't he always the wee lad for scribbling bits of stories in penny exercise books? . . ."

"He was . . . 'til I beat him for it," she replied. "Why can't you settle down here in the shop with your Uncle William?" she said to her son. "It's a comfortable, quiet sort of a life, and it's sure and steady, and when we're all gone, it'll be yours for yourself. Won't it, William?"

"Oh, aye!" said Uncle William. "Everything we have'll be John's right enough, but I doubt he's not fond of the shop! . . ."

"What's wrong with the shop? It's as good as any in the town!" She coaxed John with her voice. "You can marry some nice, respectable girl and bring her here," she said, "and I'll gladly give place to her when she comes!" She rocked herself gently to and fro in the rocking-chair. "I'd like well to have the nursing of your children in the house that you yourself were born in! . . ."

"Och, ma, I'm not in the way of marrying! . . ."

"You'll marry some time, won't you? And there's plenty would be glad to have you. Aggie Logan, though I can't bear the sight of her, would give the two eyes out of her head for you. Of course you'll marry, and I'd be thankful glad to think of your son being born in this house. You were born in it, and your da, too, and his da, and his da's da. Four generations of you in one house to be pleased and proud of, and I pray to God he'll let me live to see the fifth generation of the MacDermotts born here, too. I'm a great woman for clinging to my home, and I love to think of the generations coming one after the other in the same house

that the family's always lived in. How many people in this town can say they've always lived in the one house like the MacDermotts?"

"Not very many," Uncle William proudly replied.

"No, indeed there's not. I tell you, John, son, the MacDermotts are someone in this town, as grand in their way and as proud as Lord Castlederry himself. That's something to live up to, isn't it? The good name of your family! But if you go tramping the world for adventures and romances, the way your Uncle Matthew would have you do, you'll lose it all, and there'll be strangers in the house that your family's lived in all these generations. And mebbe you'll come here, when you're an oul' man and we're all dead and buried, and no one in the place'll have any mind of you at all, and you'll be lonelier here nor anywhere else. Oh, it would be terrible to be treated like a stranger in your own town! And if you did start a bookshop and it failed on you, and you lost all your money, wouldn't it be worse disgrace than any not to be able to pay your debts in a place where everyone knows you . . . to be made a bankrupt mebbe?"

"Ah, but, ma, the world would never move at all if everybody stopped in the one place!" John said.

"The world'll move well enough," she answered. "God moves it, not you."

John got up from the table and went and sat on a low stool by the fire. "I don't know so much," he said. "I read in a book one time! . . ."

"In a book!" Mrs. MacDermott sneered.

"Aye, ma, in a book!" John stoutly answered. "After all, you know the Bible's a book!" Mrs. MacDermott had not got a retort to that statement, and John, aware that he had scored a point, hurriedly proceeded, "I was reading one time that all the work in the world was started by men that wrote books. There never was any change or progress 'til someone started to think and write! . . ."

Mrs. MacDermott recovered her wits. "Were they happy and contented men?" she demanded.

"I don't know, ma," John replied. "The book didn't say that. I suppose not, or they wouldn't have wanted to make any alterations!"

"Let them that wants to make changes, make them," said Mrs. MacDermott. "There's no need for you to go about altering the world when you can stay at home here happy and content!"

Uncle Matthew rose from the table and came towards Mrs. MacDermott. "What does it matter whether you're happy and contented or not, so long as things are happening to you?" he exclaimed.

Mrs. MacDermott burst into bitter laughter. "You have little wit," she said, "to be talking that daft way. Eh, William?" she added, turning to her other brother-in-law. "What do you think about it?"

Uncle William had lit his pipe, and was sitting in a listening attitude, slowly puffing smoke. "I'm wondering," he said, "whether it's more fun to be writing about things nor it is to be doing things!"

John turned to him and tapped him on the knee. "I've thought of that, Uncle William," he said, "and I tell you what! I'll go and do something, and then I'll write a book about it!"

"What'll you do?" Mrs. MacDermott asked.

"Something," said John. "I can easily do *some*thing!"

"And what about the bookshop?" said Uncle Matthew.

"Och, that was only a notion that came into my head," John answered. "I won't bother myself selling books: I'll write them instead!" He glanced about the kitchen. "I've a good mind to start writing something now!" he said.

His mother sprang to her feet. "You'll do no such thing at this hour," she said. "It's nearly Sunday morning. Would you begin your career by desecrating God's Day!"

"If you start doing things," said Uncle William reverting to John's declaration of work, "you'll mebbe have no time to write about them!"

"Oh, I'll have the time right enough. I'll make the time," John said.

Uncle William got up and walked towards the staircase.

"Where are you going, William?" Mrs. MacDermott asked.

"To my bed," said Uncle William.

vii

Suddenly the itch to write came to John, and he began to rummage among the papers and books on the shelves for writing-paper.

"What are you looking for?" his mother enquired.

"Paper to write on," he said.

"You'll not write one word the night! . . ."

"Ah, quit, ma!" he said. "I must put down an idea that's come in my head. I'd mebbe forget it in the morning!"

"The greatest writers in the world have sat up all night, writing out their thoughts," Uncle Matthew murmured.

John did not pay any heed to his mother's scowls and remonstrances. He found sheets of writing-paper and placed them neatly on the table, together with a pen and ink. He looked at the materials critically. There was paper, there was ink and there was a pen with a new nib in it, and blotting paper! . . .

He drew a chair up to the table and sat down in front of the writing paper. He contemplated it for a long time while Mrs. MacDermott put away the remnants of his supper, and his Uncle Matthew sat by the fire watching him.

"What are you waiting for, John?" his Uncle Matthew asked.

"Inspiration," John replied.

He sat still, scarcely moving even for ease in his chair, staring at the white paper until it began to dance in front of his eyes, but he did not begin to write on it.

"Are you still waiting for inspiration, John?" his Uncle asked.

"Aye," he answered.

"You don't seem to be getting any," Mrs. MacDermott said.

He got up and put the writing materials away. "I'll wait 'til the morning," he replied.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER

### i

John wrote his first story during the following week, and when he had completed it, he made a copy of it on large sheets of foolscap in a shapely hand, and sewed the pages together with green thread. Uncle Matthew had purchased brass fasteners to bind the pages together, but Uncle William said that a man might easily tear his fingers with "them things" and contract blood-poisoning.

"And that would give him a scunner against your story, mebbe!" he added.

John accepted Uncle William's advice, not so much in the interests of humanity, as because he liked the look of the green thread. He had read the story to his Uncles, after the shop was closed. They had drawn their chairs up to the fire, in which sods of turf and coal were burning, and the agreeable odour of the turf soothed their senses while they listened to John's sharp voice. Mrs. MacDermott would not join the circle before the fire. She declared that she had too much work to do to waste her time on trash, and she wondered that her brothers-in-law could find nothing better to do than to encourage a headstrong lad in a foolish business. She went about her work with much bustle and clatter, which, however, diminished considerably as John began to read the story, and ended altogether soon afterwards.

"D'you like it, Uncle William?" John said, when he had read the story to them.

"Aye," said Uncle William.

"I'm glad," John answered. "And you, do you like it, Uncle Matthew?"

"I like it queer and well," Uncle Matthew murmured, "only! . . ." He hesitated as if he were reluctant to make any adverse comment on the story.

"Only what?" John demanded with some impatience. He had asked for the opinions of his uncles, indeed, but it had not occurred to him that they would not think as highly of the story as he thought of it himself.

"Well . . . there's no love in it!" Uncle Matthew went on.

"Love!"

"Aye," Uncle Matthew said. "There's no mention of a woman in it from start to finish. I think there ought to be a woman in it!"

Mrs. MacDermott, who had been silent now for some time, made a noise with a dish on the table. "Och, sure, what does he know about love?" she exclaimed angrily. "A child that's not long left his mother's arms would know as much. Mebbe, now you've read your oul' story, John, the whole of yous will sit up to the table and take your tea!"

John, disregarding his mother, sat back in his chair and contemplated his Uncle Matthew.

"I wonder now, are you right?" he exclaimed.

"I am," Uncle Matthew replied. "The best stories in the world have women in them, and love-making! I never could take any interest in *Robinson Crusoe* because he hadn't got a girl on that island with him, and I thought to myself many's a time, it was a queer mistake not to make Friday a woman. He could have fallen in love with her then!"

Uncle William said up sharply. "Aye, and had a wheen of black babies!" he said. "Man, dear, Matthew, think what you're saying! What sort of romance would there be in the like of that? I never read much, as you know, but I always had a great fancy for *Robinson Crusoe.* The way that man turned to and did things for himself . . . I tell you my heart warmed to him. *I* like your story, John,

women or no women. Sure, love isn't the only thing that men make! . . ."

"It's the most important," said Uncle Matthew.

"And why shouldn't a story be written about any other thing nor a lot of love?" Uncle William continued, ignoring the interruption. "I daresay you'll get a mint of money for that story, John. I've heard tell that some of these writers gets big pay for their stories. Pounds and pounds!"

John crinkled his manuscript in his hand and regarded it with a modest look. "I don't suppose I'll get much for the first one," he said. "In fact, if they'll print it, I'll be willing to let them have it for nothing . . . just for the satisfaction!"

"That would be a foolish thing to do," Uncle William retorted. "Sure, if it's worth printing, it's worth paying for. That's the way I look at it, anyhow!"

"I daresay I'll make more, when I know the way of it better!" John answered. "What paper will I send it to, do you think?"

"Send it to the best one," said Uncle William.

Mrs. MacDermott took a plate of toast from the fender where it had been put to keep warm. "Send it to the one that pays the most," she suggested.

"I thought you weren't listening, ma!" John exclaimed, laughing at her.

"A body can't help hearing when people are talking at the top of their voices," she said tartly. "Come on, for dear sake, and have your teas, the whole of yous!"

ii

It was Uncle William who advised John to send the story to *Blackwood's Magazine*. He said that in his young days, people said *Blackwood's Magazine* was the best magazine in the world. Uncle Matthew had demurred to this. "I'm not saying it's not a good one," he said, "but it's terribly

bitter against Ireland. The man that writes that magazine must have a bitter, blasting tongue in his head!"

"Never mind what it says about Ireland," Uncle William retorted. "Sure, they're only against the Papishes, anyway! . . ."

"The Papishes are as good as the Protestants," Uncle Matthew exclaimed.

"I daresay they are," Uncle William admitted, "but I'm only saying that *Blackwood's Magazine* is against *them:* it's not against us; and I don't see why John shouldn't send his story to it. He's a Protestant!"

"If I wrote a story," Uncle Matthew went on, "I wouldn't send it to any paper that made little of my country, Protestant or Papish, no matter how good a paper it was nor how much it paid me for my story. Ireland is as good as England any day! . . ."

"It's better," said Uncle William complacently. "Sure, God Himself knows the English would be on the dung-heap if it wasn't for us and the Scotchmen. But that's no reason why John shouldn't send his story to *Blackwood's Magazine.* In one way, it's a good reason why he should send it there, for sure, if he does nothing else, he'll improve the tone of the thing. You do what I tell you, John! . . ."

And so, accepting his Uncle William's advice, John sent the manuscript of his story to the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine;* and each morning, after he had done so, he eagerly awaited the advent of the postman. But the postman, more often than not, went past their door. When he did deliver a letter to them, it was usually a trading letter for Uncle William.

"Them people get a queer lot of stories to read," Uncle William said to console his nephew, disappointed because he had not received a letter of acceptance from the editor by Saturday morning, four days after he had posted the manuscript. "It'll mebbe take them a week or two to reach yours! . . ."

"They could have sent a postcard to say they'd got it all right," John replied ruefully. "That's the civil thing to do, anyway!"

He remembered that the Benson Shakespearean Company was still in Belfast and that *Romeo and Juliet* was to be performed in the afternoon, and *Julius Cæsar* in the evening; and he went up to the city by an earlier train than usual so that he might be certain of getting to the theatre in time to secure an end seat near the front of the pit. He had proposed to his Uncle Matthew that he should go to Belfast, too, to see the plays, but Uncle Matthew shook his head and murmured that he was not feeling well. He had been listless lately, they had noticed, and Uncle William, regarding him one afternoon as he stood at the door of the shop, had turned to John and said that he would be glad when the summer weather came in again so that Uncle Matthew could go down to the shore and lie in the sun.

"He's not a robust man, your Uncle Matthew!" he said. "I don't think he tholes the winter well!"

"Och, he's mebbe only a wee bit out of sorts," John answered. "I wish he'd come to Belfast with me! . . ."

"He'll never go next or near that place again," Uncle William replied. "He's never been there since that affair! . . ."

"You'd wonder at a man letting a thing of that sort affect his mind the way Uncle Matthew let it affect his," John murmured.

"When a man believes in a thing as deeply as he believed in the oul' Queen," said Uncle William, "it's a terrible shock to him to find out that other people doesn't believe in it half as much as he does . . . or mebbe doesn't believe in it at all!"

"I suppose you're right," said John.

"I am," said Uncle William.

John was the first person to reach the door of the pit that afternoon. The morning had been rough and blusterous,

and although the streets were dry, the cold wind blowing down from the hills made people reluctant to stand outside a theatre door. John, who was hardy and indifferent to cold, stood inside the shelter of the door and read the copy of *Romeo and Juliet* which he had borrowed from his Uncle Matthew; and while he read the play he remembered his uncle's criticism of the story he had written for *Blackwood's Magazine:* that it ought to have had a woman in it! This play was full of love. Romeo, sighing and groaning because his lady will not look kindly upon him, runs from his friends who "jest at scars that never felt a wound" . . . and finds Juliet! In *The Merchant of Venice,* Bassanio and Portia, Lorenzo and Jessica, Gratiano and Nerissa had all made love. Even young Gobbo, in a coarse, philandering way, had made love, too! In all the books he had read, women were prominent. Queer and distressing things happened to the heroes; they were constantly in trouble and under suspicion of wrong-doing; poverty and persecution were common to them; frequently, they were misunderstood; but in the end, they had their consolations and their rights and rewards. Love was the great predominating element in all these stories, the support and inspiration and reward of the troubled and tortured hero; and Woman was the symbol of victory, of achievement. At the end of every journey, at the finish of every fight, there was a Woman. Uncle Matthew had spoken wisely, John thought, when he said that you cannot leave women out of your schemes and plans.

John had not thought of leaving women out of his schemes and plans. In all his romantic imaginings, a woman of superb beauty had figured in a dim way; but the woman had been a dream woman only, bearing no resemblance whatever to the visible women about him. He had so much regard for this woman of his imagined adventures . . . she changed her looks as frequently as he changed the scene of his romances . . . that he had no regard left for the women of his acquaintance. He nodded to the girls he knew when

he met them in the street, but he had never felt any desire to "go up the road" with one of them. Willie Logan, as John knew, was "coortin' hard" and laying up trouble for himself by his diverse affections; and Aggie Logan, forgetful, perhaps, of the rebuff that John had given to her childish offers of love, had lately taken to hanging about the street when John was due to pass along it. She would pretend not to see him until he was close to her. Then she would start and giggle and say, "Oh, John, is that you? You're a terrible stranger these days! . . ." Once while he was listening to her as she made some such remark as that, Lady Castlederry drove by in her carriage, and his eyes wandered from the sallow, giggling girl in front of him to the beautiful woman in the carriage; and Aggie suffered severely by the comparison. And yet Aggie had a quicker and more intelligent look than Lady Castlederry. The beautiful, arrogant woman was like the dream-woman of his romances . . . and again she was not like her; for the dream-women had not got Lady Castlederry's look of settled stupidity in her eyes.

John had hurriedly quitted Aggie's company on that occasion. He knew why Aggie always contrived to meet him in the street, and he thought that she was a poor fool of a girl to do it. And her brother Willie was a "great gumph of a fellow," to go capering up and down the road in the evenings after any girl that would say a civil word to him or laugh when he laughed! . . .

All the same, women mattered to men. Uncle Matthew had said so, and Uncle Matthew was in the right of it. In the story-books, women surged into the hero's life, good women and bad women and even indifferent women. And, now, in these plays, he could see for himself that women mattered enormously. Yet he had never been in love with a girl! He was not even in love with the dream-woman of his romances. She was his reward for honourable and arduous service . . . that was all. He was not in love with her any

more than he was in love with a Sunday School prize. It was a reward for regular attendance and for accurate answers to Biblical questions, and he was glad to have it. It rested on the bookshelf in the drawing-room, and sometimes, when there were visitors in the house, his mother would request him to take it down and show it to them. They would read the inscription and make remarks on the oddness of Mr. McCaughan's signature and turn over the pages of the book . . . and then they would hand it back to him and he would replace it on the shelf . . . and no more was said about it. Really, his dream-woman had not meant much more to him than that. She would be given to him when he had won his fight, and he would take her and be glad to get her . . . he would be very proud of her and would exhibit her to his friends and say, "This is my beautiful wife!" and then! . . . oh, well, there did not appear to be anything else after that. The book always came to an end when the hero married the heroine. Probably she and he had children . . . but, beyond the fact that they lived happily ever afterwards, there did not appear to be much more to say about them. . . .

Somehow, it seemed to him now, as he stood in the shelter of the Pit Entrance to the Theatre Royal, reading *Romeo and Juliet,* that the heroine was different from his dream-woman. His dream-woman had always been very insubstantial and remote, but Juliet was a real woman, alive and passionate, with a real father and a real mother. The odd thing about his dream-woman was that she did not appear to have any relatives . . . at least he had never heard of any. She had not even got a name. She never spoke to him. Always, when the adventure was ended, he went up to the dream-woman, waiting for him in a misty manner, and he took hold of her hand and led her away . . . and while he was leading her away, the adventure seemed to come to an end . . . the picture dissolved . . . and he could not see any more. Once, indeed, he had kissed his dream-woman

. . . he had kissed her exactly as he had kissed his great-aunt, Miss Clotworthy, who was famous for the fact that she had attended a Sunday School in Belfast as pupil and teacher for fifty-seven years without a break . . . and the dream-woman had taken the kiss in the unemotional manner in which she took hold of his hand when he led her away . . . and lost her! . . .

There was something wrong with his dream-woman, he told himself. This man Shakespeare, so everybody said, was the greatest poet England had produced . . . perhaps the greatest poet the world had produced . . . and he ought to know something of what women were like. Whatever else Juliet might be, she certainly was not like John's dream-woman. She did not stand at the end of the road waiting for Romeo to come to her. She did not wait until the fight was fought and won. She did not offer a cold hand or cold lips to Romeo. Her behaviour was really more like that of Aggie Logan than that of the dream-woman! . . .

Aggie Logan! That "girner" with the sallow look and the giggle! He could see her now, standing in the street waiting for him, dabbing at her mouth with the foolish handkerchief she always carried in her hand. What did she want to keep on dabbing at her mouth with her handkerchief for! Men didn't dab at *their* mouths. . . . Nor did the dream-woman dab at hers. . . . But it was just possible . . . indeed, it was very likely, that Juliet dabbed at hers! . . .

At that moment, the Pit Door opened, and John, having paid his shilling, passed into the theatre.

### iii

He came away from the play in a disturbed and exalted state. Suddenly and compellingly, he had become aware of the fact of Women. While he sat in the front row of the pit, listening with his whole body to the play, something

stirred in him and he became aware of Women. The actress who played the part of Juliet had turned towards the audience for a few moments during the performance and, so it seemed to him, had looked straight into his eyes. She did not avert her gaze immediately, nor did he avert his. He imagined that she was appealing to him . . . he forgot that he was sitting in the pit of a theatre listening to a play written by a man who had died three hundred years ago . . . and remembered only that he was a young man with aspirations and romantic longings, and that a young woman, in a pitiable plight, was gazing into his eyes . . . and his heart reached out to her. He drew in his breath quickly, murmuring a soft "Oh," and as he did so, his dream-woman fell dead and he did not even turn to look at her.

When the play was over, he had sat still in his seat, more deeply moved than he had ever been before, overwhelmed by the disaster which had come upon the young lovers through the foolish brawls of their foolish elders; and it was not until an impatient woman had prodded him in the side that he returned to reality.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am!" he said and got up and hurried out of the theatre into the street.

He went along High Street towards Castle Place, and as he walked along, he regarded each woman and girl that approached him with interest.

"That one's nice-looking!" he said of a girl, and "That one's ugly!" he said of another. He wondered why it was that all the older women of the working-class were so misshapen and lacking in good looks, when so many of the girls of the working-class were shapely and pretty. Mr. Cairnduff had told him that Belfast girls were prettier than London girls. "London girls aren't pretty at all," Mr. Cairnduff had said. "You'd walk miles in London before you'd see a pretty girl, but you wouldn't walk ten yards in Belfast before you'd meet dozens!" And yet, all those

pretty working-girls grew into dull, misshapen, displeasing women. "It's getting married that does it, I suppose," he said to himself. "They were all nice once, but they married and grew ugly!"

He did not look long at the ugly and misshapen women. His eyes quickly searched through the crowds of passers-by for the pretty girls, and at them he looked with eagerness.

"There's no doubt about it," he said to himself, "girls are nice to look at!"

He found a restaurant in the street off High Street. He climbed up some stairs, and then, pushing a door open, entered a large room, at the back of which was a smaller room. A girl was standing at a window, looking out on to the street, but she turned her head when she heard him entering. She smiled pleasantly as he sat down, and came forward to take his order.

"It's turned out a brave day after all," she said.

He said "Aye" and smiled at her in return. She had thick, fair hair, and he remembered Bassanio's description of Portia:

*And her sunny locks*
*Hang on her temples like a golden fleece.*

He had a curious desire to talk to the girl about the play he had just seen, and before he gave his order, he glanced about the room. She and he were the only persons in it.

"You don't seem to be very busy," he said.

"Och, indeed, we're not," she replied. "We seldom are on a Saturday. Mrs. Bothwell . . . her that owns the place . . . thought mebbe some football fellows might come here for their tea after the matches so's they needn't go home before starting for the Empire or the Alhambra; but, sure, none of them ever comes. We might as well be shut for all the custom we get!"

He ordered his tea, and she went to the small room at the back of the large room to prepare it. He thought it would

be a good plan to ask the girl if she would care to have her tea with him, but a sudden shyness prevented him from doing so, and he was unable to say more than "Thank you" when she put the teapot by his side. There was plenty for two on the table, he said to himself: a loaf and a bap and some soda-farls and a potato cake and the half of a barn-brack and butter and raspberry jam. He looked across the room to where the girl was again looking out of the window. He liked the way she stood, with one hand resting on her hip and the other on her cheek. He could see that she had small feet and slender ankles, and while he looked at her, she rubbed her foot against her leg and he saw for a moment or two the flash of a white petticoat. . . .

"I was at the Royal the day!" he called to her.

She turned round quickly. "Were you?" she said. "Was it good?"

"It was grand. I enjoyed it the best," he answered.

She came towards him and sat down at a table near to his. "What piece was it you saw?" she asked. "It's Benson's Company, isn't it?"

"Yes. I saw *Romeo and Juliet.*"

"Oh, that's an awful sad piece. I cried my eyes out one year when I saw it!"

"It's a great play," John said.

"I suppose you often go?" she went on.

"Last Saturday was the first time I ever went to a theatre. I saw *The Merchant of Venice.* I'll go every Saturday after this, when there's a good piece on. I'm going again to-night to see *Julius Caesar!*"

"I'd love to see that piece!"

"Would you?"

"Aye, indeed I would. I'm just doting on the theatre. The last piece I saw was *The Lights of London.* It was lovely."

"I never saw that bit," John answered. "You see I live

in Ballyards and I only come up to town on Saturdays."

"By your lone?" she asked.

He nodded his head. He poured out his tea, and then began to spread butter on a piece of soda-farl.

"I'd be awful dull walking the streets by myself," she said, watching him as he did so. "I'm a terrible one for company. I can't bear being by myself!"

"Company's good," he said. "Have you had your tea yet?"

"I'll be having it in a wee while!"

"I wish you'd have it with me!" He spoke hesitatingly.

"Oh, I couldn't!" she exclaimed.

"Sure, what's to hinder you?" His voice became bolder.

"Oh, I couldn't. I couldn't really! . . ."

"You might as well have it with me as have it by yourself. And there's nobody'll see you. Where's Mrs. Bothwell?"

"She's away home with a headache! . . ."

"Then you're all by yourself here!" She nodded her head. "What time do you shut?" he went on.

"Half-six generally, but Mrs. Bothwell said I'd better shut at six the night!"

He took a cup and saucer and a knife and plate from an adjoining table and put them down opposite his own.

"Come on," he said, "and have your tea!"

"Och, I couldn't," she protested weakly.

He poured out some of the tea for her. "I suppose you take milk and sugar?" he said.

"You're a terrible fellow," she murmured admiringly, and he could see that her eyes were shining with pleasure.

"Draw up to the table," he replied.

She hesitated for a little while, and then she sat down. "This is not very like the thing," she murmured.

"It doesn't matter whether it is or not," he replied. "What'll you have . . . bread or soda-farl?"

She helped herself.

"You know," he said, "I was thinking it would be a good plan for the two of us to go to the theatre to-night!"

"The two of us," she exclaimed. "Me and you!"

"Aye! Why not?"

She put down her cup and laughed. "I never met anybody in my life that made so much progress in a short time as you do," she said. "What in the earthly world put that notion into your head?"

"There's no notion about it," he exclaimed. "I'm asking you plump and plain will you come to the theatre with me to-night! . . ."

"But it wouldn't be like the thing at all to go to the theatre with a boy that I never saw before and never heard tell of 'til this minute. I don't even know your name! . . ."

"John MacDermott," he said.

"Are you a Catholic?"

"No. I'm a Presbyterian."

"It's a Catholic name," she mused. "I know a family by the name of MacDermott, and they're desperate Catholics. They live over in Ballymacarrett. Do you know them?"

"I do not. There never was a person in our family was a Catholic . . . not that we have mind of. Will you come with me?"

"Och, I couldn't!"

"I'll not take 'No' for an answer!" he said, "and I'll not put another bite in my mouth 'til you say 'Yes.' D'you hear me?"

"You've an awful abrupt way of talking," she replied.

"What's abrupt about it?" he demanded.

"Well, queer then!" she said.

"I see nothing abrupt or queer about it. Are you coming or are you not?"

"As if you were used to getting what you wanted, the minute you wanted it," she went on, disregarding his ques-

tion and intent on explaining the queerness of his speech. "I'd be afeard to be *your* wife, you'd be such a bossy man!"

"Ah, quit!" he said. "Will you come?"

"I might! . . ."

"Will you?"

"Well, perhaps! . . ."

"Will you or will you not?"

"You're an awful man," she protested.

"Will you come?"

"All right, then," she replied, "but! . . ."

"I'll have some more tea," said John. He looked round the room while she poured the tea into his cup. "Are there any more cakes or buns?" he asked.

"Yes, would you like some?"

"Bring a plate full," he said. "Bring some with sugar on the top and jam in the middle!"

"Florence cakes?"

"Aye!"

"You've a sweet tongue in your head!" She went to the small room as she spoke.

"I have," he exclaimed. "And I daresay you have, too!"

iv

"You never told me your name," he said, when she returned with the plate of cakes.

"Give a guess!" she teased.

He looked at her for a moment. "Maggie!" he said.

"How did you know?"

"I didn't know," he answered. "You look like a Maggie. What's your other name?"

"Carmichael!"

"Maggie Carmichael!" he exclaimed. "It's a nice name!"

"I'm glad you like it," she said.

V

He sat back in his chair while she went to prepare for the theatre. How lucky it was that he had asked his Uncle William for more money that morning "in case I need it!" If he had not done so, he would not have been able to offer to take Maggie to the theatre. . . . They would go in by the Early Door. There was certain to be a crowd outside the ordinary door on a Saturday night. What a piece of luck it was that he had chosen to take his tea in this place instead of the restaurant to which he usually went. Mrs. Bothwell's headache, too, that was a piece of luck, for him, although not, perhaps, for her. He liked the look of Maggie. He liked her bright face and her laugh and her beautiful, golden hair. What was that bit again?

*In Belmont is a lady richly left,* 7
*And she is fair and fairer than that word*
*Of wondrous virtue. . . .*

and then again:

*. . . and her sunny locks*
*Hang on her temples like a golden fleece.*

Maggie came out of the small room, ready for the street, and he sat and watched her as she shut the door behind her.

"I believe I'm in love," he said to himself. "I believe I am!"

"Are you ready?" he said aloud.

"I've only to draw the blinds and then lock the door!" she replied.

"I'll draw them for you," he said, going over to the windows and drawing down the blinds as he spoke. "Did you ever see *The Merchant of Venice?*" he asked when he had done so.

"No," she said.

"There's a bit in it that makes me think of you," he went on.

"Oh, now, don't start plastering me," she exclaimed gaily.

"I mean it," he said, and he quoted the lines about Portia's sunny locks.

"That's poetry," she said.

"It is!" he replied.

"It's queer and nice!"

She opened the door leading to the stairs, and then went back to the room to turn out the light. The room was in semi-darkness, save where a splash of yellow light from the staircase fell at the doorway.

He turned towards her as she made her way to the door, and put out his hand to her. She took hold of it, and as she did so, he caught her quickly to him and drew her into his arms and kissed her soft, warm lips.

"You're an awful wee fellow," she said, freeing herself from his embrace and smiling at him.

He did not answer her, but his heart was singing inside him. *I love her. I know I love her. I love her. I love her. I know I love her.*

They went down the stairs together, and as they emerged into the street, he put his arm in hers and drew her close to him. Almost he wished that they were not going to the theatre, that they might walk like this, arm in arm, for the remainder of the evening. He could still feel the warmth of her lips on his, and he wished that they could go to some quiet place so that he might kiss her again. But he had asked her to go to the theatre, and he did not wish to disappoint her. They entered the theatre by the Early Door, and sat in the middle of the front row of the pit. There was a queer silence in the theatre, for the ordinary doors had not yet opened, and the occasional murmur of a voice echoed oddly. John put his arm in Maggie's and wound his fingers in hers, and felt the pressure of her hand against his hand. When the ordinary doors of the theatre were opened and the crowd came pouring in, he hardly seemed

aware of the people searching for good seats. Maggie had tried to withdraw her hand from his when she heard the noise of the people hurrying down the stone steps, but he had not released her, and she had remained content. And so they sat while the theatre quickly filled. Presently an attendant with programmes and chocolates came towards them, and he purchased a box of chocolates for her.

"You shouldn't have done that," she said, making the polite protest.

"I've always heard girls are fond of sweeties," he replied.

He put the box of chocolates in her lap, and opened the programme and handed it to her.

"It's a long piece," she said, "with a whole lot of acts and scenes in it. That's the sort of piece I like . . . with a whole lot of changes in it!"

"Do you?" he said.

"Yes. I came here one time to see a piece that was greatly praised in the *Whig* and the *Newsletter*, and do you know they used the same scene in every act! I thought it was a poor miserly sort of a play. The bills said it was a London company, but I don't believe that was true. They were just letting on to be from London. They couldn't have had much money behind them when they couldn't afford more nor the one scene, could they?"

"Mebbe you're right," he answered.

The members of the orchestra came into the theatre, and after a while the music began. The lights in the theatre were diminished and then were extinguishd, and the curtain went up. John snuggled closer to Maggie.

vi

He was scarcely aware of the performance on the stage, so aware was he of the nearness of Maggie. He heard applause, but he did not greatly heed it. He was in love. He

had never been in love before, and he had always thought of it as something very different from this, something cold and austere and aloof and very dignified . . . not at all like this warm, intimate, careless thing. He slipped his hand from Maggie's and slowly put his arm round her waist. She did not resist him, and when he drew her more closely to him so that their heads were nearly touching, she yielded to him without demur. He could feel her heart beating where his hand pressed against her side, and he heard the slow rise and fall of her breath as she inhaled and exhaled. He could not get near enough to her. He wanted to draw her head down on to his shoulder, to put both his arms about her, to feel again his lips on her lips. . . .

He started suddenly. Someone was tapping him on the shoulder. He turned round to meet the gaze of an elderly, indignant woman who was seated immediately behind him.

"Sit still," she said in a loud whisper. "I can't see the stage for you two ducking your heads together!"

## vii

He took his arm away from Maggie's waist, and edged a little away from her. He felt angry and humiliated. He told himself that he did not care who saw him putting his arm about Maggie's waist, but was aware that this was not true, that he deeply resented being overlooked in his love-making. He did not wish anyone to behold him in this intimate relationship with Maggie, and he was full of fury against the woman behind him because she had seen him fondling her. For of course the woman knew that he had his arm about Maggie . . . and now her neighbours would know, too. The whole theatre would know that he had been embracing the girl! . . . Well, what if they did know? Let them know! There was no harm in a fellow putting his arm round a girl's waist. It was a natural thing for

a fellow to do, particularly if the girl were so pretty and warm and loving as Maggie Carmichael. The woman herself had no doubt had a man's arm round her waist once upon a time. He did not care who knew! . . . All the same! . . . No, he did not care! . . . He slipped his hand into Maggie's hand again, and then quickly withdrew it. She was holding a sticky chocolate in her fingers! . . .

He lost all interest in the play now. It would be truer, perhaps, to say that he had not begun to be interested in it, and now that he tried to follow it, he could not do so. His mind constantly reverted to the indignant woman behind him. He imagined her looking, first this way and then that, in her efforts to see the stage, getting angrier and more angry as she was thwarted in her desire, and then, in her final indignation, leaning forward to tap on his shoulder and beg him to keep his head apart from Maggie's so that she might conveniently see the stage. His sense of violated privacy became stronger. His love for Maggie, for he accepted it now as a settled fact, was not a thing for prying eyes to witness: it was a secret, intimate thing in which she and he alone were concerned. He hated the thought that anyone else in the theatre should know that Maggie and he were sweethearts, newly in love and warm with the glow of their first affection. And then, when he had slipped his hand back into hers, he had encountered a sticky chocolate! While he was burning with feeling for her and with resentment against the old woman's intrusion into their love affair, Maggie had been chewing chocolate quite unconcernedly. In that crisis of their love, she had remained unmoved. When he had released her hand, she had simply put it into the box of chocolates and taken out a sticky sweet and had eaten it with as little emotion as if he had not been present at all, as if his ardent, pressing arm had not been suddenly withdrawn from her waist because of that angry intruder into their happiness. She had taken his hand when he gave it to her, and had released it

again when he withdrew it, without any appearance of desire or reluctance. He had imagined that she would take his hand eagerly and yield it up unwillingly, that she would try to restrain him when he endeavoured to take his hand away from hers . . . but she had not done so.

Perhaps she did not love him as he loved her. Perhaps she did not love him at all. After all, he had met her for the first time about three hours earlier in the evening. Only three hours ago! It was hard to believe that he had not loved her for centuries, had not often felt her heart beating beneath the pressure of his hand, had not frequently put his lips to her lips and been enchanted by her kisses. Why, he had only kissed her once. Only once! Once only! . . . He looked at her as she sat by his side, gazing intently at the stage. He could see a protuberance in her cheek, made by a piece of chocolate, and as he looked at her, it seemed to him to be a terrible thing that this girl did not love him. His love had gone out to her, quickly, insurgently and fully, and perhaps she thought no more of him than she might think of any chance friend who offered to take her to see a play. She might have spent many evenings in this very theatre with other men. Had she not told him that afternoon that she hated to be alone! He had put his arm about her waist in a public place and had been humiliated for doing so, but nothing of this had meant much to Maggie. She was quite willing to let him embrace her . . . perhaps she thought that she ought to allow him to hug her as a return for the treat at the theatre . . . or perhaps she liked to feel a man's arm about her waist and did not much care who the man might be. Some girls were like that. Willie Logan had told him that Carrie Furlong was the girl of any fellow who liked to walk up the road with her. She did not care with whom she went: all that she cared about was that she should have some boy in her company. She would kiss anybody.

Was Maggie Carmichael like that? Would she kiss this one or that one, just as the mood took her? . . . Oh, no, she could not be like that. It was impossible for him to fall in love with a girl who distributed kisses as carelessly and impassionately as a boy distributes handbills. He felt certain that he could not fall in love with a girl of that sort, that some instinct in him would prevent him from going so. Other fellows might make a mistake of that kind . . . Willie Logan, for example . . . but a MacDermott could not make one. Maggie must be in love with him . . . she must have fallen in love with him as suddenly as he had fallen in love with her . . . otherwise she could not have consented so readily to accompany him to the theatre. When he had taken her in his arms and kissed her, she had yielded to him so naturally, as if she had been in his arms many times before! . . . Perhaps, though, the ease with which she had yielded to him denoted that she had had much experience! . . . Oh, no, no! No, no! She was his girl, not anybody else's girl. He could not have her for a sweetheart, if she shared her love with other men. He must have her entirely to himself! . . .

Oh, what a torturing, doubt-raising, perplexing thing this Love was! A few hours ago he had known nothing whatever of it . . . had merely imagined cold, austere, wrong things about it . . . and now it had hold of him and was hurting him. Every particle of his mind was concentrated on this girl by his side . . . a stranger to him. He knew nothing of her except her name and that she was employed as a waitress in a restaurant. She was a stranger to him . . . and yet a fierce, unquenchable love for her was raging in his heart. Each moment, the flames of his passion increased in strength. When he looked away from her, he could see her in his mind's eye. Each of the players on the stage looked like Maggie. . . . And there she was, all unaware of this strong emotion in him, placidly sitting in her seat, gazing at the actors! Do women feel love as

strongly as men do? he asked himself as he looked at her, and as he did so she turned her head to him, conscious perhaps of his stare, and when her eyes met his in the glowing dusk of the theatre, she smiled, and, seeing her smile, he forgot his doubt and remembered only the great joy of loving her.

viii

He insisted on taking her to her home, although she stoutly declared that this was unnecessary. She lived at Stranmillis, she said, and the journey there and back would make him miss his train; but he swore that he had plenty of time, and would not listen to her dissuasions. When they reached the terminus at the Botanic Gardens, she tried to insist that he should return to town in the tram by which they had come out, but he said that he must walk with her for a while. She would not let him accompany her to the door of her home . . . he must leave her at a good distance from it . . . and to this he agreed, for he knew what the etiquette of these matters is. He put his arm in hers, again drawing her close to him, and, listening to her laughter, he walked in gladness by her side. It was she who stopped. "I'll say 'Good-night' to you here," she said.

"Not yet," he replied.

"You'll miss your train," she warned him.

He did not heed her warning, but drew her into the shadow and held her tightly to him.

"Don't!" she stammered, but could not speak any more because of the strength of his kisses.

Very long he held her thus, his arms tightly round her and her lips closebound to his, and then with a great sigh of pleasure, he released her.

"You're a desperate fellow," she said, half scared, and she laughed a little.

She glanced about her for a moment. "I must run now," she said, holding out her hand.

"Not yet," he said again.

"Oh, but I must. I must!" she insisted. "Good-night!"

He took her hand. "Good-night," he replied, but did not let her hand go.

She laughed nervously. "What's wrong with you?" she said.

"I . . . I'm in love with you, Maggie!" he murmured, almost inarticulately.

Her laughter lost its nervousness. "You're a boy in a hurry and a half!" she said.

"I know. Kiss me, Maggie!"

She held up her face to him. "There, then!" she said.

He kissed her again, and then again, and yet again.

"You're hurting me," she exclaimed ruefully.

"It's because I love you so much, Maggie!" he said.

"Well, let me go now! . . ." She stood away from him. "You have me all crumpled up," she said. "I'll be a terrible sight when I get in! Anybody'd think you'd never kissed a girl before in your life!"

"I haven't," he replied.

"You what?"

"I haven't. I've never kissed any other girl but you!"

"You don't expect me to believe a yarn like that?" she said.

"It's the God's truth," he answered.

"Well, nobody'd think it from the way you behave!"

He regarded her in silence for a few moments. Then he said, "Have you ever kissed anyone before?"

"I'm twenty-two." she replied.

He had not thought of her age, but if he had done so, he would not have imagined that she was more than nineteen.

"What's that got to do with it?" he asked.

"A lot," she replied. "You don't think a girl as nice-

looking as me has reached my age without having kissed a fellow, do you?"

"Then you have kissed someone else?"

"I've kissed dozens," she said. "Good-night, John!"

She turned and ran swiftly from him, laughing lightly as she ran, and for a second or two, he stood blankly looking after her. Then he called to her, "Wait, Maggie. Wait a minute!" and ran after her.

She stopped when she heard him calling, and waited for him to come up to her.

"When'll I see you again?" he said.

"Oh, dear knows!" she replied.

"Will you come to the theatre with me next Saturday?"

"I might!"

"Will you get the day off, and we'll go in the afternoon and evening, too?"

"I mightn't be let," she said. "Mrs. Bothwell mightn't agree to it!"

"Ask her anyway! . . ."

"I will, then. Good-night, John!"

He snatched at her hand. "Listen, Maggie," he said.

"What?" she answered.

"Do you . . . do you like me?"

"Ummm . . . mebbe I do!"

"I love you, Maggie!"

"Aye, so you say!" she said.

"Do you not believe me? . . ."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It's true," he affirmed. "I love you! . . ."

"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night, Maggie!"

He released her hand, but she did not go immediately. She came close to him, and put her arms about his neck and drew his face down to hers, and kissed him.

"You're a nice wee fellow," she said. "I like you queer and well!"

Then she withdrew her arms, and this time he did not try to detain her.

ix

He missed the last train to Ballyards, but he did not mind that. He set out bravely to walk from Belfast. The silence of the streets, the deeper silence of the country roads, accorded with the pleasure in his heart. He sang to himself, and sometimes he sang aloud. He was in love with Maggie Carmichael, and she . . . she liked him queer and well. He could hardly feel the ground beneath his feet. The road ran away from him. The moon and the stars shared his exultation, and the trees gaily waved their branches to him, and the leaves of the trees beat their hands together in applause. "And her sunny locks Hang on her temples like a golden fleece," he said aloud. . . .

It was very late when he reached the door of the shop in Ballyards. His Uncle William was standing in the shade of the doorway, peering anxiously into the street.

"Is that you, John?" he called out, while John was still some distance away from the shop.

"Aye, Uncle William," John called out in reply.

Uncle William came to meet him. "Oh, whatever kept you, boy?" he said when they met.

"I missed the train," John answered.

"Your Uncle Matthew, John! . . ."

Anxiety came into John's mind. "Yes, Uncle?" he said.

"He's bad, John. Desperate bad! We had to send for Dr. Dobbs an hour ago, and he's still with him. I thought you'd never reach home!"

All the joy fell straight out of John's heart. He did not speak. He walked swiftly to the house, and passing through the shop, entered the kitchen, followed by his Uncle William.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

### i

"YOUR ma's upstairs with the doctor and him," said Uncle William, closing the kitchen door behind him.

"Is he very bad?" John asked in an anxious voice.

"I'm afeard so," Uncle William replied.

John went towards the staircase, but his uncle called him back. "Better not go up yet awhile," he said. "The doctor'll be down soon, mebbe, and he'll tell you whether you can go up or not."

"Very well," John murmured, coming back into the kitchen and sitting down beside the fire.

"It come on all of a sudden just before bedtime," Uncle William went on. "He wasn't looking too grand all the morning, as you know, but we never thought much of it. He never was strong, and he hasn't the strength to fight against his disease. If he dies, I'll be the last of the three brothers. Death's a strange thing, John. Your da was the cleverest and the wisest of us all, and he was the first to go; and now your Uncle Matthew, that's wise in his way, and has a great amount of knowledge in his head, is going too . . . the second of us . . . and I'm left, the one that could be easiest spared. It's queer to take the best one first and leave the worst 'til the last. You'd near think God had a grudge against the world! . . . What were you doing in Belfast the day?"

"I went to the theatre."

"Aye. What did you see?"

"I saw *Romeo and Juliet* in the middle of the day, and

*Julius Cæsar* at night!" John answered. "Is my Uncle Matthew unconscious?"

"No. He has all his senses about him. He knows well he's dying. Did he never speak to you about that?"

John shook his head. "I couldn't bear it if he did. Does he mind, d'you think?"

"No, he does not. Why should he mind? It's us that's left behind that's to be pitied, not them that goes. I can't make out the people of these days, the way they pity the dead and dying, when it's the living's to be pitied. Did you like the plays, John?"

John roused himself to answer. "Aye," he said, "they were grand. What happened when he took bad?"

"We had just had our supper, and he started to go up the stairs, and all of a sudden he called out for your ma, and we both ran to him together, her and me, and the look on his face frightened me. I didn't stop to hear what was wrong. I went off to fetch Dr. Dobbs as quick as I could move. I never saw *Julius Cæsar* myself, but I mind well the time I saw *Romeo and Juliet*. It was an awful long time ago, when the oul' Theatre Royal . . . not this one, but the one before it, that was burnt down . . . and we saw *Romeo and Juliet*. That's a tremendous piece, John! It gripped a hold of my heart, I can tell you, and I came away from the theatre with the tears streaming down my face. I always was a soft one, anyway. That poor young boy and his lovely wee girl tormented and tortured by people that was older nor them, but hadn't half the sense! It grips you, that play!"

"Aye," said John.

"You'll hardly believe me, John, but the play was so real to me that when they talked about getting married, I said to myself I'd go and see the wedding. I did by my troth!"

"Eh?" said John abstractedly.

"I was talking about the play! . . ."

"Oh, aye, aye! Aye!"

"It sounds silly, I know," Uncle William continued, "but it's the God's own truth, as sure as I'm sitting here. And whenever I pass 'The Royal,' I always think of *Romeo and Juliet,* and I see that poor boy and girl stretched dead, and them ought to have been happy together and having fine, strong childher!"

"I wonder how he is now. Do you think I should go up now?" John said.

"Wait 'til the doctor comes down.. I have great faith in Dr. Dobbs. He never humbugs you, that man, but tells you plump and plain what's wrong with you!" He sat back in his chair, and for a while there was no sound in the kitchen but the noise of the clock and the small drooping noise made by the dying fire. There was no sound from overhead.

Uncle William glanced at the clock. He got up and stopped the pendulum. "I can't bear the sound of it," he said to John as he sat down again. They remained in silence for a while longer, and then Uncle William got up and started the clock again. "Mebbe . . . mebbe, it's better for it to be going." he said.

He searched for his pipe on the mantel-shelf and, when he had found it, lit it with a coal which he picked out of the fire with the tongs.

"Your Uncle Matthew was terribly upset by it," he said, reverting to the play. "It was a wild and wet night, and we had to walk every inch of the way, for there was no late trains in them days, John, and we were drenched to the skin. Your Uncle Matthew never said one word to me the whole road home. He just held his head high and stared straight in front of him, and when I looked at him, though the night was dark, I could see that his fists were clenched and his lips were moving, though he didn't speak. You never see no plays like that, these days, John. The last piece I saw in Belfast was a fearful foolish piece, with a lot of love and villainy in it. The girl was near drowned in

real water, and then the villain tied her on to a circular saw, and if it hadn't been for the hero coming in the nick of time, she'd have been cut in two. No man would treat a woman that way, tying her on to a saw! I'm afeard some of these pieces nowadays are terribly foolish, John, so I never want to go now!"

ii

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and presently Dr. Dobbs, a lean, stooping man, came into the kitchen, followed by Mrs. MacDermott. The Doctor nodded to John, and Mrs. MacDermott said, "You're back!" and then went into the scullery from which she soon returned, carrying a glass with which she hurried upstairs again.

"Your Uncle's been asking for you, John," said the doctor, drawing on his gloves.

"Can I go up and see him, sir?" John asked.

"In a minute or two. Your mother'll call for you when he's ready. I'm afraid there's not much hope, William!" the doctor said.

John leant against the mantel-shelf, waiting to hear more. He listened in a dazed way to what the doctor was saying, but hardly comprehended it, for in his mind the words, "I'm afraid there's not much hope!" made echoes and re-echoes. Uncle Matthew was dying, might, in a little while, be dead. Dear, simple, honest, kindly Uncle Matthew who had loved literature and good faith too well, and had suffered for his simple loyalty.

"He's easier now than he was," the doctor continued, "and he may last a good while . . . and he may not. I *think* he'll last a while yet, but he might die before the morning. I want you to be prepared for the worst. You know where to find me if you want me, William!"

"Yes, doctor!"

"I've left him in good hands. Your mother's a great nurse, John," he said, turning to the boy.

"Can I go up to him now, doctor?"

"Yes, I think perhaps . . . oh, yes, I think you may. But go up quietly, will you, in case he's dozed off! . . ."

John did not wait to hear any more, but, walking on tiptoe, went up the stairs to his uncle's room.

Uncle Matthew turned to greet him as he entered the room.

"Is that you, John?" he said.

"Yes, Uncle Matthew," John answered, tiptoeing to the side of the bed. "I'm sorry I wasn't here earlier. I never thought! . . ."

Uncle Matthew smiled at him. "Sure, son, it doesn't matter. You couldn't know . . . none of us did. Well, was the play good?"

But John did not wish to speak about the play. He wished only to sit by his Uncle's bed and hold his Uncle's hand.

"I'll go downstairs now for a wee while," Mrs. MacDermott said. "I have a few things to do, and John can call me if you need me, Matt!"

"Aye, Hannah!" said Uncle Matthew.

John looked up at his mother, but she had turned to leave the room, and he could not see her face.

He had never heard her call his Uncle by the name of "Matt" before, nor had he often heard Uncle Matthew use her Christian name in addressing her. He avoided it, John had observed, as much as possible, and it had seemed to him that his Uncle did so because of his mother's antagonism to him.

"What are you staring at, John?" Uncle Matthew said feebly.

"She called you 'Matt,' Uncle!"

"That's my name," Uncle Matthew replied, smiling at his nephew.

"Aye, but! . . ."

"She used to call me 'Matt' before she was married, and for a wee while afterwards, when we were all friends together. Your da's death was a fearful blow to her, and she never overed it. And she thought I was a bad influence on you, filling your head with stuff out of books. You see, John, women are not like men . . . they don't value things the way we do . . . and things that seem important to us, aren't worth a flip of your hand to them. And the other way round, I suppose. But a woman can't be bitter against a sick man, no matter how much she hated him when he had his health. That's where we have the whiphand of them, John. They can't stand against us when we're sick, but we can stand up against anything, well or sick! . . ."

John remembered his mother's caution that he was not to let his Uncle talk much.

"You ought to lie still, Uncle Matthew," he said, but Uncle Matthew would not heed him.

"I'm as well as I'll ever be." he said. "I know rightly I'll never leave this bed 'til I'm carried out of it for good and all. And I'm not going to deny myself the pleasure of a talk for the sake of an extra day or two! . . ."

"Wheesht, Uncle Matthew!" John begged.

"Why, son, what's there to cry about? I'm not afeard to die. No MacDermott was ever afeard to die, and *I* won't be the first to give in. Oh, dear, no!"

"But you'll get better, Uncle Matthew, you will, if you'll only take care of yourself! . . ."

"Ah, quit blethering John. I won't get better! . . . What were we saying? Something about your ma! . . ."

"Yes. Her calling you 'Matt'!"

"Oh, aye. You'd be surprised, mebbe, to hear that your Uncle William and me both had a notion of her before your da stepped in and took her from us? We had no chance against him. That man could have lifted a queen from a king's bed! . . ."

"You ought not to be talking so much, Uncle Matthew!"

"Ah, let me talk, John. It's the only comfort I have, and I'll get all the rest I want by and bye. Was it a girl kept you late the night?"

"How did you know, Uncle Matthew?"

"How did I know!" Uncle Matthew said with raillery. "How would anyone know anything but by using the bit of wit the Almighty God's put in his head. What is it makes any lad lose his train and walk miles in the dark? It's either women or drink . . . and you're no drinker, John. Tell me about her. I'd like to be the first to know!"

"I only met her the day! . . ."

"Aye?"

"I hardly know her yet . . . but she's lovely!"

"Go on . . . go on!"

"I took her to the theatre with me to see *Julius Cæsar* and then I left her home. She lives up near the Lagan . . . out Stranmillis way! . . ."

"I know it well," said Uncle Matthew. "Is she a fair girl or a dark girl?"

"She has the loveliest golden hair you ever clapped your eyes on. It was that made me fall in love with her! . . ."

"You're in love with her then? You're not just going with her?"

"Of course I'm in love with her. I never was in the habit of just going with girls. That's all right, mebbe, for Willie Logan, but I'm not fond of it," said John indignantly.

"You fell in love with her in a terrible great hurry," Uncle Matthew exclaimed.

"Aye," said John laughing. "It was queer and comic the way I fell in love with her, for I had no notion of such a thing when I went in the shop to have my tea. She's in a restaurant off High Street. I'd been to the Royal to see *Romeo and Juliet*, and I was full of the play and just wandering about, not thinking of what I was doing, when all of a sudden I saw this place fornent my eyes, and I just went

in, and she was there by her lone. The woman that keeps the place had gone home with a sore head, and left her to look after it!"

"What's her name?"

"Maggie Carmichael. It's a nice name. They don't do much trade on a Saturday, and her and me were alone in the shop by ourselves so I asked her to have tea with me, and then I asked her to go to the Royal, and she agreed after a while, and when it was over, I took her home, and that's why I missed the train and had to tramp it the whole way home. She's older nor I am. She says she's twenty-two. She was codding me for never having kissed any other girl but her! . . ."

"You got that length, did you?"

"Aye," said John in confusion.

"You're like your da. Take what you want, the minute you want it. She'll think you're in earnest, John!"

"I am in earnest. I couldn't be any other way. How could a man feel about a woman, the way I feel about her, and not be in earnest?"

"As easy as winking," said Uncle Matthew. "You'll mebbe be in love a hundred times before you marry, and every time you'll think it's the right one at last. There's no law in love, John. You can't say about it, that you've got to know a woman well before you're safe in marrying her, nor you can't just shut your eyes and grab hold of the first one that comes to your hand. There's no law, John . . . none at all. It's an adventure, love. That's what it is. You don't know what lies at the end of your journey . . . and you can't know . . . and mebbe when you reach the end, you don't know. You just have to take your chance, and trust to God it'll be all right! Is she in love with you?"

"I don't know. I don't suppose so. She made fun of me, so I suppose she can't be. But she said she liked me."

"Making fun of you is nothing to go by. Some women

would make fun of God Almighty, and think no harm of it. You'll soon know whether she's in love with you or not, my son!"

"How will I, Uncle Matthew?"

"When she begins to treat you as if you were her property. That's a sure and certain sign. The minute a woman looks at a man as much as to say, 'That fellow belongs to me,' she's in love with him, as sure as death. Anyway, she's going to marry him! Boys-a-boys, John, but you're the lucky lad with all your youth and health in front of you, and you setting out in the world. Many's the time I've longed at nights to be lying snug and comfortable and quiet in a woman's arms, but I never had that pleasure. Whatever you do, John, don't die an unmarried man like your Uncle William and me. It's better to live with a cross sour-natured woman nor it is to live with no woman at all; for even the worst woman in the world has given a wee while of happiness to her man, and he always has that in his mind to comfort him however bad she turns out after. And if she is bad, sure you can run away from her!"

"Run away from her! You'd never advocate the like of that, Uncle Matthew?"

"I would. I'm a dying man, John, and mebbe I'll be dead by the morrow's morn, so you may be sure I'm saying things now that I mean with all my heart, for no man wants to go before his God with lies on his lips. And I tell you now, boy, that if a man and woman are not happy together, they ought to separate and go away from each other as far as they can get, no matter what the cost is. Them's my solemn words, John. I'd like well to see this girl you're after, but I'll mebbe not be able. No matter for that. Pay heed to me now, for fear I don't get the opportunity to say it to you again. Whatever adventures you set out on, never forget they're only adventures, and if one turns out to be bad, another'll mebbe turn out to be good. Don't be like me, don't let one thing affect your life for ever! . . ." He lay

back on his pillow for a few moments and did not speak. John waited a little while, and then he leant forward. "Will I fetch my ma?" he asked.

Uncle Matthew shook his head and waved feebly with his hand, and John sat back again in his chair.

"Life's just balancing one adventure against another," Uncle Matthew said at last, without raising his head from the pillow. "The good against the bad. And the happy man is him that can set off a lot of good adventures against bad ones, and have a balance of good ones in his favour. But it takes courage to have a lot, John. The Jenny-joes of the world never try again after the first bad one. I . . . I was staggered that time . . . I . . . I never got my foothold again. The balance is against me, John! . . ."

Mrs. MacDermott came into the room.

"It's time you went to your bed, son," she said, "and your Uncle'll want to get to sleep, mebbe. Are you all right, Matt?"

"I'm nicely, thank you, Hannah!"

John got up from his seat and said "Good-night!" to his Uncle.

"Good-night, John. Mind well what I've said to you!"

"I will, Uncle Matthew!"

"Good-night, son, dear!" said Uncle Matthew, smiling at him.

iii

In the morning, Uncle Matthew was better than he had been during the night, and Dr. Dobbs, when he called to see him, thought that he would live for several weeks more. John went down to the kitchen from his Uncle's room, happy at the thought that his Uncle might recover in spite of the doctor's statement that death was inevitable within a short time. Doctors, he told himself, had made many mistakes, and perhaps Dr. Dobbs was making a mistake about Uncle Matthew.

He had lain late, heavy with fatigue, for Mrs. MacDermott had not called him at his usual hour and so the morning was well advanced when he came down.

"There's a letter for you," said Uncle William, pointing to the mantel-shelf, where a foolscap envelope rested against the clock. "It'll be about the story, I'm thinking!"

John took the letter in his trembling fingers and tore it open.

"They've sent it back," he said in a low tone.

"There'll be a note with it," Uncle William murmured.

"Yes! . . ." He straightened out the printed note and read it. "They've declined it," he said.

"They've what?" Uncle William exclaimed, taking the printed slip from John's hands. He read the note of rejection through several times.

"What does it say?" Mrs. MacDermott asked.

"It's a queer kind of a note, this!" said Uncle William. "You'd think the man was breaking his heart at the idea of not printing the story. He doesn't say anything about it, whether it's good or bad. He just thanks John for sending it to him and says he's sorry he can't accept it. If he's so sorry as all that, why the hell doesn't he print it!"

"William!" said Mrs. MacDermott sharply. "This is Sunday!"

"Well, dear knows I don't want to desecrate God's Day," Uncle William answered, accepting the rebuke, "but that is a lamentable letter to get, I must say!"

Mrs. MacDermott held her hand out for the letter. "Give it to me," she said, and she took it from Uncle William.

"This is his way of saying your story's no good, John," she said, when she had read through the note. "No man would refuse a thing if he thought it was worth printing!"

Her words hurt John very sorely. He looked at her, but he did not speak, and then, after a moment or two, he turned away.

"Now, now, that's not right at all," Uncle William said comfortingly. "There might be a thousand things to prevent the man from printing the story. Mebbe he doesn't know a good story when he sees it. Sure, half these papers nowadays print stories that would turn a child's stomach, and a thing's not bad just because one paper won't take it. There's other magazines besides *Blackwood's,* John, as good, too, and mebbe better!" He went over to his nephew and put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "There, there, now, don't let this upset you! Your Uncle Matthew was telling me the other day that some of the greatest writers in the world had their best stories refused time after time. Don't lose heart over a thing like that!"

"I haven't lost heart, Uncle William. I daresay it isn't as good as I thought it was, but I'll improve. It wasn't to be expected I'd succeed the first time!"

"That's the spirit, boy. That's the spirit!"

"Only I'm disappointed all the same. It's likely I don't know enough yet!"

"Oh, that's very likely," said Uncle William. "You're only a young fellow yet, you know!"

"Mebbe that story of mine is full of ignorant mistakes I wouldn't have made if I'd been about the world a bit and seen more!"

"I daresay you're right! I daresay you're right! . . ."

Mrs. MacDermott came between them. "What are you leading up to?" she demanded.

"I must travel a bit before I start writing things," John answered. "I must know more and see more. My Uncle Matthew's right. You have to go out into the world to get adventure and romance! . . ."

"Can't you get all the adventure and romance you need in this place, and not go tramping among strangers and foreigners for it?" Mrs. MacDermott retorted angrily.

"How can I get adventure and romance in a place where I know everybody?" John rejoined.

"Are you proposing to leave home, John?" Uncle William asked.

"Aye! For a while anyway," John answered. "I'll go to London! . . ."

"You'll not go to no London," Mrs. MacDermott retorted, "and your Uncle Matthew lying on his deathbed! . . ."

"I'm not proposing to go this minute, ma! . . ."

"You'll not go at all," she insisted.

"I will!"

"You will not, I tell you. What would a lump of a lad like you do in a place of that sort, where there's temptation and sin at every corner? Doesn't everyone know that the Devil's roaming up and down the streets of London day and night, luring young men to their ruin? There's bad women in London! . . ."

"There's bad women everywhere," John replied. "You don't need to be your age to know that!"

She listened angrily while John explained his point of view to his Uncle William. Travel and new experiences were necessary to the development of his mind.

"Don't you go up to Belfast every week?" Mrs. MacDermott interrupted.

"I was in Belfast yesterday," John retorted, "but there wasn't a thing happened to me, romantic or anything else! . . ." He stopped abruptly, smitten by the recollection of his meeting with Maggie Carmichael. After all, *that* was a romantic adventure! Most strange that he had not thought of his love affair in that way before! Of course, it was a romantic adventure! He had walked straight out of a dull street, you might say, into an enchanted café . . . and had found Maggie in captivity, waiting for him to deliver her from it. She had been lonely . . . and he had come to comfort her. He had taken her from that dull, cheerless . . . prison . . . you could call it that! . . . and had taken her to a pleasant place and made

love to her! Oh, but of course it was a romantic adventure, with love and a beautiful golden-haired girl at the end of it. And here he was, moping over the misadventure of a manuscript and talking of travel in distant places in search of exciting experiences as if he had not already had the most thrilling and wonderful adventure that is possible to a man! Why, if he were to leave Ballyards and go to London, he would lose Maggie . . . would not see her again! . . . By the Holy O, his mother was right after all! Women *were* right sometimes! There was plenty of romance and adventure lying at your hand, if you only took the trouble to look for it. Mebbe . . . mebbe a thing was romantic or not romantic, just according to the way you looked at it. One man could see romance in a grocer's shop, and another man could not see romance anywhere but in places where he had never been! . . .

"Mebbe you're right, ma," he said.

Mrs. MacDermott looked suspiciously at him. "You changed your mind very quick," she said.

"I always change my mind quick," he replied.

They heard the noise of tapping overhead.

"That's your Uncle Matthew," said Mrs. MacDermott, rising from her chair.

"I'll go," John exclaimed hastily. "It's mebbe me he wants!"

He ran quickly up the stairs and entered his Uncle's room.

"Yes, Uncle Matthew?" he said.

"I heard you all talking together," Uncle Matthew answered. "What's happened?"

"Oh, nothing! My story's been refused. That's all."

Uncle Matthew put out his hand and took hold of John's. "Are you very disappointed?" he said.

"Yes, I am. I made sure they'd take it!"

"There ought to have been a woman in it. You know, John, I told you that. There was no love in that story, and

people like to read about love. That's natural. Sure, it's the beginning of everything!"

"I didn't know anything about it then, Uncle! . . ."

"No, but you do now . . . a wee bit . . . and you might have imagined it. You'd never be your father's son, if you hadn't a heart brimful of love. What else were you talking about?"

John told his Uncle of his proposal to go to London in search of experience.

"Aye, you'll have to do that some day," his Uncle replied, "but there's no hurry yet awhile. You'd better finish your schooling first, and you could go on writing here 'til you get more mastery of it. You might try to write a book, and then when it's done, you could go to London or somewhere. I'd be sorry if you went just now! . . ."

"I'm not meaning to go yet, Uncle!"

"Very good, son. I'd like you to be here when I . . . when! . . ."

He did not finish his sentence, but the pressure of his hand on John's increased.

"Eh, John?" he said.

"Yes, Uncle Matthew!" John replied. He quickly changed the conversation. "You're looking a lot better," he said.

Uncle Matthew smiled. "Oh, aye," he replied, "I feel a lot better, too. I'll mebbe beat the doctor yet. He thinks I'm done for, but mebbe I'll teach him different!"

"You will, indeed. And why wouldn't you? You're young yet!"

Uncle Matthew did not reply to this. He turned on his pillow and glanced towards the dressing-table.

"Are you looking for anything?" John asked.

"Is there a book there?"

"No," John said. "Do you want one?"

"Your ma read a wee bit to me in the night, after you

went to bed. I thought mebbe you'd read a wee bit more to me. *Willie Reilly,* it was."

"I'll get it for you," John replied, going to the door.

He called to his mother, and she told him that she had brought the book downstairs with her.

"Wait a minute and I'll fetch it," she said.

She returned in a moment or two, carrying the book in her hand, and mounted half-way up the staircase to meet him. She pointed to a place in the book. "I read up to there to him in the night," she said. John looked at his mother, as he took the book from her hands, and saw how tired she looked.

"Did you not get any sleep at all, ma?" he asked with concern.

"I'm all right, son," she answered.

"No, you're not," he insisted. "You'll just go to your bed this minute and lie down for a while! . . ."

"And the dinner to cook and all," she interrupted.

"Well, after your dinner then. You'll lie down the whole afternoon. Uncle William and me'll get the tea ready, and we'll take it in turns to look after Uncle Matthew!"

She stood on the step beneath him, looking at him with dark, tired eyes, and then she put out her hand and touched him on the shoulder. "You'll not leave me, John?" she pleaded.

"No, ma," he answered. "Not for a long while yet!"

She turned away from him and went down the stairs again.

John returned to his Uncle's room, and sat down by the side of the bed. He opened the book and began to read of Willie Reilly and his Colleen Bawn. Now and then he glanced at his Uncle and wondered at the childlike and innocent look on his face. There was a strange simplicity in his eyes . . . not the simplicity of those who have not

got understanding, but of those who have a deep and unchangeable knowledge that is very different from the knowledge of other men; and once again John assured himself that while Uncle Matthew's behaviour might be "quare" when compared with that of other people, yet it was not foolish behaviour nor the behaviour of the feeble-minded: it was the conduct of a man who responded immediately to simple and honest emotions, who did not stop to consider questions of discretion or interest, but did the thing which seemed to him to be right.

"What are you thinking of, Uncle Matthew?" he said suddenly, putting down the book, for it seemed to him that his Uncle was no longer listening.

"I was thinking I wouldn't have missed my life for the wide world!" Uncle Matthew replied.

"After everything?" John asked.

"Aye, in spite of everything," said Uncle Matthew. "There's great value in life . . . great value!"

John picked up the book again, but he did not begin to read, nor did Uncle Matthew show any signs that he wished the reading to be resumed.

"Our minds go this way and that way," Uncle Matthew went on, "and some of us are not happy 'til we're away here and there! . . ."

"You were always wanting to be off after adventures yourself, Uncle Matthew!"

"Aye, John, I was, and I never went. I've oftentimes thought little of myself for that, but I'm wondering now, lying here, whether it wasn't a great adventure to stop at home. I don't know! I don't know! But I'll know in a wee while! John!"

"Yes, Uncle!"

"I wouldn't change places with the King of England, at this minute, not for all the money in the mint and my weight in gold!"

"Why, Uncle Matthew?"

"Do you know why? Because in a wee while, I'll know all there is to know, and he'll be left here knowing no more nor the rest of you. God is good, John. He shares out his knowledge without favour to anyone. The like of us'll know as much in the next world as the like of them! . . ."

iv

When the sharper anxieties concerning Uncle Matthew had subsided, John's mind was filled with thoughts of Maggie Carmichael. It seemed to him to be impossible that any seven days in the history of the world had been so long in passing as the seven days which separated him from his next meeting with her. His work at the Ballyards National School lost any interest it ever had for him: the pupils seemed to be at once the stupidest and laziest and most aggravating children on earth. Lizzie Turley completely lost her power to add two and one together and make three of them. Strive as he might, he could not make her comprehend or remember that two and one, when added together, did not amount to five. There was even a dreadful day when she lost her power to subtract. . . . Miss Gebbie, the teacher to whom he was most often monitor, had always had hard, uncouth manners, but they became almost intolerable before the seven days had passed by . . . and it seemed certain that there must be a crisis in her life and in his before the clock struck three on Friday afternoon! If she complained again, he said to himself, about the way in which he marked the children's exercise books, he would tell her in very plain language what he thought of her and her big bamboo-cane. When she slapped the children, the corners of her mouth went down and her large lips tightened and a cruel glint came into her eyes! . . .

It was only during the reading half-hour that his mind was at ease in school that week, for then he could let his thoughts roam from Ballyards to Belfast, and fill his eyes

with visions of Maggie. The droning voices of the children, reading "Jack has got a cart and can draw sand and clay in it," were almost soothing, and it was sufficient for supervision, if now and then, he would call out, "Next!" The child who was reading would instantly stop, and the child next to her would instantly begin. . . .

It seemed to him that he had the clearest impressions of Maggie Carmichael, and yet had also the vaguest impressions of her. He remembered very distinctly that she had bright, laughing eyes, and that her hair was fair, and that she had pretty teeth: white and even. He had often read in books of the beauty of a woman's teeth, but he had never paid much attention to them. After all, what was the purpose of teeth? To bite. It was ridiculous, he had told himself, to talk and write of beauty in teeth when all that mattered was whether they could bite well or not. . . . But now, remembering the beauty of Maggie Carmichael's mouth, he saw that the writers had done well when they insisted on the beauty of teeth. Any sort of a good tooth would do for biting and chewing, but there was something more than that to be said for good, white, even teeth. If teeth were of no value otherwise than for biting and chewing, false teeth were better than natural teeth! . . . And false teeth were so hideous to look at; so smug, so self-conscious. Aggie Logan had false teeth. So had Teeshie McBratney and Sadie Cochrane. Things with pale gums! . . .

He had wanted to kiss Maggie Carmichael's teeth, so beautiful were they. Just her teeth. It had been splendid to kiss her lips, but then one always kissed lips. Men, according to the books, even kissed hair and ears and eyes. He had read recently of a man who kissed a woman on the neck, just behind the ear; and at the time he had thought that this was a very queer thing to do. Love, he supposed, was responsible for a thing like that. He could not account for it in any other way. He understood *now,* of course.

When a man loved a woman, every part of her was very dear and beautiful to him, and to kiss her neck just behind the ear was as exquisite as to kiss her lips. No one, in any of the books he had read, had wished to kiss a woman's teeth. There were still hidden joys in kissing . . . and he had discovered one of them. He would kiss Maggie's teeth on Saturday. He would kiss her lips, too, of course, and her hair and her eyes and ears and the part of her neck that was just behind her ear, but most of all he would kiss her teeth! . . .

He thought that it was very strange that he should think so ardently of kissing Maggie. He could have kissed Aggie Logan dozens of times, but he had never had the slightest desire to kiss her. He remembered how foolish he had thought her that night at the soiree when someone proposed that they should play Postman's Knock. Aggie Logan had called him out to the lobby. There was a letter for him, she said, with three stamps on it. Three stamps! Did anyone ever hear the like of that? And he was to go into the lobby and give her three kisses, one after the other . . . peck, peck, peck . . . and then it would be his turn to call for someone, and Aggie would expect him to call for her! . . . Willie Logan had called for a girl. He had a letter for her with fifty stamps on it. . . . A great roar of laughter had gone up from the others when they heard of the amount of the postage, and Willie was thought to be a daring, desperate fellow . . . until the superintendent of the Sunday School said that there must be reason in all things and proposed a limit of three stamps on each letter . . . no person to be called for more than twice in succession. Willie, boisterous and very amorous, whispered to John that he did not care what limit they made . . . no one could tell how many extra stamps you put on your letter out in the lobby. . . .

John had not answered Aggie's call. He had contrived to get out of the school-room without being observed, and

Aggie had been obliged to call for someone else. Kissing! . . . Kiss her! . . . Three stamps! . . . Peck, peck, *peck!* . . .

V

Wednesday dragged itself out slowly and very reluctantly; Thursday was worse than Wednesday; and Friday was only saved from being as bad as Thursday by its nearness to Saturday. On the morrow, he would see Maggie again. Many times during the week, he had debated with himself as to whether he should write to her or not, but the difficulty of knowing what to say to her, except that he loved her and was longing for the advent of Saturday, prevented him from doing so. In any case, it would be difficult to write to her without questions from his mother, and if Maggie were to reply to him, there would be no end to the talk from her. After all, a week was only a week. On Monday, a week had seemed to be an interminable period of time, but on Friday, it had resumed the normal aspect of a week, a thing with a definite and reachable end. It was odd to observe how, as the week drew to its close, the intolerable things became tolerable. Miss Gebbie seemed to be a little less inhuman on Friday than she had been on Monday, and Lizzie Turley marvellously recovered her power to add two and one together and get the correct result. Beyond all doubt, he was in love. There could not be any other explanation of his behaviour and his peculiar impatience. That any man should conduct himself as he had done during the week now ending, for any other reason than that he was in love, was impossible. Why, he woke up in the morning, thinking of Maggie, and he went to sleep at night, thinking of Maggie. He thought of her when he was at school, and he thought of her in the street, in the shop, in the kitchen, even in his Uncle Matthew's room. When it was his turn to sit by Uncle Matthew's

side, his mind, for more than half the time, was in Belfast with Maggie. He had read more than a hundred pages of *Willie Reilly* to his Uncle, but he had not comprehended one of them. He had been thinking exclusively of Maggie.

He wondered whether he would always be in this state of absorption. Other people fell in love, as he knew, but they seemed to be able to think of other things besides their love. Perhaps they were not so much in love as he was! He began to see difficulties arising from this great devotion of his to Maggie. It would be very hard to concentrate his mind on a story if it were full of thoughts of her. He would probably spoil any work he attempted to do, because his mind would not be on it, but away with Maggie. In none of the books he had read, had he seen any account of the length of time a pair of lovers took in which to get used to each other and to adjust their affections to the ordinary needs of life. He would never cease to love Maggie, of course, but he wondered how long it would be before his mind would become capable of thinking of Maggie and of something else at the same time . . . or even of thinking of something else without thinking of Maggie at all. . . .

## vi

Her mother had looked dubiously at him when he talked of going to Belfast on Saturday. She said that he ought not to leave home while his Uncle Matthew was so ill, but Dr. Dobbs had given a more optimistic opinion on the sick man's condition, and so, after they had argued over the matter, she withdrew her objection. Uncle William had insisted that John ought to go up to the city for the sake of the change. The lad had had a hard week, what with his school work and his writing and his attention to Uncle Matthew, and the change would be good for him. "Only don't miss the train this time," he added to John.

Maggie met him outside the theatre. He had not long to wait for her, and his heart thrilled at the sight of her as she came round Arthur's Corner.

"So you have come," she said to him, as she shook hands with him.

"Did you think I wouldn't?" he answered.

"Oh, well," she replied, "you never know with fellows! Some of them makes an appointment to meet you, and you'd think from the way they talk about it that they were dying to meet you; and then when the time comes, you might stand at the corner 'til your feet were frozen to the ground, but not a bit of them would turn up. I'd never forgive a boy that treated me that way!"

"I'm not the sort that treats a girl that way," said John.

"Oh, indeed you could break your word as well as the next! Many's a time I've give my word to a fellow and broke it myself, just because I didn't feel like keeping it. But it's different for a girl nor it is for a fellow. There's no harm in a girl disappointing a fellow! I hear this piece at the Royal is awfully good this week. It's about a girl that nearly gets torn to pieces by a mad lion. I don't know whether I like that sort of piece or not. It seems terrible silly, and it would be awful if the hero come on a minute or two late and the girl was ate up fornent your eyes!"

John laughed. "There's not much danger of that," he replied.

There were very few people waiting outside the Pit Door, and so they were able to secure good seats with ease. "The best of coming in the daytime," John said, "is you have a better chance of the front row than you have at night!"

She nodded her head. "But it's better at night," she answered. "A piece never seems real to me in the daylight."

"Where'll we go to-night?" he said to her.

"Oh, I can't go with you to-night again," she exclaimed,

taking a chocolate from the box which he had bought for her.

"Why?"

"I have another appointment! . . ."

"Break it," he commanded.

"I couldn't do that! . . ."

"Oh, yes, you could," he insisted. "You told me yourself you'd disappointed fellows many's a time!"

"I daresay I did, but I can't break this one," she retorted.

Suspicion entered his mind. "Is it with another fellow?" he asked.

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," she said.

"Is it?" he demanded.

"And what if it is?"

"I don't want you to go out with anybody else but me!"

She ate another chocolate. "Have one?" she said, passing the box to him. He shook his head moodily. "Are you going to do what I ask or are you not?" he said.

"Don't be childish," she replied. "I've promised a friend to go to a concert to-night, and I'll have to go. That's all about it!"

"Is it a fellow?"

"Mebbe it is and mebbe it's not!" she teased.

"You know I'm in love with you!" She laughed lightly, and he bent his head closer to her. "Listen, Maggie," he went on, "I know I only met you for the first time last Saturday, but I'm terrible in love with you. Listen! I want to marry you, Maggie! . . ."

She burst out laughing.

"Don't make a mock of me," he pleaded.

She turned to look at him. "What age are you?" she demanded.

"I'm near nineteen," he answered.

"And I'm twenty-two," she retorted. "Twenty-two past, I am. Four years older nor you! . . ."

"That doesn't matter," he insisted.

"It wouldn't if the ages was the other way round . . . you twenty-two and me nineteen!"

"It doesn't matter what way they are. It's not age that matters: it's feeling!"

"You'll feel different, mebbe, when you're a bit older. What would people say if I was to marry you now, after meeting you a couple of times, and you four years younger nor me?"

"It doesn't matter what they'd say," he replied. "Sure, people are always saying something!"

She ruminated! "I like going out with you well enough, and you're a queer, nice wee fellow, but it's foolish talk to be talking of getting married. What trade are you at?"

"I'm a monitor," he answered. "I'm in my last year! . . ."

"You're still at the school," she said.

"I'm a monitor," he replied, insisting on his status.

"Och, sure that's only learning. When in the earthly world would you be able to keep a wife?"

"I'm going to write books! . . ."

"What sort of books?"

"Story books," he said.

"Have you writ any yet?"

"No, but I wrote a short story once!"

She looked at him admiringly. "How much did you get for it?" she asked.

"I didn't get anything for it," he replied. "They wouldn't take it!"

She remained silent for a few moments. Then she said, "Your prospects aren't very bright!"

"But they'll get brighter," he said. "They will. I tell you they will!"

"When?" she asked.

"Some day," he answered.

"Some day may be a long day in coming," she went on. "I might have to wait a good while before you were able to marry me. Five or six years, mebbe, and then I'd be getting on to thirty, John. You'd better be looking out for a younger girl nor me!"

"I don't want anybody else but you," he replied.

vii

When the play was over, they walked arm in arm towards the restaurant where she was employed. "I promised Mrs. Bothwell we'd have our tea there," Maggie said to John. "It put her in a sweet temper, the thought of having two customers for certain. She'll mebbe give up that place. It's not paying her well. She wasn't going to give me the time off at first, but I told you were my cousin up from the country for the day! . . ."

"But I'm not your cousin," John objected.

"That doesn't matter. Sure, you have to tell a wee bit of a lie now and again, or you'd never get your way at all. And it saves bother and explaining!"

They crossed High Street and were soon at the foot of the stairs leading up to Bothwell's Restaurant. "Mind," said Maggie in a whisper, "you're my cousin!"

He did not speak, but followed her up the stairs and into the restaurant where she introduced him to a plain, stoutly-built, but cheerless woman who came from the small room into the large one as they entered it. There was one customer in the room, but he finished his tea and departed soon after Maggie and John arrived. In a little while, she and he were eating their meal. John politely asked Mrs. Bothwell to join them, but she declined.

She sat at a neighbouring table and talked to them of the play.

"I don't know when I was last at a theatre," she said, "and I don't know when I'll go again. I always say to

myself when I come away, 'Well, that's over and my money's spent and what satisfaction have I got for it?' And when I think it all out, there doesn't seem to be any satisfaction. You've spent your money, and the play's over, and that's all. It seems a poor sort of return!"

"You might say that about anything," John said. "A football match or . . . or one of these nice wee cookies of yours!"

"Oh, indeed, you might," Mrs. Bothwell admitted. "Sure, there's no pleasure in the world that's lasting, and mebbe if there were we wouldn't like it. You pay your good money for a thing, and you have it a wee while, and then it's all over, and you have to pay more money for something else. Or mebbe you have it a long while, only you're not content with it. That's the way it always is. There's very little satisfaction to be got out of anything. Look at the Albert Memorial! That looks solid enough, but there's people says it'll tumble to the ground one of these days with the running water that's beneath it!"

Maggie took a big bite from a cookie. "Oh, now, there's satisfaction in everything," she said, "if you only go the right way about getting it and don't expect too much. I always say you get as much in this world as you're able to take . . . and it's true enough. I know I take all in the way of enjoyment that I can put my two hands on. There's no use in being miserable, and it's nicer to be happy!"

"You're mebbe right," said Mrs. Bothwell. "But you can't just be miserable or happy when you like. I can't anyway!"

"You should try," said Maggie.

Mrs. Bothwell went to the small room and did not return. John was glad that her dissatisfaction with the universe did not make her oblivious of the fact that Maggie and he were content enough with each other's company and did not require the presence of a third party.

He leant across the table and took hold of one of Maggie's

hands. "You've not answered my question yet?" he said.

"What question?" she said.

"About going out with me," he replied.

"I'll go to the Royal with you next Saturday," she said.

"Ah, but for good! I mean it when I say I want to marry you! . . ."

"You're an awful wee fool," she exclaimed, drawing her hand from his and slapping him playfully.

"Fool!"

"Yes. I thought at first you were having me on, but I think now you're only a wee fool. But I like you all the same!"

"Am I a fool for loving you?" he demanded.

"Oh, no, not for that, but for knowing so little!"

"Marry me, Maggie," he pleaded.

"Wheesht," she said, "Mrs. Bothwell will hear you! . . ."

"I don't care who hears! . . ."

"But I do," she interrupted. "You're an awful one for not caring. You've said that more nor once to-day!" She glanced at the clock. "I'll have to be going soon," she said.

"No, not yet awhile! . . ."

"But I will. I'll be late if I stop! . . ."

She began to draw on her gloves as she spoke.

"Well, when will I see you again?" he asked.

"Next Saturday if you like! . . ."

"Can I not see you before? I could come up to Belfast on Wednesday! . . ."

"I'm engaged on Wednesday," she said.

"But!"

"Och, quit butting," she retorted. "I'll see you on Saturday and no sooner. Pay Mrs. Bothwell and come on! . . ."

viii

She insisted on leaving him at the Junction, and he moodily watched her climbing into a tram. She waved her hand to him as the tram drove off, and he waved his in reply. And then she was gone, and he had a sense of loss and depression. He stared gloomily about him. What should he do now? He might go to the Opera House or to one of the music-halls or he might just walk about the streets. . . .

He thought of what Mrs. Bothwell had said earlier in the day. "There's very little satisfaction in anything!"

"There's a lot in that," he said to himself. "I'll go home," he continued. "There's no pleasure in mouching round the town by yourself!"

He got into a tram and was soon at the railway station. On the platform, a little way in front of him, he saw Willie Logan, flushed and excited, with two girls, one on either side of him. Willie had an arm round each girl's waist.

"That fellow's getting plenty of fun anyway," John said, as he climbed into an empty carriage. He did not wish to join Willie's party. He knew too well what Willie was like: a noisy, demonstrative fellow, indiscriminately amorous. "Nearly every girl's worth kissing," Willie had said to him on one occasion. "If you can't get your bit of fun with one woman, sure you can get it with another!"

Willie, in the carriage, would kiss one girl, John knew, and then would turn and kiss the other, "just to show there's no ill will." He might even invite John to kiss them in turn . . . so that John might not feel uncomfortable and "out of it." He would lie back in the carriage, his big face flushed and his eyes bright with pleasure, an arm round each of his companions, and when he was not kissing them, he would be bawling out some song, or, at stations, hanging half out of the window to chaff the porters

and the station-master. "Get all you can," he would say, "and do without the rest!"

But John was not a promiscuist: he was a monopolist. He put the whole of his strength into his love for one woman, and he demanded a similar singleness of devotion from her. His mind was full of Maggie, but he felt that she had cast him out of her mind the moment that the tram bore her out of his sight.

"I'll make her want me," he said, tightening his fists. "I'll make her want me 'til she's heartsore with wanting!"

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER

### i

UNCLE MATTHEW died three days later. He slipped out of life without ostentation or murmur. "The MacDermotts are not afeard to die," he had said to John at the beginning of his illness, and in that spirit he had died. In the morning, he had asked Mrs. MacDermott to look for *Don Quixote* in the attic and bring it to him, and she had done so. He had tried to read the book, but it was too heavy for him . . . his strength was swiftly going from him . . . and it had fallen from his hands on to the quilt and then had rolled on to the floor.

"I can't hold it," he murmured.

"Will I read it to you?" she said to him.

"Yes, if you please!" he said.

It was a badly-bound book, printed in small, eye-tormenting type, and it was difficult to hold; but she made no complaint of these things, and for an hour or so, she read to Uncle Matthew. She put the book down when his breathing denoted that he was asleep, but she did not immediately go from the room. She sat for a time, looking at the delicate face on the pillow, and then she picked the book up again and began to examine it, turning the pages over slowly, reading here and reading there, and examining the illustrations closely. There was a puzzled look on her face, and the flesh between her eyebrows was puckered and deeply lined. She put the book down on her lap and looked intently in front of her, as if she were considering some problem. She picked the book up again, and once more turned over the pages and examined the pictures; but she

did not appear to find any solution of her problem as she did so, for she put the book down on the dressing-table and left it there. She bent over the sleeping man for a few moments, listening to his breathing, and then she went out of the room leaving the door ajar.

And while she was downstairs, Uncle Matthew died. He had not wakened from his sleep. He seemed to be exactly in the same position as he was when she left the room. He was not breathing . . . that was all. She called to Uncle William, and he came quickly up the stairs.

"Is anything wrong?" he said anxiously.

"Matt's dead!" she replied.

He stood still.

"Shut the shop," she said, "and send for John and the doctor!"

He did not move.

She touched him on the shoulder. "Do you hear me, William?"

He started. "Aye," he said, "I hear you right enough!"

But he still remained in the room, gazing blindly at his brother. Then he went over to the bed and sat down and cried.

"Poor William!" said Mrs. MacDermott, putting her arms around him.

ii

John wrote to Maggie Carmichael to tell her of his Uncle's death. It would not be possible for him to keep his engagement with her on the following Saturday. She sent a thinly-written note of sympathy to him, telling him that she would not expect to see him for a while because of his bereavement. *"You'll not be in the mood for enjoying yourself at present,"* she wrote, *"and I daresay you would prefer to stay at home at present. I expect you'll miss your Uncle terribly! . . ."*

Indeed, he did miss his Uncle terribly!

There was a strange quietness in the house before the day of the burial, which was natural, but it was maintained after Uncle Matthew had been put in the grave where John's father lay. Uncle William's quick, loud voice became hushed and slow and sometimes inaudible, and Mrs. MacDermott went about her work with few words to anyone. John had come on her, an hour or two before the coffin lid was screwed down, putting a book in Uncle Matthew's hands. He saw the title of it . . . *Don Quixote* . . . and he said to her, "What are you doing, ma?" She looked up quickly and hesitated. "Nothing!" she answered, and suddenly aware that she did not wish to be observed, he went away and left her alone. It seemed to him afterwards that she resented his knowledge of what she had done . . . that she looked at him sometimes as if she were forbidding him ever to speak of it . . . but she did not talk of it. She spoke as seldom as Uncle William did, and it seemed to John that the voice had been carried out of the house when Uncle Matthew had been carried to the graveyard. He felt that he could not endure the oppression of this silence any longer, that he must speak to someone, and, in his search for comfort, his mind wandered in search of Maggie Carmichael with intenser devotion than he had ever experienced before. If only Uncle Matthew were alive, John could talk to him of Maggie. Uncle Matthew would listen to him. Uncle Matthew always had listened to him. He had never shown any impatience when John had talked to him of this scheme and that scheme, and he would not have mocked his love for Maggie. How queer a thing it was that Uncle Matthew who had seemed to be the least important person in the house should have so . . . so stifled the rest of them by his death!

Uncle William, who bore the whole burden of maintaining the family, mourned for Uncle Matthew as if he had lost his support; and Mrs. MacDermott began to talk, when she talked at all, of the things that Matt had liked. Matt liked

this and Matt liked that . . . and yet she had seemed not merely to disregard Uncle Matthew when he was alive, but actually to dislike him. Uncle Matthew must have had a stronger place in the house than any of them had imagined. John could not bear to go to the attic now, although he wished to turn over the books which were now his. It was in the attic that Uncle Matthew had found most of his happiness, in the company of uncomplaining, unreproachful books, and the memory of that happiness had drawn John to the attic one day when he most missed his Uncle. He had handled the books very fondly, turning over pages and pausing now and then to read a passage or two . . . and while he had turned the pages of an old book with faded, yellow leaves, he had found a cutting from a Belfast newspaper. It contained a report of the police proceedings against Uncle Matthew, and it was headed, STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF A BALLYARDS MAN! . . . John hurriedly put the book down and went out of the room. He had not shed a tear over Uncle Matthew. He did not wish to cry over him. He felt that Uncle Matthew would like his mourners to have dry eyes . . . but it was hard not to cry when one read that bare, uncomprehending account of Uncle Matthew's chivalrous act. *Strange* behaviour, the reporter named it, when every instinct in John demanded that it should be called *noble* behaviour. Was a man to be called a fool because his heart compelled him to perform an act of simple loyalty? . . . *Strange behaviour!* John seized the cutting and crumpled it in his hand. Then he straightened it out again and tore it in pieces. Were people so poor in faith and devotion that they could not recognise the nobility of what Uncle Matthew had done? And for that act of goodness, Uncle Matthew had gone to his grave under stigma. "Poor sowl," they said in Ballyards, "it's a merciful release for him. He was always quare in the head!"

John could not stay in the house with his memories of

Uncle Matthew, and so he went for walks along the shores of the Lough, to Cubbinferry and Kirklea or, turning coastwards, towards Millreagh and Holmesport; but there was no comfort to be found in these walks. He returned from them, tired in body, but unrested in mind. He tried to write another story, but he had to put the pen and ink and paper away again, and he told himself that he had no ability to write a story. Wherever he went and whatever he did, the loss of Uncle Matthew pressed upon him and left him with a sense of impotence, until at last, his nature, weary of its own dejection, turned and demanded relief. And so he set his thoughts again on Maggie Carmichael, and each day he found himself, more and more, thinking of her until, after a while, he began to think only of her. He had written to her a second time, but she had not answered his letter. He remembered that she had protested against her incompetence as a correspondent. "I'm a poor hand at letter-writing," she had said laughingly. She could talk easily enough, but she never knew what to put in a letter, and anyhow it was a terrible bother to write one. A letter would be a poor substitute for her, he told himself. He must see her soon. Mourning or no mourning, he would go to Belfast on the next Saturday and would see her. It would not be possible for him to take her to a theatre, but she and he could go for a long walk or they could sit together in the restaurant and talk to each other. This loneliness and silence was becoming unendurable: he must get away from the atmosphere of loss and mourning into an atmosphere of life and love. Uncle Matthew would wish him to do that. He felt certain that Uncle Matthew would wish him to do that. Uncle Matthew would hate to think of his nephew prowling along the roads in misery and suffering when his whole desire had been that he should have opportunity and satisfaction. He had bequeathed his property and his money "to my beloved nephew John MacDermott," and John had been deeply moved by the affection

that glowed through the legal phraseology of the will. It was not yet known how much money there would be, for Mr. McGonigal, the solicitor, had not completed his account of Uncle Matthew's affairs; but the amount of it could not be very large. That was immaterial to John. What mattered to him was that his Uncle's love for him had never flickered for a moment, but had shone steadily and surely until the day of his death.

"I never told anyone but him about Maggie," John thought. "I'm glad I told him . . . and I know he'd want me to go to her now!"

And so, late on Friday evening, he resolved that he would go to Belfast on the following day. He sent a short note to Maggie, addressing it to the restaurant, in which he told her that he would call for her on Saturday. He begged that she would go for a walk with him. *"We might go up the Cave Hill,"* he wrote, *"and be back in plenty of time for tea!"*

iii

He crossed the Lagan in the ferry-boat, so impatient was he to get quickly to Maggie, but when he reached the restaurant, Maggie was not there. He stood in the doorway, looking about the large room, but there was no one present, for it was too early yet for mid-day meals. Maggie was probably engaged in the small room at the back of the restaurant and would presently appear. It was Mrs. Bothwell who came to answer his call.

"Oh, good morning!" he said, trying to keep the note of disappointment out of his voice.

"Good morning," she answered.

"It's a brave day!"

"It's not so bad," she grudgingly admitted.

"Is . . . is Maggie in?" he asked.

"In!" she exclaimed, looking at him with astonishment plain on her face.

"Yes. Isn't she in? She's not sick or anything, is she?" he replied anxiously.

"Oh, dear bless you, no! She's not sick," Mrs. Bothwell said. "Do you mean to say you don't know where she is?"

"No, I . . . I don't, Mrs. Bothwell!" There was a note of apprehension in his voice. "I thought she'd be here!"

"But haven't you been to the house?"

"No," he answered. "I've just arrived from Ballyards this minute. What's wrong, Mrs. Bothwell?"

"There's nothing wrong that I know of. Only I don't understand you not knowing about it. Why aren't you at the church?"

"Church!"

"Aye. Sure, I'd be there myself only I can't leave the shop. I'm glad she's getting a fine day for it anyway!"

John touched her on the arm. "I don't understand what you're talking about, Mrs. Bothwell," he said. "What's happening?"

"Didn't you know she's being married the day on a polisman? . . ."

"*Married!*" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Aye. She's been going with him this long while back, and now that he's been promoted . . . they've made him a sergeant . . . they've got married. She's done well for herself. How is it you didn't know about it, and you and her such chums together?"

"Did I hear you saying she's getting married the day?" he murmured, gazing at her in a stupefied fashion.

"That's what I keep on telling you," she replied, "only you don't pay no heed to me. I thought you were her cousin! . . ."

"No, I'm not her cousin," he answered. "I was . . . I was going with her. That's all. I'm sorry to have bothered you, Mrs. Bothwell!"

"Oh, it's no bother at all. She must have been having

you on, for the banns was up at St. George's this three weeks! . . ."

"St. George's!" he repeated.

"Aye, these three weeks. She had a fancy to be married in St. George's Church, for all it's a ritualistic place, and people says they're going fast to Popery there. But I don't wonder at her, for it's quare and nice to see the wee boys in their surplices, singing the hymns! . . ."

He interrupted her. "Three weeks ago," he said, as if calculating. "That must have been soon after I met her for the first time. I met her here in this room, Mrs. Bothwell. I'd been to the Royal to see a play, and I came in here for my tea, and I struck up to her for I liked her look! . . ."

"Oh, she's a nice enough looking girl is Maggie, though looks is not everything," Mrs. Bothwell interjected.

"She never told me! . . ."

"Oh, well, if it comes to that, you never told her anything about yourself, did you?" Mrs. Bothwell demanded. "I suppose she thought you were just a fellow out for a bit of fun, and she might as well have a bit of fun, too!"

"But I wasn't out for fun," he exclaimed. "I was in earnest!"

"That's where you made your mistake," said Mrs. Bothwell. "I'm sorry for you, but sure you're young enough not to take a thing like that to heart, and she's not the only girl in the world by a long chalk. By the time you're her age, she'll have a child or two, and'll mebbe be feeling very sorry for herself . . . and you'll have the world fornent you still! A young fellow like you isn't going to let a wee thing like that upset you?"

"It isn't a wee thing, Mrs. Bothwell. It's a big thing," he insisted.

"Och, sure, everything's big looking 'til you see something bigger. One of these days you'll be wondering what in the earthly world made you think twice about her!"

He turned away from her and moved towards the door, but suddenly he remembered the letter which he had written to Maggie on the previous evening.

"Did a letter for her come this morning?" he said, turning again to Mrs. Bothwell. "I wrote to her last night to tell her I was coming up the day!"

"One did come," she answered. "I put it in the kitchen, intending to re-address it when I had a minute to spare. I'll go and get it. I suppose you don't want it sent on to her now?"

"No, I don't. It was only to tell her I'd meet her here!"

"Well, I'll bring it to you then." She went into the kitchen and presently returned, carrying John's letter in her hand. "Is this it?" she said. "It's got the Ballyards postmark on it."

He took it from her. "Yes, that's it," he replied, tearing it in pieces. "Could I trouble you to put it in the fire," he said, handing the torn paper to her.

"It's no trouble at all," she answered, taking the pieces from him.

"Good morning, Mrs. Bothwell!" he said.

"Well, good morning to you!"

He opened the door and was about to pass out of the restaurant when she spoke to him again.

"I wouldn't let a thing like that upset me if I was you," she said. "Sure, what's one girl more nor another girl! You'll get your pick and choice before long. A fine fellow like you'll not go begging for nothing!"

"I'm not letting it upset me," he said, "but it'll be the queer girl that'll make a fool of me in a hurry!"

"That's the spirit," said Mrs. Bothwell.

iv

He walked down the stairs and into the street in a state of fury. He had been treated as if he were a corner-boy.

Willie Logan, who was any girl's boy, could not have been treated so contemptuously as he, who had never cared for any other girl, had been treated. She had married a policeman . . . *a peeler!* She might as well have married a soldier or a militia-man. A MacDermott had been rejected in favour of a peeler! She had gone straight from his embraces to the embraces of a policeman . . . a common policeman. She had refused to meet him on a Wednesday, he remembered, because, probably, she had engaged to meet the peeler on that evening. He would be off duty then! While she was yielding her lips to John, she was actually engaged to be married to . . . to a policeman! By heaven! . . .

What a good and fortunate thing it was that he had not spoken of her to anyone except to Uncle Matthew! If anyone were to know that a MacDermott had fallen in love with a girl who had preferred to marry a peeler . . . *a peeler,* mind you! . . . they would split their sides laughing. What a humiliation! What an insufferable thing to have happened to him! That was your love for you! That was your romance for you! . . . Och! Och, och!! This was a lesson for him, indeed. No more love or romance for him. Willie Logan could run after girls until the soles dropped off his boots, but John MacDermott would let the girls do the running after him in future. No girl would ever get the chance again to throw him over for . . . for a *peeler!* If that was their love, they could keep their love! . . .

He walked about the town until, after a while, he found himself at the Theatre Royal. Still raging against Maggie, he paid for a seat in the pit. He had forgotten that he was in mourning, and he remembered only that he was a jilted lover, a MacDermott cast aside for a policeman. He sat through the first act of the play, without much comprehension of its theme. Then in the middle of the second

act, he heard the heroine vowing that she loved the hero, and he got up and walked out of the theatre.

"I could write a better play than that with one hand tied behind my back," he said to himself. "Her and her love!"

He walked rapidly from the theatre, conscious of hunger, for he had omitted to get a meal before going into the theatre, but he was unwilling to forego the pleasure of starving himself as a sign of his humiliation. He made his way towards Smithfield and stopped in front of a bookstall. A couple of loutish lads were fingering a red-bound book as he approached the stall, and he heard them tittering in a sneaky, furtive fashion as he drew near. The owner of the stall emerged from the back of his premises, and when they saw him, they hurriedly put the book down and walked away. John glanced at it and read the title on the cover: The Art of Love by Ovid.

"Love!" he exclaimed aloud. "Ooo-oo-oo!"

The streets were full of young men and women intent on an evening's pleasure, and as he hurried away from Smithfield Market towards the railway station, he received bright glances from girls who were willing to make friends with him. He scowled heavily at them, and when they looked away to other men, he filled his mind with sneers and bitter thoughts. A few hours before, these young girls would have seemed to him to be very beautiful and innocent, but now they appeared to him to be deceitful and wicked. Each evening, he told himself, these girls came out of their houses in search of "boys" whom they lured into love-making, teasing and tormenting them, until at last they tired of them and sent them empty away. That was your love for you! Uncle Matthew had dreamed of romantic love, and John had set out to find it, and behold, what was it? A girl's frolic, a piece of feminine sport, in which the girl had the fun and the boy had the humiliation and pain. Maggie could go from him, her lips still warm with his kisses, to her policeman . . . and take kisses from him!

There might be other hoaxed lovers . . . if she had one, why not have two or three or four . . . and his kisses might have meant no more to her than the kisses of half-a-dozen other men. Well, he had learned his lesson! No more love for him. . . .

He crossed the Queen's Bridge, and when he reached the station, he came upon Willie Logan, moodily gazing at the barriers which were not yet open. John, undesirous of society, nodded to him and would have gone away, but Willie suddenly caught hold of his arm.

"I want to speak to you a minute, John!" he said thickly.

The smell of drink drifted from him.

"What about?" John answered sourly.

"Come over here 'til a quiet place," Willie said, still holding John's arm, and drawing him to a seat at the other end of the station. "Sit here 'til the gates is open," he added, as he sat down.

"Is there anything up?" John demanded.

"Aye," Willie replied in a bewildered voice. "John, man, I'm in terrible trouble!"

"Oh!"

"Sore disgrace, John. I don't know what my da and ma'll say to me at all when they hear about it. Such a thing! . . ."

"Well, what is it?"

"Do you know a wee girl called Jennie Boak?" John shook his head. "Her aunt lives in Ballyards . . . Mrs. Cleeland! . . ."

"Oh, yes. Is that her aunt?"

"Aye. Well, me an' her has been going out together for a wee while past, and she says now she's goin' to have a child!"

John burst into laughter.

"What the hell are you laughing at?" Willie demanded angrily.

"I was thinking it doesn't matter whether it's one girl or a dozen you're after, you'll get into bother just the same!"

"Aye, but what am I to do, John? I'll have to tell the oul' fella, and he'll be raging mad when he hears about it. He's terrible against that sort of thing, and dear knows I'm an awful one for slipping into trouble. I can not keep away from girls, John, and that's the God's truth of it. And I've been brought up as respectable as anybody. Jennie's in an awful state about it!"

"I daresay," said John.

"She says I'll have to marry her over the head of it, but sure I don't want to get married at all . . . not yet, anyway. I don't know what to do. I'll have to tell the oul' lad and he'll have me scalded with his tongue. I suppose I'll have to marry her. It's a quare thing a fella can't go out with a girl without getting into bother. I wish to my goodness I had as much control over myself as you have!"

"Control!" said John.

"Aye. You'll never get into no bother!"

"Huh!" said John.

The barriers were opened, and Willie and John passed through on to the platform, and presently seated themselves in a carriage.

"This'll be a lesson to me," said Willie, lying back against the cushions of the carriage. "Not to be running after so many girls in future!"

John did not make any answer to him. He let his thoughts wander out of the carriage. He had loved Maggie Carmichael deeply, and she had served him badly; and Willie Logan, who treated girls in a light fashion, was complaining now because one girl had loved him too well. And that was your love for you! That was the high romantical thing of which Uncle Matthew had so often spoken and dreamed. . . .

He came out of his thoughts suddenly, for Willie Logan was shaking him.

There was a glint in Willie Logan's eye! . . .

"I say, John," he said, "come on into the next carriage! There's two quare nice wee girls just got in!"

"No," said John.

"Ah, come on," Willie coaxed.

"No," John almost shouted.

"Well, stay behind then. I'll have the two to myself," Willie exclaimed, climbing out of the carriage as he spoke.

"That lad deserves all he gets," John thought.

## V

His mother called to him as he passed through the kitchen on his way to the attic where his Uncle Matthew's books were stored.

"Your Uncle William's wanting a talk with you," she said. "Mr. McGonigal's been here about the will!"

"I'll be down in a wee while," John replied as he climbed the stairs. He wished to sit in some quiet place until he had composed his mind which was still disturbed. He had hoped to have the railway compartment to himself after Willie Logan had left it, but two drovers had hurriedly entered it as the train was moving out of the station, and their noisy half-drunken talk had prevented him from thinking with composure. Willie Logan's loud laughter, accompanied by giggles and the sound of scuffling, penetrated from the next compartment. . . .

In the attic, there would be quietness.

He entered the room and stood among the disordered piles of books that lay about the floor. A mania for rearrangement had seized hold of him one day, but he had done no more than take the books from their shelves and leave them in confused heaps. He had promised that he would make the attic tidy again, when his mother com-

plained of the room's disarray. His mind would become quiet, perhaps, if he were to spend a little time now in replacing the books on the shelves in the order in which he wished them to be. He sat down on the floor and contemplated them. Most of these volumes, new and old, were concerned with the love of men for women. It seemed impossible to escape from the knowledge of this passion in any book that one might read. Love made intrusions even into the history books, and bloody wars had been fought and many men had been slain because of a woman's beauty or to gratify her whim. Even in the Bible! . . .

He remembered that Uncle Matthew had told him that the Song of Solomon was a real love song or series of songs, and not, as the headlines to the chapters insisted, an allegorical description of Christ's love for the Church. There was a Bible lying near to his hand, and he picked it up and turned the pages until he reached the Song of Songs which is called Solomon's, and he hurriedly read through it as if he were searching for sentences.

*I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies. Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners!*

So the woman sang. Then the man, less abstract than the woman, sang in his turn.

*How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter: the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman. Thy navel is like a round goblet which wanted not liquor: thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins! . . .*

John glanced at the headline to this song. "It's a queer thing to call that 'a further description of the church's

graces'," he said to himself, and then his eye searched through the verses of the song until he reached the line,

*How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights! . . .*

"I daresay," he murmured to himself. "I daresay! But there's a terrible lot of misery in it, too!"

He read the whole of the last song.

*Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death: jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. . . .*

"That's true," he said. "That's very true! I love her just the same, for all she's treated me so bad! *Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.* Oh, I wish to my God I could forget things as easy as Willie Logan forgets them!"

He closed the Bible and put it down on the floor beside him, and sat with his hands clutching hold of his ankles. He would have to go away from Ballyards. He would not be able to rest contentedly near Belfast where Maggie lived . . . with her peeler! He must go away from home, and the further away he went, the better it would be. Then he might forget about her. Perhaps, after all, it was not true that "*many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.*" Poets had a terrible habit of exaggerating things, and perhaps he would forget his love for Maggie in some distant place! . . .

There was a copy of *Romeo and Juliet* perched on top of a pile of books. "That was the cause of all my trouble," he said, pushing it so that it fell off the pile on to the floor at his feet. He picked it up and opened it, and as he did

so, his eyes rested on Mercutio's speech, *If love be rough with you, be rough with love.*

Comfort instantly came into his mind.

"I will," he said, rising from the floor.

vi

His Uncle William was in the kitchen when he descended the stairs from the attic.

"Mr. McGonigal was here this morning after you went up to Belfast," he said, as John entered the kitchen. "Everything's settled up. Your Uncle Matthew left you £180 and his books. It's more nor I imagined he had, though I knew well he hardly spent a copper on himself, beyond the books he bought. He was inclined to be an extravagant man like the rest of us before that bother he got into in Belfast over the head of the oul' Queen, but he changed greatly after. The money'll be useful to you, boy, when you start off in life!"

"I'll come into the shop with you, Uncle William," John said, glancing towards the scullery where his mother was. "I want to have a word or two with you!"

"Very good," Uncle William replied, leading the way into the shop.

They sat down together in the little counting-house while John told his Uncle of his desire to go away from home.

"And where in the earthly world do you want to go to?" Uncle William demanded.

"Anywhere. London, mebbe! I'm near in the mind to go to America. Mebbe, I'll just travel the world!"

"A hundred and eighty pounds'll not carry you far," Uncle William exclaimed.

"It'll take me a good piece of the way, and if I can't earn enough to take me the rest of it, sure, what good am I?"

Uncle William shrugged his shoulders. "You must do

as you please, I suppose, but I'll miss you sore when you do go. It'll be poor pleasure for me to live on here, with you gone and your Uncle Matthew dead!"

"I'll come back every now and then to see you," John promised. "I'm not going to cut myself off from you altogether. You know that rightly. I just want to see a bit of the world. I . . . I want to find out things!"

"What things, John?"

"Oh . . . everything! Whatever there is to find out!"

"I sometimes think," said Uncle William, "you can find out all there is to find out at home, if you have enough gumption in you to find out anything at all. Have you told your ma yet?"

John shook his head.

"It'll want a bit of telling," Uncle William prophesied.

"I daresay, but she'll have plenty of time to get used to it. I'm not going this minute. I'm going to try and do some writing at home first, 'til I get my hand in. Then when I think I know something about the job, I'll go and see what I can make out of it."

Uncle William sat in silence for a few moments, tapping noiselessly on the desk with his fingers.

"It's a pity you've no notion of the grocery," he said. "This shop'll be yours one of these days!"

"I haven't any fancy for it," John replied.

"I know you haven't. It's a pity all the same. I suppose, when I'm dead, you'll sell the shop!"

"You're in no notion of dying yet awhile, Uncle William. A hearty man like you'll outlive us all!"

"Mebbe, but that's not the point, John. The MacDermotts have owned this shop a powerful while, as your ma tells you many's a time. When I'm dead, you'll be the last of us . . . and you'll want to give up the shop. That's what I think's a pity. I'm with your ma over that. I suppose, though, the whole history of the world is just one

record of change and alteration, and it's no use complaining. The shop'll have to go, and the MacDermotts, too! . . ." He did not speak for a few moments, and then, in a brisker tone, he said, "Mebbe, one of the assistants'll buy it from you. Henry Blackwood has money saved, I know, and by the time you want to sell it, he'll mebbe have a good bit past him. I'll drop a wee hint to him that you'll be wanting to sell, so's to prepare him!"

"Very well, Uncle!" John said.

"If you do sell the shop, make whoever buys it change the name over the door. If the MacDermott family is not to be in control of it, then I'd like well for the name to be painted out altogether and the new name put in its place. I'd hate to think of anyone pretending the MacDermotts was still here, carrying on their old trade, and them mebbe not giving as good value as we gave. The MacDermotts have queer pride, John!"

"I know they have, Uncle William. I have, too!"

"And they wouldn't lie content in their graves if they thought their names was associated with bad value!"

"You're taking it for granted, Uncle, I'll want to sell the shop. Mebbe, I won't. I'll mebbe not be good at anything else but the grocery. I'm talking big now about writing books, but who knows whether I'll ever write one!"

"Oh, you'll write one, John. You'll write plenty. You'll do it because you want to do it. You've got your da's nature. When he wanted a thing, he got it, no matter who had it!"

"There was one thing he wanted, Uncle William, and wanted bad, but couldn't get!"

"What was that, son?" Uncle William demanded.

"He wanted to live, but he wasn't let," John answered.

Uncle William considered for a few moments. "Of course," he said, "there's some things that even a MacDermott can't do!"

vii

John left his Uncle in the shop and went into the kitchen to tell his mother of his decision. He felt certain that she would oppose him, and he braced himself to resist her appeals that he should change his mind.

But she took his announcement very quietly.

"I've made up my mind to go to London, ma!" he said to her.

She did not look up immediately. Then she turned towards him, and said, "Oh, yes, John!"

He paused, nonplussed by her manner, as if he were waiting for her to proceed, but finding that she did not say any more, he continued. "I daresay it'll upset you," he said.

"I'm used to being upset," she replied, "and I expected it. When will you be going?"

"I don't know yet. In a wee while. I'll have to speak to Mr. Cairnduff first about quitting the school, and then I'll stay at home for a bit, writing 'til I'm the master of it. After that I'll go to London . . . or mebbe to America!"

She sat quite still in the armchair beneath the window that overlooked the yard. He felt that he ought to say more to her, that she ought to say more to him, but he could not think of anything to say to her, because she had said so little to him.

"I hope you're not upset about it," he said.

"Upset!" she exclaimed, with a sound of bitterness in her tone.

"Yes. I know you never approved of the idea!"

"It doesn't make any difference whether I approve or not, does it? . . ."

"That's not a fair way to put it, ma!"

"But it amounts to that all the same," she retorted. "No, John, I'm not upset. What would be the good? I had other hopes for you, but they weren't your hopes, and I daresay you're right. I daresay you are. After all, we

. . . we have to . . . to do the best we can for ourselves . . . haven't we?"

"Yes, ma!"

"And if you think you can do better in London . . . or America nor you can in Ballyards . . . well, you're right to . . . to go, aren't you?"

"That's what I think, ma!" John answered.

She did not say any more, and he sat at the table, tapping on it with a pencil. There was no sound in the kitchen but the ticking of the clock and the noise of the water boiling in the kettle and the little tap, tap . . . tap, tap . . . tap, tap, tap . . . of his pencil on the table. Mrs. MacDermott had been hemming a handkerchief when John entered the kitchen, and as he glanced at her now, he saw that her head was bent over it again. He looked at her for a long while, it seemed to him, but she did not raise her head to return his look. If she would only rebuke him for wishing to go . . . but this awful silence! . . .

He looked about the kitchen, as if he were assuring himself that the old, familiar things were still in their places. He would be glad, of course, to go away from home, because he wished to adventure into bigger things . . . but he would be sorry to go, too. There was something very dear and friendly about the house. He had experienced much love and care in it, and had had much happiness here. Nevertheless, he would be glad to go. He needed a change, he wished to have things happening to him. He remembered very vividly something that his Uncle Matthew had said to him in this very room. "Sure, what does it matter whether you're happy and contented or not, so long as things are happening to you!"

That was the right spirit. Uncle Matthew had known all the time what was the right life for a man to lead, even although he had never gone out into the world himself. What if Maggie Carmichael *had* treated him badly? *If love be rough with you, be rough with love!* Who was

Maggie Carmichael anyway? One woman in a world full of women! She was only Maggie Carmichael . . . or Maggie whatever the policeman's name was! *If love be rough with you, be rough with love!* . . . Oh, he would, he would! There were finer women in the world than Maggie Carmichael, and what was to prevent him from getting the finest woman amongst them if he wanted her. Had it not been said of his father that he could have taken a queen from a king's bed, lifted her clean out of a palace in face of the whole court and taken her to his home, a happy and contented woman? . . . Well, then, what one MacDermott could do, another MacDermott could do. . . .

His mother got up from her chair and, putting down her hemmed handkerchief, said, "It's time I wet the tea!"

viii

He watched her as she went about the kitchen, making preparations for the meal, and he wondered why it was that she did not look at him. Very carefully she averted her eyes from him as she passed from the fireplace to the scullery; and when she had to approach the place where he was sitting, she did so with downcast gaze. Suddenly he knew why she would not look at him. He knew that if she were to do so, she would cry, and as the knowledge came to him, a great tenderness for her arose in his heart, and he stood up and putting out his hands drew her to him and kissed her. And then she cried. Her body shook with sobs as she clung to him, her face thrust tightly against his breast. But she did not speak. Uncle William, coming from the shop, looked into the kitchen for a moment, but, observing his sister's grief, went hurriedly back to the shop.

"Don't, ma!" John pleaded, holding her as if she were a distressed child.

"I can't help it, John," she cried. "I'll be all right in a wee while, but I can't help it yet!"

After a time, she gained control of herself, and gradually her sobs subsided, and then they ceased.

"I didn't mean to cry," she said.

"No, ma!"

"But I couldn't control myself any longer. I'll not give way again, John!"

She went to the scullery and returned with cups and saucers which she put on the table.

"Would you like some soda-bread or wheaten farls?" she asked.

"I'll have them both," he answered. He paused for a moment, and then, before she had time to go to the pantry, he went on. "You know, ma, I . . . I *have* to go. I mean I . . . I *have* to go!"

"*Have* to go, John?"

"Yes. I . . . I *have* to go. I was friends with a girl! . . ."

She came quickly to his side, and put her arms round his neck. The misery had suddenly gone from her face, and there was a look of anxiety, mingled with gratification, in her eyes.

"That's it, is it?" she said. "Oh, I thought you were tired of your home. Poor son, poor son, did she not treat you well?"

"She was married this morning on a peeler, ma!"

"And you in love with her?" she exclaimed indignantly.

"Aye, ma!"

"The woman's a fool," said Mrs. MacDermott. "You're well rid of her! . . ."

He saw now that there would be no further objection made by his mother against his going from home. As clearly as if she had said so, he understood that she now regarded his departure from home as a pilgrimage from which in due time he would return, purged of his grief. And she was content.

"A woman that would marry a peeler when she might

marry a MacDermott, is not fit to marry a MacDermott,'' she said, almost to herself.

## ix

And so, when three months later, he decided to go to London, she did not try to hold him back. He had worked hard on a bitter novel that would, he imagined, fill men with amazement and women with shame, and when he had completed it, he bound the long, loose sheets of foolscap together and announced that he was now ready to go to London. Mr. Cairnduff told him of lodgings in Brixton, where an old friend of his, an Ulsterman and a journalist, was living, and Mr. McCaughan gave him a very vivid account of the perils of London life. ''Bad women!'' he said, ominously, ''are a terrible temptation to a young fellow all by himself in a big town!'' and then, brightening a little, he remarked that he need not tell so sensible a lad as John how to take care of himself. John had only to remember that he was a MacDermott! . . .

But Mrs. MacDermott did not offer any advice to him. She packed his trunk and his bag on the day he was to leave Ballyards, taking care to put a Bible at the bottom of the trunk, and told him that they were ready for him. He was to travel by the night boat from Belfast to Liverpool, and it was not necessary for him to leave Ballyards until the evening, nor did he wish to spend more time in Belfast than was absolutely necessary. His Uncle and his mother were to accompany him to the boat: Mr. McCaughan and Mr. Cairnduff would say good-bye to him at Ballyards station. Willie Logan, now safely married to his Jennie and a little dashed in consequence of the limitations imposed upon him by marriage, had volunteered to come to the station ''and see the last of'' him. There was to be a gathering of friends on the platform . . . but he wished in his heart they would allow him to go away in peace and quietness.

It was strange, he thought, that his mother did not talk to him about his journey to London. He had imagined that she would have a great deal to say about it, but it was not until the day of his departure that she spoke of it to him.

She came to him, after she had packed his trunk and bag, and said, "Come into the return room a wee minute!" and, obediently, he followed her.

"I want to show you something," she said in explanation. "Shut the door behind you!"

"Is there anything wrong, ma?" he asked, puzzled by the mystery in her manner.

"No," she answered, "only I don't want the whole world to see us!"

She went to the cupboard and took out a bottle of whiskey.

"Sit down," she said.

"Is that whiskey?" he asked as he seated himself.

She nodded her head and returned to the table.

"You're not thinking of giving me a drop, are you?" he exclaimed laughingly.

There was a look in her eyes that checked laughter.

"If I had my way," she said with great bitterness, "I'd take the men that make this stuff and I'd drown them in it. I'd pour it down their throats 'til they choked! . . ." She poured a little of the whiskey into a saucer. "Give me a light," she demanded.

He went to the mantel-shelf and brought the box of matches from it.

"Strike one," she said, and added when he had done so, "Set fire to the whiskey!"

He succeeded in making the spirit burn, and for a little while she and he stood by the table while the cold blue flames curled out of the saucer, wavering and spurting, until the spirit was consumed and the flame flickered and expired.

"That's what a drunkard's inside is like," said Mrs.

MacDermott, picking up the saucer and carrying it downstairs to the scullery to be washed. He heard the water splashing in the sink, and when he had put the bottle of whiskey back in the cupboard, he went downstairs and waited until she had finished. She returned to the kitchen, carrying the washed saucer, and when she had placed it on the dresser, she took up a Bible and brought it to him.

"I want you to swear to me," she said, "that you'll never taste a drop of drink as long as you live!"

"That's easy enough," he answered. "I don't like it!"

She looked up at him in alarm. "Have you tasted it already, then?" she asked.

"Yes. How would I know I didn't like it if I hadn't tasted it? The smell of it is enough to knock you down!"

She put the Bible back on the dresser. "It doesn't matter," she said when he held out his hand for it. "Mebbe you have enough strength of your own to resist it. I . . . I don't always understand you, John, and I'm fearful sometimes to see you so sure of yourself." She came to him suddenly and swiftly, and clasped him close to her. "I love you with the whole of my heart, son," she said, "and I'm desperate anxious about you!"

"You needn't be anxious about me, ma!" he answered. "I'm all right!"

## X

The minister said, "God bless you, boy!" and patted him on the shoulder, and the schoolmaster wished him well and begged that now and then John would write to him. Willie Logan, hot and in a hurry, entered the station, eager to say good-bye to him, but the stern and disapproving eye of the minister caused him to keep in the background until John, understanding what was in his mind, went up to him.

"I'm sure I wish you all you can wish yourself," Willie said very heartily. "I wish to my God I was going with you, but sure, I'm one of the unlucky ones. Aggie sent her

love to you, but I couldn't persuade her to come and give it to you herself!"

"Thank you, Willie. You might tell her I'm obliged to her."

"You never had no notion of her, John?"

"I had not, Willie. How's Jennie keeping?"

"Och, she's well enough," he answered sulkily. "Look at the minister there, glaring at me as I was dirt. Sure, didn't I marry the girl, and got intil a hell of a row over it with the oul' fella! And what's he got to glare at? There's no need to be giving *you* good advice about weemen, John, for you're well able to take care of yourself as far as I can see, but all the same, mind what you're doing when you get into their company or you'll mebbe get landed the same as me! . . ."

"Don't you like being married, then?"

"Ah, quit codding," said Willie.

# THE SECOND BOOK

OF

# THE FOOLISH LOVERS

Whoever loved that loved not at first sight.

MARLOWE.

"Love is a perfect fever of the mind. I question if any man has been more tormented with it than myself."

JAMES BOSWELL *in a letter to the Rev. W. J. Temple.*

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

### i

Mr. Cairnduff's friend, George Hinde, met John at Euston Station. He was a stoutly-built, red-haired man, with an Ulster accent that had not been impaired in any degree by twenty years of association with Cocknies. "How're you!" he said, going up to John and seizing hold of his hand.

"Rightly, thank you! How did you know me?" John replied, laughing and astonished.

"That's a question and a half to ask!" Hinde exclaimed. "Wouldn't an Ulsterman know another Ulsterman the minute he clapped his eyes on him? Boys O, but it's grand to listen to a Belfast voice again. Here you," he said, turning quickly to a porter, "come here, I want you. Get this gentleman's luggage, and bring it to that hansom there. Do you hear me?"

"Yessir," the porter replied.

"What have you got with you?" he went on, turning to John.

"A trunk and a bag," John answered. "They have my name on them. John MacDermott!"

"Mac what, sir?" the porter asked.

"MacDermott. John MacDermott. Passenger from Ballyards to London, via Belfast and Liverpool!"

"It's no good telling him about Ballyards," Hinde interrupted. "The people of this place are ignorant: they've never heard of Ballyards. Go on, now," he said to the porter, "and get the stuff and bring it here!"

The porter hurried off to the luggage-van. "I'll only just be able to put you in the hansom," said Hinde to

John, "and start you off home. I've got to go north to-night to write a special report of a meeting! . . ."

"What sort of a meeting?" John enquired.

"Political. An address to Mugs by a Humbug. That's what it ought to be called. I was looking forward to having a good crack with you the night, but sure a newspaper man need never hope to have ten minutes to himself. I've given Miss Squibb orders to have a good warm supper ready for you. That's a thing the English people never think of having on a Sunday night. They're afraid God 'ud send them to hell if they didn't have cold beef for their Sunday supper. But there'll be a hot supper for you, anyway. A man that's been travelling all night and all day wants something better nor cold beef in his inside on a cold night!"

"It's very kind of you! . . ."

"Ah, what's kind about? Aren't you an Ulsterman? You've a great accent! Man, dear, but you've a great accent! If ever you lose it I'll never own you for a friend, and I'll get you the sack from any place you're working in. I'll blacken your character! . . ."

"You're a terrible cod," said John, laughing at him.

"Damn the cod there's about it! You listen to these Cockney fellows talking, and then you'll understand me. It's worse nor the Dublin adenoids voice. There's no people in the earthly world talks as fine as the Ulster people. Here's the man with your luggage!" The porter wheeled a truck, bearing John's trunk and bag, up to them as he spoke. "Is that all you have?"

"Aye," said John.

"And enough, too! What anybody wants with more, I never can make out, unless they're demented with the mania of owning things! That's a bit out of Walt Whitman. Ever read any of him?"

"No," said John.

"It's about time you begun then. Put this stuff in the hansom, will you?" he went on to the porter, and while

the porter did so, he continued his conversation with John. "Miss Squibb . . . that's the name of the landlady . . . comic name, isn't it? . . . like a name out of Dickens . . . and she's a comic-looking woman, too . . . hasn't got a spare sitting-room to let you have, but you can share mine 'til she has. My bedroom's on the same floor as the sitting-room, but yours is on the floor above. We're a rum crew in that house. There's a music-hall man and his wife on the ground-floor . . . a great character altogether . . . Cream is their name . . . and a Mr. and Mrs. Tarpey . . . but you'll see them all for yourself. I'll be back on Tuesday night. Give this porter sixpence, and the cabman's fare'll be three and sixpence, but you'd better give him four bob. If he tries to charge you more nor that, because you're a stranger, take his number. Good-bye, now, and don't forget I'll be back on Tuesday night!"

He helped John into the hansom, and after giving instructions to the cabman, stood back on the pavement, smiling and waving his hand, while the cab, with a flourish of whip from the driver and a jingle of harness, drove out of the station.

"I like that man," said John to himself, as he lay back against the cushions and gave himself up to the joy of riding in a hansom cab.

ii

The house to which John was carried was in the Brixton Road, near to the White House public-house. Fifty years ago it had been a rich merchant's home and was almost a country house, but now, like many similar houses, it had fallen to a dingy estate: it was, without embroidery of description, a lodging-house. Miss Squibb, who opened the door to him, had a look of settled depression on her face that was not, as he at first imagined, due to disapproval of him, but, as he speedily discovered, to a deeply-rooted con-

viction that the rest of humanity was engaged in a conspiracy to defraud her. She eyed the cabman with so much suspicion that he became uneasy in his mind and deposited the trunk and the bag in the hall in silence, nor did he make any comment on the amount of his fare.

Miss Squibb helped John to carry the luggage to his room. Her niece, Lizzie, who usually performed such work, was spending the week-end with another aunt in North London, so Miss Squibb said, and she was due to return before midnight, but Miss Squibb would expect her when she saw her. It would not surprise her to find that Lizzie did not return to her home until Monday evening. Nothing would surprise Miss Squibb. Miss Squibb had long since ceased to be surprised at anything. No one had had more cause to feel surprised than Miss Squibb had had in the course of her life, but now she never felt surprised at anything. She prophesied that a time would come when John would cease to feel surprise at things. . . .

She stood in the centre of his bedroom in a bent attitude, with her hands folded across her flat chest, and regarded him with large, protruding eyes. "You're Irish, aren't you?" she said, accusingly.

"Yes, Miss Squibb," he said, using her name with difficulty, because it created in him a desire to laugh.

"Like Mr. 'Inde?"

"Inde!" he repeated blankly, and then comprehension came to him. "Oh, Mr. Hinde! Yes! Oh, yes, yes!"

"I thought so," she continued. "You have the syme sort of talk. Funny talk, I calls it. Wot time du want your breakfis?"

"Eight o'clock," he said.

"I s'pose you'll do syme as Mr. 'Inde . . . leave it to me to get the things for you, an' charge it up?"

"Oh, yes," John replied. "I'll do just what Mr. Hinde does!"

He looked around the dingy room, and as he did so, he

felt depression coming over him; but Miss Squibb misjudged his appraising glance.

"It's a nice room," she said, as if she were confirming his judgment on it.

"Yes," he said dubiously, glancing at the bed and the table and the ricketty washstand. There were pictures and framed mottoes on the walls. Over his bed was a large motto-card, framed in stained deal, bearing the word: ETERNITY; and on the opposite wall, placed so that he should see it immediately he awoke, was a coloured picture of Daniel in the Lions' Den, in which the lions seemed to be more dejected than Daniel.

"A gentleman wot used to be a lodger 'ere done that," said Miss Squibb when she saw that he was looking at the picture. "'E couldn't py 'is rent an' 'e offered to pynt the bath-room, but we 'aven't got a bath-room so 'e pynted that instead. It used to be a plyne picture 'til 'e pynted it. 'E sort of livened it up a bit. Very nice gentleman 'e was, only 'e did get so 'orribly drunk. Of course, 'e was artistic!"

The drawing was out of perspective, and John remarked upon the fact, but Miss Squibb, fixing him with her protruding eyes, said that she could not see that there was anything wrong with the picture. It was true, as she admitted, that if you were to look closely at the lion on the extreme right of the picture, you would find he had two tails, or rather, one tail and the remnant of another which the artist had not completely obliterated. But that was a trifle.

"Pictures ain't meant to be looked at close," said Miss Squibb, "an' any'ow you can't expect to 'ave everythink in this world. Some people's never satisfied without they're finding fault in things!"

John, feeling that her final sentence was a direct rebuke to himself, hurriedly looked away from the picture.

"There's a good view from the window," he said to console her for his depreciation of the picture.

"That's wot I often says myself," she replied. "People says it's 'igh up 'ere an' a long way to climb, but wot I says is, it's 'ealthy when you get 'ere, *and* you 'ave a view. I'll leave you now," she concluded. "When you've 'ad a wash, your supper'll be waitin' for you in Mr. 'Inde's sitting-room. I expect you'll be glad to 'ave it!"

"I shall," he replied. "I'm hungry!"

"Yes, I expect so," she said, closing the door.

He sat down on the bed and again looked about the room, and the dreariness of it filled him with nostalgia. He had not yet unpacked his trunk or his bag, and he felt that he must immediately carry them down the stairs again, that he must call for a cabman and have his luggage and himself carried back to Euston Station so that he might return to his home. The clean air of Ballyards and the bright sunlit bedroom over the shop seemed incomparably lovely when he looked about the dingy Brixton bedroom. If this was the beginning of adventure! . . . He gazed at the picture of Daniel in the Lions' Den, and wished that a lion would eat Daniel or that Daniel would eat a lion! . . .

Then he went to the washstand and washed his face and hands, and when he had done so, he went downstairs and ate his supper.

iii

In the morning, there was a thump on his bedroom door, and before he had had time to consider what he should do, the door opened and a girl entered, carrying a tray. "Eight o'clock," she said, "an' 'ere's your breakfast! Aunt said you'd better 'ave it in bed 'smornin', after your journey!"

She set the tray down on the table so carelessly that she spilled some of the contents of the coffee-pot.

"Aunt forgot to ask would you have tea or coffee, so she sent up coffee. Mr. 'Inde always 'as coffee, so she thought you would, too! An' there's a 'addick. Mr. 'Inde likes 'addick. It ain't a bad fish!"

John looked at her as she arranged the table. Her abrupt entry into the room, while he was in bed, startled him. No woman, except his mother, had ever been in his bedroom before, and it horrified him to think that this strange young woman could see him sitting in his nightshirt in bed. He had never in his life seen so untidy a woman as this. Her hair had been hastily pinned together in a shapeless lump on the top of her head, and loose ends straggled from it. Her dress was *on* her . . . that was certain . . . but *how* it was on her was more than he could understand. She seemed to bristle with safety-pins! . . .

Her total lack of shame in the presence of a man, undressed and in bed, caused him to wonder whether she was one of the Bad Women against whom Mr. McCaughan had so solemnly warned him. If she were, the warning was hardly necessary! . . .

"I think you got everythink?" she said briskly, glancing over the table to see that nothing was missing.

He saw now that she bore some facial resemblance to Miss Squibb. She was not, as that lady was, ashen-hued, but her eyes, though less prominently, bulged. This must be Lizzie! . . .

"Who are you?" he asked, as she turned to leave the room.

"Eih?"

"What's your name? I've not seen you before!"

"Naow," she exclaimed, "I've been awy! I'm Lizzie. 'Er niece!"

She nodded her head towards the door, and he interpreted this to mean Miss Squibb.

"Oh, yes," he said. "She told me about you. Were you very late last night?"

She laughed. "Naow," she replied, "I was very early this mornin'!"

She stood with her hand on the knob of the door. "If you want anythink else," she said, "just 'oller down the stairs for it. An' you needn't 'urry to get up. I know wot travellin's like. I've travelled a bit myself in my time. That 'addick ain't as niffy as it smells! . . ."

She closed the door behind her and he could hear her quick steps all the way down the stairs to the ground floor.

"That's a queer sort of woman," he said to himself.

As he ate his breakfast, he wondered at Lizzie's lack of embarrassment as she stood in his bedroom and saw him lying in bed. She had behaved as coolly as if she had been in a dining-room and he had been completely clothed. What would his mother say if she knew that a girl had entered his bedroom as unconcernedly as if she were entering a tramcar? Never in all his life had such a thing happened to him before. He had been very conscious of his bare neck, for the collar of his night-shirt had come unfastened. He had tried to fasten it again, but in his desire to do so without drawing Lizzie's attention to his state, he had merely fumbled with it, and had, finally, to abandon the attempt. What astonished him was that Lizzie appeared to be totally unaware of anything unusual in the fact that she was in the bedroom of a strange man. She did not look like a Bad Woman . . . and surely Mr. Hinde would not live in a house where Bad Women lived! . . . Perhaps Englishwomen were not so particular about things as Irishwomen! . . . Anyhow the haddock was good and the coffee tasted nice enough, although he would much rather have had tea.

He finished his meal, and then dressed himself and went downstairs to the sitting-room which he was to share with Hinde. It was less dreary than the bedroom from which he had just emerged, but what brightness it had was not due to

any furnishing provided by Miss Squibb, but to a great case full of books which occupied one side of the room. "He's as great a man for books as my Uncle Matthew," John thought, examining a volume here and a volume there. He opened a book of poems by Walt Whitman. "That's the man he was telling me about last night," he said to himself, as he turned the pages. He read a passage aloud:

*Come, Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia,*
*Cross out, please, those immensely overpaid accounts,*
*That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Æneas', Odysseus' wanderings,*
*Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus,*
*Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on Jaffa's gate and on Mount Moriah,*
*The same on the walls of your German, French and Spanish castles, and Italian collections,*
*For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried domain awaits, demands you.*

"That's strange poetry," he murmured, turning over more of the pages. "Queer stuff! I never read poetry like that before!" He began to read "The Song of the Broad Axe," at first to himself, and then aloud:

*What do you think endures?*
*Do you think a great city endures?*
*Or a teeming manufacturing State? or a prepared Constitution? or the best built steamships?*
*Or hotels of granite and iron? or any chefs d'oeuvre of engineering, forts, armaments?*
*Away! these are not to be cherished for themselves,*
*They fill their hour, the dancers dance, the musicians play for them,*
*The show passes, all does well, of course,*
*All does very well till one flash of defiance.*
*A great city is that which has the greatest men and women,*
*If it be a few ragged huts, it is still the greatest city in the world.*
*How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed!*
*How the floridness of the materials of cities shrivels before a man's or woman's look!*

He re-read aloud the last four lines, and then closed the book and replaced it on the shelf. "That man must have been terribly angry," he said to himself.

Lizzie came into the room. "I 'eard you," she said, "syin' poetry to yourself. You're as bad as Mr. 'Inde, you are. 'E's an' awful one for syin' poetry. Why down't you go out for a walk? You 'aven't seen nothink of London yet, an' 'ere you are wystin' the mornin' syin' poetry. If I was you, now, I'd go and see the Tahr of London where they used to be'ead people. An' the Monument, too! You can go up that for thruppence. An' the view you get! Miles an' miles *an'* miles! Well, you can see the Crystal Palace anywy! I do like a view! Or if you down't like the Tahr of London, you could go to the Zoo. Ow, the monkeys! Ow, dear! They're so yooman, I felt quite uncomfortable. Any'ow, I should go out if I was you, an' 'ave a look at London. Wot's the good of comin' to London if you don't 'ave a look at it!"

"I think I will," said John.

"I should," Lizzie added emphatically. "I don't suppose we'll see you until dinner time. Seven o'clock, we 'ave it!"

"I always had my dinner in the middle of the day at home," John replied.

"Ow, yes, in Ireland," said Lizzie tolerantly. "But this is London. London's different from Ireland, you know. You'll find things very diff'rent 'ere from wot they are in Ireland. I've 'eard a lot about Ireland. Mr. 'Inde . . . 'e does go on about it. Anybody would think to 'ear 'im there wasn't any other plyce in the world! . . ." She changed the subject abruptly, speaking in a more hurried tone. "I ought reely to be dustin' this room . . . only of course you're in it!"

John apologised to her. "I'm interfering with your work," he murmured in confusion.

"Ow, no you ain't. It don't matter if it's dusted or not

. . . reely. Only Aunt goes on about it. Mr. 'Inde wouldn't notice if it was never dusted. I think he likes dust reely. I suppose you're goin' to do some work now you're 'ere, or are you a writer, too, like Mr. 'Inde?''

''I want to be a writer,'' John shyly answered.

''Well, there's no 'arm in it,'' Lizzie said. ''But it ain't reg'lar. I believe in reg'lar work myself. Of course, there's no 'arm in bein' a writer, but you'd be much better with a tryde or a nice business, I should think. Reely!''

''Oh, yes,'' John murmured. ''Well, I think I'll go out now!''

''Are you goin' to the Tahr, then?''

''No,'' he answered. ''No, I hadn't thought of that. I want to see Fleet Street! . . .''

''Fleet Street!'' Lizzie exclaimed. ''Wotever is there to see there.''

''Oh, I don't know. I want to see it. That's all!''

''You 'ave got funny tyste. I should 'ave thought you'd go to see the Tahr reely! . . .'' She broke off as she observed him moving to the door. ''Mind, be back at seven sharp. I 'ate the dinner kep' 'angin' about. I don't get no time to myself if people aren't punctual. Mr. 'Inde's awful, 'e is. 'E don't care about no one else, 'e don't. Comes in any time, 'e does, an' expects a 'ot dinner just the syme. Never thinks nobody else never wants to go nowhere! . . .''

''I'll be back in time,'' said John, hurrying from the room.

''Well, mind you are,'' she called after him.

## iv

In the street, he remembered that he had forgotten to ask Lizzie to tell him how to find Fleet Street, but her capacity for conversation prevented him from returning to the house to ask her. The number of trams and 'buses of

different colours bewildered him, as he stood opposite to the White Horse, and watched them go by; and the accents of the conductors, when they called out their destinations, were unintelligible to him. He heard a man shouting "Beng, Beng, Beng, Beng, Beng, BENGK!" in a voice that sounded like a quick-firing gun, but the noise had no meaning for him. He saw names of places that were familiar to him through his reading or his talk with Uncle Matthew, painted on the side of the trams and 'buses, but he could not see the name of Fleet Street among them. He turned to a policeman and asked for advice, and the policeman put him in the care of a 'bus-conductor.

"You 'op on top, an' I'll tell you where to git off," the 'bus conductor said, and John did as he was bid.

He took a seat in the front of the 'bus, just behind the driver, for he had often heard stories of the witty sayings of London 'busmen and he was anxious to hear a 'bus-driver's wit being uttered.

"That's a nice day," he said, when the 'bus had gone some distance.

The driver, red-faced, obese and sleepy-eyed, slowly turned and regarded John, and having done so, nodded his head, and turned away again.

"Nice pair of horses you have," John continued affably.

"Yes," the driver grunted, without looking around.

John felt dashed by the morose manner of the driver and he remained silent for a few moments, but he leant forward again and said, "I expect you see a good deal of life on this 'bus?"

"Eih?" said the driver, glancing sharply at him. "Wot you sy?"

"I suppose you've seen a good many queer things from that seat?" John answered.

" 'Ow you mean . . . queer things?"

"Well, strange things! . . ."

The driver turned away and whipped up the horses.

"I've never seen anythink strynge in my life," he said. "Kimmup there! Kimmup! . . ."

"But I thought that 'bus-drivers always saw romantic things!"

"I dunno wot you're talkin' abaht. Look 'ere, young feller, are you a reporter, or wot are you?"

"A reporter!"

"Yus. One of these 'ere noospyper chaps?"

"No."

"Well, anybody'd think you was, you ast so many questions!"

John's face coloured. "I beg your pardon," he said in confusion. "I didn't mean to be inquisitive!"

"That's awright. No need to 'pologise. I can see you down't mean no 'arm!" His manner relaxed a little, as if he would atone to John for his former surliness. "That's the 'Orns," he said, pointing to a large public-house. "Well-known 'ouse, that is. Best known 'ouse in Sahth London, that is. Bert . . . that's the conductor . . . 'e says the White 'Orse at Brixton is better-known, an' I know a chep wot says the Elephant an' Castle is! . . ."

"It's mentioned in Shakespeare," John eagerly interrupted.

"Wot is?"

"The Elephant and Castle. In *Twelfth Night*. My Uncle, who knew Shakespeare by heart, told me about it. It was a public-house in those days, too. But I never heard of the Horns!"

The 'bus-driver was impressed by this statement, but he would not lightly yield in the argument. "Of course," he said, "The Elephant my 'ave been well-known in them dys, and I don't sy it ain't well-known in these dys, but I do sy thet it ain't so well-known now as wot the 'Orns is. There ain't a music-'all chep in London wot down't know the 'Orns. Not one!"

"Shakespeare didn't know it," John exclaimed.

"Well, 'e didn't know everythink, did 'e?" the driver retorted. "P'raps the 'Orns wasn't built then. I dessay not. 'E'd 'ave mentioned it if 'e'd 'ave known abaht it. All these actor cheps know it, so of course 'e'd 'a' known abaht it, too. We'll be at the Elephant presently. I always sy to Bert we 'ave the most interestin' pubs in London on this route. White 'Orse, the 'Orns, the Elephant an' the Ayngel. Ever 'eard of the Ayngel at Islington?"

"Yes," said John. "That's where Paine wrote *The Rights of Man!*"

"Did 'e?" the driver answered. "Well, I dessay 'e did. It's a celebrated 'ouse, it is. Celebrated in 'istory. There's a song abaht it. You know it, down't you? . . .

> Up and dahn the City Rowd,
> In at the Ayngel . . .
> Thet's the wy the money gows,
> Pop gows the weasel.

"Ever 'eard thet?"

"Oh, yes," John replied, smiling. "I used to sing that song at home!"

"Did you nah. An' w'ere is your 'ome?"

"In Ireland!"

"Ow! Thet acahnts for it. I couldn't myke aht 'ow it was you never 'eard of the 'Orns. Fency you 'earin' abaht the Elephant in Ireland!"

"Well, you see, Shakespeare mentions it! . . ."

"I down't tyke much interest in 'im. 'Ere's the Elephant! Thet's Spurgeon's Tabernacle over there! . . ."

The driver became absorbed in the business of pulling up at the stopping-place and alluring fresh passengers on to the 'bus in place of those who were now leaving it, and John had time to look about him. The public-house was big and garish and even at this hour of the morning the hot odour of spirits floated out of it when a door was swung open. "I don't suppose it was like that in Shakes-

peare's day," he said to himself, as he turned away and gazed at the flow of people and traffic that passed without ceasing through the circus where the six great roads of South London meet and cross. It seemed to him that an accident must happen, that these streams of carts and trams and 'buses and hurrying people must become so involved that disaster must follow. He became reassured when he observed how imperturbed everyone was. There were moments when the whole traffic seemed to become chaotic and the roads were choked, and then as suddenly as the congestion was created, it was relieved. He felt enthralled by this wonder of traffic, of great crowds moving with ease through a criss-cross of confusing streets.

"It's wonderful," he said, leaning forward and speaking almost in a whisper to the driver.

"Wot is?"

"All that traffic!"

"Ow, thet's nothink. We think nothink of thet owver 'ere," the driver replied. "We down't tyke no notice of a little lot like thet!"

The conductor rang his bell, and the driver whipped up his horses, and the 'bus proceeded on its way.

John remembered that he had not heard any witticisms from the driver. Uncle Matthew had told him that one could always depend upon a 'busman to provide comic entertainment, but this man, although, after a while, he had become talkative enough, had not said one funny thing. He had not chaffed a policeman or a footpassenger or another 'busman, and now that they had passed away from the Elephant and Castle, his conversation seemed to have dried up. The 'bus tooled through the Newington Butts, along the Borough High Street (past the very inn where Mr. Pickwick first met Sam Weller, although John was then unaware that he was passing it) and under the railway bridge at St. Saviour's Cathedral Church of Southwark.

"What's that place?" John said to the driver, pointing to the Cathedral.

"Eih? Ow, thet! Thet's a cathedral!"

"A cathedral! Hidden away like that! . . ."

A hideous railway bridge cramped St. Saviour's on one side, and hideous warehouses and offices cramped it on the other. There was a mess of vegetable debris lying about the Cathedral pavement, the refuse from the Borough Market.

"What cathedral is it?" John demanded.

"Southwark!" the driver replied, pronouncing it "Sutharc."

"Suthark!" John said vaguely. "Do you mean Southwark? . . ." He pronounced the name as it is spelt.

"We call it Suthark!" said the driver. "Yes, thet's it. Southwark Cathedral! . . ."

"But that's where Shakespeare used to go to church!" John exclaimed.

"Ow!" the driver replied.

"And look at it! . . ."

"Wot's wrong with it?" The 'bus was now rolling over London Bridge, and the Cathedral could not be seen.

"They've hidden it. That awful bridge! . . ."

"I down't see nothink wrong with it," the driver interrupted.

"Nothing wrong with it! You'd think they were ashamed of it, they've hidden it so!"

"I down't see nothink wrong with it. Wot you gettin' so excited abaht?"

*"Shakespeare said his prayers there!"* John ejaculated.

"Well, wot if 'e did?" the driver replied. "We down't think nothink of Cathedrals owver 'ere! We've got 'undreds of 'em!"

John sat back in his seat and stared at the driver. He was incapable of speaking, and the driver, busy with his horses, said no more. The 'bus crossed the river, drove

along King William Street into Prince's Street, and stopped. The conductor climbed to the roof and called to John. "You chynge 'ere," he said, beckoning him.

"Good-morning," John said to the driver as he rose from his seat.

"Goo'-mornin'!" said the driver. He paused while John got out of the seat into the gangway. "You know," he went on, "you wown't git so excited abaht things after you bin 'ere a bit. You'll tyke things more calm. Like me. I down't go an' lose my 'ead abaht Shykespeare! . . ."

"Good-morning," said John.

"Ow, goo'-mornin'!" said the driver.

The conductor was standing on the pavement when John descended.

"You'll get a 'bus owver there at the Mansion 'Ouse," he said, "thet'll tyke you right into Fleet Street. Or you can walk it easy from 'ere. 'Long Cheapside, just rahnd the corner! . . ."

"Cheapside!" John said with interest. Uncle Matthew had told him that Herrick, the poet, was born in Cheapside, and that Richard Whittington, resting in Highgate Woods, had heard Bow Bells pealing from a Cheapside steeple, bidding him return to be Lord Mayor of London and marry the mercer's daughter.

"Yus, Cheapside!" the conductor dully repeated. "Go 'long Cheapside, turn to the left pas' St. Paul's, and you'll be in Ludgate 'Ill. After thet, follow your nowse! See?"

"Thank you!" said John.

The throng of traffic seemed to be greater here than it had been at Elephant and Castle, and John, confused by it, stood looking about him. "Thet's the Benk of England, thet!" the conductor hurriedly continued, pointing across the street to the low, squat, dirty-looking building which occupied the whole of one side of the street. "An' thet's the Royal Exchynge owver there, an' this 'ere is the Man-

sion 'Ouse where the Lord Mayor lives. I can't stop to tell you no more. Ayngel, Ayngel, Ayngel! Any more for the Ayngel? . . ."

Several persons climbed on to the 'bus, and then, after attempting to persuade people, anxious to go to Charing Cross, to go to the Angel at Islington instead, the conductor rang his bell. He waved his hand in farewell to John, who smiled at him. The 'bus lumbered off. John watched it roll out of sight and, when it had gone, turned to find Cheapside. There was an immense pressure of people in the streets, and for a few moments he imagined that he had wandered into the middle of a procession.

"Is there anything up?" he said to a lounger.

"Up?" the man repeated in a puzzled tone.

"Yes. All these people! . . ."

"Oh, no," the man said. "It's always like this!"

*Always like this!* . . .

He had never seen so many people or so much traffic before. The crowd of workmen pouring out of the shipyards in Belfast was more impressive than this London crowd, but not so perturbing, for that was a definite crowd, having a beginning and an end and a meaning: it was composed entirely of men engaged in a common enterprise; but this crowd had no beginning and no end and no meaning: there was no common enterprise. It was an amorphous herd, and almost it frightened him. If that herd were to become excited . . . to lose its head! . . . Hardly had the thought come into his mind when an accident happened. A four-wheeler cab, trundling across Mansion House Place towards Liverpool Street, overbalanced and fell on its side. The driver was thrown into the road, and John, imagining that he must be killed by a passing vehicle, shut his eyes so that he might not see the horrible thing happen. . . . When he opened his eyes again, the driver was on his feet and, assisted by policemen and some passers-by, was freeing his horse from its harness, while two other policemen

dragged an old lady through the window of the cab and placed her on the pavement.

"Really, driver!" she said, "you ought to be more careful. I shall lose my train!"

"You'd think I'd done it a-purpose to 'ear 'er," the driver mumbled.

And the traffic swept by on either side of the overturned cab, and there was no confusion, no excitement, no disaster. The careless traffic of the streets which seemed so likely to end in disorder never ended otherwise than satisfactorily. There was control over it, but the control was not obtrusive.

He felt reassured in a measure, but a sense of loneliness filled him. He stood with his back against the wall of a large building and regarded the scene. Wherever he looked there were masses of people and vehicles and tall buildings. Crowds and crowds of people with no common interest save that of speedily reaching a destination. He might stand there for hours, with his back to this wall, and not see the end of that crowd. In Belfast, at twelve o'clock on Saturday morning, the workmen would hurry over the bridge to their homes: a thick, black, unyielding mass of men; but at thirty minutes after twelve, that thick, black, seemingly solid mass would be dissolved into the ordinary groupings of a provincial city and there would be no sign of it. This London crowd would never dissolve. The man had told him that "it's always like this"! . . . There were nearly seven millions of men and women and children in London, but he did not know one of them. He had seen George Hinde for a few moments, and he had spoken to Miss Squibb and to Lizzie . . . but he did not know anyone. He was alone in this seven-million-fold herd, without a relative or an intimate friend. He might stand at this corner for days, for weeks, on end, viewing the passersby until his eyes were sore with the sight of them, and never see one person whom he knew even slightly. In Ballyards,

he could not walk a dozen yards without encountering an acquaintance. In Belfast, he was certain to see someone whom he knew in the course of a day. But in this place! . . . He became horrified at the thought that if he were suddenly to drop dead at that moment, none of the persons who would gather round his body could say who he was. He would be carried off to a morgue and laid on a marble slab in the hope that someone would turn up and identify him . . . and he might never be identified; he might be buried as "a person unknown." He determined to keep a note of his name and address in his breast-pocket, together with a note of his mother's name and address.

"I'm not going to run the risk of them burying me without knowing who I am," he murmured to himself.

Some one jostled him roughly, and mumbling "Sorry!" hurried on. In Ireland, John thought to himself, had a man jostled a stranger so rudely, he would have stopped and apologised to him and would have asked for assurance that he had not hurt him. "I beg your pardon, sir," he would have said. "I'm very sorry. I hope I haven't hurt you!" But this stranger who had roughly shoved against him, had not paused in his rude progress. He had shouted "Sorry!" at him, but he had barely turned his head to do it.

"Of course, I ought not to be standing here, blocking the way!" John admitted to himself. "I wonder is London always like this, rough and in a hurry!"

He crossed the street, not without alarm, and stood by the entrance to the Central London Railway. There were some flower-sellers sitting by the railings, but they had no resemblance to the flower-girls of whom Uncle Matthew had often told him. He glanced at them with distaste. "It's queer," he thought, "how disappointed I am with everything!" and then, as if he would account for his disappointment, he added, "I'm bitter. That's what's wrong with me! I'm bitter about Maggie Carmichael!"

He turned to a man who was leaning against the iron railings. "What's down there?" he asked, pointing to the stairs leading to the Central London Railway.

"The Toob," said the man.

"The what?"

"The Toob. The Tuppeny Toob. Undergrahnd Ryle-wy!"

"Oh, is that what you call the Tuppeny Tube?" John exclaimed, as comprehension came to him. He had read of the Underground Railway built in the shape of two long tubes stretching from the centre of the City to Shepherd's Bush, but he had imagined a much more dramatic entrance to it than this dull flight of steps.

"But you *walk* into it," he exclaimed to his informant.

"There's lifts down below," the man replied unemotionally.

"I thought it would be different," John continued.

"Different? 'Ow . . . different?"

"Well . . . different!"

The man spat. "I down't see wot more you could expect," he said. "It's there, ain't it? Wot more du want?"

"Oh, it's there, of course . . . only! . . ."

The man interrupted him. "Wot's a toob for?" he said. He answered his own question. "To travel by. Well, you can travel by it. Wot more du want?"

"But I thought it would be exciting! . . ."

"An' 'oo the 'ell wants excitement in a toob!" the man answered.

John considered the matter for a moment or two. "I expect you're right," he said, and then, more briskly, added, "Yes, of course. Of course, you're right. Travelling in a train would not be pleasant if it were exciting."

"It would not," the man answered.

"But it sounded such an extraordinary thing, a Tube,

when I read about it that I expected to see something different,'' John continued.

''Well, it is an extraordinary thing,'' the man said. ''You walk down them steps there, an' get into a lift, an' wot'll 'appen to you? You'll be dropped 'undreds of feet into the earth, an' when you get to the bottom, you'll find trains runnin' by electricity. I call that extraordinary, if you down't . . . only I down't want to myke a song abaht it!''

John felt that he had been rebuked for an excess of enthusiasm. The Englishman was right about the Tube. It was a wonderful thing, more wonderful, perhaps, because of the quietness of its approach: it would not be any more wonderful if people were to go about the town uttering shouts of astonishment over it, nor was it any less wonderful because the English people treated it as if it were an ordinary affair.

He looked across the road at the Bank of England, devoid equally of dignity and sensation, and then turned and looked at the Royal Exchange. A pigeon flew up from the ground and perched among the figures carved over the portico, and as he watched it, he read the inscription beneath the figure of Justice: *The Earth is the Lord's and the Fullness Thereof.*

''Dear me!'' he said, turning away again.

He began to feel hungry, and he moved away to search for a place in which to find a meal.

''Good-morning,'' he said to the man who had instructed him concerning the Tube.

''Oh, goo'-mornin'!''

V

He walked along Queen Victoria Street and, without considering what he was doing, turned into a narrow street that ran off it at an angle of seventy-five degrees. It was a perilous street to traverse for every building in it seemed

to have a crane near its roof, and every crane seemed to have a heavy bale dangling from it in mid-air; and from the narrow pavement cellar flaps were raised so that an unwary person might suddenly find himself descending into deep, dark holes in the ground. The roadway was occupied by lorries, and John had to turn and cross, and cross and turn many times before he could extricate himself from the labyrinth into which he had so carelessly intruded. While he was crossing the street at one point, and passing between two lorries, he found himself in front of a coffee-house, and again aware of his hunger, he entered it. He passed to the back of the L-shaped shop, and sat down at a small marble-topped table and waited for a waitress to come and take his order. There was a girl sitting on the other side of the table, but he did not observe her particularly, for her head was bent over a letter which she was reading. He looked about him. The room was full of men and young women, all eating or waiting to eat, and from a corner of the room came a babble of conversation carried on by a group of young clerks, and while John looked at them, a waitress came to him, and said, "Yes, sir!"

He looked up at her hurriedly. "Oh, I want something to eat!" he said. She waited for him to proceed. "What have you?" he asked. She handed a bill of fare to him, and he glanced through it, feeling incapable of choice.

"The sausages are very nice," the waitress suggested.

"I'll have sausages," he replied, thankful for the suggestion.

"Two?"

He nodded his head.

"Tea or coffee?"

"Tea, please. And a roll and butter!"

The waitress left him, and he sat back in his chair, and now he regarded the bent head of the girl sitting opposite to him, and as he did so, she looked up and their eyes met. She looked away.

"What lovely eyes she has," John said to himself.

She stood up as he thought this, and prepared to leave the restaurant, and he saw again that her eyes were very beautiful: blue eyes that had a dark look in them; and he said to himself that a woman who had beautiful eyes had everything. He wished that he had come earlier to the restaurant or that she had come later, so that they might have sat opposite to each other for a longer time. He listened while she asked the waitress for her bill. The softness of her voice was like gentle music. He thought of the tiny noise of a small stream, of the song of a bird heard at a distance, of leaves slightly stirring in a quiet wind, and told himself that the sound of her voice had the quality of all these. He wondered what it was that brought her to the City of London. Perhaps she was employed in an office. Perhaps she had come up to do some shopping. . . . She moved away, and as she did so, he saw that she had left her letter lying on the table. He leant over and picked it up, reading the name written on the envelope: *Miss Eleanor Moore.* He got up and hurried after her.

The restaurant was a narrow cramped one, and it was not easy for him to make his way through the people who were entering or leaving it, and he feared that he would not be able to catch up with her before she had reached the street. Customers in that restaurant, however, had to stop at the counter to pay their bills, and so he reached her in time.

"Excuse me," he said. "I think you left this letter behind you."

She looked up in a startled manner, and then seeing the letter which he held out to her, smiled and said, "Oh, thank you! Thank you very much. I left it on the table!"

She took it from him, and put it in a pocket of her coat.

"Thank you very much," she said again, and turned to take her change from the man behind the counter.

John stood for a moment, looking at her, and then, re-

membering his manners, went back to his seat and began to eat his meal of tea and bread and butter and sausages.

"Eleanor Moore!" he murmured to himself as he cut off a large piece of sausage and put it into his mouth. "That's a very nice name!" He munched the sausage. "A very nice name," he thought again. "Much nicer than Maggie Carmichael."

## vi

He left the restaurant and, having enquired the way, proceeded along Cheapside towards Fleet Street. There was nothing of interest to him in Cheapside, and so, in spite of its memories of Richard Whittington and Robert Herrick, he hurried out of it. He turned into St. Paul's Churchyard, eager to see the Cathedral, but as he did so, his heart fell. The Eastern end of the Cathedral does not impress the beholder. John ought to have seen St. Paul's first from Ludgate Hill, but, coming on it from Cheapside, he could not get a proper view of it. He had expected to turn a corner and see before him, immense and wonderful, the great church, rich in tradition and dignity, rearing itself high above the houses like a strong man rising up from the midst of pigmies . . . and he had turned a corner and seen only a grimy, blackened thing, huddled into a corner . . . jostled almost . . . by greedy shopkeepers and warehousemen. A narrow passage, congested by carts, separated the eastern end of the cathedral from ugly buildings; a narrower passage separated the railings of the churchyard from shops where men sold baby linen and women's blouses and kitchen ranges and buns and milk. . . .

His Uncle Matthew had told him that the dome of St. Paul's could be seen from every part of London. "If ever you lose yourself in London," he had said, "search the sky 'til you see the dome of St. Paul's and then work your way towards it!" And here, in the very churchyard of the Cathedral, the dome was not visible because the shop-keep-

ers had not left enough of room for a man to stand back and view it properly. John wondered whether the whole of London would disappoint him so much as St. Paul's had done. The English seemed to have very little regard for their cathedrals, for they put them into cramped areas and allowed merchants to encircle them with ugly shops and offices. In Southwark, he had seen the church where Shakespeare prayed, hidden behind a hideous railway bridge, with its pavement fouled by rotting cabbage leaves and the stinking debris of a vegetable market. And here, now, was St. Paul's surrounded by dingy, desolating houses, as if an effort were being made to conceal the church from view.

He hurried through the churchyard until he reached the western end of the Cathedral, where some of his disappointment dropped out of his mind. The great front of the church, with its wide, deep steps and its great, strong pillars, black and grey from the smoke and fog of London, filled him with a sense of imperturbable dignity. Men might build their dingy, little shops and their graceless, scrambling warehouses, and try to crowd the Cathedral into a corner, but the great church would still retain its dignity and strength however much they might succeed in obscuring it. He walked across the pavement, scattering the pigeons as he did so, undecided whether to enter the Cathedral or not, until he reached the flagstone on which is chiselled the statement that "Here Queen Victoria Returned Thanks to Almighty God for the Sixtieth Anniversary of Her Accession. June 22, 1897." As he contemplated the flagstone, he forgot about the Cathedral, and remembered only his Uncle Matthew. On this spot, a little, old woman had said her thankful prayers, the little, old woman for whom his Uncle, who had never seen her, had cracked a haberdasher's window and suffered disgrace; and she and he were dead, and the little, old lady was of no more account than the simple-minded man who had nearly been sent to gaol

because of his devotion to her memory. Many times in his life, had John heard people speak of "the Queen" almost in an awe-stricken fashion, until, now and then, she seemed to him to be a legendary woman, a great creature in a heroic story, someone of whom he might dream, but of whom he might never hope to catch a glimpse. It startled him to think that she had human qualities, that she ate and drank and slept and suffered pain and laughed and cried like other people. She was "the Queen": she owned the British Empire and all that it contained. She owned white men and black men and yellow men and red men; she owned islands and continents and deserts and seas; a great tract of the world belonged to her . . . and here he was standing on the very spot where she had sat in her carriage, offering thanks in old quavering accents to the Almighty God for allowing her to reign for sixty years. The fact that he was able to stand on that very spot seemed comical to him. There ought to have been a burning bush on the place where "the Queen" had said her prayers. Uncle Matthew would have expected something of that sort . . . but there was nothing more dramatic than this plainly-chiselled inscription. And the little, old woman was as dusty in her grave as Uncle Matthew was in his. . . .

vii

He passed down Ludgate Hill, across Ludgate Circus, into Fleet Street, turning for a few moments to look back at the Cathedral. Again, he had a sense of anger against the English people who could allow a railway company to fling an ugly bridge across the foot of Ludgate Hill and destroy the view of St. Paul's from the Circus; but he had had too many shocks that morning to feel a deep anger then, and so, turning his back on the Cathedral, he walked up Fleet Street. He stared about him with interest, gazing up at the names of the newspapers that were exhibited in large

letters on the fronts of the houses. The street seemed to be shouting at him, yelling out names as if it were afraid to be silent. It was a disorderly street. It seemed to straggle up the hill to the Strand, as if it had not had time to put its clothes on properly. All along its length, he could see, at intervals, scaffold-poles and builders' hoardings. Houses and offices were being altered or repaired or rebuilt. He felt that the street had been constructed for a great game of hide-and-seek, for the flow of the buildings was irregular: here, a house stood forward; there, a house stood back. In one of these bays, a player might hide from a seeker! . . . Somewhere in this street, John remembered, Dr. Johnson had lived, and he tried to imagine the scene that took place on the night of misery when Oliver Goldsmith went to the Doctor and wept over the failure of *The Good Natured Man,* and was called a ninny for his pains. But he could not make the scene come alive because of the noise and confusion in the street. The air of immediacy which enveloped him made quiet imagination impossible. His head began to ache with the sounds that filled his ears, and he wished that he could escape from the shouting herd into some little soundless place where his mind could become easy again and free from pain. He stared around him, glancing at the big-lettered signs over the newspaper offices, at the omnibuses, at the crowds of men and women, and once his heart leaped into his throat as he saw a boy on a bicycle, carrying a bag stuffed with newspapers on his back, ride rapidly out of a side street into the middle of the congested traffic as if there were nothing substantial to hinder his progress . . . and as he stared about him, it seemed to him that Fleet Street was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. . . .

"I must get out of this," he said to himself, turning aimlessly out of the street.

He found himself presently in a narrow lane, and, looking up at the sign, saw that it was called "Hanging Sword Alley." He looked at the bye-way, a mere gutter of a

street, and wondered what sort of a man had given it that romantic name; and while he wondered, it seemed to him that his mind had suddenly become illuminated. His Uncle Matthew had had romantic imaginings all his life about everything except the things that were under his nose. He had never seen Queen Victoria, but he had suffered for her sake. He had never seen London, but he had declared it to be a city of romance and colour and vivid happenings. Perhaps Uncle Matthew was like the man who had named this dull, grimy, narrow passage, "Hanging Sword Alley"! Perhaps Queen Victoria was not quite . . . not quite all that Uncle Matthew had imagined her to be. The thought staggered him, and he felt as if he had filled his mind with treason and sedition! . . . He could not say what Queen Victoria was, but with his own eyes he had seen London, and London had as little of romance in it as Hanging Sword Alley had. There were noise and scuffle and dingy distraction and mobs of little white-faced, nervous men and women, and a drab content with blotched beauty . . . but none of these things had romance in them. He had been told that London flower-girls were pretty . . . and he had seen only coarse and unclean women, with towsled hair. He had been told that London 'busdrivers were cheerful, witty men . . . but the driver to whom he had spoken had been surly at the beginning and witless to the end. If Uncle Matthew had come into this dirty bye-way, he would have seen only the name of Hanging Sword Alley, but John had seen more than the name: he had seen the inadequacy of the bye-way to the name it bore.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "I can't see the romance in things. Mebbe, Uncle Matthew could see more than I can! . . ."

His head ached more severely now, and he wandered into Tudor Street. A great rurr-rurr came from the cellars of the houses, and glancing into them, he could see big machines working, and he guessed that these were the engines

that printed the newspapers. The thump of the presses, as they turned great rolls of white paper into printed sheets, seemed to beat inside his head, causing him pain with every stroke. He pressed his fingers against his temples in an effort to relieve the ache, but it would not be relieved. "Oh!" he exclaimed aloud after one very sharp twinge, and then, as he spoke, he found himself before a gate and, heedless of what he was doing, he passed through it . . . and found himself in an oasis in a desert of noise. The harsh sounds died down, the *rurr-rurr-rurr* of the machines ceased to trouble him, the scuffle and haste no longer offended his sense of decency. He was in a place of cool cloisters and wide green lawns. He could see young men in white flannels playing tennis . . . in Ballyards it was called "bat and ball" . . . and beyond the tennis-courts, he saw the shining river.

"What place is this?" he said to a man who went by.

"Temple Gardens!" the man replied.

He walked about the Gardens, delighting in the quiet and the coolness. Pigeons flew down from the roof of a house and began to pick bread-crumbs almost at his feet. There was a sweet noise of birds. . . .

He looked at the names of the barristers painted on the doorways of the houses, and wondered which of them were judges. He wished he could see a judge in his crimson robes and his long, curly wig, coming out of the chambers, and while he wished for this splendid spectacle, he saw a barrister in his black gown and horse-hair wig, come down a narrow passage from the Strand and enter the doorway of one of the houses. He walked on into Pump Court and watched the sparrows washing themselves in the fountain where Tom Pinch met Ruth . . . and while he watched them, his sense of loneliness returned to him. His head still ached and now his heart ached, too. Disappointment had come to him all day. He was alone in a city full of people who knew nothing of him and cared nothing for him. And

his heart was aching. The peace of Pump Court only served to make him more aware of the ache in his head. As he dipped his hand in the water of the fountain, he wished that he could go round a corner and meet Uncle William or Mr. Cairnduff or the minister or even Aggie Logan . . . meet someone whom he knew! . . .

"I'd give the world for a cup of tea," he said to himself suddenly, and then, "I wonder could I find that place where I saw the girl. Mebbe she'd be there again! . . ."

He looked about him in an indeterminate way. Then he moved from the fountain in the direction of the Strand. "I can try anyway!" he said.

viii

The girl was sitting at a large table in a corner of the restaurant, and he saw with joy that there was a vacant seat immediately opposite to her. He looked at her as he sat down, but she gave no sign of recognition. He had hoped that their encounter earlier in the day would have entitled him to a smile from her, but her features remained unrelaxed, although he knew that she was aware of him and remembered him. Her eyes and his had met, and he had been ready to answer her smile with another smile, but she averted her eyes from his stare and looked down at her plate. What eyes she had . . . grey at one moment and blue at another as her face turned in the light! When she looked downwards, he could see long lashes fringing her eyelids, and when she looked up, the changing colour of her irises and the blue tinge that suffused the cornea, caused him to think of her eyes as pools of light. Her face was pale, and in repose it had an appearance of puzzled pathos that made him feel that he must instantly offer comfort to her, and he would have done so had not her nervous reticence prevented him. What would she do if he were to speak to her? There was an illustrated paper lying close

to her plate. He leant across the table and, pointing to the paper, said, "Are you using that?"

She started, and then, without a smile, said, "No," and passed the paper to him.

"Thank you!" he murmured, taking it from her.

It was an old paper, and he did not wish to read it, but he had to pretend to be interested in it, for the girl showed no desire to offer any more than the casual civilities of one stranger to another. He hoped that he might suddenly look up and find that she was regarding him intently . . . she would hurriedly glance away from him with an air of pretty confusion . . . but although he looked up at her many times, he never caught her gazing at him. He wished that she would take her hat, a wide-brimmed one, off so that he might see her hair. How ridiculous it was of women to sit at meals with hats on! . . . He could just see a wave of dark brown hair under the brim of her hat, flowing across her broad brow. Her eyebrows were dark and level and very firm, and he thought how wonderfully the darkness of her eyebrows and her eyelids and the pallor of her skin served to enrich the beauty of her eyes. Maggie Carmichael's eyes had had laughter in them . . . they seemed always to be sparkling with merriment . . . but this girl's eyes had tears in them. She might often smile, John told himself, but she would seldom laugh. Her air of listening for an alarm and the nervous movement of her fingers made him imagine that a magician had changed some swift and beautiful and timid animal into a woman. The magicians in the *Arabian Nights* frequently turned men and women into hounds and antelopes, but the process had been reversed with this girl: an antelope had been turned into a woman. . . . If only she would give him an opportunity of speaking to her, of making friends with her! He suddenly held out the paper to her. "Thank you!" he said.

"It isn't mine," she answered indifferently.

He became confused and clumsy, and he put the paper

down on the table so that it upset a spoon on to the floor with a noise that seemed loud enough to wake the dead; and as he stooped to pick it up, he pushed the paper against her plate, causing it almost to fall into her lap.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed.

"It's all right," she replied coldly.

He could feel the blood running hotly through his body, and the warm flush of it spreading over his cheeks. "That was a cut," he said to himself, and wondered what he should do or say next. What a fool he must appear to her! . . . It would be ridiculous to ask her to tell him the time, for there was a large and palpable clock over her head so fixed that he could not fail to see it. It was very odd, he thought, that she should not wish to speak to him when he so ardently wished to speak to her. She had finished her meal and he knew that in a moment or two she would rise and go out of the restaurant. He leant across the table.

"Miss Moore," he said, "I wish you would be friends with me!"

She looked at him as if she were not certain that he had spoken to her, and as she saw how earnestly he gazed at her, the expression of her face changed from one of astonishment to one of alarm.

"Won't you?" he said.

She gave a little gasp and rose hurriedly from her seat.

"Miss Moore!" he said appealingly.

"I don't know you," she replied, hurrying away.

He sat still. It seemed to him that every person in the restaurant must be looking at him and condemning him for his behaviour. He had spoken to a girl who did not know him, and he had frightened her. The look of alarm in her face was unmistakable. What must she think of him? Would she ever believe that he had no wish to frighten her, that he wished only to be her friend, to talk to her? If he had told her that he did not know anyone in London and was

feeling miserably lonely, perhaps she would have been kind to him . . . but what opportunity had he had to tell her anything. Well, that was the end of that! He was not likely to see Eleanor Moore again, and even if he were, he could hardly hope, after such a rebuff, to win her friendship unless a miracle were to happen . . . and he had begun to feel dubious about miracles since he had arrived in London. Perhaps, if he were to follow her and explain matters to her! . . .

He hurried out of the restaurant, and stood for a moment or two on the pavement glancing up and down the street. She was turning out of the lane into Queen Victoria Street, and as he stood looking at her, she turned round the corner and he lost sight of her.

"I'll go after her," he said.

## ix

He ran into Queen Victoria Street and glanced eagerly about him. It was difficult in the press of people to distinguish a single person, but fortunately the street was fairly clear of traffic, and he saw her crossing the road near the Mansion House. He hastened after her and saw her enter a block of offices in Cornhill. He reached the door of this building in time to see her being carried out of sight in the lift. He entered the hall and stood by the gate until the lift had descended.

"Can you tell me which of these offices that lady works in?" he said to the liftman. "The lady you've just taken up, Miss Moore?"

The liftman looked at him suspiciously.

"Wot you want to know for?" he demanded.

"Oh, I . . . I'm a friend of hers," John answered lamely.

"Well, if you're a friend of 'ers, I daresay she'll tell you

'erself next time she sees you,'' said the liftman. ''Any-'ow, I sha'n't. See?''

''But I particularly want to know,'' John persisted. ''Look here, I'll give you half-a-crown if you'll tell me! . . .''

''An' I'll give you a thick ear if you don't 'op it out of this quick,'' the liftman retorted angrily. ''I know you. Nosey Parker, that's wot you are! Comin' 'round 'ere, annoyin' girls! I know you! I seen fellers like you before, I 'ave! . . .''

''What do you mean?'' said John.

''Mean! 'Ere's wot I mean. You're either a broker's man! . . .''

''No, I'm not,'' John interrupted.

''Or you're up to no good, see! An' wotever you are, you can just 'op it, see! You'll get no information out of me, Mr. Nosey Parker, see! An' if I ketch you 'angin' about 'ere, annoyin' 'er or anybody else I'll 'it you on the jawr, see, an' then I'll 'and you over to the police. An' that'll learn you!''

John stared at the man. ''Do you mean to say? . . .''

''I mean to say wot I 'ave said,'' the liftman interjected. ''An' I don't mean to say no more. 'Op it. That's all. Or it'll be the worse for you!''

The lift bell rang, and the man entered the lift and closed the gate. Then he ascended out of sight. John gaped through the gate into the well of the lift.

''I've a good mind to break that chap's skull,'' he said to himself as he turned away.

He left the block of offices and went towards Prince's Street.

''It's no good hanging about here any longer,'' he said. ''I'll go home!''

A 'bus drove up as he reached the corner, and he climbed into it. ''I'll come again to-morrow,'' he said, ''and try

and find her. She'll have to listen to me. I'm really in love this time!''

He had been provided with a latch-key before leaving Miss Squibb's house in the morning, and, with an air of responsibility, he let himself in. Lizzie, carrying a tray of dishes, came into the hall as he opened the door.

''Just in time,'' she said affably. ''If you'd 'a' been a bit sooner, you'd 'a' seen the Creams. They come back just after you went out 'smornin'. I told 'em all about you . . . you bein' Irish an' littery an' never 'avin' been to the Zoo or anythink. They *was* interested!''

''Oh!''

'' 'E's such a nice man, Mr. Cream is. She ain't bad, but 'e's nice. They gone to the Oxford now. I wish you'd seen 'em start off in their broom!''

''Broom?''

''Yes, their carriage. They 'ave to 'ire one when they're in London so's to get about from one 'all to another. They act in two or three 'alls a night in London. I do like to see 'em go off in their broom of a evenin'. Mykes the 'ouse look a bit classy, I think, but Aunt says they're living in sin an' she down't feel 'appy about it. But wot I sy is, wot's it matter so long as they pys their rent reg'lar an' down't go an' myke no fuss. They couldn't be less trouble. They keep on their rooms 'ere, just the same whether they're 'ere or not, an' sometimes they're away for months at a stretch. It ain't every dy you get lodgers like them, and wot I sy is, if they are livin' in sin, it's them that'll ave to go to 'ell for it, not us. Aunt's very religious, but she can see sense syme's anybody else, so she 'olds 'er tongue about it. I down't 'old with sin myself, mind you, but I down't believe in cuttin' off your nose to spite someone else's fyce. You go an' wash your 'ands, an' I'll 'ave your dinner up in 'alf a jiff! . . .''

John stared at her. ''I don't know what you mean by living in sin,'' he said.

"Well, you are innercent," she replied. " 'Aven't you never 'eard of no one livin' together without bein' married?"

"I've read about it! . . ."

"Well, that's livin' in sin, that is. Pers'nally, I down't see wot diff'rence it mykes. They be'ave about the syme. married or not. 'E's a bit more lovin', per'aps, than a 'usband, but otherwise it's about the syme!"

The bluntness of Lizzie's speech disconcerted him, and yet the simplicity of it reassured him. He did not now feel, as he has felt in the morning, that she was a Bad Woman; but he could not completely comprehend her. Girls in Ballyard did not speak as she spoke. One knew that there were Bad Women in the world and that there was much sin in love-making, but one did not speak of it, except in shuddering whispers. Lizzie, however, spoke of it almost as if she were talking of the weather. Evidently, life and habit in England were very different from life and habit in Ballyards. . . . He went up the stairs to his room, in a mood partly of horror and partly of curiosity. He was shocked to think that he was living in the same house with guilty sinners, but he had an odd desire to see them.

When he had reached the first landing, Lizzie called after him. "There's a poce-card for you," she said. "From Mr. 'Inde. 'E says 'e'll be 'ome to-morrow, an' 'e asts you to give me 'is love. Saucy 'ound! 'E's a one, 'e is!"

John turned towards her. "It won't be necessary for me to give his love to you, will it?" he said sarcastically. "You seem to have taken it already!"

She was unaware of his sarcasm. "So I 'ave," she said. "I'll tell 'im that when 'e comes back!"

"Do you always read post-cards, Lizzie?" he asked.

"Of course I do," she answered. "So does everybody. You 'urry on now, an' I'll 'ave your dinner up before you finish dryin' your fyce!" She contemplated him for a

moment. "You got nice 'air," she said, "only it wants brushin'. An' cuttin', too!"

Then she disappeared down the stairs leading to the basement.

"That's a *very* rum sort of a woman," John murmured to himself as he proceeded to his room.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

i

HE had gone to bed before the Creams returned from their round of the music-halls, but in the morning, when Lizzie had removed the remnants of his breakfast, John heard a tap on the door of the sitting-room, and on opening it, found a small, wistful-looking man, with a smiling face, standing outside.

"Good-morning," said the stranger, holding his hand out. "I'm Cream from the ground-floor!"

"Oh, yes," John answered, shaking hands with him. "Come in, won't you!"

"Well, I was going to suggest you should come down and be introduced to the wife. She'd like to meet you!" Mr. Cream said, entering the sitting-room as he spoke.

John had a sensation of self-consciousness when he heard the word "wife."

"Settling down comfortably?" Mr. Cream continued.

"Oh, yes, thank you," said John. "I went out all day yesterday and had my first look at London!"

"And what do you think of it? Great place, eh?"

John confessed that he had been disappointed in London, and in a few moments he began to recite a list of the things that had disappointed him.

"Wait 'til you've been here a few months," Mr. Cream interrupted. "You'll love this town. You'll hate loving it, but you won't be able to help yourself. I've been all over the world, the wife and me, and I've seen some of the loveliest places on earth, but London's got me. You'll be the same. You see!" He glanced about the room, casting

his eyes critically at the books. "I hear you're a writer, too?" he said, less as an assertion than as a question.

"I've written one book," John replied, "but it hasn't been printed. I want to discuss it with Mr. Hinde, but I haven't had a chance to do that yet. He's been away ever since I arrived. He'll be home the day though!"

"So Lizzie told me. Queer bird, Lizzie, isn't she?"

"Very," said John.

"But she's a good soul. I'd trust Lizzie with every ha'-penny I have, but I wouldn't trust that old cat of an aunt of hers with a brass farthing. She's too religious to be honest. That's my opinion of her. Come on down and see the wife!" He rose from his seat as he spoke. "I suppose you've never tried your hand at a play, have you?" he asked, leading the way to the door.

"No, not yet, but I had a notion of trying," John said, following him.

"I could give you a few tips if you needed advice," Mr. Cream continued, as they descended the stairs. "As a matter of fact, the wife and me are in need of a new piece for the halls, and it struck me this morning when I heard you were a writer, that mebbe you could do a piece for us. It would be practice for you!"

"What about Mr. Hinde?" John asked.

"I've tried him time after time, but it's no good asking. He's a journalist, and a journalist can only work when he's excited. Put him down to something that needs thought and care, and he's lost. And he always says he's writing a tragedy about St. Patrick and can't think of anything else!"

John smiled, without quite understanding why he was smiling, and followed Mr. Cream into the ground-floor sitting-room where Mrs. Cream was lying on a sofa.

"This is the wife," Mr. Cream said. "Dolly, this is Mr. . . . Mr! . . ."

"MacDermott," John prompted.

"Oh, yes, of course. Mr. MacDermott. Lizzie did tell me, but I can never remember Irish names somehow!"

Mrs. Cream extended a limp hand to John. "You must excuse me for not getting up," she said, "but I'm always very tired in the morning!"

"You see, Mac," Mr. Cream explained, "Dolly is a very intense actress . . . I think she's the most intense actress on the stage . . . and she gets very worked up in emotional pieces. Don't you, Dolly?"

Dolly nodded her head, and then, as if the effort of doing so had been too great an exertion for her, she lay back on the sofa and closed her eyes.

"Perhaps I'd better go! . . ." John suggested.

"Oh, no, no! She's always like that. All right in the afternoon. Won't you, Dolly?"

Dolly waved her hand feebly.

"Her acting takes a lot out of her," Mr. Cream said. "Very exhausting all that emotional work. Bound to be . . . *bound* to be! Now, comic work's different. I can be as comic as you like, and all that happens is I'm nicely tired about bedtime, and I sleep like a top. In fact, I might say I sleep like two tops, for the wife's so unnerved, as you might say, by her own acting that it takes her half the night to settle down. Nerves, my boy. That's what it is! Nerves! I tell you, Mac, old chap, if you want to have a good night's rest, go in for comic work, but if you want to lie awake and think, tragedy's your trade. Nerves all on edge. Overwrought. Terrible thing, tragedy! Isn't it, Dolly?"

Mrs. Cream moaned slightly and twisted about on the sofa. "Too much talk!" she murmured.

"All right, my dear, all right. Suppose we just go up to your room again, Mac, and talk until she's quieted down? Eh?"

"Very well," said John who was feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

They left the room together. John walking on tiptoe, for he felt that the situation made such a solemnity necessary.

"Temperament is a peculiar thing," Mr. Cream said as they ascended the stairs.

"Evidently," John answered.

"I may as well warn you that Dolly'll make love to you when she's recovered herself, but you needn't let it worry you. She can't help it, poor dear, and I often think it's the only real relaxation she has . . . with her temperament. Just humour her, old chap, if she does. I'll know you don't mean anything by it. It's temperament, that's all it is. Dolly wouldn't *do* anything . . . not for the world . . . but it gives her a lot of satisfaction to pretend she's doing something. Lot of women like that, Mac. Not nice women, really . . . except Dolly, of course . . . and you can excuse her because of her temperament!"

They entered the sitting-room and sat down at the table.

"And I may as well tell you," Cream continued, "that Dolly and me aren't married. I'd like to be regular myself, but Dolly says she'd feel respectable if she was married . . . and she thinks you can't be tragic if you're respectable. She always says that she's at her best when she feels that I've ruined her life. I daresay she's right, old chap, only I'd like to be regular myself. As I tell her, if it's hard to be tragic when you're respectable, it's damn hard to be comic when you're not. I expect Lizzie told you about me and Dolly!"

John nodded his head.

"I thought as much. Lizzie always tells people. I don't know what the hell she'd do for gossip if we were to get married. I can't think how she found out . . . unless Dolly told her . . . but you can be certain of this, Mac, if there's a skeleton in your cupboard, Lizzie'll discover it. Dolly's the skeleton in my cupboard. Of course, old chap, I don't want it talked about. I wouldn't have told you anything about it, only I guessed that Lizzie'd told you.

Not that I mind *you* or Hinde knowing . . . you're writers . . . but music-hall people are so particular about things of that sort. You wouldn't believe how narrow-minded and old-fashioned they are about marriage . . . not like actors. That's really why I mentioned the matter. I don't want you to think I'm bragging about it or anything!"

"Oh, no, no," said John. "No, of course not. I wouldn't dream of saying a word to anybody!"

"Thanks, Mac, old chap!" Cream extended his hand to John, and John, wondering why it was offered to him, shook it. "Now about this idea of mine for a play!"

"Play?"

"Yes, for me and Dolly. Why shouldn't you do one for us? The minute I heard you were a writer, I turned to Dolly and I said, 'Dolly, darling, let's get him to do a play for us!' And she agreed at once. She said, 'Do what you like, darling, but don't worry me about it!' You see, Mac, we're getting a bit tired of this piece we're doing now . . . we've been doing it twice-nightly for four years . . . *The Girl Gets Left,* we call it . . . and we want new stuff. See? We'd like a good dramatic piece . . . a little bit of high-class in it . . . for Dolly . . . if you like, only not too much. Classy stuff wants living up to it, and I haven't got it in me, and people aren't always in the mood for it either. In the music-halls, anyway. See?"

"But! . . ."

"Dramatic stuff . . . that's what we want. Go! Snap! Plenty of ginger! Raise hell's delight and then haul down the curtain quick before the audience has had time to pull itself together. See? We'd treat the author very handsome if we could get hold of a good piece with a big emotional part for the wife . . . and although I'm her husband . . . in the sight of God, anyway . . . I will say this for her, Mac, there's not another woman on the stage . . . Ellen Terry, Mrs. Pat or Sarah Bernhardt herself . . . can hold a candle to Dolly for emotional parts. Of course,

there'd have to be a comic part for me, too, but you needn't worry much about that. I always make up my own part to a certain extent. Just give me the bare outline: I'll do the rest. You see, I understand the public . . . it's a knack, of course . . . and I can always improve the author's stuff easy. What do you say?"

"I don't know," said John.

"You needn't put your name to it, if you don't want to. Use a nom de plume or leave the name out altogether. *Our* audience doesn't pay any attention to authors, so that won't matter. And it'll be a start for you, Mac!"

"Oh, yes!"

"Any little bit of success, even if you're half ashamed of it, bucks you wonderful, Mac . . . I say, you don't mind me calling you Mac, do you? . . ."

"No," John replied.

"Somehow it's homely when you can call a chap Mac, somehow! Now, if you was to do a play for us, and it went well, it 'd put heart into you for something better. If you can find your way to the heart of a music-hall audience, Mac, my boy, you can find your way anywhere. Now, what about it, eh? Will you try to do a piece for us?"

"I'll try, but! . . ."

"That's all right," said Cream, again extending his hand to John. "Dolly'll be very pleased to hear we've settled it!"

"But I've never seen a music-hall play!" John exclaimed, "and you haven't said how much you'll pay me for it!"

"Never been in a music-hall! . . . Where was you brought up, Mac?"

"In Ballyards," John replied seriously.

"Where's that?"

"Have you never heard of Ballyards, Mr. Cream?"

"No," the comedian replied.

"Well, where were you brought up then?"

Cream regarded him closely for a few moments. Then he burst into laughter and again shook John fervently by the hand.

"That's one up for you, Mac!" he said genially. "Quite a repartee. Well, come with us to-night and see *The Girl Gets Left*. That'll give you a notion of the sort of stuff we want. See?"

"How much will you pay me for it?"

"Well, we gave the chap that wrote *The Girl Gets Left* . . . poor chap, he died of drink about six weeks ago . . . couldn't keep away from it . . . signed the pledge . . . ate sweets . . . did everything . . . no good . . . always thought out his best jokes when he was drunk . . . well, we gave him thirty bob a week for *The Girl Gets Left* . . . and mind you he was an experienced chap, too . . . but Dolly and me, we've decided you have to pay a bit extra for classy stuff, and we'll give you two quid a week for the piece if it suits us. Two quid a week as long as the play runs, Mac. *The Girl Gets Left* has been played for four years . . . four years, Mac . . . all over the civilised globe. If your piece was to run that long, you'd get Four Hundred and Sixteen Quid. Four Hundred and Sixteen shiny Jimmy o' Goblins, Mac! Think of it! And all for a couple of afternoons' work! . . ."

"And how much will you get out of it?" John asked.

"Oh, I dunno. Enough to pay the rent anyhow. You know, Mac, these high-class chaps like Barrie and Bernard Shaw, they've never had a play run for four years anywhere, and yet old Hookings, that nobody never knew nothing about and died of drink, his play was performed all over the civilised world for four years. That's something to be proud of, that is. Four solid years! But there was nothing in the papers about him, when he died . . . nothing . . . not a word. And if Barrie was to die, or Bernard Shaw . . . columns, pages! Barrie . . . well, he's all right, of course . . . not bad . . . but compare him with

Hookings. Why, he doesn't know the outside of the human heart, not the outside of it he doesn't, and Hookings knew what the inside of it's like. You take that play of Barrie's, *The Twelve Pound Look.* Not bad . . . not a bad play, at all . . . but where's the feeling heart in it? Play that piece in front of an audience of coalminers and what 'ud you get? The bird, my boy! That sort of stuff is all right for the West End . . . but the people, Mac, want something that hits 'em straight between the eyes and gives 'em a kick in the stomach as well. The best way to make a man sit up and take a bit of notice is to hit him a punch on the jaw, and the best way to make the public feel sympathetic is to hit it a punch in the heart! . . ."

The little man broke off suddenly and glanced towards the door. "I must toddle down to Dolly now. She gets fretful if I'm out of her sight for long. I'll see you later on . . . seven o'clock, old chap!"

"Very good," John answered.

"Aw reservoir, then!" said Cream, as he left the room and hurried downstairs.

ii

He told himself that he ought to do some work, but the desire to see more of London overcame his good resolution, and so he left the house and set out again for the town. He hoped that he might see Eleanor Moore. If he were to go to the tea-shop at the same hour as she had entered it yesterday, he might contrive to seat himself at her table again, and this time perhaps she would listen to him. When he reached the City, he found that he was too early for the mid-day meal, and so he resolved to go and stand about the entrance to the office where Eleanor Moore was employed. He would see her coming out of it and could follow discreetly after her. . . . But although he waited for an hour, she did not appear, nor was she to be seen in the tea-shop,

when, tired and disappointed, he took his place in it. He dallied over his meal, hoping every moment that she would turn up, but at length he had to go away without seeing her. At teatime, he told himself, he would come again and wait for her. He climbed on to a 'bus and let himself be taken to Charing Cross, where he enquired the way to the National Gallery. He wandered through the rooms until his eyes ached with looking at the pictures and his feet were sore with walking on the polished floors. He felt self-conscious when he looked at the nudes, and he blushed when he found a woman standing by his side as he looked at the portrait of Jean Arnolfini and Jeanne his wife by van Eyck. He turned hotly away, and wondered that there was no blush on the face of the woman. In Ballyards, a man always pretended not to see a woman about to have a child . . . unless, of course, he was with other men and the woman could not see him, when he would crack jokes about her condition! . . . Here, however, people actually exhibited pictures of pregnant women in a public place where all sorts, old and young, male and female, could look at them . . . and no one appeared to mind. It might be all right, of course, and after all a woman in that way was natural enough . . . but he had been brought up to be ashamed of seeing such things, and he could not very well become easy about them in a moment. . . . And he became very tired of Holy Families and Crucifixions! . . .

"I'll walk back to the place," he said to himself as he left the Gallery and crossed Trafalgar Square. He dappled his fingers in the water of one of the fountains, and listened to two little Cocknies wrangling together. . . .

"They've a queer way of talking," he said to himself.

. . . and then he started off down the Strand towards Fleet Street and the City. Eleanor Moore was not in the tea-shop when he entered it, nor did she come into it while he remained there. He finished his meal and walked in the direction of the Royal Exchange and just as he was run-

ning out of the way of a 'bus, he saw her going towards the stairs leading into the Tube.

"There she is," he murmured and hurried after her.

She was at the foot of the stairs when he reached the top of them, and when he had got to the foot of them, she was almost at the entrance to the booking-office of the Tube. He tried to get near her so that he might speak to her, but the press of people going home prevented him from doing so. He saw her go down the steps and take her place in the queue of people purchasing tickets, and he walked across to the bookstall and stood there until she had obtained her ticket. Then as she walked to the lift, he moved towards her. She was examining her change as she walked along, and did not see him until he was close to her. He meant to say, "Oh, Miss Moore, may I speak to you for a moment!" but suddenly he became totally inarticulate, and while he was struggling to say something, she looked up and saw him. She started slightly, then her face became flushed, and she hurried forward and joined the group of wedged people in the lift. He determined to follow her, but while he was resolving to do so, the lift attendant shouted, "Next lift, please!" and pulled the gates together. He watched the light disappear from the little windows at the top of the gates! . . .

"I've missed her again," he said.

iii

He was just in time to swallow a hurried meal and set off to the theatre with the Creams. Mrs. Cream, recovered from the devastating effects of a tragical temperament, was very vivacious as they sat in the brougham; and she rallied him on his authorship. She told him that when he was a celebrated writer, she would be able to say that she had discovered him. . . .

"As a matter of fact, Dolly," said her husband, "it was me that thought of the idea!"

She ignored her husband. She pretended that John would become too proud to know the poor little Creams! . . .

"I'm not too proud to know anyone," he interrupted.

She burbled at him, and pressed closer to him. "You're quite complimentary," she said.

Cream had given John a note to the manager of the theatre which induced that gentleman to admit him, free of charge, to the stalls. He would travel home by himself, for the Creams had to play at other music-halls, and would not be able to take him back to Brixton in their brougham. "We finish up at Walham Green," said Cream, as John left the carriage.

He waited impatiently for the performance of *The Girl Gets Left,* and he had an extraordinary sense of pleasure when he saw Cream's wistful face peering through a window immediately after the curtain went up. The little man was remarkably funny. His look, his voice, his gestures, all compelled laughter from the audience without the audience understanding quite why it was amused. He had the pathetic appearance that all great comedians have, the look of appeal that one saw in the face of Dan Leno, in the face of James Welch, and it seemed that he might as easily cry as laugh. The words he had to say were poor, vapid things, but when he said them, he put some of his own life into them and gave them a greater value than they deserved. The turn of his head was comic; a queer little helpless movement of his hands was comic; the way in which he seemed to stop short and gulp as if he were bracing himself up was comic; the swift downward and then upward glance of his eyes, followed by an assumption of complete humility and resignation, these were comic. And when he appeared on the stage, the audience, knowing something of his quality, collectively lifted itself into an attitude of attention.

A dismal young woman, singing a dreary lecherous song and showing an immense quantity of frilled underclothing, had occupied five or six minutes in boring the audience before *The Girl Gets Left* began; and an air of lassitude had enveloped the men who were sitting in relaxed attitudes in the theatre. Their eyes seemed to become dull, and they paid more attention to their pipes and their cigarettes than they paid to the young woman's underclothing. . . . But when *The Girl Gets Left* began, and the whimsical face of Cream was seen peering through the window of the scene, the lassitude was lifted and the men's eyes began to brighten again. The first words, the first gesture of comic helplessness, from Cream sent a ripple of laughter round the theatre, and immediately the place was full of that queer, uncontrollable thing, personality.

John laughed heartily at the acting of his new friend, and he decided that he would certainly try to write a play for him. How good Mrs. Cream must be if she were better than her husband, as he so proudly declared she was. It would be a privilege to write a play for people so clever. . . . Then Mrs. Cream, magnificently dressed, appeared, and as she did so, some of the atmosphere that enveloped the stage and the auditorium and made them one and very intimate, was dispelled. John watched her as she moved about the stage, and wondered why it was that the audience had suddenly become a little fidgetty. His eyes were full of astonishment. He gazed at Mrs. Cream as if he were trying to understand some ineluctable mystery. . . . He remembered how enthralled he had been by the acting of the girl who had played Juliet. He had been caught up and transported from the theatre to the very streets of Verona. He had felt that he was one of the crowd that followed the Montagues or the Capulets, and had been ready to bite his thumb with the best. . . . But here was something that left him uneasy and alien. He felt as if he were prying into private affairs, that at any moment someone, a policeman,

perhaps, might come along and seize him for trespassing. He did not then know that bad acting always leaves an audience with a sensation of having intruded upon privacies . . . that an actor who is incompetent leaves the people who see him acting badly with the feeling that they have vulgarly peeped into his dressing-room and seen him taking off his wig and wiping the paint from his face. Mrs. Cream acted with great vigour; her voice roared over the footlights; and she seemed to hurl herself about the scene as if she were determined either to smash the furniture or to smash herself. She made much noise. Her gestures were lavish. Her dresses were very costly and full of glitter. She worked hard. . . .

"But she can't act," said John to himself, sighing with relief when at last she left the stage to her husband.

The little man's small, fragile voice, with its comic hesitation and its puzzled note, sounded very restful after the torrential noises made by his wife, and in a few moments he had the minds of the audience fused again into one mind and made completely attentive. When the play was ended, there was very hearty applause, but none of it so hearty as the applause from John. The last few moments of the piece had been given to Mr. Cream, and he had left the audience with the pleased impression of himself and forgetful of the jar it had received from his wife. . . .

"That wee man can act all right," said John, clapping his hands until they were sore.

## iv

Hinde was waiting for him in the sitting-room when he returned to the lodging-house.

"What did you think of the Creams?" the journalist asked when they had greeted each other and had ended their congratulations on being Ulstermen.

"He's very good," John began. . . .

"And she's rotten?" Hinde interrupted.

"Well! . . ."

"Oh, my dear fellow, you needn't be afraid of telling me what you think. There's only one person in the world who doesn't realise that Mrs. Cream can't act and never will be able to act . . . and that's poor old Cream himself. He's as good a comedian as there is in the world—that little man: the essence of Cockney wit; and he does not know how good he is. He thinks that she is much better than he can ever hope to be, and she thinks so, too; but if it were not for him, MacDermott, she wouldn't get thirty shillings a week in a penny gaff!"

"They've asked me to write a play for them," John said.

"Are you going to do it?"

"I don't know. That play to-night was a very common sort of a piece. It's not the style of play I want to do! . . ."

"What style of play *do* you want to do?" Hinde asked.

"Good plays. Plays like Shakespeare wrote."

Hinde looked at him quickly. "Oh, well," he said, "there's no harm in aiming high!"

John told him of the book he had written at Ballyards, and of the story he had sent to *Blackwood's Magazine.*

"I've a great ambition to do big things," he ended.

"There's no harm in that either," Hinde replied. "In the meantime, what are you going to do? It'll be a wheen of years yet before you can hope to get anything big done!"

"Oh, I don't know about that," John answered confidently. "The MacDermotts are great people for getting their own way!"

"Mebbe they are . . . in Ballyards," Hinde retorted, "but this isn't Ballyards. And you can't spend all your time writing masterpieces. You'll have to do a wee bit of ordinary common work. What about trying to get a job on a paper?"

"I don't mind taking a job if there's one to be got. Only what sort of a job? . . ."

Hinde teased him. "They'll not let you edit the *Times* yet awhile," he said.

"I don't want to edit it," John replied.

"Well, that's a lucky thing for the man that's got the job now!"

John felt aggrieved at once. "You're coddin' me," he complained.

"Say that again," Hinde exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Say what again?"

"Say I'm coddin' you. I haven't heard that word for years. Gwon! Say it!"

"You're coddin' me! . . ."

"Isn't it lovely? Isn't it a grand word, that? Good Ulster talk! . . ."

The door opened and Lizzie entered the room.

"Mr. 'Inde! . . ." she said.

"Don't call me 'Inde," he shouted, jumping up from his chair. "What do you think the letter *h* was put in the alphabet for? For you to leave it out?"

Lizzie smiled amiably at him. "Ow, go on," she said, "you're always 'avin' me on!" She turned to John. " 'E's a 'oly terror, 'e is. Talks about me speakin' funny, but wot about 'im? I think Irish is the comicest way of talkin' I ever heard. Wot'll you 'ave for your breakfis, Mr. 'Inde?"

"*H*inde, woman, *H*inde! . . ."

"Well, wot'll you 'ave for your breakfis?"

"One of these days I'll have you fried and boiled and stewed! . . ."

Lizzie giggled.

"Ow, you are a funny man, Mr. 'Inde," she said between her titters.

Hinde gaped at her as if he were incapable of expressing himself in adequate language.

"That female," he said turning to John, "always tells me I'm a funny man! . . ."

"Well, so you are, Mr. 'Inde!" Lizzie interrupted.

"Get out," he roared at her.

Lizzie addressed John. "You'll get used to 'is comic ways when you know 'im as well as I do. Wot'll you 'ave for breakfis?" she continued, speaking again to Hinde.

"Anything," he replied. "Anything on God's earth, so long as you get out!"

"That's all I wanted to know," said Lizzie. "It'll be 'am an' eggs. Goo'-night, Mr. MacDermott!"

"Good-night, Lizzie," John murmured.

"Goo'-night, Mr. 'Inde!"

"Come here!" said Hinde.

She came across the room and stood beside him. He took hold of her chin. "If you hadn't such a rotten accent," he said, "I'd marry you!"

She giggled. "You do myke me laugh, Mr. 'Inde!" she said.

"*H*inde, woman, *H*inde! . . ."

She moved away from him as if he had uttered some perfectly commonplace remark. "Very well," she said, "it'll be 'am an' eggs for breakfis. I'm glad you chose them, because we ain't got nothink else in the 'ouse. Goo'-night, all!"

She went out of the room, but hardly had she shut the door behind her, when she opened it again.

" 'Ere's the Creams 'ome again!" she said. "Goo'-night all!"

## V

A few minutes later, Cream tapped on their door and, in response to Hinde's "Come in!" entered. He greeted Hinde lavishly, and then turned to John.

"Well, my boy," he said, "what do you think of her?

Great, isn't she? Absolute eye-opener, that's what she is. I knew you'd be struck dumb by her. That's the effect she has on people. Paralyses them. Lays 'em out. By Gum, Mac, that woman's a wonder! . . ."

"How is she?" John asked.

Cream shook his head. "All in bits, as usual, Mac. I ought not to let her do the work . . . it's wearing her out . . . but you can't keep a great artist away from the stage. She'd die quicker if she weren't doing her work than she will while she's doing. That's Art, Mac. Extraordinary thing, Art! . . ."

"Have a drink, Cream," Hinde exclaimed.

"I don't mind if I do, Hinde, old chap. Did you notice how she held the audience, Mac? The minute she stepped on to the stage, she got 'em. Absolute! She played with 'em . . . did what she liked with 'em! . . . I wish I could get hold of 'em like that. By Heaven, Mac, it must be wonderful to have that woman's power to make an audience do just what you want it to do! . . ."

Hinde handed a glass of whiskey and soda to him. "Thanks, old chap!" he said, taking it from him. He raised the glass. "Well, here's health!" he murmured, swallowing some of the drink. He put the glass down on the table beside him. "When do you think you'll be able to let us have the manuscript of the play, Mac?"

John started. "Well," he began nervously, "well, I haven't thought much about it yet! . . ."

"Look here," said Cream, "I've been talking to Dolly about the matter, and this is her idea. She wants to play in a piece about a naval lieutenant. See? In a submarine or something. Something with a bit of snap in it. She'd like to be an Irish girl called Kitty in love with the lieutenant. See? Make it so's he can wear his uniform and a cocked hat and a sword. See? The audience likes to see a bit of style. You could put a comic stoker in . . . that 'ud do for me, but of course as I told you, you needn't

worry much about my part. I'll look after myself. Now, do you think you could do anything with that idea? Dolly's dead set on playing an Irish girl, and of course, you being Irish and all that, you'd know the ropes!"

"I'll think about it," said John.

"Do. That's a good chap. And perhaps you can let me have the manuscript at the end of the week . . . in the rough anyhow!"

He finished his whiskey and soda.

"Have another?" Hinde said.

"No, thanks, no. You know, Mac, the stage is a funny place. The average author doesn't realise what a funny place it is. I've met a few authors in my time, high-brow and low-brow and no-brow-at-all, and they're all the same: think they know more about the theatre than the actor does. But they don't. They all want to be littery. And that's no good . . . in the music-halls anyhow. If you've got anything to say to a music-hall audience, don't waste time in being littery or anything like that. Bung It At 'Em, Mac!" He pronounced the last injunction with enormous emphasis. "An audience is about the thickest thing on earth. Got no brains to speak of, and doesn't want to have any. Mind you, each person in the audience may be as clever as you like, but as an audience . . . see? . . . they're simply thick. And if you want 'em to understand anything, you've got to Bung It At 'Em. No use being delicate or pretty or anything like that. That's what authors don't understand. Now, you heard those back-chat-comedians at the Oxford to-night?"

John nodded his head. "They weren't much good," he said.

"Why?" Cream demanded, and then, before John could speak, he went on to give the answer to his question. "Because they don't know how to get their stuff over the footlights. That's why! They had good stuff to work with, but they didn't know what to do with it. *I* could have told

'em. Do you remember that joke about the dog that swallowed the tape-measure and died?"

"Yes. It sounded rather silly! . . ."

"And it didn't get a laugh. The silliness of a thing doesn't matter if it makes you laugh. This is how they said it. The tall chap says to the little one, 'How's your dog, Joe?' and the little one answered, 'Oh, he died last week. He swallowed a tape-measure and died by inches! . . .' "

Hinde laughed. "Do people pay good money to listen to that sort of stuff?"

"You're a journalist," Cream replied, "and you ought to know they pay money to *read* worse than that!"

"So they do," Hinde admitted.

"When I heard those two duffers ruining that joke," Cream continued, "I felt as if I wanted to run on to the stage and tell 'em how to get it over to the audience. This is how they ought to have done it!"

He stood up and enacted the characters of the two back-chat comedians, and as John watched him and listened to him, he realised what a great actor the little man was.

*"Say, Joe, what're you in mourning for?"*

*"I'm in mourning for my little dog!"*

*"Your little dog. Why, your little dog ain't dead, is it?"*

*"Yes, my little dog's dead!"*

*"Well, Joe, I'm sorry to hear your little dog's dead. What was the matter with your little dog?"*

*"My little dog died last week."*

*"Yes, your little dog died last week? . . ."*

*"He swallowed a tape-measure! . . ."*

*"Good heavens, your little dog swallowed a tape-measure?"*

*"Yes, my little dog swallowed a tape measure, and HE DIED BY INCHES!"*

Cream sat down when he had finished giving his performance. "That's how they ought to have done it," he said.

"It makes me angry to see men ruining a good story. You see, Mac, you've got to lead up to things. Everything in this world has to be led up to. You can't rush bald-headed at anything. And you've got to get a climax. These back-chat chaps hadn't got a climax. The joke was over before the audience had time to realise it was a joke. See?"

"I see," said John.

A few minutes later, Cream went downstairs to his own room.

"That little man knows just how to get an effect," said Hinde. "The amazing thing about him is that he doesn't know that he can act and that his wife can't! . . ."

"Why do you call her his wife?" John replied.

"Out of civility," said Hinde. "I don't see that it matters much whether she is or not!"

"That's what Lizzie says."

"Lizzie is an intelligent woman. I hope you don't think I was rude to Lizzie just now? . . ."

"Oh, no," John answered insincerely.

"I wouldn't hurt Lizzie's feelings for the world," said Hinde. "I'm going to bed now, but you needn't hurry unless you want to. I'm tired, and I shall have a busy day to-morrow. I'll see if there's any work that would suit you on my paper. You ought to have some sort of a job besides scribbling masterpieces. I suppose you left a girl behind you in Ballyards?"

John's face flushed. "No," he replied.

"That's good," Hinde said. "You'll be able to get on with your work instead of wasting time writing letters to a girl. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Mr. Hinde!" said John, suddenly ceremonious.

"Not so much of the Mister. Call me Hinde. I think I'll follow Cream's example and call you Mac!"

"Very well, Hinde," said John.

"We'll go up to town in the morning together, if you like!"

"I would," said John.

## vi

John's dreams that night were queerly complicated. Eleanor Moore flitted through a scene on a submarine in which a dog was dying by inches while a naval lieutenant made passionate love to an Irish girl called Kitty; and while Eleanor passed vaguely from side to side of the submarine, a gigantic piece of red tape came and enveloped her and enveloped John, too, when, unaccountably, he appeared and tried to save her. He felt himself being strangled by red tape, and he knew that Eleanor was being strangled, too. He felt that if only the dog would eat the red tape, both Eleanor and he would be delivered from it, but somehow the Irish girl called Kitty prevented the dog from eating it. And in the dream, he called pitifully to Eleanor, "She won't let us work up to a climax! She's preventing us from working up to a climax! . . ."

## THE THIRD CHAPTER

### i

At the end of a month from the day on which he arrived in London, John MacDermott began to consider his position and ended by finding it in a very unsatisfactory state. He had spent much of his time in sight-seeing, and would have spent more of it, had not Hinde informed him that the only way in which to know a city is to live in it, not as a tourist, but as an ordinary citizen. "Change your lodgings every twelve months," he said, "and go and live in a different part of the town every time you change them. Then you'll get to know London. It's no use tearing round the place like an American . . . half an hour here and a couple of minutes there, and a Baedeker never out of your hands. Americans think they're getting an impression of a country when they're only getting a sick-headache; and when they go home again, they can never remember whether Mont Blanc was a picture they saw in Paris or a London chop-house where they had old English fare at modern English prices. If you want to *know* St. Paul's Cathedral, don't go there with a guide-book in your hand. Go as one of the congregation! . . ."

He had sent the manuscript of his novel to a publisher who had not yet expressed any eagerness to accept it, and he had made a half-hearted effort to write a play for the Creams, but had not been very successful with it, chiefly because he felt contempt for *The Girl Gets Left* and had little liking for Mrs. Cream. She came to the sitting-room one morning when Hinde was away and her husband was interviewing his agent, and went straight to John, nibbling

a pen at the writing desk, and put her arms about his neck.

"Don't do that," he said, disengaging her arms from about him.

"I love you," she replied very intensely.

"I daresay, but I'm not in love with you, Mrs. Cream, and I never will be. I don't like you. I like your wee man, but I don't like you. I think you're an awful humbug of a woman! . . ."

Mrs. Cream stood still as if she had been suddenly paralysed.

"You don't like me! . . ." she said at last, utterly incredulous.

"No, I don't."

"Oh!"

She raised her hands, and for a few moments he imagined that she was about to strike him. Then she dropped them to her side again and laughed.

"I don't know whether to hug you or slap you," she said. "You impudent brat!"

"I wouldn't advise you to do either the one or the other," he answered.

She came nearer to him, and laid her hand on his sleeve.

"You're very cold and hard," she said, and then, in a softer voice, she added his name, "John!"

"What's cold about me? Or hard?" he asked.

"Everything. You must know that I feel more for you than for my husband! . . ."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself for saying such a thing, Mrs. Cream. I want you to understand that I'm not that sort. I come from Ballyards, and we don't do things like that there. Forby, I'm not in love with you. I'm in love with somebody else . . . a nice girl, not a married woman . . . and I've no time to think of anybody else but her. I'm very busy the day, Mrs. Cream! . . ."

"Is she an Irish girl?"

"I don't know what nationality she is. I've not man-

aged to get speaking to her yet. It'll be an advantage if she is Irish, but I'll overlook it if she isn't. I'm terrible busy, Mrs. Cream!"

She stood before him in an indecisive attitude. . . . "You're really a fool," she said, turning away. "I thought you were clever, but you're simply thick-headed! . . ."

"Because I won't start making love to you, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, Mr. MacDermott. You're thick apart from that. You're so thick that you'll never know how thick you are. I can't think why I wasted a minute's thought on you! . . ."

John sat down at his desk again. *"Sticks an' stones 'll break my bones, but names 'll never hurt me,"* he quoted at her. *"When you're dead and in your grave, you'll suffer for what you called me!"*

She came behind him and put her arms tightly round his neck and forced his head back so that she could conveniently kiss him.

"There!" she exclaimed, hurrying from the room. "I've kissed you anyhow!"

He leaped up and ran to the top of the stairs and leant over the banisters.

"If you do that again," he shouted at her, "I'll give you in charge!"

"Bogie-bogie!" she mocked.

Soon after that time, the Creams had gone on tour again, and John, with a vague promise to Mr. Cream that he would try and do a play for him, let Mrs. Cream slip out of his mind altogether. She had not attempted to make love to him again, and her attitude towards him became more natural, almost, he thought, more friendly. She appeared to bear him no malice, and her friendliness caused him to shed some of his antagonism to her. When they bade good-bye to Hinde and John, she turned to her husband as they were leaving, and said, "I kissed him one morning, and do you know what he did?"

"No," her husband answered.

"He said he'd give me in charge if I tried to do it again," she exclaimed, laughing as she spoke.

"Goo' Lor'!" said Cream. "That's the first time that's ever been said to you, Dolly!" He turned to John. "You're a funny sort of a chap, you are! Fancy not letting Dolly kiss you. Goo' Lor'!"

ii

He had tried hard to see Eleanor Moore again, but without success. Every day for a fortnight he went to lunch in the tea-shop where he had first seen her, and in the evening he would hang about the entrance to the offices where she was employed; but he did not see her either there or in the tea-shop, and when a fortnight of disappointment had gone by, he concluded that he would never see her again. He imagined that she was ill, that she had left London, that she had obtained work elsewhere, that he had frightened her . . . for he remembered her startled look when she hurried from him into the Tube lift . . . and finally and crushingly that she had married someone else. In the mood of bitterness that followed this devastating thought, he planned a tragedy, and in the evenings, when Hinde was engaged for his paper, he worked at it. But the bitterness which he put into it failed to relieve him of any of the bitterness that was in his own mind. He felt doubly betrayed by Eleanor Moore because he had had so little encouragement from her. It hurt him to think that he had only succeeded in alarming her. Maggie Carmichael had responded instantly when he spoke to her and had accepted his embraces and his kisses as amiably as she had accepted his chocolates he had bought for her; but this girl with the tender blue eyes that changed their expression so frequently, had made no response to his offer of affection, had run away from it. If only she had listened to him! He

was certain that he could have persuaded her to "go out" with him. He had only to tell her that he loved her, and she would realise that a man who could fall in love with her so immediately as he had done must be acceptable! . . . The affair with Maggie Carmichael had considerably dashed his belief in romantic love, but he told himself now that it would be ridiculous to condemn his Uncle Matthew's ideals because one girl had fallen short of them. If Maggie Carmichael had behaved badly, that was not a sign that Eleanor Moore would also behave badly. Besides, Eleanor was different from Maggie. There was no comparison between the two girls. After all, he had not really cared for Maggie: he had only fancied that he cared for her. But there was no fancying or imagination about his love for Eleanor, and if he had the good fortune to meet her again, he would not let anything prevent him from telling her plump and plain that he wanted to marry her. Whenever he left the house, he looked about, no matter where he went, in the hope that he might see her.

iii

Hinde urged him to do journalism and advised him to make a study of the London newspapers so that he might discover which of them he could most happily work for. "You could do a few articles, perhaps, and then it wouldn't matter whether you agreed with the paper or not, but I'd advise you to try and get a job on one paper for a while. You'll learn a lot from journalism if you don't stay at it too long. It'll be a good while yet before you can make a living at writing books, and you'll want something to keep you going until you can. Journalism's as good as anything, and in some ways, it's a lot better than most things, and let me tell you, Mac, anybody can make a decent living out of newspapers if he only takes the trouble to earn it.

Half the fellows in Fleet Street treat journalism as if it were a religious vocation, and they lie about in pubs all day waiting for the Holy Ghost to come down and inspire them with a scoop!"

John studied the London newspapers, as Hinde advised him, but he did not feel drawn towards them. He considered that the morning papers were very inferior to the *Northern Whig*, and he was certain that the *North Down Herald* was far more interesting than the *Times*. The London evening papers, he said to Hinde, gave less value for a half-penny than the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, and he complained that there was nothing to read in them.

"You'll have to start a paper yourself, Mac," said Hinde. "All the best papers were started by men who couldn't find anything to read in other papers. It would be a grand notion now to set up a paper for Ulstermen who can't find anything in London that's fit to read. By the Hokey O, that would be a grand notion. We could call the paper *To Hell With the Pope* or *No Surrender! . . .*"

"Ah, quit your codding," John interrupted. "You know rightly what's wrong with these London papers. They're not telling the truth!"

"And do you think the *Whig* and the *Telegraph* are?" Hinde demanded.

"Well, it's what *we* call the truth anyway," John stoutly retorted.

Hinde slapped him on the back. "That's right," he said. "Ulster against the whole civilised world!"

"If I was to take a job on one of these papers," John continued, "I'd insist on telling the truth to the people!"

"You would, would you? And do you know what 'ud happen to you? The people 'ud cut your head off at the end of a fortnight."

"I wouldn't let them."

Hinde sat in silence for a few minutes. Then he leant

forward and tapped John on the shoulder. ''The editor of the *Daily Sensation* is a Tyrone man,'' he said. ''He comes from Cookstown! . . .''

''I never was in it,'' John murmured.

''Mebbe not, but it exists all the same. Go up the morrow evening to his office and tell him you want a job on his paper so's you can start telling everybody the truth. And see what happens to you.''

John answered angrily. ''You think you're having me on,'' he said, ''but you're queerly mistaken. I will go, and we'll see what happens!''

''That's what I'm bidding you do,'' Hinde continued. ''And listen! There's a couple I know, called Haverstock, living out at Hampstead. They have discussions every month at their house on some subject or other, and there's to be one next Wednesday. Will you come with me if I go to it?''

John nodded his head.

''Good! The Haverstocks'll be glad to welcome you as you're a friend of mine, but it's not them I'm wanting you to see. It's the crowd they get round them. All the cranks and oddities and solemn mugs of London seem to go to that house one time or another, and I'd just like you to have a look at some of them. The minute they find out you're Irish, they'll plaster you with praise. They'll expect you to talk like a clown one minute, and weep bitter tears over England's tyranny the next. They're all English, most of them, and they'll tell you that England is the worst country in the world, and that Ireland would be the greatest if it weren't for the fact that some piffling Balkan State is greater. And they'll ram Truth down your throat till you're sick of it. You've only to bleat about Ireland's woes to them, and call yourself a member of a subject race, and they'll be all over you before you know where you are. There's only one other man has a better chance of shining in their society than an Irishman, and that's an Armenian.''

"Well, that's great credit to them," John replied. "I must say it makes me think well of the English! . . ."

"Don't do that. Never acknowledge to an Englishman that you think well of him. He'll think little of you if you do. Tell him he's a fool, that he's muddle-headed, that he's a tyrant, that he's a materialist and a compromiser and a hypocrite, and he'll pay you well for saying it. But if you tell the truth and say he's the decent fellow he is, he'll land you in the workhouse! . . ."

## iv

It had not been easy to interview the editor of the *Daily Sensation*. A deprecating commissionaire, eyeing him suspiciously, had cross-examined him in the entrance hall of the newspaper office, and then had compelled him to fill in a form with particulars of himself . . . his name and his address . . . and of his business.

"I suppose," John said sarcastically to the commissionaire, "you don't want me to swear an affidavit about it?"

The commissionaire regarded him contemptuously, but did not reply to the sarcasm.

After a lengthy wait and much whistling and talking through rubber speaking-tubes, John was conducted to a lift, given into the charge of a small boy in uniform who treated him as a nuisance, and taken to the office of the editor. Here he had to wait in the society of the editor's secretary for another lengthy period. He had almost resolved to come away from the office without seeing the editor, when a bell rang and the secretary rising from her desk, bade him to follow her. He was led into an inner room where he saw a man seated at a large desk. The editor glared at him for a moment or two as if he were accusing him of an attempt to commit a fraud. Then he said "Sit down" and began to speak on the telephone. John glanced interestedly about him. There was a portrait

of Napoleon . . . *The Last Phase* . . . on one wall, and, on the wall opposite to it, a portrait of the proprietor of the *Daily Sensation* in what might fairly be described as the first phase. On the editor's desk was a framed card bearing the legend: SAY IT QUICK. . . .

The telephonic conversation ended, and Mr. Clotworthy . . . the editor . . . put down the receiver and turned to John, frowning heavily at him. "Well?" he said so shortly that the word was almost unintelligible. "I can give you two minutes," he added, pulling out his watch and placing it on the desk.

"That'll be enough," John replied. "I want a job on this paper!"

"Everybody wants a job on this paper. The people who are most anxious to get on our staff are the people who are never tired of running us down! . . ."

"I daresay," said John.

"Ever done any newspaper work before?" the editor demanded.

"No!"

"Then what qualifications have you for the work? . . ."

"I've written a novel! . . ."

"That's not a qualification!" Mr. Clotworthy exclaimed.

"But it's not been published yet," John replied.

"Oh, well! . . . Anything else?"

"I've written several articles which have not been printed, but they're as good as the stuff that's printed in any paper in London."

"Quite so!"

"And I come from Ulster where all the good men come from," John concluded.

"I've seen some poor specimens from Ulster," Mr. Clotworthy said.

"Mebbe you have, but I'm not one of them."

The editor remained silent for a few moments. He

tapped on his desk with an ivory paper-knife and glanced quickly now and then at John.

"What part of Ulster do you come from?" he demanded.

"Ballyards."

"I've heard of it," Mr. Clotworthy continued. "It's not much of a place, is it?"

John flared up angrily. "It's better than Cookstown any day," he said.

"Who told you I came from Cookstown?"

"Never mind who told me. If you don't want to give me a job on your paper, you needn't. There's plenty of other papers in this town! . . ."

"That temper of yours'll get you into serious bother one of these days, young fellow," said Mr. Clotworthy. "I'm willing to give you work on the paper if you're fit to do it, but don't run away with the notion that you've only to walk in here and say you're an Ulsterman, and you'll immediately get a position. What sort of work do you want to do? You know our paper, I suppose? Well, how would you improve it?"

John opened his mouth to speak, but before he could say a word, the editor stopped him.

"Don't," he exclaimed, "say it doesn't need improvement. A lot of third-rate fellows have tried that tack with me, as if they'd flatter me into giving them a job. The fools never seemed to realise that when they said the paper didn't need improvement they were giving the best reason that could be given why they shouldn't be employed on it. If you weren't a plain-spoken and direct young fellow I wouldn't give you that warning. Go on!"

"In my opinion," John replied, "what's wrong with your paper is that it doesn't tell the truth. It tells lies to its readers. My idea is to tell them the truth instead!"

Mr. Clotworthy laughed at him. "You won't do it on this paper," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because it can't be done. There's no such thing as truth. There never was, and there never will be such a thing as truth. There's only point-of-view! . . ."

"Well, I've got my point-of-view," John interrupted.

"Yes, but on this paper we express the point-of-view of the man that owns it. That's him there!" He pointed to the companion picture to the portrait of Napoleon. "If you imagine that we spend hundreds of thousands of pounds every year to express your point-of-view, you're making a big mistake, young fellow my lad. What you want is a soap-box in Hyde Park. You can express your own point-of-view there if you can get anybody to listen to you. Or you can start a paper of your own. But this paper is the soap-box of that chap, and his is the only point-of-view that'll be expressed in it. Do you understand me?"

"I do," said John. "All the same, I believe in telling the people the truth!"

The editor touched the bell on his desk. "Are you quite sure," said he, "that you know what the truth is?"

"Of course I'm sure." John began, but before he could finish his sentence, the door of the editor's room was opened by the lady-secretary.

"Good-morning, Mr. MacDermott!" said the editor, reaching for the telephone receiver.

"But I haven't finished yet," John protested.

"I have." He tapped the handle of the telephone. "You can come and see me again when you've learned sense," he added, after he had given an instruction to the telephone operator. "Good morning!"

"Ah, but wait a minute! . . ."

"We've no use for John the Baptists here. Good morning!"

"All the same! . . ."

The editor impatiently waved him aside.

"This way, please!" the lady secretary commanded.

John glared at her, half in the mood to ask her what she meant by interrupting him and half in the mood to tell her that it little became a woman to intrude herself into the conversation of men, but the moods did not become complete, and, sulkily calling "Good morning!" to Mr. Clotworthy, he left the office.

"One of these days," he said to the lady secretary when they were in the outer office, "I'll be your boss. And his, too. And I'll sack the pair of you!"

"You'll find the lift at the end of the passage," she replied.

## V

Hinde mocked him for his failure to make the editor of the *Daily Sensation* accept his view of the universe.

"That man sized you up the minute he clapped his eyes on you," he said. "He's seen hundreds of young fellows like you. We've all seen them. They come down from Oxford and Cambridge with their heads stuffed with ideas pinched from Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, and they try to stampede old Clotworthy. 'By God, I'm a superman!' is their cry, and they say that night and morning and before and after every meal until even they get sick of listening to it. Then they say 'Oh, damn!' and go into the Civil Service, and in three years' time an earthquake wouldn't rouse them. All you youngsters want to go about telling the truth, especially when it's disagreeable, but there isn't one in a million of you is fit to be let loose with the truth, and there isn't one in ten million of men or women wants to be bothered by the truth. Lord alive, Mac, can't you young fellows leave us a few decent lies to comfort ourselves with? . . ."

"You'll get no lies from me," John replied.

"I can see very well you're going to be a nice cheerful chum to have in the house," Hinde said. "However, I'll

bear it. The Haverstocks' 'At Home' is to-night. I don't suppose you have a dress suit?"

"No, I haven't!"

"It doesn't matter. Half the people who go to the Haverstocks don't wear evening dress on principle. That's their way of showing their contempt for conventionality. I suppose you'll come with me?" John nodded his head. "Good! We'll start off immediately after we've had our dinner. You'll get a good dose of Truth to-night, my son. There was a couple went there once . . . the rummest couple I ever saw in my life. They thought they must do something for Progress and Advanced Thought, so they pretended they weren't married, but were living in sin! . . ."

"Like the two downstairs?" said John.

"Aye, only they were legally married all right. You'll observe in time, Mac, that the people who make changes are never the advanced people who talk about them, but the ordinary, conventional people who have no theories about things, but just alter them when they become inconvenient. Butter wouldn't melt in the mouth of the man who is a devil of a fellow in print. This couple went to live at a Garden City and made an enormous impression on the Nut-eaters; and every Sunday evening crowds went to see them living in sin. I went myself one night: it was terribly dull, and I thought if that's the best sin can do for a man, I'm going to join the Salvation Army. The woman took off her wedding-ring and hid it in the clock, and the man made a point of snorting every time he passed a parson. They had a grand time, as I tell you, until a terrible thing happened. A jealous nut-eater . . . and I can tell you there's nothing on earth so fearful and vindictive as a jealous vegetarian . . . discovered that these two were really married all the time, and he exposed them to their admirers. He produced a copy of their marriage-certificate at a public meeting which the man was address-

ing on the subject of Intolerable Bonds, and the meeting broke up in disorder. They had to leave the Garden City after that, and they're now hiding somewhere in the north of England and leading a life of shameful matrimony! . . ."

John giggled. "Are there really people like that?" he asked.

"Lots of them. You'll see some of them, mebbe, at the Haverstocks the night. I think there's to be some sort of a discussion, but I'm not sure. Mrs. Haverstock is a great woman for discussions, but I will say this for her, she doesn't humbug herself over them. She told me once that it was better to talk about adultery than to commit it! . . ."

John blushed frightfully. He felt the hot blood running all over his body. This casual way of speaking of things that were only acknowledged in the Ten Commandments had a very disturbing effect upon him. He hoped that Hinde would not observe his confusion, and he put his hand in front of his eyes so that he might conceal his red cheeks. If Hinde noticed that John was embarrassed, he did not make any comment about the matter.

"And I daresay it is," he went on. "As long as you're letting off steam, there's no danger of the engine bursting. I've often noticed that there's less misbehaviour in places where people are always chattering as if they had never conducted themselves with decency in their lives than there is in places where they never say a word about it. *You'll* notice that too, when you've learned to use your eyes better! . . ."

vi

The Haverstocks lived in an old creeper-covered and slightly decrepit house in the Spaniards' Road. It was without a bathroom until the Haverstocks took possession of it, for it had been built in the days when the middle-

classes had not yet contracted the habit of frequently washing their bodies. From the front windows of the house one saw across Hampstead Heath towards London, and from the back windows one saw across the Heath towards Harrow. The house, in spite of its slight decrepitude and the clumsiness of its construction—the stairs were obviously an afterthought of the architect—had that air of comfortable kindliness which is only to be seen in houses which have been occupied by several generations of human beings. Mr. Haverstock was vaguely known as a sociologist. He investigated the affairs of poor people, and was constantly engaged in inveigling labourers into filling large *questionnaires* with particulars of the wages they earned, the manner in which they spent those wages, the food they ate, the number of children they procreated, and other intimate and personal matters. He was anxious to discover exactly how much proteid was necessary to the maintenance of a labouring man in health and efficiency, and he conducted the most elaborate experiments with beans and bananas for that purpose. It was one of the most discouraging features of modern civilisation, he often said, that the spirit of research and disinterested enquiry was less prevalent among the labouring classes than was desirable. He could not induce a labouring man to live exclusively on beans and bananas for six months in order that he might compare his physical condition at the end of that period with his physical condition after a period spent in flesh-eating. He told sad stories of the reception that had been accorded to some of his assistants at the time that they were obtaining data from workmen on the question of the limitation of the family! . . .

He was a kindly, solemn man, with large, astonished eyes, and he wore a beard, less as a decoration than as a protest. The beard was really a serious nuisance to him, for he had dainty manners and he disliked to think of soup dribbling down it; but someone had convinced him that a man who

wore a beard early in life was definitely bidding defiance to the conventions of the time, and so he sacrificed his sense of niceness to his desire to *epater les bourgeois.* He said that a beard was a sign of Virility! . . . Mrs. Haverstock and he were childless. Mrs. Haverstock, a quick-witted and merry-minded American, had married her husband in the days when she believed that a man who wrote books of sufficient dullness must be a distinguished and desirable man; and since she brought a considerable fortune to England with her, she enabled him to write more dull books than he could otherwise have had published. Much of her awe of her husband had disappeared in the course of time, but it had, fortunately, been replaced by deep affection: for his generosity and kindliness appealed to her increasingly as her respect for his learning and solemnity declined. She often said of him that he would do more for his friends than his friends would do for themselves . . . and indeed many of them were willing to allow him to do anything and everything for them . . . but so long as knight-errantry with an entirely sociological intent made him happy, she did not mind how he spent her money. He had many moments of dubiety about her fortune . . . he frequently threatened to cross the Atlantic in order to discover whether the money was justly earned . . . but he invariably comforted himself with the reflection that even if the money were ill-gained, he could at least put it to better use than anyone else; and so he refrained from crossing the Atlantic, not without a sensation of relief, for he was an unhappy sailor.

He loved discussions and arguments about Deep Things, and Mrs. Haverstock had invented her series of At Homes in order that her husband might get rid of some of his noble principles at them. She felt that if he could dissipate part of them in argument with other very high-minded men, life, between the At Homes, would be a little more human and livable for her. She secured a regular supply of at-

tendants at these discussions by the simple method of supplying an excellent supper to those who came to them.

"I first met Haverstock," Hinde said to John as they walked along the Spaniards' Road, "during a strike at Canning Town. He was trying to persuade the police to remember that the strikers were men and brothers, and he was trying also to persuade the strikers that force was no argument and that they ought to use constitutional means of settling their disputes with their employers. And between the two, he was in danger of getting his eye knocked out, until I hauled him out of the crowd and shoved him into a cab and took him home. Mrs. Haverstock was so grateful to me that she's invited me to her house ever since . . . but the people I meet there make me feel murderous. I like her, a sensible, sonsy woman, and I like him too, although his solemn, priggish airs make me tired, but I cannot bear the crowd they get round them: all the cranks and oddities and smug, self-sufficient, interfering people seem to get into their house, and they're all reforming something or uplifting something else or generally bleating against this country. Things done in England are always inferior to things done elsewhere. English cooking is inferior to French cooking: English organisation is inferior to German organisation. Whatever is done in England is wrongly done. The English are hypocrites, the English are sordid and materialistic, the English are everlastingly compromising, the English are this, that and the other that is unpleasant and objectionable! . . . I tell you, Mac, there's nobody makes me feel so sick as the Englishman who belittles England!"

"Well, we make little of the English, don't we?" John protested.

"I know we do, and perhaps it is natural that we should, but it's a poor, cheap thing at the best, and does very little credit to our intelligence. The English ideal of life is as good an ideal as there is in the world. I think it is far the

finest ideal there is, chiefly because it does not make impossible demands on human beings. When everything that can be alleged against the English is alleged and admitted, it remains true that they love freedom far more constantly than other people, and that without them, freedom would have a very thin time in the world. You ask any liberty-loving American which country has more freedom, his country or this country, and he'll tell you very quickly, England! Englishmen don't argue about freedom: they just are free, and on the whole, they carry freedom with them. An American will argue about liberty even while he is clapping you into gaol for asserting your right to freedom! . . . Here's the house!"

They turned into the front garden of the Haverstocks' house as he spoke.

"In a way," he said, as they walked along the gravel path leading to the door, "the English Radical is the strongest testimony to the English ideal of freedom that you could have. He is so jealous of his country's good name that he is always ready to shout out if he is not satisfied with her behaviour. That's a good sign, really! Only they're so smug about it! . . ."

Most of the guests were already assembled when they entered the drawing-room where Mr. and Mrs. Haverstock bade them welcome. Hinde introduced John to them, mentioning that he had only lately arrived from Ireland. Mrs. Haverstock smiled and hoped he would often come to see them, and Mr. Haverstock looked pontifical and said, "Ah, yes. Poor Ireland! *Poor* Ireland! Tragic! Tragic!" He waved his hand in a vague fashion, and then turned to greet the representative of another distressed nation. John could hear him murmuring, "Ah, yes. Poor Georgia! *Poor* Georgia! Tragic! Tragic!" but was unable to hear any more because Mrs. Haverstock led him up to a lean, staring youth with goggle eyes who, she said, had promised to read several of his poems to the guests and to open a

discussion on Marriage. The goggle-eyed poet informed John that Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley and Browning were comic old gentlemen who entirely misunderstood the nature and function of poetry. He had founded a new school of poetry. It appeared from his account of this school that the important thing was not what was said in a poem, but what was left out of it. He illustrated his meaning by allowing John to read the manuscript of one of the poems he proposed to read that evening. It was entitled "Life," and it contained two lines! . . .

LIFE

**Big, black crows on bare, black branches,**
**Cawing! . . .**

"Where's the rest of it?" said John innocently.

The poet looked at him with such contempt that he felt certain he had committed an indiscretion. "Is that the whole of it?" he hurriedly asked.

"That fact that you ask such a question," said the poet, "shows that you have no knowledge of the completeness of life! . . ."

"Well, I only came here about a fortnight ago," John humbly replied . . . but the poet had moved away and would not listen to him any longer. "I seem to have put my foot in it," John murmured to himself.

He made his way to Hinde's side, resolved that he would not budge from it for the rest of the evening. The people present frightened him, particularly after his experience with the poet, and he determined that he would keep himself as inconspicuous as possible. He felt that all these people were terribly clever and that his ignorance would be immediately apparent if he opened his mouth in their presence. He tried hard to realise the magnitude of "Life," but he could not convince himself that it was either an adequate description of existence or that it was a description of anything; and, in his innocence, he believed

that he was mentally deficient. Hinde named some of the guests to him. This one was a novelist and that one had written a play . . . and in the excitement of seeing and listening to men who had actually done things that he wished to do, John forgot some of his humiliation.

"I saw you talking to Palfrey," Hinde said to him.

"The poet chap?" John replied.

Hinde nodded his head. "What did you think of him?" he continued.

"He showed me one of his poems. I couldn't understand it, and when I said so, he walked away!"

Hinde laughed. "That's as good a description of him as you could invent," he said. "He always walks away when you can't understand what he's getting at. The reason why he does that is he's afraid someone'll discover he isn't getting at anything. He's just an impertinent person. He thinks he's being great when he's only being cheeky!"

John repeated the poem entitled "Life" to Hinde. "What do you think of that?" he asked.

"I don't think anything of it," Hinde replied.

John felt reassured. "I asked him where the rest of it was, and he nearly ate the face off me," he said. "I was afraid he'd think me a terrible gumph! . . ."

"If you let a humbug like that impose upon you, Mac, I'll never own you for my friend. Any intelligent office-boy could write poems like that all day long!"

There was a movement in the room, and the guests began to settle in their seats or on the floor, and after a short while, Mr. Haverstock, who acted as chairman of the meeting, took his place in front of a small table, and Mr. Palfrey sat down beside him. The poet, said the chairman, would honour them by reading some new poems to them, after which he would open a discussion on Marriage. They all knew that Marriage was an important matter, affecting the lives of men and women to a far greater extent, probably,

than anything else in the world, and it was desirable therefore that they should discuss it frankly and frequently. Problems would remain insoluble so long as people remained silent about them. He could not help expressing his regret to those present at the extraordinary reluctance which the average person had to revealing experiences of matrimony. He had initiated an important enquiry into the question of marital relationships with a view to discovering exactly what it was that caused so many marriages to fail, and he had had to abandon the enquiry because very few people were willing to tell anything about their marriages to him. There was a great deal of foolish reticence in the world . . . at this point Mr. Palfrey emphatically said, "Hear! Hear!" . . . and he trusted that those present that evening would cast away false modesty and would say quite openly what their experiences had been. He would not detain them any longer . . . he was quite certain that they were all very anxious to hear Mr. Palfrey . . . and so without any more ado he would call upon him to read his poems and then to discuss the great and important question of Marriage.

vii

Mr. Palfrey read his poems in a curious sing-song fashion, beating time with his right hand as he did so. He seemed to be performing physical exercises rather than modulating his own accents, and on two occasions his gesture was longer than his poem. He read "Life" very slowly and very deliberately, saying the word "cawing" in a high-pitched tone, and prolonging it until his breath was exhausted. He recited a dozen of these poems, obtaining his greatest effect with the last of them, which was entitled, "The Sea":

> Immense, incalculable waste,
> The dribblings from a giant's beard. . . .

"Isn't it wonderful?" said an ecstatic girl sitting next to John.

"No," he replied.

She looked at him interrogatively, and he added, very aggressively, "I think it's twaddle!"

"Oh, *do* you?" she exclaimed as if she could scarcely believe her ears.

"I do," said John.

He would have said more, but that Mr. Haverstock was on his feet proposing that they should now have supper and take the more important business of the evening afterwards, namely, the discussion of this great problem of Marriage. They had all been deeply moved by Mr. Palfrey's beautiful verses and would no doubt like an opportunity of discussing them in an informal manner. . . .

Mrs. Haverstock led John to a girl who was sitting at the back of the room, and introduced him to her. Miss Bushe was the daughter of the editor of the *Daily Groan,* and Mrs. Haverstock desired that John would take her into supper.

"Mr. MacDermott is Irish—he has only just arrived from Ireland," Mrs. Haverstock said to Miss Bushe by way of explanation or possibly as a means of providing them with conversation.

"I've always wanted to go to Ireland," said Miss Bushe, taking his arm and allowing him to lead her to the dining-room.

"Well, why don't you go?" he asked.

All evening people had been telling him that they had always wanted to go to Ireland, but had somehow omitted to do so.

"Well, mother likes Bournemouth," Miss Bushe replied, "and so we always go there. She says that she knows there'll be a bathroom at Bournemouth, and plenty of hot water and she can't bear the thought of going to some place

where hot water isn't laid on. I suppose I shall go to Ireland some day!"

"There's plenty of hot water in Ireland," said John.

Miss Bushe giggled. "You're so satirical," she said.

"Satirical?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. About the hot water in Ireland!"

He gazed blankly at her. "I don't understand you," he replied. "I meant just what I said. You can get hot water in Ireland as easily as you can in England. Some people have it laid on in pipes, and other people have to boil it on the fire; but you can get it all right!"

There was a look of disappointment on Miss Bushe's face. "I thought you were making a reference to politics," she said.

John stared at her. Then he turned away. "Will I get you something to eat?" he murmured as he did so. He had observed the other men gallantly waiting upon the ladies.

"Oh, thank you," she said. She glanced towards the table. "I wonder if that trifle has got anything intoxicating in it?" she added.

"I daresay," he answered. "Trifles usually have drink of some sort in them!"

"I couldn't take it if it has anything intoxicating in it," she burbled.

"Why not?" John demanded. "It'll do you no harm!"

"Oh, I couldn't. I simply couldn't if it has anything intoxicating in it. We're very strict about intoxicants. They do so much harm!"

John did not know what to do or say next. She still stared longingly at the trifle, and it was clear that she would greatly like to eat some of it.

"Well?" he said vaguely.

"I wonder," she replied, "whether you'd mind tasting it first, just to see whether it has anything intoxicating in it?"

John thought that this was a strange sort of young woman to take into supper, but he did as she bid him. He

took a large portion of the trifle on to a plate and tasted it. She gazed at him in a very anxious manner.

"It has," he said, "and it's lovely!"

The light went out of her eyes. "Then I think I'll just have some blanc-mange," she said.

"There's nothing intoxicating in that," he replied, going to get it for her.

"Do you know," she murmured when he had returned and she was eating the blanc-mange, "I almost wish you had said there was nothing intoxicating in the trifle! . . ."

"That would have been a lie," John interrupted.

"Yes, but! . . . Oh, well, this blanc-mange is quite nice!"

John tempted her. "Taste the trifle anyway," he said.

"Oh, no," she replied, shrinking back. "I couldn't. We're very strict! . . ."

viii

After supper, Mr. Palfrey opened the discussion on Marriage. He declared that Marriage was the coward's refuge from Love. He said that Marriage had been invented by lawyers and parsons for the purpose of obtaining fees and authority. These unpleasant people, the lawyers and the parsons, had contrived to make Love an impropriety and had reduced Holy Passion to the status of a schedule to an act of parliament. Cupid had been furnished with a truncheon and a helmet and had been robbed of his wings in order that he might more suitably serve as a policeman. He demanded Free Love, and pleaded for the chaste promiscuity of the birds! . . . After he had said a great deal in the same strain, he sat down amid applause, and Mr. Haverstock invited discussion. He would like to say, however, that he strongly believed in regulation. In his opinion there was something beautiful in the sight of a bride and a bridegroom signing the parish register in the presence of

their friends. The young couple, he said, asked for the approval and sanction of the community in their love-making. Love without Law was License, and he trusted that Mr. Palfrey was not inviting them to approve of Licentiousness. . . .

Mr. Palfrey created an enormous sensation and some laughter by saying that that was precisely what he did invite them to do. All law was composed of hindrances and obstacles and forbiddings, and therefore he was entirely opposed to Law. This statement so nonplussed Mr. Haverstock that he abruptly sat down, and for a few moments the meeting was in a state of chaotic silence. Then a large man rose from the floor where he had been lying almost at full length and announced that in his opinion the world would cease to have any love in it at all if the present craze for vegetable diet increased to any great extent. How could a bean-feaster, he demanded, feel passion in his blood? Meat, he declared, excited the amorous instincts. All the great lovers of the world were extravagantly carnivorous, and all poetry, in the last resort, rested on a foundation of beef-steak puddings. What sort of lover would Romeo have been had he lived on a diet of lentils? Would Juliet have had the power to move the sympathies of generations of men and women if she had nourished her love on haricot beans? . . .

Immediately he sat down, a lean and bearded youth sprang to his feet and announced in vibrant tones that he had been a practising vegetarian from birth and could affirm from personal experience that a vegetable diet, so far from suppressing the passions, actually stimulated them; and he offered to prove from statistics that vegetarians, in proportion to their number, had been more frequently engaged in romantic philandering than carnivorous persons had. Look at Shelley! . . . He could assure those present that he was as amorous and passionate as any meat-eater in the room. . . .

The discussion went to pieces after that, and became a wrangle about proteid and food values. There was an elderly lady who insisted on telling John all about the gastric juices! . . . Hinde rescued him on the plea that they had a long journey in front of them, and very gratefully John accepted the suggestion that they should set off at once in order to reach their lodgings at a reasonable hour. Mr. and Mrs. Haverstock conducted them to the door . . . a chilly and contemptuous nod had been accorded to John by Mr. Palfrey . . . and pressed them to come again soon. "Every Wednesday evening," said Mr. Haverstock, "we're at home, and we discuss . . . everything! . . ."

They hurried along the Spaniards' Road towards the Tube Station, and as they did so, John told Hinde of his encounter with Miss Bushe over the trifle.

"That accounts for it," Hinde exclaimed aloud.

"Accounts for what?" John demanded.

"The *Daily Groan.* I've often wondered what was the matter with that paper, and now I know. They're always wondering whether there's anything intoxicating in the trifle! . . . I don't mind a boy talking in that wild way. A clever, intelligent lad ought to talk revolutionary stuff, but when a man reaches Palfrey's age and is still gabbling that silly-cleverness, then the man's an ass. There's no depth in him! . . ."

ix

They sat in the sitting-room for a long while after they had returned to Brixton, and Hinde related some of his reminiscences to John.

"I'm one of the world's failures," he said. "I came to London to try and do great work, and I'm still a journalist. I can recognise a fine book when I see it, but I can't create one. I'm just a journalist, and a journalist isn't really a man. He has no life of his own . . . he goes home on sufferance, and may be called up by his editor at any

minute to go galloping off in search of a 'story.' We go everywhere and see nothing. We meet everybody and know nobody. A journalist is a man without beliefs and almost without hope. The damned go to Fleet Street when they die. It's an exciting life . . . oh, yes, quite exciting, but it's horrible to see men merely as 'copy' and to think of the little secret, intimate things of life only as materials for a good 'story.' I wish I were a grocer! . . ."

"Why?" John demanded.

"Well, at least a grocer does not look upon human beings merely as consumers of sugar!"

"I could have been a grocer if I'd wanted to," John continued. "My mother wanted me to be a clergyman!"

"What put it into your head to turn scribbler?"

"I just wanted to write a book. I can't make you out, Hinde. One minute you're advising me to go on a paper, and the next minute you're telling me a journalist isn't a man! . . ."

"When you know more of us," Hinde interrupted, "you'll know that all journalists belittle journalism. It's the one consolation that's left to them. Unless you're prepared to associate only with journalists, Mac, you'd much better keep out of Fleet Street. Newspaper men always feel like fish out of water when they're in the company of other men. They must be near the newspaper atmosphere . . . they can't breathe without the stink of ink in their nostrils! . . ."

"All the same I'll have a try at the life," said John.

## X

But at the end of his first month in London, John had no more to his account than this, that he had begun but had not completed a music-hall sketch, that he had begun but had not made much progress with a tragedy, that he had tried to obtain employment on the staff of the *Daily*

*Sensation* and had failed to do so, and, worst of all, that he had fallen in love with Eleanor Moore but could not find her anywhere. His novel supplied the one element of hope that lightened his thoughts on his month's work. He wished now that he had asked Hinde to read it before it had been sent to the publisher. Perhaps it would redeem the month from its dismal state.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

### i

It was Hinde who brought the good news to John. Mr. Clotworthy, the editor of the *Daily Sensation,* had met Hinde in Tudor Street that afternoon and when he had heard that John and Hinde were living together, he said, "Tell him I'll take him on the staff if he'll promise to keep the Truth well under control!" and had named the following morning for an appointment.

"It's a queer thing," said Hinde as he related the news to John, "that I'm advising you to take the job when I was telling you the other night that journalism's no work for a man; but that only shows what a journalist I am. No stability . . . carried off my feet by any excitement. And mebbe the life'll disgust you and you'll go home again! . . ."

"With my tail between my legs?" John demanded. "No, I'll not do that. I'd be ashamed to go home and admit I hadn't done what I set out to do. What time does Mr. Clotworthy want me?"

Hinde told him.

"I'll write to my mother at once," said John, "and tell her he's sent for me. That'll impress her. She'll be greatly taken with the notion that he sent for me instead of me running after him! . . ."

"The great fault in an Ulsterman," said Hinde, "is his silly pride that won't let him acknowledge his mistake when he's made one. You'll get into a lot of bother, John MacDermott, if you go about the world letting on you've

done right when you've done wrong, and pretending a mistake is not a mistake!"

"I'll run the risk of that," John replied.

ii

Mr. Clotworthy spoke very sharply to him. "You understand," he said, "that you're here to write what we want you to write, and not to write what you think. If you start any of your capering about Truth and Reforming the world, I'll fire you into the street the minute I catch you at it. You're here to interest people. That's all. You're not here to elevate their minds or teach them anything. You're here to keep up our sales and increase them if you can. D'you understand me?"

"I do," said John.

"Well?"

"I'll try the job for a while and see how I like it!"

Mr. Clotworthy sat back in his chair and rubbed his glasses with his handkerchief. "You've a great nerve," he said, smiling. "I don't know whether you talk like that because you're sure of yourself or just stupid!"

"I always knew my own mind," John replied.

Mr. Clotworthy turned him over to Mr. Tarleton, the news-editor, who was instructed to give him hints on his work and introduce him to other members of the staff.

For two days John did very little in the office, beyond finding his way about, but on the third day of his employment, Tarleton suddenly called him into his room and told him that the musical critic had telephoned to say he was unwell and would not be able to attend a concert at the Albert Hall that evening.

"You'll have to go instead," said Tarleton.

"But I don't know anything about music," John protested.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, I thought one was supposed to know something about music before you wrote a criticism of it!"

"Look here, young fellow," said Tarleton. "Let me give you a piece of advice. Never admit that there's anything in this world that you don't know. A *Daily Sensation* man knows everything! . . ."

"But I have no ear for music. I hardly know a minim from a semi-quaver! . . ."

"Well, that doesn't matter. Get a programme. Mark on it the songs and pieces that get the most applause. Those are the best things. See? Anybody can criticise music when he knows a tip or two like that. If the singer is a celebrated person, like Melba or Tetrazzini, you say she was in her usual brilliant form. If the singer isn't celebrated, just say that she shows promise of development! . . ."

"But supposing I don't like her?"

"Then say nothing about her. If we can't praise people on this paper, we ignore them. Get your stuff in before eleven, will you? Here's the ticket!"

Tarleton thrust the card into John's hand and, a little dazed and a little excited, John went out of the room. This was his first important job. Words that he had written would appear in print in the morning, and hundreds of thousands of people would read them. The *Daily Sensation* had an enormous circulation . . . a million people bought it every morning, so Tarleton said, and that meant, he explained, that about three or four million people read it. Each copy of a paper was probably seen by several persons. The thought that some judgment of his would be read by a million men and women in the morning caused John to feel tremendously responsible. He must be careful to give his praise judiciously. All of the persons present at the concert that night, but more especially the singers and instrumentalists, would turn first of all to his notice. There might be a great political crisis or a sensa-

tional murder reported in the morning's news, but these people would turn first to his notice to see what he had said about the music. And it would not do to let them have a wrong impression about the concert. Tarleton had told him not to dispraise anything . . . "it'll be cut out if you do" . . . but at all events he would take care that his praise was justly given. He would send copies of the papers, marked with blue pencil, to his mother and Mr. McCaughan and Mr. Cairnduff. He could imagine the talk there would be in Ballyards about his criticism of the concert. The minister and the schoolmaster would be greatly impressed when they realised that the paper with the largest circulation in the world had asked him to say what he thought of Madame Tetrazzini. Mr. McCaughan had never heard anything greater than a cantata sung by the church choir in the church room, and he had been deeply impressed by the statements made about it by a reporter from the *North Down Herald* who declared that the rendering of the sacred work reflected great credit on all concerned in it, but particularly on the Reverend Mr. McCaughan to whose sterling instruction in the principles of true religion, the young people engaged in singing the cantata clearly owed the sincerity and fervour with which they sang their parts. If he were so greatly impressed by a report in the *North Down Herald*, would he not be overwhelmed by the fact that one of his congregation had been chosen to pronounce judgment on the greatest singer in the world in the greatest newspaper in the world . . . for John was now satisfied that the *Daily Sensation* was enormously more important than any other paper that was published.

He went to a tea-shop in Fleet Street where he knew he could hope to meet Hinde, and found him sitting in a corner with a friend who, soon after John's arrival, went away.

"You needn't go to the concert if you're not desperately

keen on it,'' Hinde said when John had told him of his job. ''You can write your notice now! . . .''

''Write it now! . . . But I haven't been to the concert!''

''I wouldn't give much for the man who couldn't write a criticism of a concert without going to it,'' Hinde contemptuously replied. ''Say that Tetrazzini's wonderful voice enthralled the audience and that there were scenes of unparalleled enthusiasm as the diva graciously responded to the clamorous demands for encores. Add a few words about the man who played her accompaniments and the number of floral tributes she received, and there you are. That's all that's necessary!''

''I couldn't do it,'' said John. ''It wouldn't be honest!''

''Don't be a prig,'' Hinde exclaimed.

''Prig! Is it being a prig to do your work fairly?''

''No, but it's being a prig to treat a thing as important that isn't important at all. I wanted you to come to a music-hall with me to-night!''

''I'm sorry,'' John replied stiffly. ''I'd like to go with you, but I couldn't think of doing such a thing as you suggest to me!''

''I wonder how long you'll feel like that, Mac?'' Hinde laughed.

''All my life, I hope!''

''Well, have it your own way, then. But you're wasting your time!''

''And another thing,'' John continued. ''I want to hear the woman singing. I've never heard anybody great at the music yet!''

iii

He entered the great circular hall, and sat, very solemnly, in his seat on the ground floor. He felt nervous and uneasy and certain that he would not be able to write adequately of the concert. He tried to think of suitable words to apply to great music, but it seemed to him that he could

not think at all. He glanced about the Hall, hoping that perhaps he would find inspiration in the ceiling, but there was no inspiration there. He could see wires stretched across the roof from side to side, and there were great pieces of canvas radiating from the central cluster of lights in the dome. He wondered why the wires were there. Blondin, he remembered, had walked across a wire, as thin-looking as those, which was stretched high up in the roof of the Exhibition at the Old Linen Hall in Belfast; but he could scarcely believe that these wires were intended for tight-rope performances. He turned to a man at his side. "Would you mind telling me what those things are for?" he asked, pointing to them.

"To break the echoes," the man replied, entering into an involved account of acoustics. "It's all humbug really," he added. "They don't break the echoes at all, but we all imagine that they do, and so we're quite happy!"

The warm, comfortable look of the red-curtained boxes in the softened electric light pleased him, and he liked the effect of the tiers rising up to the high roof, and the great spread of floor, and the gigantic magnificence of the organ.

"How many people does this place hold?" he demanded of his neighbour.

"About ten thousand," his neighbour answered, glancing at him quizzically. "Is this the first time you've been here?"

"Yes. I'm new to London. They must take a great deal of money in a night at a place like this. An immense amount!"

"They do. It's part of the Albert Memorial, this hall. The other part is in the Park across the road. Have you seen it?"

"No," said John. "Is it any good?"

"Well," said the stranger, "we've tried to overlook it . . . but unfortunately it's too big. There are some ex-

cellent bits in it, but the whole effect! . . . Poor dear Queen Victoria . . . she was a little woman, and so, of course, she believed in magnitude. She liked Bigness. She's out of fashion nowadays . . . people titter behind their hands when they speak of her . . . and there's a tendency to regard her as a somewhat foolish and sentimental old woman . . . but really, she was a very capable old girl in her narrow way, and there was nothing soft about her. She was as hard as nails . . . almost a cruel woman . . . she'd compel her maids-of-honour to stand in her presence until the poor girls fainted with fatigue. . . . I'm sure she'd have made Queen Elizabeth feel uncomfortable in some ways. This hall is a memorial to her husband!"

"Yes," said John. "There's a Memorial in Belfast to him. What did he do?"

"He was Queen Victoria's husband!"

"I suppose," said John, "it wasn't much fun being her man?"

"Fun!" exclaimed the stranger. "Well, of course, it depends on what you call fun!"

There was a bustling sound from the platform and some applause, and then a dark-looking man emerged from the sloping gangway underneath the organ and sat down at the piano. He played Mascagni's *Pavana delle Maschere*, and while he played it, John took some writing paper from his pocket and prepared to note down his opinions of the evening's entertainment.

"Hilloa," said the stranger in a whisper, "are you a critic?"

John, feeling extraordinarily important, nodded his head and continued to listen to the music. It sounded quite pleasant, but it conveyed nothing to him. All he could think of was the contortions of the pianist as he played his piece, and he wished that all pianists could be concealed behind screens so that their grimaces and gyrations should not be seen. He ought to say something about the man,

but he had no idea of what was fitting! . . . The solo ended and was followed by another one, and then the pianist stood up to acknowledge the applause.

"What do you think of it?" the stranger respectfully asked, and John, aware of the respect in his voice and conscious that he did not know what to think of it, murmured, "Um-m-m! Not bad!"

"Coldish, I think," the stranger continued. "Technically skilful, but hardly any feeling!"

John considered for a moment or two, and then answered very judicially. "Yes! Yes, I think that's a fair description of him!"

He waited until the stranger was engaged in reading the programme, and then he jotted down on his writing-paper, "Mr. Pietro Mancinelli played Mascagni's *Pavana delle Maschere* with great technical ability, but with hardly any emotional quality!"

"I'm very glad I sat down beside this chap," he murmured to himself, as the accompanist played the opening bars of Handel's *Droop not, young lover*, and then he settled down to listen to the man who sang it. He was happier here, for singing was more easy to judge than instrumental music. Either a song was well sung, he told himself, or it was not well sung, and the gentleman who was singing *Droop not, young lover* certainly had a voice that sounded well in that great hall. . . . He wrote in his report that "Mr. Albert Luton's magnificent voice was heard to great advantage in Handel's charming aria . . ." and was exceedingly glad that he had lately read some musical notices in one of the newspapers, and could remember some of the phrases that had been used in them.

"Now for a treat," said the stranger, as a burst of hearty applause opened out from the platform and went all round the hall.

John glanced towards the passage leading to the artist's room and saw a smiling, plump lady, with very bright, dark

eyes and dark hair come on to the platform. She was clad in white that made her Italian looks more pronounced.

"Tetrazzini!" the stranger whispered in John's ear.

The applause died down, and the singer stood rigidly in front of the platform while the pianist played the opening of Verdi's *Caro nome.* Then her voice sounded very clear and bell-like in the deep silence of the great hall. . . . She sang *Solveig's Song* by Greig and *A Pastoral* by Veracini, and then the satiated audience allowed her to retire from the platform.

John sat back in his seat in a dazed fashion. All round him were applauding men and women . . . and he could not applaud. There was a buzz of admiring talk, and he could hear the words "wonderful" and "magnificent" . . . and he had not been moved at all. The great voice had not caused him to feel any thrill or emotion whatever. It was wonderful, indeed, but that was all that it was. There was no generous glow in her music; she did not cause him to feel any emotion other than that of astonishment at the perfection of her vocal organs. He had imagined that the great singer's voice would compel him to jump out of his seat and wave his hands wildly and shout and cheer . . . but instead he had sat still and wondered at the marvellous way in which her throat functioned.

"Well?" said his neighbour, in the tone of one who would say that only words of an extremely adulatory character were conceivable after such a performance.

"She's a very remarkable woman," John replied.

"Remarkable!" his neighbour indignantly exclaimed. "She's a miracle! . . ."

John disregarded his ecstatics. "I kept on thinking of a clever machine," he said. "The wheels went round without a hitch. She's a grand invention, that woman! She can sing her pieces without thinking about them. She hardly knows the notes are coming out of her mouth . . .

she doesn't know where they come from or why they come at all, and I don't suppose it matters to her where they go. There's a grand machine in our place that prints the papers. You put a big roll of white paper on to it, and you turn a wee handle, and the machine sends the roll spinning round and round until it's done, and a lot of folded papers, nicely printed, come tumbling out in counted batches, all ready to be taken away and sold in the shops and streets. It's a wonderful machine . . . but it can't read its own printing and it doesn't know what's in the papers after it's done with them. That's what she's like; a wonderful machine! . . .''

''My dear sir,'' the stranger exclaimed, but John prevented him from saying any more.

''That's my opinion anyway,'' he went on, ''and I can only think the things I think. I can't think what other people think!''

''A limitation,'' said the stranger. ''A distinct limitation!''

''Mebbe it is, but I don't see what that matters!''

After Tetrazzini had left the platform and the applause of her admirers had died away, there was a violin solo, and then came an interval of fifteen minutes. John determined to write part of his notice in the vestibule of the Hall, and he got up from his seat to do so. He mounted the stairs that led to the first tier of boxes, and as he approached them, he saw Eleanor Moore sitting in the box nearest the exit through which he was about to pass. There were other people in the box . . . girls, he thought . . . but he hardly saw them. As he came nearer to her, she raised her eyes from her programme and looked straight at him, and for a few moments neither of them averted their eyes. Then she looked away, and he passed through the curtained exit.

iv

He had found her again! She had not flown away from London . . . she was not ill, as he had so alarmingly imagined, nor, as he had horribly imagined for one dreadful moment, was she dead. She lived . . . she was well . . . she was here in this very hall, separated from him only by a thin partition of wood . . . and she had looked at him without fear in her eyes. He mounted the short flight of stairs leading to the corridor on to which the doors of the boxes opened, and read the name written on the card underneath the number painted on the door of the box in which Eleanor was sitting. "The Viscountess Walbrook." The name puzzled him, and he turned to an attendant, a lugubrious man in a dingy frock-coat looking extraordinarily like a dejected image of Albert the Good, and asked for an explanation.

"It means that she owns that box," he explained. "Lots of the seats and boxes 'ere belong to private people. That one belongs to the Viscountess Walbrook. She in'erited it from 'er father. Very kind-'earted woman . . . always gives 'er box to orphans and widders and people like that!"

"Then the ladies in the box now are not friends of hers?" John asked, meaning by "friends," relatives.

"I shouldn't think so," the attendant answered. "I noticed the party comin' in. They come in a 'ired carriage. No, they're orphans or widders or somethin'. There's always a lot of orphans an' widders about this 'All, partic'lar on a Sunday afternoon when they're doin' 'Andel's *Messiar*. And the *Elijiar,* too! You know! Mendelssohn's bit! Reg'lar fascination for orphans an' widders that 'as. I call it depressin' meself, but some 'ow it seems to fit in with orphans an' widders! . . ."

John thanked the attendant and moved down the corridor. He must not lose sight of Eleanor now that he had found her again. If only he could discover where she lived.

. . . He stood where he could see the door of the Viscountess Walbrook's box, and brooded over the chances of discovering Eleanor's home. He must not lose sight of her . . . that was imperative. The luckiest thing in the world had brought him into her company again, and he might never have such an opportunity again if he let this one slip away from him. He could look round every now and then from his seat to assure himself that she was still in the box, but supposing she were to go away in the interval between his assuring glances? Even if he were to see her leaving the box, he would have some difficulty in getting to her in time to keep her in sight! . . . No, no, he must not run the risk of losing her again. He must stay in some place from which he could immediately see her leaving the box and from which he could easily follow her without ever missing her. He looked about him, and felt inclined to sit down in the corridor and wait there until Eleanor emerged from the Viscountess Walbrook's private property! But the corridor was a draughty and conspicuous and depressing place in which to loiter, and he felt that the cheerless attendant might suspect him of some felonious or other criminal intent if he were to stay there during the whole of the second part of the programme. He peered through the curtains which separated the corridor from the auditorium and saw an empty seat on the opposite side of the gangway to that on which Lady Walbrook's box was situated; and when the interval was ended and the violinist began to play the first movement of Beethoven's *Romance in G,* he slipped into the seat, and sat so that he could see every movement that Eleanor made. How very beautiful she looked! She seemed more beautiful to him in her blue evening dress even than she had seemed on the first day that he saw her. Until he had come to London, he had never seen a woman in evening dress, except in photographs and in illustrated papers, and when, for the first time, he had seen real women in real evening clothes in a theatre, the sight of their bare

white shoulders and bosoms had appeared to him both beautiful and improper. Eleanor's shoulders were bare, and as he looked at her, he could see her bosom very gently rising and falling with her breathing, but he felt no confusion in seeing her in that bare state. She was beautiful . . . he could think of nothing else but her beauty. Her shapely head was perfectly poised upon her strong neck, and he was aware instantly of the graceful line of her shoulders. If she had not been in those pretty evening clothes, he would not have known that her neck and shoulders were so beautiful. Her soft, dark hair, loosely dressed over her ears, glowed with loveliness, and the narrow golden band that bound it was no brighter than her eyes. How lovely she is, he said to himself, indifferent to the applause that was offered to the violinist, and then he fell to admiring the way in which she clapped her gloved hands together, slowly but firmly. Her applause was not languid applause, neither was it without discrimination. She seemed to John to be telling the violinist that he had played well, but might have played better. . . .

"She's the great wee girl," he said to himself.

He saw now that she shared the box with two other girls, but he had no further interest in them than that they were in her company and that they were not men. He wished that her hands were not gloved so that he might see whether she wore rings on her fingers, and if so, on which fingers they were worn. Supposing she were engaged to some other man . . . or worse still, supposing she were married! It was possible for her to have been married since he last saw her! . . . An agony of doubt and despair came upon him as he brooded over the thought of her possible marriage, and although he was aware that Tetrazzini was singing Mazzone's *Sogni e Canti* and Benedict's *Carnevale di Venezia*, the music was no more than a noise in the air to him. What should he do if Eleanor were married? Bad enough if she were engaged, but married! . . . An engagement was not

an irrefragable affair, and he could woo her so ardently that his rival would swiftly vanish from her thoughts . . . but a marriage! . . . He knew that marriages were not so irrefragable as they might be, and that a very desperate couple might go to the length of running away together even though one of them were married to someone else . . . but he did not like the thought of running away with a married woman. Eleanor might not wish to run away with him . . . his agony of mind was such that he stooped to that humility of imagination . . . she might very dearly love her husband! . . .

Lord alive, why couldn't that Italian woman stop singing! Why was not this silly music ended so that he could settle his doubts about Eleanor's freedom to marry him! Why could the audience not be content with two songs from the woman instead of demanding encores from her! . . .

And then the concert ended after what seemed an interminable time, and the audience began to emerge from the Hall. John went quickly into the corridor and waited until the door of the Viscountess Walbrook's box opened and Eleanor, followed by her friends, came out of it. She had a long coat with a furry collar over her pretty blue frock, and as she gathered her skirts about her, he could see that she was wearing blue satin shoes and blue silk stockings. One hand firmly grasped her skirts and the other hand held the furry collar in front of her mouth. She passed so close to him that he could have touched her glowing cheeks with his hands, but she did not see him. The crush of people made progress slow and difficult, but he was glad of this for it enabled him to be near to her much longer than he could otherwise have hoped to be. As she passed him, he had fallen in behind her, and now he could touch her very gently without her being aware that his touch was any more than the unavoidable contact of people in the crowd. There was a faint smell of violets about her clothes,

and he snuffed up the delicate odour eagerly. Mrs. Cream had smelt strongly of perfume, an overpowering hothouse-smelling perfume that had made him feel as if he were stifling, but this delicate odour pleased him. How natural, how very obvious even, that Eleanor should use the scent of violets!

When they reached the front of the Hall, Eleanor turned to her friends and made some remark about a carriage. He supposed they had hired a vehicle to bring them to the Hall and take them home again, and when he discovered that his supposition was right, a sense of disappointment filled him. He had hoped that they would walk home or that they would get on to a 'bus! . . .

He watched them climb into the shabby hired brougham, and when the door was closed upon them and the driver had whipped up his horse, he followed it into the Kensington Road. The traffic was so congested that the horse had to move at a walking pace, and John was easily able to keep close to it; but in a few moments, he told himself, the driver would get clear of the congestion and then the horse would begin to trot; and while the thought passed through his mind, the driver cracked his whip and the slow, spiritless horse began to move more rapidly . . . and as it gathered speed, resolution suddenly came to John out of a sudden vision of a boy's pleasure.

"Fancy not thinking of this before," he said, as he swung himself on to the back of the carriage and balanced uncomfortably on the bar.

## V

The brougham drove along Kensington Road and then turned sharply into Church Street along which it was drawn at an ambling pace to Notting Hill. It turned to the right, and went along the Bayswater Road, and then John lost his bearings. He was in one of the streets off the

Bayswater Road, but in the darkness he could not tell what its name was. Presently the driver shouted "Whoa!" to his horse and drew up in front of a dreary, tall house, with a pillared portico, and John had only sufficient time in which to drop from the back of the carriage and skip across the street to the opposite pavement before the three girls alighted from the brougham and stood for a few moments in front of the house. The driver drove off, and John, lurking in the shadow of a doorway, watched the girls as they stood talking together. Then he saw two of them climb up the steps leading to the house, and Eleanor, calling out "Good-night!" to them, went round the corner. He hurried after her, and saw her going up the steps of a similar house immediately round the corner from the one into which her friends had entered. She was fumbling at the keyhole with her key as he came opposite the house, and she did not see him until he spoke to her.

"Miss Moore," he said in a hesitating manner, taking off his hat as he spoke.

She started and turned round. "What is it?" she said in an alarmed manner.

"I . . . I've been trying to find you for a long time! . . ."

She shrank away from him. "I don't know you," she said. "You've made a mistake. Please go away!"

"Don't be afraid of me," he pleaded. "I know you don't know me, but I know you. You're Eleanor Moore! . . ."

She came forward from the shadow. "Yes," she said, half in alarm, half out of curiosity. "Yes, that's my name, but I don't know you! . . ." Then she recognised him. "Oh, you're that man!" she said, now wholly alarmed.

"I saw you at the tea-shop," he replied hastily. "You remember you left a letter behind and I picked it up and gave it to you. That's how I know your name!"

"Why are you persecuting me?" she demanded, almost tearfully.

He was daunted by her tone. "Persecuting you!" he said.

"Yes. You follow me about in the street, and stare at me. I saw you this evening at the Albert Hall, and you stared at me! . . ."

"Because I love you, Eleanor!" He went nearer to her, and as he did so, she retreated further into the shadow. "Don't be afraid of me, please," he said. "I fell in love with you the moment I saw you, but I'm a stranger in this town and I had no way of getting to know you. I tried hard, Eleanor! . . ."

"Don't call me Eleanor!"

"I can't help it. I think of you as Eleanor. I always call you Eleanor to myself. You see, dear, I'm in love with you!"

"But you don't know me. I wish you'd go away. I shall ring the bell or tell the policeman at the corner! . . ."

"Let me tell you about myself," he pleaded.

"I don't want to hear about you. I don't like you. You stare so hard, and you're always looking at my stockings! . . ."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, you are. You're looking at them now!"

"Only because you mentioned them. I won't look at them if you tell me not to! . . ."

"I don't want to tell you anything," she murmured. "I only want you to go away! . . ."

"I know that, dearest, but just let me tell you this. My name is John MacDermott! . . ."

"I don't care what your name is," she interrupted. "It doesn't interest me in the least! . . ."

"But it will, Eleanor, darling. When you're married to me! . . ."

She burst out laughing. "I think you're mad," she said.

"I was very lonely, Eleanor, when I saw you. I have not got a friend in London! . . ." He omitted to remember the existence of Hinde. "I come from Ireland! . . ."

"Oh!"

"And I had not been in London more than a day when I saw you. I fell in love with you at once! . . ."

"Absurd!" she said.

"It's true. After you'd gone back to your office, I went for a long walk, but all the time I was thinking of you, and I hurried back to the shop at teatime, hoping I'd see you. And you were there, looking lovelier than you looked in the middle of the day. Do you remember?"

"Yes," she said. "You looked so ridiculous! . . ."

"Perhaps I did, but I didn't care how I looked so long as I was near you. I felt miserable and lonely, and you were the only person in London I knew! . . ."

"But you didn't know me!" she insisted.

"I knew your name, and I was in love with you. That was enough. I tried to speak to you, but you would not let me. I asked you to be friends with me, and you got up and walked away. I felt ashamed of myself because I thought I had frightened you, and I hurried out of the shop and followed you so that I might tell you how sorry I was and how much I loved you, but I lost you at your office, and the man at the lift nearly had a fight with me! . . ."

"Then it *was* you who had been asking for me? He told me that a suspicious character had been hanging about the hall, enquiring for me. I thought it might be you!"

"I don't look suspicious, do I?"

"You behave suspiciously. You speak to people whom you do not know, and you follow them in the street! . . ."

"Only you, Eleanor. Not anybody else!"

There was a silence for a few moments, and then she turned to the door and inserted the key in the lock.

"Well, please go away now," she said. "You can't do any good here! . . ."

"Let me come in and tell your father and mother I want to marry you!"

She opened the door and gazed at him as if she could not believe her ears.

"This is a residential club for women," she said. "I have no parents. I think you're the silliest man I've ever encountered. Please go away! You'll get me talked about! . . ."

She shut the door in his face.

He stared blankly at the glass panels of the door for a few moments and then went down the steps into the street, and as he did so, he saw a light suddenly illuminate the room immediately above the pillared portico. He stared up at it, and saw that the window was open, and while he looked, he saw Eleanor come to it and begin to draw it down.

He called out to her. "Eleanor!" he said. "Hi, Eleanor!"

She peered out of the window, and then leant her head through the opening. "There's a policeman at the corner," she said. "I shall call him if you don't go away!"

"Very well," he replied. "They can't put a man in gaol for loving a woman!"

"They can put him in gaol for annoying her!"

"I'm not annoying you. How can I annoy you when I'm in love with you? No, don't interrupt me. You haven't let me get a word out of my mouth all night!" He could hear her laughing at him. "Are you codding me?" he said.

"What?" she replied in a puzzled voice.

"Are you codding me?" he repeated. "Are you making fun of me?"

She leant out of the window as if she were trying to see him more closely. "You really are funny," she said. "I was afraid of you . . . you stared so . . . but I'm not afraid of you now. You're a funny little fellow, but I do wish you'd go away!"

"Come down and talk to me, and I'll go home content! . . ."

"You're being silly again!"

"No, I'm not. I tell you, girl, I'm mad in love with you, and I'll sit on your doorstep all night 'til you agree to go out with me!"

"The policeman would lock you up if you were to do that," she replied. "I'm not in love with you . . . I don't even like you . . . I think you're a horrid man, staring at people the way you do . . . and I won't 'go out with you,' as you call it. I'm not a servant girl! . . ."

"What does it matter to me what sort of a girl you are, if I'm in love with you. You must like me . . . you can't help it! . . ."

"Oh, can't I?"

"No. I never heard tell yet of a man loving a woman the way I love you, and her not to fall in love with him!"

"Don't talk so loudly, please," she said in a lowered tone. "People will hear you, and there's someone coming down the street."

"I don't care! . . ."

"But I do. Now listen to me, Mr. . . . Mr. . . . I can't remember your name!"

"My name's MacDermott, but you can call me John."

"Thank you, Mr. MacDermott, but I don't wish to call you John. Now listen to me. I think you're a very romantic young man! . . . No, please let me finish one sentence! You're a very romantic young man, and I daresay you think that all you've got to do is to tell the first girl you meet that you're in love with her, and she'll say, 'Oh, thank you!' and fall into your arms. Well you're wrong! You may think you're very romantic, but I think you're just a tedious fool! . . ."

"A what?"

"A tedious fool. You've made me feel exceedingly uncomfortable more than once. I had to stop going to that

tea-shop because I couldn't eat my food without your eyes staring at me all the time. Fortunately, the work I was doing in the City was only a temporary job, and I got a permanent post elsewhere and was able to move away from the City altogether! . . ."

"But Eleanor! . . ."

"How dare you call me Eleanor?"

"Because I love you!" he said.

She seemed to be nonplussed by his reply. She did not speak for a few moments. Then, altering her tone, she said, "Oh, well, I daresay you think you do!"

"I don't think. I know. I'll not be content till I marry you. Now, Eleanor, do you hear that?"

"I know nothing whatever about you! . . ."

"Come down to the doorstep and I'll tell you. Will you?"

"No, of course not!"

"Well, how can you blame me then if you won't listen to me when I offer to tell you about myself. You know my name. John MacDermott. And I'm Irish! . . ."

"Yes," she interrupted, "I'm making big allowances for that!"

"My family's the most respected family in Ballyards! . . ."

"Where's that?" she asked.

"Do you not know either? You're the second person I've met in London didn't know that. It's in County Down. My mother lives there, and so does my Uncle William. I've come here to write books! . . ."

"Are you an author?" she exclaimed with interest.

"I am," he said proudly. "I've written a novel and I'm writing a play! . . . Come down and I'll tell you about them!"

"Oh, no, I can't. It's too late. And you must go home. Where do you live?"

"At Brixton," he answered.

"That's miles from here. And you'll miss the last 'bus if you don't hurry! . . ."

"I can walk. Come down, will you!"

"No. No, no. It's much too late," she said hurriedly. "And I can't stay here talking to you any longer. Some-one will make a complaint about me. You'll get me into trouble! . . ."

"Well, will you meet me to-morrow somewhere? Wher-ever you like!"

"No! . . ."

"Ah, do!"

"No, I won't. Why should I?"

"Because I'm in love with you and want you to meet me."

"No! . . ."

"Then I'll sit here all night then. I'll let the peeler take me up, and I'll tell the whole world I'm in love with you!"

"You're a beast. You're really a beast!"

"I'm not. I'm in love with you. That's all. Will you meet me the morrow?"

"I don't know! . . ."

"Well, make up your mind then."

She remained silent for a few moments.

"Well?" he said.

"I don't see why I should meet you! . . ."

"Never mind about that. Just meet me!"

"Well . . . perhaps . . . only perhaps, mind you . . . I don't promise really . . . I might meet you . . . just for a minute or two! . . ."

"Where?"

"At the bookstall in Charing Cross station. Do you know it?"

"I'll soon find it. What time?"

"Five o'clock!"

"Right. I'll be there to the minute! . . ."

"Go home now. You've a long way to go, and I'm very tired!"

"All right, Eleanor. I wish you'd come down, though. Just for a wee while!"

"I can't. Good-night!"

"Good-night, my dear. You've the loveliest eyes! . . ."

She closed the window, but he could see her standing behind the glass looking at him.

He kissed his hand to her and then, when she had moved away, he walked off.

"Good night, constable!" he said cheerily to the policeman at the corner.

The policeman looked suspiciously at him.

"How do you get to Brixton from here?" John continued.

"First on the right, first on the left, first on the right again, and you're in the Bayswater Road. Turn to the left and keep on until you reach Marble Arch. You'll get a 'bus there, if you're lucky. If you're too late, you'll have to walk it. Go down Park Lane and ask again. Make for Victoria!"

"Thanks," said John.

He walked along the Bayswater Road, singing in his heart, and after a while, finding that the street was almost empty, he began to sing aloud. The roadway shone in the cold light thrown from the high electric lamps, and there was a faint mist hanging about the trees in Kensington Gardens. He looked up at the sky and saw that it was full of friendly stars. All around him was beauty and light. The gleaming roadway and the gleaming sky seemed to be illuminated in honour of his triumphant love, for he did not doubt that his love was triumphant. The night air was fresh and cool. It had none of the exhausted taste that the air seems always to have in London during the day. It was new, clean air, fresh from the sea or from the hills, and he took off his hat so that his forehead might

be fanned by it. He glanced about him as if in every shadow he expected to see a friend. London no longer seemed too large to love.

"I like this place," he said, waving his hat in the air.

A policeman told him of a very late 'bus that went down Whitehall and would take him as far as Kensington Gate, and he hurried off to Charing Cross and was lucky enough to catch the 'bus.

"How much?" he said to the conductor.

"Sixpence on this 'bus," the conductor replied.

John handed a shilling to him. "You can keep the change," he said.

vi

Hinde was lying on the sofa in the sitting-room when John, slightly tired, but too elated to be aware of his fatigue, got home.

"Hilloa," he said sleepily, "how did the concert go?"

John suddenly remembered.

"Holy O!" he exclaimed, clapping his hand to his head.

"What's that?" Hinde said.

"I forgot all about it," John replied.

"Forgot all about it! Do you mean you didn't go to it?"

"I went all right, but I forgot to take my notice to the office!"

Hinde sat up and stared at him. "You *forgot!* . . ." He could not say any more.

John told him of the encounter with Eleanor.

"You mean to say you let your paper down for the sake of a girl," Hinde exclaimed incredulously.

"I'll go back now," John said, turning to leave the room.

"Go back *now!* What's the good of that? The paper's been put to bed half an hour and more ago. My God Almighty . . . you let the paper down. For the sake of a girl!"

He seemed to have difficulty in expressing his thoughts, and he sat back and gaped at John as if he had just been informed that the Last Day had been officially announced.

"You needn't show your nose in *that* office again," he said again. "I never heard of such a reason for letting a paper down! Good heavens, man, don't you realise what you've done? *You've let the paper down!*"

"I'm in love with this girl! . . ."

Hinde almost snarled at him. "Ach-h-h, *love!*" he shouted. "And you propose to be a journalist. Let your paper down. For a girl. You sloppy fellow! . . . My heavens above, I never heard of such a thing. Letting your paper down! . . ."

He walked about the room, repeating many times that John had "let his paper down."

"And I recommended you to Clotworthy, too. I told him you had the stuff in you. I thought you had. I thought you could do a job decently, but by the Holy O, you're no good. You let your own feelings come between you and your work. Oh! Oh, oh! Oh, go to bed quick or I'll knock the head off you. I'll not be responsible for myself if you stand there any longer like a moonstruck fool!"

"If you talk to me like that," said John, "I'll hit you a welt on the jaw. I'm sorry I forgot about the paper, but sure what does it matter anyway? . . ."

"What does it matter!" Hinde almost shrieked at him. "Your paper will be the only paper in London which won't have a report of that concert in it to-morrow. That's what it matters? I'd be ashamed to let my paper down for any reason on earth. If my mother was dying, I wouldn't let her prevent me from doing my job! . . . If you can't understand that, John MacDermott, you needn't try to be a journalist. You haven't got it in you. Your paper's your father and your mother and your wife and your children! Oh, go to bed, out of my sight, or I'll forget myself! . . ."

John walked towards the door.

"I'd rather love a woman any day than a paper," he said.

"Well, go and love her then, and don't try to interfere with a paper again! Don't come down Fleet Street pretending you're a journalist!"

"Good-night!"

"Yah-h-h!" said Hinde.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER

### i

It had been exceedingly difficult for John to explain his defection to Mr. Clotworthy and to Tarleton. The only mitigating feature of the business was that the matter to be reported was only a concert. Both Mr. Clotworthy and Tarleton trembled when they thought of the calamity that would have befallen the paper if the forgotten report had been of a murder! They hardly dared contemplate such a devastating prospect. They invited John to think of another profession and wished him a very good morning. Tarleton quitted the room, leaving John alone with the editor, and as he went he showed such contempt towards him as is only shown towards the meanest of God's creatures.

"Well, where's your Ulster now?" said Mr. Clotworthy very sardonically when they were alone together.

"I know rightly I'm in the wrong from your point of view, Mr. Clotworthy," John replied, "but I'd do the same thing again if twenty jobs depended on it. It's hard to make you understand, and mebbe I'm a fool to try, but there it is. The minute I clapped my eyes on her, I forgot everything but her. I'm sorry I've lost my post here, but I'd be sorrier to have lost her. That's all about it. You were very kind to give me the work, and I wish I hadn't let your paper down the way Hinde says I did, but it's no good me pretending about it. I'd do it again if the same thing happened another time. That's the beginning and end of it all. I'd rather be her husband than edit a dozen papers

like yours. I'd rather be her husband than be anything else in the world!"

"Well, good afternoon!" said Mr. Clotworthy.

"Good afternoon!" said John, turning away.

He moved towards the door of the room, feeling much less assurance than he had felt when he came into it.

"If you care to send in some articles for page six," Mr. Clotworthy added, "I'd be glad to see them!"

"Thank you," said John.

"Not at all," the editor replied without glancing up.

He left the *Daily Sensation* office, and walked towards Charing Cross. A queer depression had settled upon his spirits. Hinde had treated him as if he were mentally deficient, and he knew that Mr. Clotworthy and Tarleton, particularly Tarleton, regarded him with coldness, but he was not deeply affected by their disapproval. Nevertheless, depression possessed him. He felt that Eleanor would fail to keep her appointment. Quietly considered, there seemed to be no reason why she should keep it. She knew absolutely nothing of him except what he had told her while she leaned out of the window. How was she to know that he was speaking the truth? What right had he to expect her to pay any heed to him at all? Dreary, drizzling thoughts poured through his mind. He felt as certain that his novel would not be published as he felt that Eleanor would not be at the bookstall at Charing Cross station when he arrived there. The tragedy on which he was working had seemed to him to be a very marvellous play, but now he thought it was too poor to be worth finishing. He had been in London for what was quite a long time, but he had achieved nothing. He had not even written the music-hall sketch for the Creams. He had not earned a farthing during the time that he had been in London. All the exaltation which had filled him as he walked along the Bayswater Road on the previous night, with his mind full of Eleanor and love and starshine and moonlight and gleaming streets

and trees hanging with mist and friendliness for all men, had gone clean out of him. Fleet Street was a dirty, ill-ventilated alley full of scuffling men and harassed women. London itself was a great angry thing, a place of distrust and contention, where no one ever offered a friendly greeting to a stranger. He would go to Charing Cross station and he would stand patiently in front of the bookstall, but Eleanor would not come to meet him. He would stand there, dumb and uncomplaining, and no one of the hurrying crowd of people would turn to him and say, "You're in trouble. I'm sorry!" They would neither know nor care. They would be too busy catching trains. He would stand there for an hour, for two hours . . . until his legs began to ache with the pain of standing in one place for a long time . . . and then, when it was apparent that waiting was useless and he had, perhaps, aroused the suspicions of policemen and railway porters concerning his purpose in loitering thus so persistently in front of the bookstall, he would go home in his misery to a contemptuous Hinde! . . .

ii

And while these bitter thoughts poured through his mind, he entered Charing Cross station, and there in front of the bookstall was Eleanor Moore. The bitter thoughts poured out of his mind in a rapid flood. He felt so certain that his novel would be published that he could almost see it stacked on the bookstall behind Eleanor. He would finish the tragedy that week and in a short while England would be acclaiming him as a great dramatist! . . . He hurried towards her and held out his hand, and she shyly took it.

"Have you been here long?" he anxiously asked.

"No," she answered, "I've only just come!"

"Let's go and have some tea," he went on.

"I've had mine, thanks! . . ."

"Well, have some more. I've not had any! . . ."

"I don't think I can, thanks. I've really come to say that I can't! . . ."

"There's a little place near here," he interrupted hurriedly, "where they give you lovely home-made bread. I found it one day when I was wandering about. We'll just go there and talk about whatever you want to say. Give me that umbrella of yours!" He took it from her hand as he spoke. "This is the way," he said, leading her from the station. As they crossed the road, he took hold of her arm. "These streets are terribly dangerous," he said. "You never know what minute you're going to be run over!"

He still held her arm when they were safely on the pavement, but she contrived to free herself without making a point of doing so. He tried to bring her back to the mood in which they were when she leaned out of the window to listen to him . . . "like Romeo and Juliet," he told himself . . . but the congestion of the streets made such intimacies impossible. They were constantly being separated by the hurrying foot-passengers, and so they could only speak in short, dull sentences. He brought her at last to the quiet tea-shop where he ordered tea and home-made bread and honey! . . .

"Eleanor," he said, when the waitress had taken his order and had departed to fulfil it, "it's no good you telling me that you can't go out with me. You must, my dear. I want to marry you! . . ."

"But it's absurd," she expostulated. "How can you possibly talk like that when we're such strangers to each other!"

"You're no stranger to me. I've loved you for two months now. I've hardly ever had you out of my mind. I was nearly demented mad when I lost you. I used to go and hang about that office of yours day after day in the hope that you'd come out! . . . And if ever I get the chance, I'll break that liftman's neck for him. He in-

sulted me the day I asked him what office you were in. He called me a Nosey Parker!''

She laughed at him. ''But that was right, wasn't it?'' she said. ''You wouldn't have him give information about me to any man who chooses to ask for it?''

''He should have known that I was all right. A child could have seen that I wasn't just playing the fool. But you're mebbe right. I'll think no more about him. Do you know what happened last night?''

''No.''

He told her of his relationship with the *Daily Sensation.*

''Then you've lost your work?'' she said.

He nodded his head, and they did not speak again for a few moments. The waitress had brought the tea and bread and honey, and they waited until she had gone.

''I'm so sorry,'' she said.

''It doesn't bother me,'' he replied. ''I only told you to show you how much I love you. I'm not codding you, Eleanor. You matter so much to me that I'd sacrifice any job in the world for you. I told Clotworthy that . . . he's the editor of the paper . . . I told him I'd rather be your husband than have his job a hundred times over. And so I would. Will you marry me, Eleanor?''

''I've never met anyone like you before! . . .''

''I daresay you haven't but I'm not asking you about that. Will you marry me? We can fix the whole thing up in no time at all. I looked it up in a book this morning, and it says you can get married after three weeks' notice. If I give notice the morrow, we can be married in a month from to-day!''

''Oh, stop, stop,'' she said. ''Your mind is running away with you. I spoke to you for the first time last night! . . .''

''Beg your pardon,'' he said, ''you spoke to me the first day we met. I handed you your letter! . . .''

''Oh, but that doesn't count. That was nothing. I

really only spoke to you last night, and I don't know you. I'm not in love with you . . . no, please be sensible. How can I possibly love you when I don't know you! . . ."

"I love you, don't I?" he demanded.

"You say so!"

"Well, if I love you, you can love me, can't you. That's simple enough!"

She passed a cup of tea to him. "Do all Irishmen behave like this?" she said.

"I don't know and I don't care. It's the way I behave. I know my mind queer and quick, Eleanor, and when I want a thing, I don't need to go humming and hahhing to see whether I'm sure about it. I want you. I know that for a fact, and there's no need for me to argue about it. I'll not want you any more this day twelvemonth than I want you now, and I won't want you any less. Will you marry me?"

"No!"

"How long will it be before you will marry me, then?"

She threw her hands with a gesture of comical despair. "Really," she said, "you're unbelievable. You seem to think that I must want to marry you merely because you want to marry me. I take no interest whatever in you! . . ."

"No, but you will!"

She shrugged her shoulders. "It isn't any use talking," she said. "Your mind is made up! . . ."

"It is. I want to marry you, Eleanor, and I'm going to marry you. I have a lot to do in the world yet, but that's the first thing I've got to do, and I can't do anything else till I have done it. So you might as well make up your mind to it, and save a lot of time arguing about it when it's going to happen in the end!"

She pushed her cup away, and rose from her seat. "I'm going home," she said. "This conversation makes me feel dizzy!"

"There's no hurry," he exclaimed.

She spoke coldly and deliberately. "It's not a question of hurry," she replied. "It's a question of desire. I *wish* to go home. Your conversation bores and annoys me!"

"Why?"

"Because you treat me as if I were not human and had no desires of my own. I'm to marry you, of whom I know absolutely nothing, merely because you want me to marry you. I don't know whether you are a gentleman or not. You have a very funny accent! . . ."

"What's wrong with my accent?" he demanded.

"I don't know. It's just funny. I've never heard an accent like that before, and so I can't tell whether you're a gentleman or not. If you were an Englishman, I should know at onee, but it's different with Irish people. Your very queer manners may be quite the thing in Ireland!"

He put out his hand to her, but she drew back. "Sit down," he said. "Just for a minute or two till I talk to you. I'll let you go then!"

She hesitated. Then she did as he asked her. "Very well!" she said primly.

"Listen to me, Eleanor. I know very well that my behaviour is strange to you. It's strange to me. Till last night we'd never exchanged a dozen words. I know that. But I tell you this, if you live to be a hundred and have boys by the score, you'll never have a man that'll love you as I love you. I'm in earnest, Eleanor. I'm not codding you. I'm not trying to humbug you. I love you. I'm desperate in love with you! . . ."

She leant forward a little, moved by his sincerity. "But," she said, and then stopped as if unable to find words adequate to her meaning.

"There's no buts about it," he replied. "I love you. I don't know why I love you, and I don't care whether I know or not. All I know is that the minute I saw you, I

loved you. I wanted to see you again, and I schemed to make you talk to me! . . ."

"Yes, and very silly your schemes were. Asking me if I wanted the *Graphic* back again! . . ."

"You remember that, do you?" he asked.

"Well, it was so obvious and so stupid," she answered.

"Listen. Tell me this. Do you believe me when I tell you I love you. It's no use me telling you if you don't believe me!"

"It's so difficult to say! . . ."

"Do you believe me," he insisted. "Do I look like a man that would tell lies to a girl like you. Answer me that, now?"

She raised her eyes and gazed very straightly at him. "No," she said, "I don't think you would. I . . . I think you mean what you say! . . ."

"I do, Eleanor. As true as God's in heaven, I do. Will you not believe me?"

"But I don't love you," she burst out.

"Well, mebbe you don't. That's understandable!" he admitted.

"And the whole thing's so unusual," she protested.

"What does that matter? If I love you and you get to love me, does it matter about anything else? Have wit, woman, have wit!"

"Don't speak to me like that. You're very abrupt, Mr. MacDermott! . . ."

"My name's John to you! Now, don't flare up again. You were nice and amenable a minute ago. You can stop like that. You and me are going to marry some time. The sooner the better. All I want you to do now, as you say you don't love me, is to give me a chance to make you love me. Come out with me for a walk . . . or we'll go to a theatre, if you like! Anyway, let's be friends. I don't know anybody in this town except one man, and him and

me's had a row over the head of the *Daily Sensation!* . . ."

"Yes," she interrupted, "you've lost your work through your foolishness. What are you going to do now? It isn't very easy to get work."

"I'll get it all right if I want it. I've enough money to keep me easy for a year without doing a hand's turn, and I daresay my mother and my Uncle William 'ud let me have more if I wanted it. I don't want to be on a paper much. I want to write books!"

Her interest was restored. "Tell me about the book you've written. Is it printed yet?" she said.

He told her of his work, and of the Creams and of Hinde. He told her, too, of his life in Ballyards.

"Where do you come from?" he said.

"Devonshire," she answered. "My father was rector of a village there until he died. Then mother and I lived in Exeter until she died! . . ."

"You're alone then?" he asked.

"Yes. My mother had an annuity. That stopped when she died. My cousin . . . he's a doctor in Exeter . . . settled up her affairs for me, and when everything was arranged, there was just enough money to pay for my secretarial training and keep me for a year. I trained for six months and then I went as a stop-gap to that office where you saw me. I'm in an office in Long Acre now — a motor place!"

"And have you no friends here—relations, I mean!"

"Some cousins. I don't often see them. And one or two people who knew father and mother!"

"You're really alone then . . . like me?" he said.

"Yes," she answered. "Yes, I suppose I am!"

He leant back in his chair. "It seems like the hand of God," he said, "bringing the two of us together!"

"I wish," she said, "you wouldn't talk about God so much!"

iii

When he went home that evening, he wrote to his mother. *Dear Mother,* he wrote, *I've got acquainted with a girl here called Eleanor Moore, and I've made up my mind I'm going to marry her. She's greatly against it at present, but I daresay she'll change her mind. . . .* There was more than that in the letter, but it is not necessary to repeat the remainder of it here. He also wrote to Eleanor. *My dearest,* the letter ran, *I'm looking forward to meeting you again tomorrow night at the same place. I know you said you wouldn't meet me, but I'm hoping you'll change your mind. I'll be waiting for you anyway, and I'll wait till seven o'clock for you. Remember that, Eleanor! If you don't turn up, it'll be hard for you to sit in comfort and you thinking of me waiting for you. You'll never have the heart to refuse me, will you? We can have our tea together, and then go for a walk or a ride on a 'bus till dinner-time, and then, if you like, after we've had something to eat, we'll go to a theatre. Don't disappoint me, for I'm terribly in love with you. Yours only, John MacDermott. P. S. Don't be any later than you can help. I hate waiting about for people.*

iv

She came, reluctantly so she said, to the bookstall at Charing Cross station, but only to tell him that she could not do as he wished her to do. She would take tea with him for this once, but it was useless to ask her to go for a walk with him or for a 'bus-ride either, and she certainly would not dine with him nor would she go to a theatre. Yet she went for a walk on the Embankment with him, and they paced up and down so long that she saw the force of his argument that she might as well have her dinner in town as go back to her club where the food would be tepid, if not actually cold, by the time she was ready to eat it. She need

not go to a theatre unless she wished to do, but he could not help telling her that a great deal of praise had been given to a piece called *Justice* by a man called Galsworthy. Mebbe she would like to see it. She was not to imagine that he was forcing her to go to the theatre. . . . And so she went, and they sat together in the pit, hearing with difficulty because of the horrible acoustics of the Duke of York's Theatre; and when the play was over, he had to comfort her, for the fate of Falder had pained her. They climbed on to the top of a 'bus at Oxford Circus and were carried along Oxford Street to the Bayswater Road. They sat close together on the back seat of the 'bus, with a waterproofed apron over their knees because the night was damp and chilly; and as the 'bus drove along to Marble Arch they did not speak. The rain had ceased to fall before they quitted the theatre, but the streets were still wet, and John found himself again realising their beauty. Trees and hills and rivers in the country and flowers and young animals were beautiful, but until this moment he had never known that wet pavements and wooden or macadamised roads were beautiful, too, when the lamps were lit and the cold grey gleam of electric arcs or the soft, yellow, reluctant light of gas lamps fell upon them. He could see a long wet gleam stretching far ahead of him, past the Marble Arch and the darkness of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens into a region of which he knew nothing; and as he contemplated that loveliness, he remembered that the sight of tramlines shining at night had unaccountably moved him more than once. Once, at Ballyards, he had stood still for a few moments to look at the railway track glistening in the sunshine, and he remembered how puzzled he had been when, in some magazine, he had read a complaint of trains, that they marred the beauty of the fields. He had seen trains a long way off, moving towards him and sending up puffs of thick white smoke that trailed into thin strips of blown cloud, and had waited until the silence of the distant engine, broken once

or twice by a shrill, sharp whistle, had become a stupendous noise, and the great machine, masterfully hauling its carriages behind it, had galloped past him, roaring and cheering and sending the debris swirling tempestuously about it! . . . The sight of a train going at a great speed had always seemed to him to be a wonderful thing, but now he realised that it was more than wonderful, that it was actually beautiful. . . . He turned his head a little and looked past Eleanor to the Park. Little vague yellow lights flickered through the trees, all filmy with the evening mists, and he could smell the rich odour of wet earth. He looked at Eleanor and as he did so, they both smiled, and he realised that suddenly affection for him had come to life in her. Beneath the protection of the waterproofed apron, his hand sought for hers and held it. Half-heartedly she tried to withdraw her fingers from his grasp, but he would not let them go, and so she did not persist in her effort.

"Look!" he said, snuggling closer to her.

She turned towards the Park, and then, after a little while, turned back again. "I've always loved the Park," she said. "It's the most friendly thing in London!"

He urged his love for her again. He had seen affection for him in her eyes and had felt that her hand was not being firmly withdrawn from his.

"No, no," she protested, "don't let's talk about it any more. I don't love you! . . ."

"Well, marry me anyhow!"

Backwards and forwards their arguments passed, returning always to that point: *But I don't love you! Well, marry me anyhow!* . . .

He took her to the door of her club, and for a while, they stood at the foot of the steps talking of the play they had seen that evening and of his love for her.

"It's no good," she said, trying to leave him, but unable to do so because he had taken hold of her hand and would not release it.

"Don't go in yet," he pleaded. "Wait a wee while longer!"

"What's the use?" she exclaimed.

"You'll meet me again to-morrow? . . ."

"I can't meet you *every* night!"

"Why not?" he demanded. "Tell me why not!"

"Well . . . well, because I can't. It's ridiculous. You're so absurd. You keep on saying the same thing over and over . . . and it's so silly. If I were in love with you, I might go out with you every evening, but! . . ."

"Do you like me?"

"I don't know. I . . . I suppose I must or I wouldn't go out with you at all. Really, I'm sorry for you! . . ."

"Well, if you're sorry for me, come out with me to-morrow night. We'll have our dinner in town again!"

"No, no! Don't you understand, Mr. MacDermott! . . ."

"John, John, John!" he said.

"I can't call you by your Christian name! . . ."

"Why not? I call you by yours, don't I?"

"Yes, but you oughtn't to. I've asked you not to call me Eleanor, but it doesn't seem to be any good asking you to do anything that you don't want to do. But even you must understand that I can't let you take me out every evening. I can't let you pay for things! . . ."

"Oh," he said, as if his mind were illuminated. "Is that your trouble? We can soon settle that. If you won't let me pay for things, pay for them yourself . . . only let me be with you when you're doing it. You have to have food, haven't you? Well, so have I. We have no friends in London that matter to us, and you like me . . . you admitted it yourself . . . and I love you . . . so why shouldn't we have our meals together even if you do pay for your own food?"

"Of course, it sounds all right as you put it," she answered, "but it isn't all right. I can't explain things. I don't know how to explain them, but I know about them

all the same. And I know it isn't all right. You'll begin to think I'm in love with you! . . ."

"I hope you will be, but you'll never be certain unless you see me fair and often. You'll come again to-morrow, won't you?"

"Oh, good-night," she said impatiently, suddenly breaking from him. "You're like a baby. You think you've only got to keep on asking for things and people will get tired of saying 'No!' I won't go out with you again. You make me feel tired and cross! . . ."

"Well, if you won't meet me to-morrow night, will you meet me the next night?"

"No!"

"Then will you stay a wee while longer now?"

She turned on the top step and looked at him, and he saw with joy that the anger had gone out of her eyes and that she was smiling at him. "You really are! . . ." she said, and then she stopped. He waited for her to go on, but she shrugged her shoulders and said only, "I don't know! It simply isn't any good talking to you!"

He went up the steps and stood beside her and took hold of her hand. "Let me kiss you, Eleanor," he said.

She started away from him. "No, of course I won't!"

"Just once!"

"No!"

"Well, why not? You've let me hold your hand. What's the difference?"

"There's every difference. Besides I didn't let you hold my hand. You took it. I couldn't prevent you. You're so rough! . . ."

"No, my dear, not rough. Not really rough. Eleanor, just once! . . ."

"No," she said again, this time speaking so loudly that she startled herself. "Please go away. I shan't go out with you again. I was silly to go out with you at all. You don't know how to behave! . . ."

She broke off abruptly and turned to open the door, but she had difficulty with the key because of her anger.

"Let me open it for you," he said, taking the key from her hand and inserting it in the lock. "There!" he added, when the door was open.

"Thank you," she said, taking the key from him. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, Eleanor!" he replied very softly.

They did not move. She stood with her hand on the door and he stood on the top step and gazed at her.

"Well—good-night," she said again.

"Dear Eleanor," he replied. "My dear Eleanor!"

She gulped a little. "Goo—good-night!" she said.

"I love you, my dear, so much. I shall never love anyone as I love you. I have never loved anybody else but you, never, never! . . . Well, I thought I loved someone else, but I didn't! . . ."

"It's no good," she began, but he interrupted her.

"Well, meet me again to-morrow night at the same place! . . ."

"No, I won't!"

"At five o'clock. I'll be there before you . . . long before you. You'll meet me, won't you?"

"No."

"Please, Eleanor!"

She hesitated. Then she said, "Oh, very well, then! But it'll be the last time. Good-night!"

She pushed the door to, but before she could close it, he whispered "Good-night, my darling!" to her, and then the door was between them.

He waited until he saw the flash of the light in her room, and hoped that she would come to the window; but she did not do so, and after a while he went away.

V

Up in her room, she was staring at her reflection in the mirror, while he was waiting below on the pavement for her to come to the window, and as he walked away, she began to talk to the angry, baffled girl she saw before her.

"I won't marry him," she said. "I won't marry him. I don't love him. I don't even like him. I *won't* marry him! . . ."

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER

### i

Now that he had found Eleanor again, he was able to settle down to work. It was necessary, he told himself, that he should have some substantial achievements behind him before she and he were married, particularly as he had lost his employment on the *Daily Sensation*. The money he possessed would not last for ever and he could hardly hope to sponge on his Uncle William . . . even if he were inclined to do so . . . for the rest of his life. He must earn money by his own work and earn it quickly. In one way, it was a good thing that he had lost his work on the newspaper . . . for he would have all the more time to write his tragedy. The sketch for the Creams had been hurriedly finished and posted to them at a music-hall in Scotland where they were playing, so Cream wrote in acknowledging the MS., to "enormous business. Dolly fetching 'em every time! . . ." Two pounds per week, John told himself, would pay for the rent and some of the food until he was able to earn large sums of money by his serious plays. The tragedy would establish him. It would not make a fortune for him, for tragedians did not make fortunes, but it would make his name known, and Hinde had assured him that a man with a known name could easily earn a reasonable livelihood as an occasional contributor to the newspapers. It was Hinde who had proposed the subject of the tragedy to him. For years he had dallied with the notion of writing it himself, he said, but now he knew that he would never write anything but newspaper stuff! . . .

"Do you know anything about St. Patrick?" he said to John.

"A wee bit. Not much."

"Well, you know he was a slave before he was a saint?" John nodded his head. "A man called Milchu," Hinde continued, "was his master. An Ulsterman. He was the chieftain of a clan that spread over Down and Antrim. Our country. He had Patrick for six years, and then he lost him. Patrick escaped. He returned to Ireland as a missionary and sent word to Milchu that he had come to convert him to Christianity, and Milchu sent word back that he'd see him damned first. Milchu wasn't going to be converted by his slave. No fear. And he destroyed himself . . . set fire to his belongings and perished in his own flames rather than have it said that an Ulster chieftain was converted by his own slave. That's a great theme for a tragedy. I suppose you're a Christian, Mac?"

"I am. I'm a Presbyterian!"

"Oh, well, you won't see the tragedy of it as well as I see it. Think of a slave trying to convert a free man to a slave religion. There's a tragedy for you! . . ."

"I don't understand you," said John.

"No? Well, it doesn't matter. There's a theme for you to write about. A free man killing himself rather than be conquered by a slave! Of course, the real tragedy is that St. Patrick converted the rest of Ireland to Christianity! . . . Milchu escaped: the others surrendered. It wasn't the English that beat the Irish, Mac. They were beaten before ever the English put their feet on Irish ground. St. Patrick beat them. The slave made slaves of them! . . ."

"Is that what you call Christians?" John indignantly demanded. "Slaves?"

Hinde shrugged his shoulders. "The Irish people are the most Christian people on earth," he said. "That's all! . . ."

They put the subject away from them, because they felt that if they did not do so, there must be antagonism between them. But John determined that he would write a play about St. Patrick and the Pagan Milchu. Hinde lent him his ticket for the London Library, and he spent his mornings reading biographies of the saint: Todd and Whitley, Stokes and Zimmer and Professor J. B. Bury; and accounts of the ancient Irish church. Slowly there came into his mind a picture of the saint that was not very like the picture he had known before and was very different from Hinde's conception of the relationship between Milchu and St. Patrick. To him, the wonderful thing was that the slave had triumphed over his owner. Milchu, in his conception, had not been sufficiently manly to stand before Patrick and contend with him and to own himself the inferior of the two. He had run away from St. Patrick! With that conception of the two men in his mind, he began to write his play.

"You're wrong," said Hinde. "Milchu was a gentleman and Patrick was a slave! . . ."

"The son of a magistrate!" John indignantly interrupted.

"A lawyer's son!" Hinde sneered. "And Milchu, being a gentleman, would not be governed by a slave. Think of an Irish gentleman being governed by an Irish peasant!" There was a wry look on his face. "And a little common Irish priest to govern a little common Irish peasant! . . . They won't get gentlemen to live in a land like that!"

"I'm a peasant," said John. "There's not much difference between a shopkeeper and a peasant! . . ."

"I'm talking of minds," said Hinde, "not of positions. I believe in making peasants comfortable and secure, but I believe also in keeping them in their place. I'm one of the world's Milchus, Mac. I'd rather set fire to myself than submit to my inferiors!"

John sat in his chair in silence for a few moments, trying

to understand Hinde's argument. "Then why do you write for papers like the *Daily Sensation?*" he asked at last.

Hinde winced. "I suppose because I'm not enough of a Milchu," he replied.

ii

John had met Eleanor at their customary trysting-place, in front of the bookstall at Charing Cross Road, and they had walked along the Embankment towards Blackfriars. The theme of his tragedy was very present in his mind and he told the story to Eleanor as they walked along the side of the river in the glowing dusk. They stood for a while, with their elbows resting on the stone balustrade, and looked down on the dark tide beneath them. The great, grim arches of Waterloo Bridge, made melancholy by the lemon-coloured light of the lamps which surmounted them, cast big, black shadows on the water. They could hear little lapping waves splashing against the pillars, and presently a tug went swiftly down to the Pool. Neither of them spoke. Behind them the tramcars went whirring by, and once when John looked round, he felt as if he must cry because of the beauty of these swift caravans of light, gliding easily through the misty darkness of a London night. He had turned quickly again to contemplate the river, and as he did so, Eleanor stirred a little, moving more closely to him, demanding, so it seemed, his comfort and protection, and instantly he put his arm about her and drew her tightly to him. He did not care whether anyone saw them or not. It was sufficient for him that in her apprehension she had turned to him. Both his arms were about her, and his lips were on her lips. "Dear Eleanor," he said. . . .

Then she released herself from his embrace. "I felt frightened," she said. "I don't know why. It's so lovely to-night . . . and yet I felt frightened!"

"Will we go?" he asked.

"Yes!"

He put his arm in hers and she did not resist him. "You're my sweetheart now, aren't you, Eleanor?" he whispered to her, as they walked along towards Westminster.

She did not answer.

"My dear sweetheart," he went on, "and presently you'll be my dear wife, and we'll have a little house somewhere, and we'll love each other for ever and ever. Won't we?" He pressed her arm in his. "Won't we, Eleanor? Every night when I come home from work and we have had our supper, we'll go for a walk like this, and I'll talk and you'll listen, and we'll be very happy, and we'll never be lonely again. Oh, I pity the poor men who don't know you, Eleanor! . . ."

She smiled up at him, but still she did not speak.

"I couldn't have believed I should be so happy as I am," he continued. "I wonder if it's right for one woman to have so much power over a man . . . to be able to make him happy or miserable just as the fancy takes her . . . but I don't care whether it's right or wrong. I'm content so long as I have you. We're going to be married, aren't we, Eleanor? Aren't we?"

He stopped and turned her round so that they were facing each other.

"Aren't we, Eleanor?" he repeated.

"Don't let's talk about that," she murmured. "I'm so happy to-night, and I don't want to think about what's past or what's to come. I only want to be happy now!"

"With me?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Then you do love me? . . ."

"I don't know. I can't tell. But I'm frightfully happy. I expect I shall feel that I've made a fool of myself . . . in the morning, but just now I don't care whether

I'm fool or not. I'm like you. I'm content. Let's go on walking!"

They turned back at Boadicea's statue, and when they were in the shadows again, he took his arm from hers and put it about her waist. "Let's pretend there's nobody else here but us," he said.

iii

They dined in Soho, and when they had finished their meal, they walked to Oxford Circus and once more climbed to the top of a 'bus that would take them along the Bayswater Road.

"You must like me, Eleanor," he said to her, as they sat huddled together on the back seat, "or you wouldn't come out with me as you do!"

"Yes," she answered, "I think I do like you. It seems odd that I should like you, and I made up my mind that I shouldn't ever like you. But I do. You're very likeable, really. It's because you're so silly, I suppose. And so persistent!"

"Then why can't we get married, my dear? Isn't it sickening for you to be living in that club and me to be living at Brixton, when we might be living in our own home? I hate this beastly separation every night. Let's get married, Eleanor!"

"I suppose we will in the end," she said, "but I don't feel like getting married to you. After all, John! . . ." She called him by his Christian name now. "After all, John, if I were to marry you now, when we know so little of each other, it would be very poor fun for me, if you discovered after we were married that you did not care for me as much as you imagined. And suppose I never fell in love with you?"

"Yes," he said gloomily.

"How awful!"

"But I'd have you. I'd have the comfort of being your husband and of having you for my wife!"

"It mightn't be a comfort. Oh, no, it's too risky, John. We must wait. We must know more of each other! . . ."

"Will you get engaged to me then?" he suggested.

"But that's a promise. No. Let's just go on as we are now, being friends and meeting sometimes!"

"Supposing we were engaged without anybody knowing about it?" he said. "Would that do?"

"I don't want either of us to be bound . . . not yet. Oh, not yet. Do be sensible, John!"

"I am sensible. I know that I want to marry you. That's sensible, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," she replied, laughing.

"Well, isn't it sensible to want to be sensible as soon as possible? You needn't laugh. I mean it. It's just foolishness to be going on like this. I'm as sensible as anybody, and I can't see any sense in our not marrying at once. Get engaged to me for a while anyway!"

"But what would be the good of that?"

"All the good in the world. I just want the comfort of knowing there's a chance of you marrying me!"

"It seems so unsatisfactory to me . . . and so risky!" she protested.

"I'm willing to take the risk. I'll wait as long as you like."

"I'll think about it. But if I do get engaged to you, we won't get married for a long time!"

"How long?"

"Oh, a long time. A very long time."

"What do you mean? Six months?"

"No, years. Oh, five years, perhaps!"

"My God Almighty!" he said. "Do you know what you're saying? Five years? We might all be dead and buried long before then. What age will I be in five years

time. Oh, wheesht with you, Eleanor, and don't be talking such balderdash. Five years! Holy O!"

"What does 'Holy O!' mean?" she demanded.

"I don't know. It's just a thing to say when you can't think of anything else. Five years! Five minutes is more like it!"

"We're too young to be married yet, and in five years' time we'll know each other much better!"

"I should think so, too," he said. "It's a lifetime, woman! Whatever put that idea into your head?"

"If I get engaged to you at all," she replied, "and I'm not sure that I will, it'll be for five years or not at all. You may be willing to take risks, but I'm not. Risks are all right for men . . . they can afford to take them . . . but women can't. If you don't agree to that, you'll have to give up the idea altogether!"

"Then you'll get engaged to me?"

"No, I didn't say that. I said that if I got engaged to you at all, it would be for five years. I'm not sure that I shall get engaged to you. I don't think I really like you. I think I'd just get tired of saying 'No' to you! . . ." She could see that his face had become glum, and she hurriedly reassured him. "Yes, I do like you! I like you quite well . . . but I'm not going to marry you . . . if I ever marry you . . . till I'm sure about you!"

They descended from the 'bus and walked towards her club.

"Anyway," he said, "I consider myself engaged to you. And I'll buy you a ring the morrow morning!"

"Indeed, you won't," she said.

"Indeed, I will," he replied. "I'll have it handy for the time you agree to have me!"

"You won't be able to get one until you know the size, and I won't tell you that! . . ."

They wrangled on the doorstep until it was late, but she would not yield to him. He could consider himself en-

gaged to her if he liked . . . she could not prevent him from considering anything he chose to consider . . . but she would not consider herself engaged to him nor would she wear a ring until she was sure of her feelings.

He kissed her when they parted, and she did not resist him. It was useless to try to resist an accomplished thing. His childlike insistence both attracted and irritated her. She felt drawn to him because his mind seemed to be so completely centred upon her, and repelled by him because his own wishes appeared to be the only considerations he had. She could not decide whether the love he had for her . . . and she believed that he loved her . . . was complete devotion or complete selfishness. Love at first sight was a perfectly credible, though unusual thing. It was possible that he had fallen in love with her . . . her vanity was pleased by the thought that he had done so . . . but she certainly had not fallen in love with him either at first or at second sight. She was not in love with him now. She felt certain of that. He was likeable and kind and a very comforting person, and there was much more pleasure to be had from a walk with him than from an evening spent in the club! . . . Ugh, that club, that dreadful conglomeration of isolated women! Oh, oh, oh! She gave little shudders as she reflected on her club-mates. Most of them were girls like herself, working as secretaries either in offices or in other places . . . to medical men or writers . . . and, like her, they had few friends in London. Their homes were in the country. Among them were a number of aimless spinsters, subsisting sparely on private means . . . poor, wilting women without occupation or interest. They were of an earlier generation than Eleanor, the generation which was too genteel to work for its living, and they had survived their friends and their families and were left high and dry, without any obvious excuse for existing, among young women who were profoundly contemptuous of a woman who could not earn a living for herself. They sat

about in the drawing-room and sizzled! They knew exactly at what hour this girl came in on Monday night, and at exactly what hour the other girl came in on Tuesday night. They whispered things to each other! They thought it was very peculiar behaviour for a girl to come back to the club alone with a man at twelve o'clock . . . "midnight, my dear!" they would say, as if "midnight" had a more terrible sound than twelve o'clock . . . and they were certain that Miss Dilldall's parents should be informed of the fact that on Saturday evening she went off in a taxi-cab with a man who was wearing dress-clothes and a gibus-hat. Miss Dilldall publicly boasted of the fact that she had smoked a cigarette in a restaurant in Soho! . . .

Ugh! Even if John were selfish, he was preferable to these drab women, these pitiful females herded together. Women in the mass were very displeasing to look at, and they frightened you. They turned down the corners of their mouths and looked coldly and condemningly at you. It was extraordinary how unanimous the girls were in their dislike of working under women. The woman in authority was more hateful to women even than to men. Eleanor had done some work for an advanced woman, an eminent suffragette, who had crept about the house in rubber-soled shoes so that she might come unexpectedly into the room where Eleanor was working and assure herself that she was getting value for her money! . . . She was always spying and sneaking round! What an experience that had been! How impossible it had been to work with that woman! A girl in the club had worked for a royal princess . . . not at all an advanced woman . . . and she, too, had had to seek for employment under a man. The princess was a foolish, spoilt, utterly incompetent person who did not know her own mind for two consecutive hours. She sneaked around, too, and spied! . . . All these women in authority seemed to spend half their day peering through keyholes. . . .

Perhaps it was because the club was such a dingy, cheerless hole that she liked to go out with John. The food was meagre and poor in quality and vilely cooked. Somehow, women living together seemed unable to feed themselves decently. Miss Dilldall, gay little woman of the world, had solemnly proposed that a man should be hired to *growse* about the meals. "We'll never get good food in this damned compound," she said, "until we get some men into it. Bringing them as guests isn't any good. They're too polite to their hostesses to say anything, but I'm sure that every man who has a meal in this place goes away convinced that the food we are content to eat is a strong argument against votes for women! And so it is. What a hole!"

"That's really why I like going out with him," Eleanor confided to her reflection in the looking-glass as she brushed her hair. "It's really to escape from this dreary club! But I can't marry him for that reason. It wouldn't be fair to him. It would be much less fair to me. Of course, I *like* him! . . . Oh, no! No, no! . . ."

iv

Lizzie was in the hall when John let himself into the house that night.

"Hilloa," he said, "not gone to bed yet?"

"I never 'ave time to go to bed," she said. " 'Ow can I get any sleep when I 'ave to look after *men!* You an' Mr. 'Inde!" She came nearer to him. "You'll get a bit of a surprise when you go upstairs," she said very knowingly.

"Me!"

She nodded her head and giggled.

"What sort of a surprise?" he demanded.

"You'll see when you get upstairs. It's been waitin' for you 'ere since seven o'clock! . . ."

"Seven o'clock! What is it? A parcel?"

Lizzie could not control her laughter when he said "parcel." "Ow!" she giggled. "Ow, dear, ow, dear! A par-

cel! Ow, yes, it's a parcel all right! You'll see when you get up! . . ."

He began to mount the stairs. "You're an awful fool, Lizzie," he said crossly, leaning over the banisters.

"Losin' your temper, eih?" she replied, bolting the street door.

He hurried up to the sitting-room and as he climbed the flight of stairs that led directly to it, Hinde called out to him, "Is that you, Mac?"

"Yes," he answered.

Hinde came to the door and opened it fully. "There's someone here to see you," he said.

"To see me! At this hour?"

He entered the room as he spoke. His mother was sitting in front of the fire.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, remembering just in time not to say "Ma!" which would have sounded very childish in front of Hinde.

"This is a nice hour of the night to be coming home," she said, trying to speak severely, but she could not maintain the severity in her voice, for his arms were about her and she was hugging him.

"You never told me you were coming," he said. "What brought you over?"

"I've come to see this girl you've got hold of," she answered.

V

"But why didn't you tell me you were coming?" he asked. "I'd have met you at the station!"

She ignored his question. "This is a terrible town," she said. "Mr. Hinde says there's near twice as many people in this place as there is in the whole of Ireland. How in the earthly world do they manage to get about their business?"

"Oh, quite easily," he said nonchalantly, and as he spoke he realised that he had come to be a Londoner.

"When I got out at the station," Mrs. MacDermott continued, "I called a porter and said to him, 'Just put that bag on your shoulder and carry it for me!' 'Where to, ma'am?' says he, and then I gave him your address. I thought the man 'ud drop down dead. 'Is it far?' says I. 'Far!' says he. 'It's miles!' By all I can make out, John, you live as far from the station as Millreagh is from Ballyards. I had to come here in one of them things that runs without horses . . . what do you call them?"

"Taxi-cabs!"

"That's the name. It's a demented mad place this. Such traffic! Worse nor Belfast on the fair-day!"

"It's like that every day, Mrs. MacDermott!" Hinde interjected.

"What bothers me," she went on, "is how ever you get to know your neighbours!"

"We don't get to know them," Hinde replied. "I've lived in this house for several years, but I don't know the names of the people on either side of it!"

"My God," said Mrs. MacDermott, "what sort of people are you at all? Are you all fell out with each other?"

"No. We're just not interested!"

"I wouldn't live in this place for the wide world," she exclaimed. "And you," she continued turning to her son, "could come here where you know nobody from a place where you knew everybody. The world's queer! What was that water I passed on the way out! . . ."

"Water!"

"Aye. We went over it on a bridge!"

"Oh, the river!"

"What river?" she said.

"Why, the Thames, of course!"

"Is that what you call it?"

Hinde smiled at John. "So you've learned to call it the river, have you? Mrs. Hinde, in this town we always talk as if there were only one river in the world. A Londoner

always says he's going up the river or down the river or on the river. He always speaks of it as the river. He never speaks of it as the Thames. In Belfast, you speak of the Lagan . . . never of the river. The same in Dublin. They speak of the Liffey . . . never of the river. John's become a Londoner. He knows the proper way to speak of the Thames!"

"London seems to be full of very conceited and unneighbourly people," Mrs. MacDermott said.

John demanded information of his mother. How were Uncle William and Mr. Cairnduff and the minister and Willie Logan? . . .

"His wife's got a child," Mrs. MacDermott replied severely.

"A boy or a girl?"

"A boy, and the spit of his father, God help him. Thon lad Logan'll come to no good. Aggie's courting hard. Some fellow from Belfast that travels in drapery. She told me to remember her to you!"

"Thank you, mother!"

Hinde rose to leave them. "You'll have a lot to say to each other, and I'm tired," he explained, as he went off to bed.

"I like that man," said Mrs. MacDermott when he had gone. "And now tell me about this girl you've got. Are you in earnest?"

"Yes, ma!" John answered, using the word "ma," now that he was alone with his mother.

"Will she have you?"

"I hope so. She hasn't said definitely yet, but I think she will!"

"Who is she? Moore you said her name was. That's an Irish name!"

"But she's not Irish. She's English. Her father was a clergyman, but he's dead. So is her mother. She has hardly any friends!"

"Does she keep herself?"

"Yes, ma. She works in a motor-place . . . in the office, typing letters. She's an awful nice girl, ma! I'm just doting on her, so I am!"

"Do you like her better nor that Belfast girl that married the peeler? . . ."

"Och, that one," John laughed. "I never think of her now . . . never for a minute. Eleanor's the one I think about!"

"Are you sure of yourself! . . ."

"As sure as God's in heaven, ma!"

"Oh, yes, we know all about that, but are you sure you're sure? You were queerly set on that Belfast girl, you know!"

He pledged himself as convincingly as he could to Eleanor, and told his mother that he could never be happy without her.

"And how do you propose to keep her?" she said, when he had finished.

"Work for her, of course!"

"How much have you earned since you came here?"

"Nothing!"

"And you've no work fornent you?"

"No, not at the minute. I had a job, but I lost it!"

He gave an account of his relationship with the *Daily Sensation.*

"You'll not be able to buy much with that amount of work," she interrupted.

He told her of the sketch for the Creams and of the tragedy of St. Patrick.

"What's the use of writing about him," she said. "Sure, he's been dead this long while back!"

He did not attempt to make her understand. "And then there's the novel I wrote when I was at home," he concluded.

"But you've heard nothing of it yet. As far as I can see

you've done little here that you couldn't have done at home!"

"Oh, yes I have. I've learned a great deal more than I could ever have learned in Ballyards. And I've met Eleanor!"

"H'm!" she said, rising from her seat. "I'm going to my bed now. That girl Lizzie seems a good-natured sort of a soul. Where does Eleanor live?"

"Oh, a long way from here! . . ."

"Give me her address, will you?"

"Yes, ma, but why?"

"I'm going to see her the morrow!"

He had to explain that Eleanor could not be seen in the day-time because of her employment, and he proposed that his mother should go with him in the evening to meet her at the bookstall at Charing Cross station.

"Very well," she said as she kissed him, "Good-night!"

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

### i

Mrs. MacDermott had remained in London for a week. John, eager to show the sights to her, had tried to persuade her to stay for a longer period, but she was obstinate in her determination to return to Ireland at the end of the week. "I don't like the place," she said; "it's not neighbourly!" She repeated this objection so frequently that John began for the first time in his life to understand something of his mother's point of view. He remembered how she had insisted upon the fact that the MacDermotts had lived over the shop in Ballyards for several generations; and now, with her repetition of the statement that London was an unneighbourly town, he realised that Ballyards in her mind was a place of kinsmen, that the people of Ballyards were members of one family. She was horrified when she discovered that Hinde had been stating the bare truth when he said that he had lived in Miss Squibb's house for several years, but still was ignorant of the names of his neighbours. Miss Squibb had told her that people in London made a habit of taking a house on a three-years' lease. "When it expires, they go somewhere else," she had said. Miss Squibb had never heard of a family that had lived in the same house in London for several generations. She did not think it was a nice idea, that. She liked "chynge" herself, and was sorry she could not afford to get as much of it as she would like to have.

"I do not understand the people in this place," Mrs. MacDermott had complained to Hinde. "They've no feeling for anything. They don't love their homes! . . ."

But although she had stayed in London for a week only, she had seen much of Eleanor Moore in that time. It had not occurred to John, until the moment his mother and he entered Charing Cross station, that Mrs. MacDermott and Eleanor might not like each other. He imagined that his mother must like Eleanor simply because he liked her, but as he held a swing-door open so that his mother might pass through, a sudden dubiety took possession of him and he became full of alarm. Supposing they did not care for each other? . . . The doubt had hardly time to enter his mind when it was resolved for him. Eleanor arrived at the bookstall almost simultaneously with themselves. (It struck him then that Eleanor was a remarkably punctual girl.) "This is my mother, Eleanor!" he had said, and stood anxiously by to watch their greeting. The old woman and the girl regarded each other for a moment, and then Mrs. MacDermott had taken Eleanor's outstretched hand and had drawn her to her and had kissed her; and John's dubiety disappeared from his mind. They had dined together in Soho that night, but Mrs. MacDermott had not enjoyed the meal. The number of diners and the clatter of dishes and knives and the foreign look and the foreign language of the waiters disconcerted her and made her feel as if she were a stranger. Above all else in the world, Mrs. MacDermott hated to feel like a stranger! She demanded familiar surroundings and faces, and was unhappy when she found herself without recognition. The menu made her suspicious of the food because it was written in French. She distrusted foreigners. London appeared to be full of all sorts of people from all parts of the world. Never in her life had she seen so many black men as she had seen in London that day. John had taken her to St. Paul's Cathedral in the afternoon and had shown her the place where Queen Victoria returned thanks to Almighty God for her Diamond Jubilee . . . and there, standing on the very steps of a Christian church, was a Chinaman! There were no

Chinamen in Ballyards, thank God, nor were there any black men either. She realised, of course, that God had made black men and Chinamen and every other sort of men, but she wished that they would stay in the land in which God had put them and would not go trapesing about the world! . . .

"What about us, then?" said John. "We don't stay in the one place!"

"I know that," she replied. "That's what's wrong with the world. Everyone should stay in his own country!"

The dinner had not entirely pleased John. Somehow, in a way that he could not understand, he found himself being edged out of the conversation, not altogether, but as a principal. His mother and Eleanor addressed each other primarily; they only addressed him now and then and in a way that seemed to indicate that they had suddenly remembered his presence and were afraid he might feel hurt at being left out of their talk. He was glad, of course, that his mother and Eleanor were getting on so well together, but after all he was in charge of this affair. . . . When his mother proposed to Eleanor that they should meet on the following evening and go somewhere for a quiet talk, he could hardly believe his ears.

"But what about me?" he said.

"Oh, you! You'll do rightly!" his mother replied.

"But! . . ."

"You can come and bring me home from wherever we go," Mrs. MacDermott continued.

Eleanor had suggested that Mrs. MacDermott should meet her at the bookstall and go to her club from which John would fetch her at ten o'clock.

"That'll do nicely, Eleanor!" Mrs. MacDermott said.

John hardly noticed that his mother had called Eleanor by her Christian name: it seemed natural that she should do so; but he was vaguely disturbed by the arrangement that had just been made.

"I wonder what she's up to?" he said to himself as he moodily examined his mother's face.

He sat back in his chair and listened while Eleanor and his mother talked together. He was not accustomed to taking a subsidiary part in discussions and he greatly disliked his present position, but he could not think of any way of altering it.

"Do you like living in London?" Mrs. MacDermott had suddenly said to Eleanor.

"No, I hate it," Eleanor vehemently answered.

"Then why do you stay?" Mrs. MacDermott continued.

"I have to. A girl gets better-paid work in London than in the provinces. That's the only reason!"

"Would you rather live in the country, then?"

"Yes!" Eleanor said.

"I wonder would you like Ballyards!" Mrs. MacDermott said almost as if she were speaking to herself. Then she began to talk of something else.

ii

He had taken his mother to Charing Cross station on the following day, hoping that they would relent and allow him to go to Eleanor's club with them, but neither of them made any sign of relenting. His mother, indeed, turned to him immediately after Eleanor had arrived and said, "Well, we'll say 'Good-bye' for the present, John. We'll expect you at ten!" and very sulkily he had departed from them. He saw Eleanor lead his mother out of the station. She had taken hold of Mrs. MacDermott's arm and drawn it into hers, and linked thus, they had gone out, but neither of them had turned to look back at him. He had not known how to fill in the time between then and ten o'clock . . . whether to go to a theatre or walk about the streets . . . and had ended by spinning out his dinner-time as long as possible, and then walking from Soho to Eleanor's

club. He had arrived there before ten o'clock, but they allowed him to sit with them! . . . He had an overwhelming sense of being *allowed* to do so. Suddenly and unaccountably all his power had gone from him, his instinctive insistence upon his own will, his immediate assumption that what he desired must be acceptable to others and his complete indifference to whether what he desired was acceptable or not to others . . . suddenly and unaccountably these things had gone from him and he was submitting to the will of his mother and of Eleanor. His mother's conversation, too, had been displeasing to him. She talked of Ballyards and of the shop all the time. She talked of the prosperity of the business and of the respect in which the MacDermotts were held in their town. Mr. Hinde had told her of the harsh conditions in which journalists and writers had to work, particularly the journalists. They had no settled life . . . they went here, there and everywhere, but their wives stayed always in the one place . . . and sometimes money was not easily obtainable. Anything might happen to put a journalist out of employment! . . .

"But I don't want to be a journalist, mother!" John had testily interrupted. "I want to write books and plays!"

"That's even worse," she had said. "It takes a man years and years before he can earn a living out of books. Mr. Hinde told me that! . . ."

"He seems to have told you a fearful lot," John sarcastically exclaimed.

"I asked him a lot," Mrs. MacDermott replied. "If you ever get that book of yours printed at all, he says, you'll not get more nor thirty pounds for it, if you get that much. And there's little hope of you making your fortune with the tragedy you're wasting your time over. Now, your Uncle William has a big turnover in the shop! . . ."

"I daresay he has," John snapped, "but I'm not interested in the shop, and I am interested in books!"

"Oh, well," Mrs. MacDermott murmured, "it's nice to

have work that takes your fancy, but if you get married I'm thinking your wife'll have a poor job of it making ends meet on the amount of interest you take in your work, if that's all the reward you get for it. You were a year writing that story of yours, and you haven't had a penny-farthing for it yet. However, you know best what suits you. I suppose it's time we were thinking about the road!" She rose as she spoke, and Eleanor rose too. "Come up to my room," Eleanor said, "and we'll get your things!"

They left John sitting in the cheerless room. "That's a queer way for her to be talking," he said to himself. "Making little of me like that!"

He maintained a sulky manner towards his mother as they returned to Brixton, but Mrs. MacDermott paid no heed to him.

"Fancy having to go all this way to see your girl," she said, as they climbed the steps of Miss Squibb's house. "In Ballyards you'd only have to go round the corner!"

"I daresay," he replied, "but you wouldn't find Eleanor's match there if you went!"

"No," she agreed. "Eleanor's a fine girl. I like her queer and well. She was very interested to hear about Ballyards and the shop. Very interested!"

She turned to him at the top of the stairs.

"Good-night, son," she said. "I'm away to my bed. I'm tired!"

She put her arms round him. "You're a queer headstrong wee fellow," she said. "Queer and headstrong! Good-night, son!"

"Good-night, ma!" he replied as he kissed her.

He held her for a moment. "I can't make out what you and Eleanor had to talk about," he said. "What were you talking about?"

"Oh, nothing!" she replied. "Just about things that interest women. You wouldn't be bothered with such talk. And you know, son, women likes to have a wee crack to-

gether when there's no men about. It's just a wee comfort to them. Good-night!"

"Good-night, ma!"

She went up the stairs, and when she had disappeared round the bend of the bannisters, John went into the sitting-room. There was a postal packet for him lying on the table. It contained the MS. of his novel. Messrs. Hatchway and Seldon informed him that they had read his story with great interest, but they were sorry to have to inform him that conditions of the publishing trade at present were such that they saw no hope of a return for the money they would be obliged to spend on the book. They would esteem it a favour if he would permit them to see future work of his and they begged to remain his faithfully per pro Hatchway and Selden, J.P.T.

"Asses!" he said, as he wrapped the MS. up again in the very paper in which Messrs. Hatchway and Selden had returned it to him. Then he tied the parcel securely and addressed it to Messrs. Gooden and Knight, who, he told himself, were much better publishers than Messrs. Hatchway and Selden. He would post it in the morning.

iii

And then a queer thing happened to him. He had been about to extinguish the light and go to bed, when he remembered that the parcel of MS. was lying on the table and that his mother would see it in the morning. She would probably ask questions about it . . . and he would have to tell her that Messrs. Hatchway and Selden had refused to publish it. He seized the parcel and tucked it under his arm. He would keep it in his room and post it without saying anything to her about it. He did not wish her to know that it had been declined. Messrs. Hatchway and Selden had given a very good excuse for not publishing it—conditions of the publishing trade—and they had manifested a desire

to see other work of his. That could hardly be said to be a refusal to print the book . . . at all events, it could not be called an ordinary, condemnatory refusal. No doubt, had the conditions of the publishing trade been easier, Messrs. Hatchway and Selden would have been extremely pleased to print the book. It was not their fault that the conditions of the publishing trade were so difficult! . . . Anyhow, he did not wish his mother to know that the book had been refused, even though the conditions of the publishing trade were so difficult. So he took the MS. up to his bedroom with him.

iv

He had been enormously relieved when his mother returned to Ireland. Eleanor and he had seen her off from Euston. . . . Hinde had come for a few moments snatched from an important job . . . and he had been very conscious of some understanding between the two women which was not expressible. It was as if his mother were not his mother, but Eleanor's mother . . . as if he were simply Eleanor's young man come to say good-bye to Eleanor's mother . . . and she were being polite to him, because Eleanor would like her to be polite to him. He felt that things were being taken out of his control, that he had ceased to have charge of things and was now himself being ordered and controlled; but he could not definitely say what caused him to feel this nor could he think of any notable incident which would confirm him in his fear that control had passed out of his hands. All he knew was that he was glad his mother had resisted his importunities to her to stay for a longer time in London. This state of uncertainty had not begun until Mrs. MacDermott suddenly and without warning had arrived at his lodgings. He hoped that it would end with her departure from Euston. Eleanor's attitude towards him during the week of his mother's visit had been very odd. She accepted him now without any

qualms, but not, he felt, as her husband to be, hardly even as her lover. She accepted him, instead, as one who might become her lover if she could persuade herself to consent to allow him to do so. Once, in a moment of dreadful humility, he imagined that she accepted him merely as Mrs. MacDermott's son! . . . He had watched the train haul itself out of the station and had waved his hat to his mother until she was no longer distinguishable, and then he had turned to Eleanor with a curiously determined look in his eye.

"Are you going to marry me?" he demanded.

"Yes," she said, "I think I will. I like your mother aw-f'lly, John! . . ."

"It's me you're going to marry. Not her. Do you like me?"

"Yes, I like you . . . though you're frightfully conceited and selfish! . . ."

"Selfish! Me? Because I try hard to get what I want?" he indignantly exclaimed.

"Oh, we won't argue about it. You'll never understand. I don't know whether I love you or not. But I like you. I like you very much. Of course, we may be making a mistake. It's foolish of me to marry you when I know so little about you . . . and that little scares me! . . ."

"What scares you?"

"Your selfishness scares me. You are selfish. You're frightfully selfish. You think of nothing and no one but yourself! . . ."

"Amn't I always thinking of you?"

"Oh, yes, but only because you want me to marry you. That's all!"

He was very puzzled by this statement. "What other reason would a man have for thinking of a woman?" he asked.

"That's just it," she replied. "You can't think of any

other reason for thinking about a woman . . . and I can think of a whole lot of reasons. But I shall marry you in spite of your selfishness because I know you're as good as I'm likely to get! . . ."

"That's a queer reason for marrying a man!"

"I suppose it is. You're really rather a dear, John, and I daresay I shall get to love you quite well . . . but I don't now. Why should I? I haven't known you very long . . . and you've rather pestered me, haven't you?"

"No, I haven't!"

"Yes, you have. But I don't mind that. Being pestered by you is somehow different from being pestered by other men. . . ."

"Have any other men bothered you?" he interrupted.

They were walking towards Tottenham Court Road as they spoke, and her arm was securely held in his.

"Of course they have," she answered. "Do you think a girl can walk about London without some man pestering her. Old men! . . ." She shuddered and said "Oh!" in tones of disgust. "Why are old men so beastly?"

"Are they?"

"Oh, yes, of course they are. Beastly old things. I think old men ought to be killed before they get nasty . . . but never mind that. Being pestered by you is very different from that sort of thing. I know very well that you won't stop asking me to marry you until I either say I will or I run away from London altogether and hide myself from you; and I don't want to do that. So I'll marry you!"

He glanced at her in a wrathful manner.

"Is that what my mother told you to say?" he asked.

"Your mother? She never said anything at all about it!"

John laughed. "I told her about it," he said. "That's what she came over about. She wanted to have a look at you!"

"Yes, I suppose I ought to have guessed that. I did in a way, but I didn't know you'd said anything definite about it!"

"I'm always definite," said John.

"Yes. M' yes, I suppose you are!"

They walked down Tottenham Court Road and caught a 'bus going along Oxford Street.

"You don't seem very pleased now that I've said I'll marry you," she murmured, as they sat together on the back seat on top of the 'bus.

"I believe you're only marrying me to get away from that club you're living in!" he replied.

"That's one reason, but it isn't the only reason. I *do* like you, John. Really, I do!"

"I want you to love me, love me desperately, the way I love you."

"But you've no right to expect that. Women don't love men for a long time after men love them . . . and sometimes they never love them. There's a girl in our club . . . well, she's not a girl, but she's unmarried, so of course we call her a girl . . . and she says that most of us can live fairly happily with quite a number of people. She says that a person has one supreme love affair . . . which may not come to anything . . . and enough liking for about a hundred people to be able to marry and live happily with anyone of them. I think that's true. I've known plenty of men that I think I could have married and been happy enough with. You're one of them! . . ."

"This is a nice thing to be telling me when my heart's bursting for you. I tell you, Eleanor, I love you till I don't know what I'm doing or thinking, and all you tell me is that I'm one out of a hundred and you like me well enough to put up with me! . . ."

"You don't want me to tell you that I'm in love with you . . . like that . . . when I'm not?"

"No, of course not . . . only! . . ."

"Perhaps you don't want to marry me now!"

He put his arm round her and pressed her so tightly that she gave a little cry of rebuke. "I love you so much," he said, "that I'm thankful glad for the least bit of liking you have for me. I wish I'd known sooner. I'd have told my mother before she went back to Ballyards!"

"I'll write and tell her myself," said Eleanor. "I'd like to tell her myself!"

V

"I'm going to be married," John said to Hinde that night.

"I thought as much," Hinde replied.

"Why?"

"Well, when a man does one dam-fool thing, he generally follows it up with another. You lose your job on the *Sensation*, and then you get engaged to be married. I daresay your wife'll have a child just about the time you've spent every ha'penny you possess. I suppose that was her at the station to-night?" John nodded his head. "Well, you're a lucky man!"

"Thank you," said John.

"I don't know whether she's a lucky woman or not!"

"*Thank* you," said John. "If you've no more compliments to pay, I'll go to my bed!"

"Good-night. Cream's coming back to-morrow. Miss Squibb had a letter from him this evening!"

But John took no interest in the Creams.

"If I were you, I wouldn't fall out with the Creams," said Hinde. "Now that you're going to get married, the money he'll pay you for a sketch will be useful. I suppose you'll begin to be serious when you're married?"

"I'm serious now," John replied.

"At present, Mac, you're merely bumptious. I was like that when I first came to London. I had noble ideals, but

I very soon discovered that the other high-minded men were not quite so idealistic as I was. I know one high-souled fellow who went into a newspaper office and asked to be allowed to review a novel with the express intention of damning it because he had some grudge against the author. Half the exalted scribblers in London are busily employed scratching each other's backs, and if you aren't in their little gang, you either are not noticed at all in their papers or you are unfairly judged or very, very faintly praised. You've either got to be in a gang in London or to be so immeasurably great or lucky that you can disregard gangs . . . otherwise there's very little likelihood of you getting a foothold in what you call good papers. I know these papers. Mr. Noblemind is editor of one paper and Mr. Greatfellow is a regular contributor to another and Mr. PraisemeandI'llpraiseyou is the literary editor of a third, and they employ each other; and Mr. Noblemind calls attention to the beauty of his pals' work in his paper, and they call attention to the beauty of his in theirs. My dear Mac, if you really want to know what dishonesty in journalism is, worm yourself into the secrets of the highbrow Press and the noble poets. I'm a Yellow Journalist and a failure, but by heaven, I'm an honest Yellow Journalist and an honest failure. I'm not an indifferent journalist pretending to be a poet! . . ."

"I don't see what all this has got to do with me," John said.

"No," Hinde replied in a quieter tone. "No, I suppose it hasn't anything to do with you. You're quite right. I'm in a bad temper to-night. I'm glad you're engaged to that girl. She looks a sensible sort of woman. Heard any more about your book?"

"Yes. It's been returned to me! . . ."

"Oh, my dear chap, I'm very sorry!"

"I've sent it out again. It's sure to be printed by someone," John said.

"I hope so. I wish you'd let me read it!"

"Yes, I'd like you to read it. I wish I'd kept it back a while. But you'll see it some day. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Mac!"

vi

The Creams returned to Miss Squibb's on the following evening, and Cream came to see Hinde and John soon after they arrived. Dolly, he said, was too tired after her journey to do more than send a friendly greeting to them.

"I wanted to have a talk to you about that sketch," he said to John. "It's very good, of course, quite classy, in fact, but it wants tightening up. Snap! That's what it wants. And a little bit of vulgarity. Oh, not too much. Of course not. But it doesn't do to overlook vulgarity, Mac. We've all got a bit of it in us, and pers'nally, I see no harm in it, *pro*-vided . . . *pro-vided,* mind you . . . that it's comic. That's the only excuse for vulgarity . . . that it's comic. Now, the first thing is the title!"

Mr. Cream took the MS. of John's sketch from his pocket and spread it on the table. "This won't do at all," he said, pointing to the title-page of the play. "*Love's Tribute!* My dear old Mac, what the hell's the good of a title like that? Where's the snap in it? Where's the attraction, the allurement? Nowhere. A title like that wouldn't draw twopence into a theatre. *Love's Tribute!* I ask you! . . ." His feelings made him inarticulate and he gazed round the room in a helpless manner.

"Well, what would you call it?" John demanded.

"Something snappy. I often say a title's half the play. Now, take a piece like *The Girl Who Lost Her Character* or *The Man With Two Wives* . . . there's a bit of snap about that. Titles like those simply haul 'em into the theatre. *Snap! Go! Ginger!* Something that sounds 'ot, but isn't . . . that's the stuff to give the British public. You make 'em think they're going to see something . . .

well, *you* know . . . and they'll stand four deep in the snow waiting to get into the theatre. If you were to put the Book of Genesis on the stage and call it *The Girl Who Took The Wrong Turning,* people 'ud think they'd seen something they oughtn't to . . . and they'd tell all their friends. Now, how about *The Guilty Woman* for your sketch, Mac?

John looked at him in astonishment. "But the woman in it isn't guilty of anything," he protested.

"That doesn't matter. The title needn't have anything to do with it. Very few titles have anything to do with the piece. So long as they're snappy, that's all you need think about. Pers'nally, I like *The Guilty Woman* myself; but Dolly's keen on *The Sinful Woman.* And that just reminds me, Mac! Here's a tip for you. Always have *Woman* in your title if you can. *A Sinful Woman*'ll draw better than *A Sinful Man.* People seem to expect women to be more sinful than men when they are sinful . . . or p'raps they're more used to men being sinful than women. I dunno. But it's a fact . . . *Woman* in the title is a bigger draw than *Man.* And you got to think of these little things. If you want to make a fortune out of a piece, take my advice and think of a snappy adjective to put in front of *Woman* or *Girl!* Really, you know, play-writing's very simple, if you only remember a few tips liks that! . . ."

"But my play isn't about sin at all," John protested.

"Well, what's the good of it then?" Cream demanded. "All plays are about sin of some sort, aren't they? If people aren't breaking a rule or a commandment, there's no plot, and if there's no plot, there's no play. Of course, Bernard Shaw and all these chaps, they don't believe in plots or climaxes or anything, and they turn out pieces that sound as if they'd wrote the first half in their Oxford days and the second half when they were blind drunk.

You've got to have a plot, Mac, and if you've got to have a plot, you've got to have sin. What 'ud Hamlet be without the sin in it? Nothing! Why, there wasn't any drama in the world 'til Adam and Eve fell! You take it from me, Mac, there'll be no drama in heaven. Why? Because there'll be no sin there. But there'll be a hell of a lot in hell! Now, I like *The Guilty Woman.* It's not quite so bare-faced as *The Sinful Woman,* but as Dolly likes it better . . . she's more intense than I am . . . we'll have to have it, I expect!"

"I don't like either of those titles," John said, gulping as he spoke, for he felt that there was a difference of view between Cream and him that could not be overcome.

"Well, think of a better one then," Cream good-naturedly answered. "There's another thing. As I said, the piece wants overhauling, but you can leave that to me. When I've had a good go at it! . . ."

"But! . . ."

"Now, look here, Mac," Cream firmly proceeded, "you be guided by me. You're a youngster at the game, and I'm an old hand. I never met a young author yet that didn't imagine his play had come straight from the mind of God and mustn't have a word altered. The tip-top chaps don't think like that. They're always altering and changing their plays during rehearsal . . . and sometimes after they've been produced, too. Look at Pinero! He's altered the whole end of a play before now. He had a most unhappy end to *The Profligate* . . . the hero committed suicide in the last act . . . but the public wouldn't have it. They said they wanted a happy end, and Pinero had the good sense to give it to them. In my opinion the public was right. The happy end was the right end for that piece! . . ."

"But artistically! . . ." John pleaded.

"Artistically!" Cream exclaimed in mocking tones to

Hinde. "I ask you! Artistically! What's Art? Pleasing people. That's what Art is!"

"Oh, no," John protested. "Pleasing yourself, perhaps! . . ."

"And aren't you most pleased when you feel that people are pleased with you. I ask you! What do you publish books for if you only want to please yourself? Why don't you keep your great thoughts to yourself if you don't want to please anybody else? Yah-r-r, this Art talk makes me feel sick. You'd rather sell two thousand copies of a book than two hundred, wouldn't you? Of course, you would. I've heard these highbrow chaps talking about the Mob and the Tasteful Few. I acted in a play once by a fellow who was always bleating about the Tasteful Few . . . and you should have heard the way he went on when his play only drew the Tasteful Few to see it. If his piece had had a chance of a long run, do you think he'd have stopped it at the end of a month because he objected to long runs as demoralizing to Art. Not likely, my lad! . . . Now, this piece of yours, Mac, has too much talk in it and not enough incident, see? You'll have to cut some of it. The talk's good, but in plays the talk mustn't take the audience off the point, no matter how good it is. See? You don't want long speeches: you want short ones. The talk ought to be like a couple of chaps sparring . . . only not too much fancy work. I've seen a lot of boxing in my time. There's boxers that goes in for what's called pretty work . . . nice, neat boxing . . . but the spectators soon begin to yawn over it. What people like to see is one chap getting a smack on the jaw and the other chap getting a black eye. And it's the same with everything. Ever seen Cinquevalli balancing a billiard ball on top of another one? Took him years to learn that trick, but he'll tell you himself . . . he lives round the corner from here . . . that his audiences take more interest in some flashy-looking thing

that's dead easy to do. When he throws a cannon-ball up into the air and catches it on the back of his neck . . . they think that's wonderful . . . but it isn't half so wonderful as balancing one billiard-ball on top of another one. See? So it's no good being subtle before simple people. They don't understand you, and they just get up and walk out or give you the bird! . . ."

"I'm going to tell you something," he continued, as if he had not said a word before. "I've noticed human nature a good deal, and I think I know something about it. There was a sketch we did once, called *The Twiddley Bits.* It was written by the same chap that did *The Girl Who Gets Left* . . . he had a knack, that chap . . . only he took to drink and died. There was a joke in *The Twiddley Bits* that went down everywhere. Here it is. I played the part of a comic footman, and I had to say to the villain, 'What are you looking at, guv'nor?' and he replied, 'I'm wondering what on earth that is!' and then he pointed to my face. That got a laugh to start with. Then I had to say, 'It's my face. What did you think it was? A sardine tin?' That got a roar. Brought the house down, that did. We played that piece all over the world, Mac, and that joke never failed once. Not once. We played it in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, America, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, and it never missed once. Fetched 'em every time. Human nature's about the same everywhere, once you get to understand it, Mac, and if you like you can put that joke in your play. It'll help it out a bit in the middle! . . ."

## vii

"Well?" said Hinde to John when Cream had left them.

"I'd rather sell happorths of tea and sugar than write the kind of play he wants," John replied.

Hinde paused for a few moments. Then he said, "Why don't you sell tea and sugar. You've got a shop, haven't you?"

"Because I'm going to write books," John answered tartly.

"I see," said Hinde.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

### i

THREE months after Mrs. MacDermott departed from London, Eleanor and John were married. They walked into St. Chad's Church in the Bayswater Road, accompanied by Mr. Hinde and Mrs. MacDermott (who had come hurriedly to London again for the ceremony) and Lizzie and a cousin of Eleanor's who excited John's wrath by using the marriage ceremony for propaganda purposes in connexion with Women's Suffrage; and there, prompted by an asthmatic curate, they swore to love and cherish each other until death did them part. Mrs. MacDermott had begged for a Presbyterian marriage in Ballyards . . . "where your da and me were married" . . . but there were difficulties in the way of satisfying her desire, and she had consented to see them married in what, to her mind, was an imitation of a Papist church. Eleanor had stipulated for at least a year's engagement, partly so that they might become more certain of each other and partly to enable John to prove that he could earn enough money to maintain a home, but John had worn down her opposition to an immediate marriage by asserting repeatedly that he could easily earn money for her, would, in fact, be better able to do so because of his marriage which would stimulate him to greater activity, and, finally, by his announcement that his tragedy had been accepted for production by the Cottenham Repertory Theatre. The manager had written to him to say that the Reading Committee were of opinion that his interesting play should be performed, and he enclosed an agreement which he desired John to sign and return to

him at his convenience. He had not been able to restrain his joy when he received the letter, and he had hurried to the nearest post office so that he might telephone the news to Eleanor.

"My dear!" she said proudly over the telephone.

"Didn't I tell you I could do it," he exclaimed. "Didn't I?"

"Yes, darling, you did!"

"Wait till Hinde comes back! This'll be one in the eye for him. He thought the play was a very ordinary one, but this proves that it isn't, doesn't it, Eleanor?"

"Yes, dear!"

"It's a well-known theatre, the Cottenham Repertory. One of the best-known in the world. Can you get off for the day, do you think, and we'll go out and celebrate it? . . ."

"Don't be silly, John! . . ."

"Well, we'll have lunch together. We'll have wine for lunch! . . . Oh, my dear, I'm nearly daft with joy. We ought to make enough money out of the play to set up house at once. I don't know how much you make out of plays, but you make a great deal. We'll get married at once! . . ."

"But we can't! . . ."

"Och, quit, woman! This makes all the difference in the world. Aren't you just aching for a wee house of your own, the same way that I am! . . ."

And after a struggle for time to think, Eleanor had consented to be married much sooner than she had ever meant to be. They were married in June, and the play was to be performed at the Cottenham Repertory Theatre in the following September. The manager had written to John, after the business preliminaries were settled, to say that if the play were successful in Cottenham, he would include it in the Company's repertoire of pieces to be performed in London during their annual season. "And of

course, it'll be successful," said John when he had read the letter to Eleanor. "I should think we'd easily make several hundred pounds out of the play . . . and there's always the chance that it may be a popular success!" His high hopes were dashed by the return of his novel from Messrs. Gooden and Knight who regretted that the novel was not suitable for publication by them; but he recovered some of them when he reflected that the fame he would achieve with his play would cause Messrs. Gooden and Knight to feel exceedingly sorry that they had not jumped at the chance of publishing his book. Hinde had read it and thought it was as good as most first novels. "Nothing very great about it," he said, "but it isn't contemptible!" That seemed very chilly praise to John, and he was grateful to Eleanor for her enthusiasm about the book. "Of course, it has faults," she admitted. "I daresay it has, but then it's your *first* book. You wouldn't be human if you could write a great book at the first attempt, would you?"

That had consoled him for much, and very hopefully he sent the book on its third adventure, this time to Mr. Claude Jannissary, who called himself "The Progressive Publisher."

## ii

On the night before he was married, John, vaguely nervous, left his mother at Miss Squibb's and went for a walk. All day, he had been "on pins and needles," and now, although it was nine o'clock, he could not remain in the house any longer. He felt that his head would burst if he stayed indoors. The house seemed to be unusually stuffy, and the spectacle of Lizzie gazing at him with mawkish interest, made him wish to rise up and assault her. He had fidgetted about the room, taking a book from its shelf and then, without reading in it, replacing it, until his mother, observing him with cautious eyes, proposed that he

should go for a walk. "I won't wait up for you," she said, "so you needn't hurry back!"

"Very well, ma!" he said, getting ready to go out.

He left the house and started to walk towards Streatham, but before he had gone very far, he felt drawn away from Streatham, and he turned and walked past his home and on towards Kennington. At the Horns, he paused indecisively. There were more light and stir towards the Elephant and Castle than there was in the Kennington Road, and light and stir were attractive to him, but to-night he ought to be in quiet places and in shadows. He was beginning to feel dubious about himself. Marriage, after all, was a very serious business, but here he was thrusting himself into it with very little consideration. Eleanor had protested all along that they were insufficiently acquainted with each other and had pleaded for a long engagement, but he had overruled her: they knew each other well enough. The best way for a man and woman to get to know each other, he said, was to marry. Eleanor had exclaimed against that doctrine because, she said, if the couple discovered that they did not care for each other, they could not get free without misery and possibly disgrace.

"You have to run the risk of that," said John.

That always had been his determining argument: that one must take risks. Now, on this night before his marriage, the risk he was about to take alarmed him. The fidgettiness, the nervous irritability which had been characteristic of him all day now concretely became fright. Who was this woman he was about to marry? What did he know of her? She was a pleasant, nice-looking girl and she had an extraordinary power over him . . . but what did he *know* of her? Nothing. Nothing whatever. He liked kissing her and holding her in his arms, but he had liked kissing Maggie Carmichael and holding her in his arms; and now he was very thankful he had not married Maggie. How was he to know that he would feel any more

for Eleanor in six months' time than he now felt for Maggie . . . for whom he had once felt everything? Eleanor had told him that she only liked him . . . was not in love with him . . . that he was one of a hundred men, anyone of whom she might have married and lived with in tolerable happiness! . . .

A cold shiver ran through his body as he thought that he might be about to make the greatest mistake that any man could make . . . marry the wrong woman. Ought he to postpone the marriage so that Eleanor and he should have more time in which to consider things? Postponement would mean terrible inconvenience to everybody, but it would be better to suffer such inconvenience than to enter into a dismal marriage because one was reluctant to upset arrangements. This marrying was a terrible affair! . . . He walked steadily along the Kennington Road and presently found himself in Westminster Bridge Road, and then he crossed the river and turned on to the Embankment. There was a cool breeze blowing from the sea, and he took his hat off and let the air play about his head. He leant against the parapet and gazed across the water to the dark warehouses on the Lambeth side and wondered why they were so beautiful at night when they were so hideous by day. Even the railway bridge at Charing Cross seemed to be beautiful in the dusk, and when a train rumbled across it, sending up clouds of lit smoke from the funnel of the engine and making flickering lights as the carriages rolled past the iron bars of the bridge-side, it seemed to him to be a very wonderful and appealing spectacle. His fidgettiness fell from him as he contemplated the swift river and the great dark shapes of warehouses and the black hulks of barges going down to the Pool and the immutable loveliness of Waterloo Bridge. He had walked along the Embankment past Hungerford Bridge, and then had stopped to look at Waterloo Bridge for a few moments. Even the

moving lights of the advertisements of tea and whiskey on the Lambeth side of the river made beauty for him as they were reflected in the water. There were little crinkled waves of green and red and gold on the river as the changing lights of the advertisements ran up and down. . . . He had seen articles in the newspapers protesting against these illuminated signs . . . "the ugly symbols of commercialism" . . . but to-night they had the look of loveliness in his eyes. Very often since he had come to London had he found himself in disagreement with the views of men who wrote as if Almighty God had committed Beauty to their charge . . . he had never been able to understand or agree with their arguments against great engines and the instruments of power and energy . . . and it seemed to him that many of these writers were querulous, fractious people who had not the capacity to make themselves at ease in a striving world. That poet fellow . . . what was his name? . . . whom he had met at Hampstead . . . Palfrey, that was the man's name . . . had sneered at Commerce! John had not been able to make head or tail of his arguments against Commerce, and he had found himself defending it against the Poet . . . "the very word is beautiful!" he had asserted several times . . . mainly on his recollection of his Uncle William. Palfrey had had the best of the argument, because Palfrey could use his tongue more effectively, but John had felt certain that the truth was not in Palfrey, and here to-night, in this place where Commerce was most compactly to be seen, he knew that there was Beauty in the labours of men, that bargaining and competition and striving energies and rivalry in skill were elements of loveliness. "These little poets sitting in their stuffy attics scribbling about the moon! . . . Yah-rr-r!" he said, putting his hat on to his head again.

His mind was quieter now. He was certain of his love for Eleanor. How wise his mother had been to suggest that he should go out for a walk. She had guessed, no

doubt, that he was ill at ease and full of doubt, and had sent him forth to find rest in movement and ease in energy. It was a great comfort to have his mother by him now. That morning he had looked at her, sitting in the light of the window, and had seen for the first time the great depth of her eyes and the wonderful patience in her face. . . . He must consider her more in future. Eleanor liked her, and she liked Eleanor. That was all to the good! . . . He must go home now. He would walk to Blackfriars Bridge, cross the river and go home by the Elephant and Castle. He started to walk briskly along the Embankment, but he had not gone very far on his way when he heard his name called.

"Oh, John!" the call was, and looking round, he saw Eleanor rising from one of the garden-seats near the kerb.

"Eleanor!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

She came quickly to him and he took hold of her hands.

"I was frightened," she said, half sobbing as she spoke.

"Frightened!"

"Yes. I lost my nerve this evening and I . . . I came out to think. Oh, I wonder are we wise! . . ."

He drew her arm in his. "Come home, my dear," he said.

He led her across the road, through the District Railway Station and up Villiers Street to the Strand, and as they walked along he told her of his own fears. "You were frightened, too?" she said in astonishment.

"Not frightened," he replied, "only . . . well, dubious!"

"Perhaps we'd better wait," she suggested.

"Oh, no, no. I should feel such a fool if I were to tell people we'd postponed our marriage because we'd both got scared about it!"

"It's better to feel a fool than! . . ."

"And anyhow I know that it's all right. I feel sure it's all right. When I walked along the Embankment before I met you, I became certain that I wanted you, Eleanor,

and no one else but you. My dear, I'm terribly happy!"

"Are you?"

"Yes. Why, of course, I am. How can I be anything else when I shall be your husband this time to-morrow."

They walked along Bond Street because they had discovered that Bond Street, when the shops are shut, is dark and quiet, and once they stopped and faced each other, and John took her in his arms and kissed her. "Sweetheart!" he murmured, with his lips against hers.

Then he took her to her club. "What a place for you to be married from?" he said, as he bade her good-night.

"This is my last night in it," she answered. "I shall never live in a place where there are only women again!" She paused for a moment, and then, with a sigh of relief, added, "Thank Goodness!"

iii

On the following morning they were married; and in the evening they went to Ireland for their honeymoon. They were to go to Dublin for a week, and then up to Ballyards for a fortnight. Eleanor had proposed that Mrs. MacDermott should cross to Ireland with them, but she shook her head and smiled. "I'm foolish enough," she said, "but I'm not as foolish as all that. You'll want to be by yourselves, my dear!"

"I'll see your mother safely off from Euston," Hinde said, "when she makes up her mind to go!"

They spent the day quietly together until the time came for Eleanor and John to go to the railway station. Mrs. MacDermott took him out of the room. "I want to have a wee talk with you," she said in explanation.

"Here," she said, putting an envelope into his hand. "That's a wedding present for you from me! . . ."

"But you've given me one already," he interrupted.

"Oh, aye, that was just an ordinary one, but this is the one that matters. It'll be useful to you sometime!"

He opened the envelope, and inside it were ten notes for ten pounds each. "Ma!" he said.

"Now, now, never mention it," she exclaimed hurriedly. "What does an old woman like me want with money when there's two young ones in need of it. It'll help to keep you going till you're earning!"

He hugged her to show his gratitude. "My son," she said, patting his back.

"Listen, John," she went on, "while I speak to you!"

"Yes, ma!"

"Don't forget that Eleanor's a young girl with no one to tell her things. She's very young, and . . . and! . . ." She stumbled over her words. "You'll be very kind to her, won't you, son?"

"Of course, I will, ma," John replied with no comprehension whatever of what it was she was trying to say.

Then she let him go back to Eleanor.

They gathered in the hall to make their "Good-byes." There was a telegram from the Creams to wish them happiness that Eleanor insisted on taking with her although she had never seen the Creams; and Miss Squibb mournfully insisted on giving a packet of sandwiches to them to eat on the journey. She told them that they knew what these trains and boats were like, and that they would be lucky if they got anything at all to sustain them during their travels. "Though you probably won't want to eat nothink when you get on the boat," she added encouragingly.

"Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!"

John went up the hall to Lizzie. "Good-bye, Lizzie!" he said, and then, "What on earth are you crying for?"

"I dunno," she answered, wiping her eyes. "Just 'appiness, I s'pose. I'll be doin' it myself some dy. See if I down't. It'd annoy aunt, anyway!"

They scrambled into the cab and were driven off. They leant back against the cushions and looked at each other.

"Well, we're married, Eleanor. I always said we would be," John said.

"It's frightfully funny," Eleanor replied. "Isn't it?"

He did not answer. He took her in his arms instead.

# THE THIRD BOOK

OF

# THE FOOLISH LOVERS

Ask, is Love divine,
Voices all are, ay.
Question for the sign,
There's a common sigh.
Would we through our years,
Love forego,
Quit of scars and tears?
Ah, but no, no, no!

MEREDITH.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

### i

The honeymoon at Ballyards had been a triumph for Eleanor. Uncle William had immediately surrendered to her, making, indeed, no pretence to resist her. She had demanded his company on a boating excursion on the Lough, and when he had turned to her, sitting behind him in the bow of the boat, and had said, "This is great health! It's the first time I've been in a boat these years and years!" she had retorted indignantly, "The first time! But why?"

"Och . . . busy!" he had explained.

She had called to John, sitting with his mother in the stern, and demanded an explanation of the causes which prevented Uncle William from taking holidays like other people.

"Sure, he likes work!" said John.

"Nobody likes work to that extent," Eleanor replied, and then Mrs. MacDermott gave the explanation. "There's no one else but him to do it," she said. "Uncle Matthew had his head full of romantic dreams and John fancied himself in other ways, so Uncle William had to do it all by himself!"

John flushed, and was angry with his mother for speaking in this way before Eleanor. He felt that she was stating the case unfairly. Had he not once offered to quit from his monitorial work to help in the shop and had not his offer been firmly refused? . . .

"There'll be no need for Uncle William to work hard when my play is produced," he said.

"Ah, quit blethering about hard work," Uncle William exclaimed, bending to the oars. "Sure, I'd be demented

mad if I hadn't my work to do. What would an old fellow like me do gallivanting up and down the shore in my bare feet, paddling like a child in the water? Have sense, do, all of you. Eleanor, I'm surprised at you trying to make a loafer out of me!"

She leant forward and pulled him suddenly backwards, and he fell into the bottom of the boat. "We'll all be drowned," he shouted. "I'll cowp the boat if you assault me again! . . ."

"What does 'cowp' mean?" she demanded.

"In God's name, girl, where were you brought up not to know what 'cowp' means! Upset!" said he.

"Well, why don't you say upset, you horrible old Orangeman," she retorted.

"I'm no Orangeman," he giggled at her. "I wouldn't own the name!"

"You are. You are. You say your prayers every night to King William and Carson! . . ."

"Ah, you're the tormenting wee tory, so you are! Here, take a hold of these oars and do something for your living!"

She had changed places with Uncle William, and John felt very proud of her as he observed the skilful way in which she handled the oars. Her strokes were clean and strong and deliberate. She did not thrust the oars too deeply into the water nor did she pull them impotently along the surface nor did she lean too heavily on one oar so that the boat was drawn too much to one side or sent ungainly to this side and to that in an exhausting effort to keep a straight course. He lay back against his mother and regarded Eleanor out of half-shut eyes. She mystified him. Her timidity when he had first spoken to her had seemed to him then to be her chief characteristic and it had caused him to feel tenderly for her: he would be her protector. But she was not always timid. He had discovered courage in her and something uncommonly like obstinacy of mind. She uttered opinions which startled him, less be-

cause of the flimsy grounds on which they were built, than because of the queer chivalry that made her utter them. She defended the weak because they were weak, whereas he would have had her defend the truth because it was the truth. The attacked had her sympathy, whether they were in the right or in the wrong, and John demanded that sympathy should be given only to those who were in the right even if they happened also to be the stronger of the contestants. He had seen her behaving with extraordinary calmness at a time when he had been certain that she would show signs of hysteria, and while he was marvelling at her imperturbability, he had heard her screaming with fright at the sight of an ear-wig. He had rushed to her help, imagining that she was in terrible danger, and had found her trembling and shuddering because this pitiful insect had crawled on to her dressing-gown. . . . He had been very frightened when he heard her screaming to him for help, and he suffered so strange a reaction when he discovered that her trouble was trivial that he lost his temper. "Don't be such a fool," he said, putting his foot on the ear-wig. "You couldn't have made more noise if someone had been murdering you!"

"I hate ear-wigs!" she replied, still shuddering. "I hate all crawly things. Oh-h-h!"

And here was another aspect of her: her skill in doing things that required effort and thought. She handled a boat better than he could handle it. He was more astonished at this feat than he had been when he discovered that she had great skill in managing a house and in cooking food, for he assumed that all women were inspired by Almighty God with a genius for housekeeping and that only a deliberately sinful nature prevented a woman from serving her husband with an excellently-prepared dinner. In a vague way, he had imagined that Eleanor would need instruction in housekeeping, but that she would "soon pick it up." Any woman could "soon pick it up." His mother,

he decided, would give tips to Eleanor while they were at Ballyards, and thereafter things would go very smoothly. He had determined that the flat at Hampstead which they had rented should be furnished according to his taste so that there should be no mistake about it; but when they began to choose furniture, he found that Eleanor had better judgment than he had, and he wisely deferred to her opinion. He was inclined, he discovered, to accept things which he disliked or did not want rather than take the trouble to get only the things he desired and appreciated; but Eleanor had no compunction in making a disinterested shop-assistant run about and fetch and carry until she had either obtained the thing for which she wished or was satisfied that it was not in the shop. John always had a sense of shame at leaving a shop without making a purchase when the assistant had been given much bother in their behalf; but Eleanor said that this was silliness. "That's what he's there for," she said of the shop-assistant. "I'm not going to buy things I don't want just because you're afraid of hurting his feelings!"

He began to feel, while they were furnishing their flat, that she knew her own mind at least as well as he knew his, and a fear haunted his thoughts that perhaps this adequacy of knowledge might bring trouble to them. Gradually he found himself consulting her as an equal, even accepting her advice, and seldom instructing her as one instructs a beloved pupil. When she required advice, she asked for it. At Ballyards, he had seen his mother quickening into zestful life because of Eleanor's desire to be informed of things. One evening he had come home from a visit to Mr. Cairnduff to find Eleanor seated on the high stool in the "Counting House" of the shop while Uncle William explained the working of the business to her.

"She's a great wee girl, that!" Uncle William said afterwards to John. "The great wee girl! You've done well for yourself marrying her, my son. She's a well-brought-up

girl . . . a girl with a family . . . and that's more nor you could say for some of the women you might 'a' married. That Logan girl, now! . . ."

"I'd never have married her," John interrupted.

"No, I suppose you wouldn't. They're no family at all, the Logans . . . just a dragged-up, thrown-together lot. They've no pride in themselves. They'd marry anybody, that family would. Willie's away to the bad altogether . . . drinking and gambling and worse . . . and Aggie got married on a traveller from Belfast, and two hours after she married the man, he was dead drunk. He's been drunk ever since, they say. Aw, she's a poor mouth, that woman, and not fit to hold a candle to Eleanor. I'm thankful glad you've married a sensible woman with her head on the right way, and not one of these flyaway pieces you see knocking around these times. I'd die of despair to see you married to a woman with no more gumption than an old hen! . . ."

ii

He had experienced his most humiliating defect in comparison with Eleanor on board the mail-boat from Kingstown to Holyhead. He had been sea-sick, but she had seemed unaware of the fact that she was afloat on a rough sea. That terribly swift race of water that beats against a boat off Holyhead and causes the least queasy of stomachs a certain amount of discomposure, affected Eleanor not at all; and when they disembarked, it was she who found comfortable seats in the London train for them and saw to their luggage; for John still felt ill and miserable. "Poor old thing," she said, "you do look a sight!"

iii

Mrs. MacDermott had begged him to stay beyond the stipulated time in Ballyards, and Uncle William, with a

glance towards Eleanor, had reinforced her appeal; but John had refused to yield to it. There was work to be done in London, and Eleanor and he must return to town to do it. In a short while, his play would be produced . . . he must attend the rehearsals of it . . . and then there was his novel for which he had yet to find a publisher; and he must write another book. Eleanor had hesitated for a few moments, not irresponsive to Uncle William's look, but the desire to be in her own home had conquered her desire to remain in Ballyards, and so she had not asked John to stay away from London any longer. The flat was a small and incommodious one, but it was in a quiet street and not very far from Hampstead Heath. They had spent more money on furnishing it than they had intended to spend, but John had soothed Eleanor's mind by promising that his play would more than make up for their extravagance; and when, a fortnight after their return to town, Mr. Claude Jannissary, "the Progressive Publisher," wrote to John and invited him to call on him, they felt certain that their anxieties had been very foolish. John visited Mr. Jannissary on the morning after he had received that enlightened gentleman's letter, and was overwhelmed by the praise paid to his book. Mr. Jannissary said that he was not merely willing, but actually eager to publish it. He felt certain that its author had a great future before him, and he wished to be able to say in after years that he had been the first to recognize John's genius. He did not anticipate that he would make any profit whatever out of *The Enchanted Lover* . . . the title of the story . . . at all events for several years, partly because John still had to create a reputation for himself and partly because of the appalling conditions with which enlightened publishers had to contend. In time, no doubt, John would attract a substantial body of loyal readers, but in the meantime there was, if John would forgive the gross commercialism of the expression, "no immediate money in him." Nevertheless, Mr.

Jannissary was prepared to gamble on John's future. Even if he should never make enough to cover the expense of publishing John's book, he would still feel compensated for his loss merely through having introduced the world to so excellent a novel. Idealism was not very popular, he said, but thank God he was an idealist. He believed in Art *and* Literature *and* Beauty, and he was prepared to make sacrifices for his beliefs. He could not offer any payment in advance on account of royalties to John . . . much as he would like to do so . . . for the conditions with which an enlightened publisher who tried to preserve his ideals intact had to contend were truly appalling; but he would publish the book immediately if John would consent to forego all royalties on the first five hundred copies, and would accept a royalty of ten per cent on all copies sold in excess of that number, the royalty to rise to fifteen per cent when the copies sold exceeded two thousand. Mr. Jannissary would put himself to the great inconvenience of trying to find a publisher for the book in America, and would only expect to receive twenty-five per cent of the author's proceeds for his trouble. . . .

John had not greatly liked the look of Mr. Claude Jannissary. So uncompromising an idealist might have been expected to possess a more pleasing appearance and a less shifty look in his eyes . . . but soothed vanity and youthful eagerness to appear in print and a feeling that very often appearances were against idealists, caused him to sign the agreement which Mr. Jannissary had already prepared for him. A great thrill of pleasure went through him as he signed the long document, full of involved clauses. He was now entitled to call himself an author. In a little while, a book of his would be purchaseable in bookshops. . . . "We'll print immediately," said Mr. Jannissary, handing a copy of the agreement, signed by himself, to John and putting the other copy carefully away. "I'm

sure the book will be a great success . . . *artistically*, at all events . . . and after all, that's the chief thing. *That's* the chief thing. Ah, Art, *Art*, Mr. MacDermott, what a compelling thing it is! I often feel that I have thrown my life away ever since I resolved to publish books instead of writing them. There are times when I long to throw up everything and run away into the country and meditate. Meditate! But one can't escape from the bonds of the body, Mr. MacDermott!''

''Oh, no,'' John vaguely answered.

''The world is too much for us . . . poor, bewildered idealists, searching for the gleam and so often losing it. Rent has to be paid, butchers demand payment for their meat . . . I'm speaking figuratively, of course, for I'm a vegetarian myself . . . and one must pay one's way. So the body has us, and we have to compromise. Ah, yes! But at the bottom of Pandora's box, Mr. MacDermott, there is always. . . . Hope! This way, please, and *good* afternoon! It's been very nice indeed to meet you! . . .''

Hinde had disturbed John's complacency very considerably when he saw the agreement which John had signed. Eleanor had begun the process by failing to understand why the first five hundred copies of the novel should be published free of royalty. If Mr. Jannissary was to make money out of these five hundred copies why was John not to make any? He quelled her doubts momentarily by informing her that she was totally ignorant of the conditions of publishing. If she only knew how appalling they were! . . . Mr. Jannissary had so impressed John with the terrible state of the publisher's business that he had gone away from the office feeling exceedingly fortunate to have his book published at all without being asked to pay for it. Eleanor's doubts, however, had revived when Hinde, who dined with them on the evening of the day on which the agreement had been signed, declared with extraordinary

emphasis that Mr. Jannissary was a common robber and would, if he had his way, be enduring torture in gaol.

"He's a notorious little scoundrel who has been living for years on robbing young authors by flattering their vanity. I suppose he told you you were a marvel and bleated about his ideals?"

John could not deny that Mr. Jannissary had spoken of his ideals several times during their interview.

"I know him, the greasy little bounder!" Hinde exclaimed. "You'll never get one farthing from that book of yours, for he won't print more than five hundred copies! . . ."

"He will if they're demanded."

"*If* they're demanded. Do you think they will be?"

"I hope so!"

"Oh, we can all hope, but there's not much chance of you realising your hope. Your book isn't a very good one! . . ." Eleanor glanced up at this. She had not felt very certain about John's book herself, but now that Hinde was belittling it, she was angry with him.

"*I* think it's good," she said decisively.

"Even if it is," Hinde retorted, "it will only sell well if it's advertised well. Lots of good books don't sell even when they are advertised. But Jannissary doesn't advertise. He hasn't got enough money to advertise. Look at the newspapers! How many times do you see Jannissary's list in the advertisements!" John could not remember. "Very seldom," said Hinde. "His books get less attention from reviewers than other people's because the reviewers know that he's a rascal and that nine out of ten of his books aren't worth the paper they're printed on. Booksellers will hardly stock them. He makes his living by selling copies to the libraries and persuading mugs to pay for the publication of their books. That's how Jannissary lives! . . ."

"He didn't ask me to pay for publishing my book," John murmured.

"That's a wonder," Hinde replied. "Why didn't you ask for advice before you signed this thing?"

"I want the book published as soon as possible. I have to make my name and I daresay I shall have to pay for making it!"

Hinde put the agreement down. "Oh, well, if you look at it like that," he said, "there's no more to be said, but you've done a silly thing!"

"I don't see it," John boldly asserted, though there was doubt in his mind.

"You'll see it some day!"

Hinde had parted from them earlier that evening than he had intended or they had expected. He made an excuse for leaving them by saying that he was tired and needed sleep after late nights of work, but he went because John's vanity had been hurt by his criticism of the agreement and also because he had said that John's book had no remarkable qualities. "I'm telling you the truth that you're always demanding, and I won't tell you anything else. You've been very anxious to tell it to other people and now you'll have a chance of hearing it yourself. Your book is not a good book. There are dozens like it published every year. The *Sensation* reviews them six-a-time in three or four hundred words. You may write good books some day, but *The Enchanted Lover* is just an ordinary, mediocre book. I think your tragedy is better! . . ."

"Well, it ought to be. It was written afterwards," John said, trying hard to speak without revealing resentment.

"Yes. Yes, of course!" Hinde murmured.

A little later, he had taken his leave of them.

"I wonder if he's right!" Eleanor said to John when he had gone.

"Of course he isn't," John tartly replied. "I believe he's jealous!"

"Jealous!"

"Yes. He's been talking for years of writing a tragedy about St. Patrick, but he's not done it, and then I come along and do it quite easily and get the play accepted. And my novel's to be published, too. Of course he's jealous! Any disappointed man's jealous when he sees someone else doing things he's failed to do. I'm sorry for him really!"

"Perhaps that is it," Eleanor said, taking comfort to herself.

"No doubt about it. Anyhow, even if the novel is a failure, there's the play. That's good. I know it's good. The novel was bound to have some faults. All first books have!"

iv

Then came the disappointment of the tragedy. The manager of the Cottenham Repertory Theatre wrote to say that they were compelled to postpone the production of it for a few weeks because their season had been unfortunate and they were eager to replenish their treasury by the production of popular pieces. They all admired John's play very much and were quite certain that it would be a great artistic success, but its tragical nature made it unlikely to be profitable to any of them just at present. . . .

"It's funny how these people keep on talking about *artistic* success when they think a thing isn't going to be any good," Eleanor said when he had finished reading the letter to her.

"No good!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean, no good!"

"Well . . . of course I don't mean that your play isn't any good . . . only I begin to feel doubtful about things when I hear the word *artistic* mentioned."

"They're only postponing the play for a short while

until they've got enough money together to keep on. That's reasonable, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes. It's reasonable. I'm not saying anything about that . . . only it's a disappointment!"

"I'm disappointed myself," he said, ruefully contemplating the letter.

"How much do you think you'll make out of it, John?" Eleanor asked pensively.

"Make? Oh, I don't know. About a hundred pounds or so on the first performances . . . and then there's the London season . . . and of course if the play's a great success, we shall make our fortune. But I think we can reckon on a hundred pounds anyhow. I don't want to expect too much. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I'm getting anxious about money. You see, dear, you haven't earned much since we got married, have you?"

"No, not much. One or two articles in the *Sensation*. But you needn't worry about that. I'll look after the money part. Don't you worry!"

"Perhaps you could get a regular job on the *Evening Herald* now that Mr. Hinde's in charge of it," she suggested.

Hinde had recently been appointed editor of the *Evening Herald*.

"Oh, no, Eleanor, I don't want a journalist's job. I'm a writer . . . an artist . . . not a reporter. Besides, I shouldn't have time to work at the book I'm doing now. Look at Hinde. He never has time to do anything but journalism. The worst of work like that is that after a time you can't do anything else. You think in paragraphs! . . ."

"Supposing the play isn't a success . . . I mean a financial success?" she asked.

"Well, I'll make money for you some other way. Leave it to me, Eleanor. I'm pretty confident about myself. I

feel convinced that the play *and* the novel will be successful financially as well as artistically. I've always been confident about myself!"

"Yes."

"And I feel quite confident about this. So don't worry your head any more like a good girl!"

The receipt of the proofs and the excitement of correcting them caused Eleanor to forget her anxiety about their finances. John and she sat in front of the fire, she with one batch of galley sheets in her lap, he with another; and he read the story to her, correcting misprints and making alterations as he went along, while she copied the corrections on to her proofs.

"Do you like it?" he asked, eager for her praise.

"Yes," she said, leaning her head against his shoulder, "I do like it. It's . . . it's quite good, isn't it?"

He imagined that there was a note of dubiety in her voice, but he did not press her for greater praise, and they finished the correction of the proofs and sent them to Mr. Claude Jannissary as quickly as they could.

"What does it feel like to have written a book?" Eleanor said to him when the proofs had been dispatched.

"Fine," he replied. "I wish my Uncle Matthew were alive. He'd feel very proud of me!"

"I'm proud of you," she said, drawing nearer to him.

"Are you?" he exclaimed, his eyes brightening. He put his arm round her neck and she took hold of his hand. "Do you like me better now, Eleanor, than you did when we were married?"

"Oh, yes, dear, of course I do."

"Do you remember that night on the Embankment when we were both so scared of getting married?"

"Yes. Weren't we silly? I very nearly ran away that night . . . only I didn't know where to run to. I was awfully frightened, John. I thought we were both making terrible mistakes! . . ."

"Well, we haven't regretted it yet, have we?"

"No, not yet. So far our marriage has been successful!"

"I told you it would be all right, didn't I? I knew I could make you happy. You're such a darling . . . how could I help loving you?"

## V

The novel was published in the same week that the tragedy was produced at the Cottenham Repertory Theatre. John had intended to be present at all the rehearsals of his play, but the manager of the theatre informed him that this was hardly necessary. It would be sufficient if he were to attend the last two and the dress rehearsal, and when John considered the state of his work on the second novel, he decided to accept the manager's advice. "After all," he said to Eleanor, "I don't know anything at all about producing plays and this chap spends his life at the job, so I can safely leave it to him!"

The complimentary copies of his novel reached him on the evening before he was to travel to Cottenham to attend his first rehearsal. He opened the parcel with trembling fingers and took out the six red-covered volumes and spread them on the table. He liked the bold black letters in which the title of the book and his name were printed on the covers: THE ENCHANTED LOVER by JOHN MACDERMOTT. It seemed incredible to him that a book should bear his name, but there, in big, black letters on a red ground, was his name. He turned the pages, reading a sentence here and a sentence there until Eleanor, who had been out when the parcel arrived, came in.

"Look!" he said, holding one of the books towards her.

She exclaimed with delight and ran forward to take the book from him. "Oh, my dear," she said, clasping the novel with one hand while she embraced him with the other. "I'm so proud of you, you clever creature!"

He was greatly moved by her affection, and he felt that he wanted to cry. There were very queer sensations in his throat, and he had tremendous difficulty in keeping his eyes from blinking.

"It's rather nice?" he said, touching the book.

"It's lovely," she said. She went to the table. "Are these the others?" She drew a chair forward and sat down. "Let's send them out to-night. This one to your mother and this one to Uncle William. I'll keep this one!" She opened the book at the dedication "To Eleanor." "Here," she said, "write your name in it!" He found a pen and ink and wrote under the dedication, "from her devoted husband," and when she saw what he had written, she hugged him and told him again that she was proud of him.

"What about the others? Are you going to send them out, too?" she asked, and he proposed to her that one should be sent to Hinde, one to Mr. Cairnduff and one to Mr. McCaughan. . . .

"We shan't have any left, except my copy, if you do that!" she objected.

"We can easily get some more," he replied.

"I'd like to send one to that beastly cousin in Exeter just to let him see how clever you are. He hadn't the decency to send us a wedding present, the stingy miser!"

They packed up the books after John had inscribed them, and went off to the post-office together to send them off.

"Won't it be fun reading the reviews?" said John as they walked up High Street.

"I hope they'll like it, the people who review it," she answered. "Don't let's go in just yet. Let's walk along the Spaniards' Road a little while!"

They walked up Heath Street, and when they came to the railings above The Vale of Health, they stood against them and looked towards London. A blue haze had settled over the city and the trees were like long hanging veils

through which little, yellow lights from the street-lamps shone like tiny jewels. The air was full of drowsy sounds, as if the earth were happily tired and were resting for a while before the pleasures of the night began.

"Would you like to go back to your club, Eleanor?" John said.

"Silly old silly!" she replied, pinching his arm.

"I feel as if I want to tell everybody that you've written a book and a play," she said, as they walked on. "It doesn't seem right that all these people don't know about you!"

He went to Cottenham on the next day, carrying with him an early edition of the *Evening Herald* in which Hinde had printed a very flattering review of *The Enchanted Lover.* Eleanor had been puzzled by the promptness with which the review had appeared until John explained to her that review copies of books were sent to the newspapers a week or a fortnight before the date of publication.

"It's a very good review," she said. "I thought he didn't like the book much!"

"So did I. I hope he isn't just writing like this to please me. I don't want insincere reviews! . . ."

"I expect," said Eleanor, "he didn't tell you how much he really liked it!"

"Hmmm! Perhaps that's it," John replied.

He put the paper in his pocket, and as the train drew out of Euston and started on its journey to Cottenham, he speculated on the sincerity of Hinde's review. He took the paper out of his pocket and read it again. The review was headed, "A REMARKABLE FIRST NOVEL" and was full of phrases that seemed fulsome even to John. "We prophesy that this notable novel will have a very great success among the reading public. It is certainly the finest story of its kind that has been *published in this country for a generation.*"

"I wouldn't have said that about it myself," John re-

flected. "Of course, I'd like to think it's true, but! . . . I hope this isn't just logrolling!" He remembered how fiercely Hinde had described the back-scratching, high-minded poets who boomed each other in their papers. "I don't want to get praise that way," he thought, putting the paper back into his pocket. "I'll order half-a-dozen copies of the *Herald* when I get back from Cottenham. My Uncle William will be glad of a copy, and so will Mr. Cairnduff and the minister! . . ."

## vi

The Cottenham Repertory Theatre was a dingy, ill-built house in a back street in Cottenham. It had been a music-hall of a low class until the earnest playgoers of Cottenham, extremely anxious about the condition of the drama, formed themselves into a society to improve the theatre. By dint of agitation and much hard work, they contrived to get enough money together to take the music-hall over from its owner who was unable to compete against the syndicate halls and was steadily drinking himself to death in consequence, and turned it into a repertory theatre. Their success had been moderate, for they united to their good intentions a habit of denunciation of all plays that were not "repertory" plays which had the effect partly of irritating the common playgoer and partly of frightening him. All the plays that were labelled "repertory" plays were praised by these earnest students of the drama without any sort of discrimination, and when, as often happened, a very poor play was produced at the Repertory Theatre, any common playgoer who saw it and was bored by it, went away in the belief that he was not educated up to the standard of such austere work and resolved that he would seek his entertainment elsewhere in future. It was to this theatre that John went on the day after his arrival in Cottenham. The town itself depressed him immeasur-

ably. It was the most shapeless, nondescript, undignified town he had ever seen, and yet it was one of the richest places in England. There was no seemliness in its main streets: little huckstering shops hustled larger and more pretentious shops, but all of them had an air of vivacious vulgarity. They had not been given the look of sobriety which age gives even to ugly streets in ugly towns. They seemed to be striving against each other in a competition to decide which was the commonest and shoddiest shop in the city. It seemed to John that all these Cottenham shops dropped their aitches! . . . The clouds were grey when he arrived in Cottenham, dirty-grey and very cheerless; they were still dirty-grey when he went to the theatre, and rain fell before he reached it; and the clouds remained in that dismal state until he quitted Cottenham after the first performance of *Milchu and St. Patrick: A Tragedy.* It seemed to John that they would never be otherwise than dirty-grey, that the streets would always be wet and the shops always clamantly vulgar.

"I wouldn't live in this place for the wide world," he said, as he turned into the stage-door of the Repertory Theatre.

He was directed to the manager's office by the doorkeeper. The Manager was on the stage, so the girl secretary informed him, and if Mr. MacDermott would kindly follow her she would take him there at once. He had never seen the stage side of the proscenium before, and although the place was dark and he stumbled over properties, he felt enormously interested in what he saw.

"Is that the scenery?" he said to the secretary as they passed some tawdry looking flats lying against the walls of the scene-dock.

"Yes," she answered. "It looks awful in the daylight, doesn't it? But when the footlights are on and the limes are lit, you'd be surprised to see how fine it looks. They

say that common materials look better in limelight than good things do. Funny, isn't it?"

She led him on to the stage and brought him to the manager.

"This is Mr. MacDermott," she said to a tall, lean, worried man who was standing immediately in front of the footlights, directing the rehearsal which was then beginning.

"Oh, ah, yes!" said the manager, and then he turned to John. "I'm Gidney," he said.

John murmured a politeness.

"Now, let me introduce you to people!" He turned to the players, all of whom had that appearance of depression which actors habitually wear in daylight, as if they felt naked and ashamed without their grease-paint. "This is the author of the play," he exclaimed to them. "Mr. MacDermott!" He led John to each of the players, naming them as he did so, and each of them murmured that he or she was delighted to have the pleasure! . . .

"I think if you were to sit in the front row of the stalls, Mr. MacDermott!" said Gidney, "while the rehearsal proceeds, that would be best. You can tell me at the end of each act what alterations or suggestions you wish to propose!"

"Very good," said John, feeling his spirits running rapidly into his boots. What were these cheerless people going to do with the play over which he had laboured and sweated for weeks and weeks? . . .

They went through their parts with a lifeless facility that turned his tragedy, he imagined, into a neat piece of machinery and left it without any glow of emotion whatever. Now and then the ease with which they recited their words was interrupted by forgetfulness and the player, whose memory had failed him, would snap his fingers and call to the prompter, "What is it?" or "Give me that line, will you?"

"How do you think it's going?" said the manager to John at the end of the first act.

"Well, I don't know," he answered with a nervous laugh. "They aren't putting much enthusiasm into it, are they?"

"Ah, but this is only a rehearsal. Wait till you see the dress rehearsal!"

He felt considerably relieved. A rehearsal, of course, must be very different from a performance. But on the night of the dress rehearsal . . . it took place on Sunday, for the stage was occupied on week-nights by regular performances . . . the players seemed to go to pieces. All of them had difficulty in remembering their lines, and when at the end of the last act, a piece of the scenery collapsed upon St. Patrick, John felt that he could have cheerfully seen the entire theatre collapse on everybody concerned with it. He went to the grubby Temperance hotel in which he had taken a room, and gave himself completely to gloom and despair. He felt that his play was not quite so brilliant as he had imagined it to be, but he was not sure that his dissatisfaction with it ought not really to be displayed against the actors. Any play, treated as his had been treated, must seem to be a poor piece. Gidney had appeared to be pleased with the dress rehearsal and had wrung John's hand with great heartiness when they separated. "Going splendidly!" he murmured. "Congratulate you. Excellent piece! . . ." On the way to his hotel, he had seen a play-bill in the window of a tobacconist's shop, and a thrill of pleasure had quickened him as he stood in front of the glass and read his name beneath the title of the play. He must remember to ask Gidney for a copy of the play-bill to hang up in his flat! Now, in the dull and not very clean bedroom of the Temperance Hotel, he felt indifferent to play-bills and the thrill of seeing his name in print. He wished that Eleanor were with him. They had decided that she should not be present at the first night in Cottenham because of the expense of hotel bills and railway fares.

"I'll see it in London," she had said bravely, trying to conceal her disappointment. Now, however, he wished that she were with him. She had remarkable powers of comforting. If he were depressed, Eleanor would draw his head down to her shoulder and would soothe him into a good temper again. There had been times since their marriage when he had been dubious about her . . . when it seemed to him that she had only a kindly affection for him and still had not got love for him . . . and the thought filled him with resentment against her. Why could she not love him? He was lovable enough and he loved her. A woman ought to love a man who loved her! . . . Then some perception of the self-sufficiency and the smugness of these thoughts went through his mind and he would abase himself in spirit before her and reproach himself for unkindnesses that he imagined he had shown to her . . . hasty words that hurt her. His temper was quick to rise, but equally quick to fall; and sometimes he failed to realise that in the sudden outburst of anger he had said cruel, hurting things which made no impression on him because they were said without any feeling, but left a hard impression on those to whom they were addressed. He had seen pain in Eleanor's eyes when he had spoken some swift and biting word to her, and then, all repentance, he had tried to kiss the pain from her. . . .

To-night, in this grubby bedroom, smelling of teetotallers and grim, forbidding people in whom are to be found none of the genial foibles of ordinary, hearty men, he felt an excess of remorse for any unkind thing he had ever said to Eleanor. His pessimism about his play caused him to exaggerate the enormity of his offences. He pictured her, looking at him with that queer air of puzzled pathos that had so impressed him when he first saw her, and intense shame filled him when he thought that he had done or said anything to make her look at him in that way. Well, he would compensate her for any pain that he had caused her.

He would love her so dearly that her life would be passed in continual sunshine and comfort. Even if she were never to return his love or to return only a slight share of it, he would devote himself to her just as completely as if she gave everything to him. His play might be miserably acted and be a failure, apart from the acting, but what mattered that? While he had Eleanor he had everything.

## vii

He went down to the theatre on the evening of the first performance in a state of calm and quietness which greatly astonished him. He had expected to tremble and quake with nervousness and to be reluctant to go near the theatre. He remembered to have read somewhere an account of the way in which some melodramatist of repute behaved on a first night. He walked up and down the Embankment while his play was being performed, mopping his fevered brow and groaning in agony. Someone had found the melodramatist on one occasion, sitting at the foot of Cleopatra's Needle, howling into his handkerchief. . . . John, however, had no terrors whatever when he entered the theatre, and he told himself that the melodramatist was either an extremely emotional man or a very considerable liar. There was a moderate number of people in the auditorium, enough to preserve the theatre from seeming sparsely-occupied, but not enough to justify anyone in saying that the house was full. The atmosphere resembled that of a church. People spoke, when they spoke at all, in whispers, and John was so infected by the air of solemnity that when a small boy in the gallery began to call out "Acid drops or cigarettes!" he felt that a sidesman must appear from a pew and take the lad to the police-station for brawling in a sacred edifice. He waited for the orchestra to appear, but the play began without any preliminary music. The lights were lowered, and soon after-

wards someone beat the floor of the stage with a wooden mallet . . . sending forth three sepulchral sounds that seemed to hammer out of the audience any tendency it might have had to enjoy itself. Then the curtain ascended, and the play began.

viii

The actors were much better than they had promised to be at the dress rehearsal, but they were still far from being good. It was very plain that they had been insufficiently rehearsed and there were some bad cases of mis-casting. Nevertheless, the performance was better than he had anticipated, and his spirits rose almost as rapidly as they had fallen on the previous night; and when at the end of the performance there were calls for the author, he passed through the door that gave access from the auditorium to the stage with a great deal of elation. He was thrust on to the stage by Gidney, and found himself standing between two of the actresses. There was a great black cavern in front of him which, he realised, was the auditorium, and he could hear applause rising out of it. The curtain rose and fell again, and the buzz of voices calling praise to him grew louder. Then the curtain fell again, and this time it remained down. He realised that he had gripped the actresses by the hand and that he was holding them very tightly. . . . "I beg your pardon!" he said, releasing them.

"Awf'lly good!" said one of the actresses, smiling at him as she moved across the stage. How horrible actors and actresses in their make-up looked close to! He could not conceive of himself kissing that woman while she had so much paint on her face. . . . He turned to walk off the stage, and found that walking was very difficult. He was trembling so that his knees were almost knocking together and when he moved, he reeled slightly.

"I say," he said to one of the actors, "my nerve's gone

to pieces. Funny thing . . . I . . . felt nothing at all . . . nothing . . . until just now!"

The actor took hold of his arm and steadied him. "Queer how nerves affect people," he said, as John and he left the stage. "I knew a man who got stage fright two days before the first night of a play in which he had a big part. Nearly collapsed in the street. All right afterwards . . . never turned a hair on the stage. Must congratulate you on your play . . . jolly good, I call it. Tragedy, of course! . . ."

He had expected some sort of festivity after the performance, but there was none. The players were eager to get home, and Gidney had a headache, so John thanked each of them and went back to his hotel.

"Thank goodness," he said, "I shall be at home to-morrow."

He got into bed and lay quietly in the darkness, but he could not sleep, and so he turned on the light again and tried to read; but his head was thumping, thumping and the words had no meaning for him. He put the book down. How extraordinary is the common delusion, he thought, that actors and actresses lead gay lives! Could anything be more dull than the life of an actor in a repertory theatre? Daily rehearsals in a dingy and draughty theatre and nightly performances in half-rehearsed plays! . . . "Give me the life of a bank clerk for real gaiety," he murmured. "An actor's just a drudge . . . and a dull drudge, too! Very uninteresting people, actors! . . . Why the devil did I leave Eleanor behind?"

## ix

He returned to London on the following morning, carrying copies of the *Cottenham Daily Post* and the *Cottenham Mercury* with him. The notices of his play were mildly appreciative . . . that of the *Post* being so mild as to be

almost denunciatory. The critic asserted that John's play, while interesting, showed that its author had no real understanding of the meaning of tragedy. He found no evidence in *Milchu and St. Patrick* that John appreciated the importance of the pressure of the Significant Event. The Significant Event decided the development of a tragedy, but in Mr. MacDermott's play there was no Significant Event. The play just happened, so to speak, and it ought not to "just happen." It was an excellent discursus on the drama from the time of the morality plays to the time of the Irish Players, and it included references to Euripides, Ibsen, the Noh plays of Japan, Mr. Bernard Shaw (in a patronising manner) Synge and Mr. Masefield; but John felt, when he had read it, that most of it had been written before its author had seen his play. The other notice was less learned, but it left no doubt in the mind of the readers that although *Milchu and St. Patrick* was an interesting piece . . . the word "interesting," after he had read these notices, seemed to John to be equivalent to the word "poor" . . . it was not likely to mark any epochs.

"I don't think much of Cottenham anyhow!" said John, putting the papers in his pocket.

Eleanor met him at Euston. The fatigue which settles on a traveller in the last hour of a long railway journey had raised the devil of depression in John. He had re-read the notices in the Cottenham papers, and as he considered their very restrained praises of his play, he remembered that Hinde had said *The Enchanted Lover* was an ordinary novel.

"I wonder am I any good," he said to himself as the train hauled itself into Euston.

He looked out of the window and saw Eleanor standing on the platform, scanning the carriage as she sought for him.

"Well, she thinks I am," he thought, as he alighted from the train. "Eleanor!" he called to her, and she turned and when she saw him, her eyes lit and she hurried to him.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

### i

Hinde's enthusiastic review of *The Enchanted Lover* had not been followed by other reviews equally enthusiastic or nearly so. Many papers failed to do more than include it in the List of Books Received. *The Times Literary Supplement* gave six lines of small type to a cold account of it. The reviewer declared that "this first novel is not without merit" but either had not been able to discover the merit or had not enough space in which to describe it, for he omitted to say what it was. John had paid a visit to the local lending library every morning for a week in order that he might see all the London newspapers and such of the provincial papers as were exhibited, and had searched their columns eagerly for references to his book; but the references were few and slight. Mr. Claude Jannissary, when John visited him, wagged his head dolefully and uttered some mournful remarks on the sad state of idealism in England. He regretted to say that the book was not selling so well as he had hoped it would sell. The appalling conditions of the publishing trade were accentuated by the extraordinary reluctance of the booksellers to take risks or to show any enthusiasm for new things. Between Mr. Jannissary and John, he might say that booksellers were a very unsatisfactory lot. Most of them were quite uncultured men. Hardly any of them read books. Mr. Jannissary longed for the day when booksellers would look upon their shops as places of adventure and romance! . . .

A curious sensation of distaste for these words passed through John when he heard them spoken by Mr. Jannissary.

The booksellers, said the publishers, should be ambitious to earn the title of the new Elizabethans . . . hungering and thirsting after dangerous experiences. He would like to see a bookseller turning disdainfully from "best sellers" and eagerly purchasing large quantities of books by unknown authors. "Think of the thrill of it," said Mr. Jannissary; and John, perturbed in his mind, tried hard to think of the thrill of it. His mental perturbation was due to the lean look of his bank balance. Money was going out of his house more rapidly than it was coming in, and Eleanor had been full of anxiety that morning. He had not yet received a cheque from the Cottenham Repertory Theatre for the royalties due on the week's performance of *Milchu and St. Patrick,* but he had soothed Eleanor's fears by assuring her that there would be the better part of a hundred pounds to come to them from Cottenham in a few days. In the meantime, he told her, he would call on Jannissary and see whether he could not obtain some money from him. "He must have sold much more than five hundred copies by this time," he said. "If all the bookshops in the country only took one copy each, he'd have sold more than five hundred, and I'm sure they'd all take two or three each. Perhaps more!"

The suggestion that he might make a small advance to John on account of accrued royalties had a very chilling effect upon Mr. Jannissary. "My dear fellow," he said, putting up his hands in a benedictory manner and then dropping them as if to say that even he found difficulty in believing in the nobility of man, "impossible! Absolutely impossible! I've sunk . . . Money . . . much Money . . . in your book . . . I don't regret it . . . not for a moment . . . I believe in you, MacDermott . . . strongly . . . but it will be a long time before I recover any of that . . . Money . . . if I ever recover it. I'm sorry! . . ."

John had come away from the publisher in a cheerless

state of mind, and as he turned into the Strand, he collided with Hinde.

"How's the book getting on?" Hinde demanded when they had greeted each other.

John told him of what Jannissary had said.

"I tell you what I'll do," said Hinde. "I'll work up a boom for it in the *Evening Herald*. I'll turn one of my chaps on to writing half a dozen letters to the Editor about it! . . ."

"But you don't like the book," John expostulated. "You told me it wasn't much good!"

"Och, I know that," Hinde replied, "but that doesn't matter. I'd like to do you a good turn. There's a smart chap working for me now . . . he can put more superlatives into a paragraph than any other man in Fleet Street, and he isn't afraid of committing himself to anything. Most useful fellow to have on your staff. He does our Literary article, and he's discovered a fresh genius every week since he came to me. He'll get on, that chap! I'll turn him on to your book!"

"I don't want praise that I don't deserve," John said, thrusting out his lower lip.

"Oh, you'll deserve it all right. Everybody deserves some praise. How's Eleanor?"

"All right!"

Then Hinde hurried away, and John went home. There was a letter from the Cottenham Repertory Theatre awaiting him, and he eagerly opened the envelope.

"You needn't worry any longer," he said to Eleanor as he took out the contents of the envelope. . . .

He gaped at the cheque and the Returns Sheet.

"How much is it?" Eleanor asked.

"There must be a mistake! . . ."

"How much is it?" she repeated.

"Sixteen pounds, nine shillings and sevenpence! But! . . ."

ii

She took the Returns Sheet from him. "No," she said after she had examined it, "there doesn't appear to be any mistake. It seems to be all right!"

She put the paper and the cheque down, and turned away.

"It's queer, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes. Yes, very! We shall have to do something, John. We've very little left!"

"Of course, there's the London season to come yet," he said to comfort her.

"Not for a very long time," she answered, "and it may not be any better than this!" She hesitated for a moment, then she hurriedly said, "John, why shouldn't I go on with my work?"

"On with your work! What do you mean?"

"Why shouldn't I get a job again? We could manage, I think, and the money I'd earn would be useful. You could finish your new book! . . ."

His pride was hurt. "Oh, no," he said at once. "No, no, I can't agree to that. What sort of a husband would I look like if people heard that I couldn't maintain my wife. Oh, Eleanor, I couldn't think of such a thing! . . .

"I don't see why not. You're not going to make money easily, so far as I can see, and either you or I must get work of some sort. I know you want to finish your book, so why shouldn't I earn something to help us to keep going!"

"No," he said, "that's my job. I daresay Hinde would give me work if I asked for it!"

"But you've always been against doing journalism."

"I know. I'm still against it, but one can't always resist things. He might let me do literary work for him. I'll go in and see him to-morrow."

He told her of his encounter with Hinde that day and

of Hinde's proposal to boom *The Enchanted Lover*. "I don't like the idea much, but perhaps it'll be useful!" He picked up the cheque from the Cottenham Repertory Theatre. "I'm actually out of pocket over this affair," he said. "What with the cost of typing the play and my expenses in Cottenham. . . ."

"I wish we could go back to Ballyards," Eleanor said.

"Go back to Ballyards!" he exclaimed, staring at her in astonishment.

"Yes, we'd be much better off there!"

"Go back and admit I've failed in London! Crawl home with my tail between my legs! . . ."

"Don't be melodramatic," said Eleanor.

"I have my pride," he retorted. "You can call that being melodramatic, if you like, but I call it decent pride. I won't admit to anybody that I've failed. I haven't failed! . . ."

"I didn't say you had, dear!"

"I won't fail. You wait. Just you wait. I'll succeed all right. If I have failed so far, I can try again, can't I? Can't I?"

"Yes, John! . . ."

"I'm not going to take a knock-down blow as a knock-out. I know I can write. I feel the stuff inside me. The book I'm doing now, isn't that good?"

"Well! . . ."

"Isn't it good? You'll have to admit it's good!"

"I daresay it is. It isn't the kind of book I like, but I'm sure it's good. That's why I want to get a job, so that you can finish it in peace. Let me try . . . just until you've finished the book. Then perhaps things will be all right. I'd like to be able to say that I helped you!"

"You're a lot too good for me."

"Oh, no, I'm not. Any girl who *is* a girl would want to help, wouldn't she?"

His temper had subsided now, and the reproach he always

felt after such a scene as this made him feel very ashamed of himself.

"I'm sorry, Eleanor, that I lost my temper just now. I didn't mean to say what I did! . . ."

"But, my dear," she exclaimed, "you didn't say much, and if you did it was because you were upset about the play and the novel. Don't worry about that. Now, listen to me. I met Mr. Crawford this morning! . . ."

"Crawford?"

"Yes. He's managing director of that motor place I used to be in. He told me he had never had a secretary so useful as I was, and that he wished I'd never met you! . . ."

"Did he, indeed?"

"Yes. Of course, that was only a joke. I'm sure he'd let me go back to my old job for a while! . . ."

"No. No, no!"

She stood up, half turned away from him, and said, "Well, I'm going to ask for it anyhow!"

"You're what?"

"Yes, John, I'm going to ask for it. Don't shout at me! You really must listen to sense. I'm not going to run into debt or have trouble with tradesmen about money just because of your pride. I want you to finish that book!"

"I'd rather sweep the streets than let you go back to your old job."

"Well, I'll get a new one then!"

"Or any job," he said. "I don't care what it is. That man Crawford, what do you think he'd say if you went back to him? I know. 'Poor Mrs. MacDermott, her husband must be a rum sort of a fellow . . . not able to keep his wife . . . she had to go out to work again soon after he married her!' That's what he'd say!"

"But does it matter what he says?"

"Yes. I'm not going to have anybody say that I can't earn enough to keep you decently!"

"That's all very fine, John, but you're not doing it. Your novel hasn't brought you any money at all, and you've spent as much on the play as you've got so far. You've had one or two articles printed, and that's all. The rest of the money we've lived on has come from your Uncle William! . . ."

"Uncle William! None of it came from him. Uncle Matthew left me his money and my mother gave me the rest!"

"Yes, and how did they get it? From your Uncle William, of course. His work has kept them, hasn't it? And you? We're sponging on your Uncle William, and I hate to think we're sponging on him. You're very proud about not letting me go out to work, but you're not so proud about letting Uncle William keep you!"

This was a blow between the eyes for him. "That's a bitterly unkind thing to say," he murmured.

"It's true, isn't it?" she retorted. "I don't want to be unkind, John, but we've really got to face things. I'm frightened. I don't like the thought of getting into debt. I've never been in debt before. Never! And I can't see what's going to happen when we've spent our money if one of us doesn't start to earn something now!" She changed her tone. "John, don't be silly about it. Do agree to my getting a job for the present. You'll be able to get on with your book at home, and any other writing you want to do, and then perhaps things will get straight and we'll be all right!"

"The point is, do you believe in me?" he demanded.

"Of course I believe in you! . . ."

"Ah, but I mean in my work. In my writing. Do you believe in that?"

"What's that got to do with it? Lots of books are very good that I don't much care for. I liked *The Enchanted Lover*—it was quite good—but I don't much care for the

one you're doing now. I can't help that. I daresay other people will like it better!"

"Why don't you like it?"

"Well, it doesn't seem to me to be about anything."

"Listen, Eleanor! I don't want just to be one of a mob of fairly good writers. If I can't be a great writer, I don't want to be a writer at all. I'll have everything or I'll have nothing!"

"I see!"

"So now you know. I feel I have greatness in me . . . but you don't feel like that about me," he said.

"I don't know anything about greatness. All I know is that I like some things and that I don't like others. I don't know why a book is great or why it isn't. You can't judge things by what I say. It's quite possible that you are a great writer, and that's why I want you to let me get a job, so that you can go on with your work and be able to show the world what you can do. I'd hate to think you'd been prevented from doing your best work because you'd had to use up your energy doing other things. It won't take long to finish this book, will it?"

"No."

"Well, then, I shan't have to work for very long. By the time it's finished, *The Enchanted Lover* may have earned a lot of money for us . . . and the play, too . . . and then we can just laugh at our troubles now! . . ."

iii

He remained obdurate for a while, but in the end she wore his opposition down. Mr. Crawford gladly welcomed her back to her old job, and even offered her a larger salary than she had been receiving before her marriage. "I've learned your value since you went away," he said. "I'm a

fool to tell you that, perhaps, but I can't help it. Half the young women who go out to offices nowadays would be dear at ninepence a week. The last girl we had here caused me to imperil my immortal soul twice a day through her incompetence. I've sworn more in a week since you left us, than I ever swore in my life before! . . ."

Eleanor insisted that John should not inform his mother of her return to work. Intuitively she knew that Mrs. MacDermott's pride would be outraged by this knowledge, and that she would make bitter complaint to John of his failure to maintain his wife in a way worthy of his family; and so she urged John to say nothing at all of the matter either to Mrs. MacDermott or to Uncle William. He had made no comment on the matter, but she knew that he had been relieved by her request.

Hinde had fulfilled his promise to boom *The Enchanted Lover* in the *Evening Herald,* and Mr. Jannissary reluctantly admitted that the book was selling. "Slowly, of course, but still . . . selling! I think I shall get my money back," he said.

"Do you think I'll get any money out of it?" John asked.

"Ah, these things are on the knees of the gods, my dear fellow! It is impossible to say!"

The second book moved in a leisurely manner to its close. and Mr. Jannissary declared that he was delighted to hear that *The Enchanted Lover* would shortly have a successor. He thought that perhaps he could promise to pay royalties from the first copy of the new novel! . . .

"How do writers manage to live, Mr. Jannissary?" John said to him at this point, and Mr. Jannissary murmured that there was a divinity which shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may.

"Oh, is that it?" said John.

"Some men have been very hungry, MacDermott, because they served their Art faithfully. Think of the garrets, the

lonely attics in which beautiful things have been imagined! . . ."

"I've no desire to go hungry or to live in a lonely attic, Mr. Jannissary. Let me tell you that!"

"No . . . no, of course not. None of us have. I trust I am not a voluptuary or self-indulgent in any way, but I too would dislike to be excessively hungry. Still, I think it must be a great consolation to a man to think that he had made a great work out of . . . his pain, so to speak!"

John reflected for a moment on this. Then he said, "How do you manage to keep going, Mr. Jannissary, when you publish so many books that don't bring you any return?"

Mr. Jannissary glanced very interrogatively at John. Then he waved his hands, and murmured vaguely. "Sacrifices," he said. "We all have to make sacrifices! . . ."

John left the publisher and went on to the office of the *Evening Herald* where he saw Hinde. "I've brought an article I thought you'd like to print," he said when he had been admitted to Hinde's office. Hinde glanced quickly through it. "Good," he said, "I'll put it in to-morrow. I suppose," he continued, "you wouldn't like to do a job for me?"

"What sort of a job?"

"There's to be a great ceremony at Westminster Abbey to-morrow . . . dedication of a chapel for the Order of the Bath. The King'll be there. Like to go and write an account of it?"

"Yes, I would!"

"Good. I'll get Masters to send the ticket of admission on to you to-night!"

He felt much happier when he left the *Herald* offices than he had felt when he entered them. He had sold an article and had been commissioned to do an interesting job. Eleanor would be pleased. He hurried home so that he might be there to greet her when she returned from her work.

iv

She was sitting in front of the fire when he entered the flat. "Hilloa," he said, "you're home early, aren't you?"

She looked up and smiled rather wanly at him.

"Yes," she said, "I came home about three! . . ."

"Why? Aren't you well?"

"I'm not feeling very grand!"

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. At least I . . . Oh, I don't know. It may only be imagination!"

He sat down beside her. "Imagination! . . ." She looked at him very steadily, and he found himself remembering how beautiful he had thought her eyes were that day when he saw her for the first time. They were still very beautiful.

"I'm not sure," she said. "I don't know . . . but I . . . I think I'm going to have a baby!"

"Holy Smoke!"

"I don't know. I feel so stupid! . . ."

She had been smiling while she was telling this to him, but now she dismayed him by bursting into tears.

"Eleanor!" he exclaimed, not knowing what to say or to do, and she let herself subside into his arms and lay there, half laughing and half crying.

"I'm being a . . . frightful . . . fool," she said between sobs, "but I . . . I can't help it!"

They sat together until the dusk had turned to darkness, holding each other and whispering explanations and hopes and fears. A queer sense of responsibility settled upon John, a feeling that he must bear burdens and be glad to bear them. Eleanor seemed to him now to be a very fragile and timid creature, turning instinctively to him for care and protection. Immeasureable love for her surged in his heart. This very dear and gentle girl, so full of courage and yet so full of alarm, had become inexpressibly precious

to him. She had come to him in doubt and had entrusted her life to him, not certain that she cared for him sufficiently to be entirely happy with him. He had tried to make her happy, and slowly he had seen her liking for him growing into some sort of affection. Perhaps now she loved him as he loved her. Soon she would be the mother of a child . . . his child! . . . How very extraordinary it seemed! A few months ago, Eleanor and he had been strangers to each other . . . and now she was about to bear a child to him!

"I must work hard," he said to himself, and then to her, "Of course, you can't go back to Mr. Crawford. I'll write to my mother and tell her!"

He remembered the commission from Hinde, and while he was telling her of it, the postman delivered a letter from the *Herald* in which was the invitation card for the ceremony in Westminster Abbey.

She examined it with interest. "But it says Morning Dress must be worn," she exclaimed, pointing to the notice in the corner of the card. "You haven't got any Morning Dress!"

"Do you think it'll matter?"

"They may not let you in if you go as you are now. You haven't even a silk hat!"

"What shall I do then?" he asked.

"We must think of something. Perhaps Mrs. Townley's husband would lend you his silk hat!" The Townleys were their neighbours. "He hardly ever wears it, and he's about your size!"

"I shouldn't like to ask them! . . ."

"Oh, I'll ask them all right," Eleanor said.

She left the flat and crossed the staircase to the door of the Townleys' flat, and after a little while, she returned carrying a silk hat that was much in need of ironing.

"She lent it quite willingly," Eleanor said. "She says Mr. Townley's only used it twice. Once when they were

married and once at a funeral. Put it on!" She fixed it on his head. "It doesn't quite fit," she said. "Perhaps if I were to put some paper inside the band, that would make it sit better!"

She lined the hat with tissue paper and then put it on his head again. "That's a lot better," she exclaimed. "Look at yourself in the glass!"

"I feel an awful fool in it," he murmured, glancing at his reflection in the mirror.

"Oh, well, I suppose all men do feel like fools when they put on silk hats . . . at first anyhow . . . but it isn't any worse than a bowler hat or one of those awful squash-hats that Socialists wear. Men's hats are hideous whatever shape they are. I don't know what we're to do about a morning coat for you. I didn't like to ask Mrs. Townley to lend her husband's to me! . . ."

"Good Lord, no! You can't borrow the man's entire wardrobe from him!"

"Your grey flannel trousers might look like ordinary trousers, if we could get a morning-coat for you!" She paused as if she were reflecting on the problem. "I know," she said at last. "It's sure to rain in the morning. King George is going to the thing, so it's sure to rain. Wear your overcoat . . . then you won't need a morning coat . . . and the silk hat and your grey flannel trousers and your patent leather boots! . . ."

"It's a bit of a mixture, isn't it?"

"It won't be noticed. That'll do very nicely! Thank goodness, we've solved that problem! The money will be useful, dearest!"

V

"What luck!" said Eleanor, looking out of the window in the morning. The sky was grey and the streets were wet and dirty.

John had urged her to stay at home, offering to explain to Mr. Crawford why she was not returning to her employment, but she had insisted that she was well enough now and must treat Mr. Crawford as fairly as he had treated her. "I'll give notice to him at once," she said, "and he can get someone else as soon as possible . . . but I can't leave him in the lurch!"

They travelled by Tube to town together, and John went on to Westminster Abbey. He was very early and when he arrived at the entrance nominated on the Invitation Card he found that he was the first arrival. Ten minutes afterwards, a grubby-looking man in a slouch hat ambled up the asphalt path to the narrow door against which John was leaning. "Good morning!" John said, glancing at the slouch hat and the shabby reefer coat and the brown boots. "Have you come to do this ceremony, too?" The man nodded his head. He was very uncommunicative and had a surly look. "But they won't let you in, like that!" said John.

"Won't let me in! Who won't let me in?" the man demanded.

"It says 'Morning Dress to be worn' on the Invitation Card," John answered, showing his card as he spoke.

"That's all bunkum! They'd let me in if I were naked. I'm here to report the performance, not to display my elegance, and these people want the thing reported as much as possible. I don't suppose you know me?"

"No, I don't," said John.

"Well, I'm known as the Funeral Expert in Fleet Street. My paper always sends me out on special occasions to report big funerals. I'm very good at that sort of thing. I seem to have a flair for funerals somehow. I've never done a show like this before, but if I can only persuade myself to believe that there's a corpse about, I'll do it better than anybody else. I make a specialty of quoting the more literary parts of the Burial Service in my reports! . . ."

"You won't be able to do that to-day. This isn't a funeral," said John.

"No, but I can quote the hymns if they've got any merit at all. Otherwise I shall drag in the psalms. Hymns aren't very quotable as a rule. Shocking doggerel most of 'em! . . ."

They were joined by other reporters, and John observed that he alone among them was wearing a silk hat. He commented on the fact to the Funeral Expert.

"There's only one silk hat in the whole of Fleet Street," the Funeral Expert replied, "and it belongs to the man who specialises in Murders. He never investigates a murder without wearing his silk hat. He says it's in keeping with the theme!"

The door was opened by a verger and the journalists entered the Abbey and were led up some very narrow and dark and damp stone stairs until at last they emerged on to a rude platform of planks high up in the roof. At one end of the platform a pole had been placed breast-high between two pillars, and against this the journalists were invited to lean. Far below, the ceremony was to take place. John felt giddy as he looked down on the floor of the Cathedral.

"We shan't be able to see anything up here," he said to the Funeral Expert.

"What do you want to see?" was the reply he received. "You've got a programme of the ceremony, haven't you, and an imagination. That's all you need. I suppose you've never done a job of this sort before?"

"No. I'm a beginner!"

"Well, write a lot of slushy stuff about the sun shining through the rose-coloured window just as the King entered the Abbey. That always goes down well. There are three psalms to be sung during the service. If you quote the first one, I'll quote the second, and then we shan't clash. Is that agreed?"

"All right!"

Half the journalists retreated from the pole-barrier and sat on a pile of planks at the back of the platform. Like John, they suffered from giddiness. They had their writing-pads open, however, and were busily engaged in inventing accounts of the ceremonial that was presently to be performed. John glanced over a man's shoulder and caught sight of the words, "As His Majesty entered the ancient abbey, a burst of sunlight fell through the old rose window and cast a glorious crimson light on his beautiful regalia! . . ."

"Lord!" said John, moving away.

He went to the end of the platform, and then, moved by some feeling which he could not explain, descended the dark, stone stairs which he had lately mounted. He could hear the music of the organ, and presently the choir began to sing an anthem.

"I suppose it's beginning," he thought.

He reached the ground-floor, and presently found himself standing behind a stone-screen in the company of selected persons and officials in brilliant uniforms. There were three special reporters here, to whom an official in a gorgeous green garb, looking very like a figure on a pack of cards, was giving information. John edged nearer to them, and as he did so, he saw that some ceremony was proceeding in one of the chapels.

"What's happening?" he asked in a whisper.

His neighbor whispered back that this was to be the chapel of the Order of the Bath, and that the King was about to conduct some ceremonial with the Knights of the Order. He raised himself on the edge of a tomb and saw two lines of old men in rich claret-coloured robes facing each other, with a broad space between them, and while he looked, the King passed between the Knights who bowed to him as he passed towards the altar. He heard the murmur of old, feeble voices as the Knights swore to protect the

widow and the orphan and the virgin from wrong and injury! . . .

"They haven't the strength to protect a fly," John whispered to his neighbour.

"Ssh!" his neighbour whispered back, "it's a symbolical promise! . . ."

## vi

He hurried to the offices of the *Evening Herald* and wrote his account of the ceremony he had seen. He described the old and venerable men who had sworn to protect the widow and the orphan and the distressed virgin, and demanded of those in authority by what right they degraded an ancient and honourable Order by allowing feeble octogenarians to make promises they were incapable of fulfilling. Heaven help the distressed virgin who depended on these tottering knights for succour! . . . He had written half a column of very vituperative stuff when Hinde came into the room.

"Hilloa," said Hinde, "done that job all right?"

John smiled and nodded his head.

"I've got a letter for you," Hinde continued. "Cream sent it to me and asked me to pass it on to you. He hasn't got your address!"

He handed the letter to John and then picked up some of the sheets on which the report of the ceremony in the Abbey was being written. He read the first two sheets and then uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Anything wrong?" John asked.

"Wrong!" Hinde gaped at him, incapable of expressing himself with sufficient force. He swallowed and then, with a great effort, spoke very calmly. "My dear chap," he said, "I regard it as a merciful act of God that I came into this room when I did. What the! . . . Oh, well, it's no good talking to you. You're absolutely hopeless!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Matter! I can't print your stuff. I should get the sack

if I were to let this sort of thing go into the paper. Haven't you any sense of proportion at all?"

"But the whole thing was ridiculous! . . ."

"What's that got to do with it? Half the world is ridiculous, but there's no need to run about telling everybody!"

"But if you'd seen them . . . *old* fellows swearing to draw their swords in defence of women and children, and them not fit to do more than draw their pensions! . . ."

"Yes, yes, we know all about that. But a certain amount of humbug is decent and necessary!" He turned to a young man who had just entered the room. "Here, Chilvers, I want you to do a couple of columns on that stunt at the Abbey this morning!"

"Righto," said Chilvers.

"But he wasn't there!" John protested.

"Wasn't there!" Hinde echoed scornfully. "A good journalist doesn't need to be there. Just give the programme to him, will you?" John handed the order of proceedings to Chilvers, and Hinde added a few instructions. "Write up the King," he said. "Every inch a sovereign and that sort of stuff. Royal dignity! . . . Was Kitchener there?" he said turning again to John.

"Yes. A disappointing-looking man! . . ."

"Write him up, too. Say something about soldierly mien and stern, unbending features!"

"I see," said Chilvers. "The other chaps. . . . I'll work them off as venerable wiseacres! . . ."

"No, don't rub their age in. Venerable's not a nice word to use about anything except a cathedral. You can call the Abbey a venerable edifice or the sacred fane, but it would look nicer if you call the old buffers "the Elder Statesmen." Good phrase that! Hasn't been used much, either. Get it done quickly, will you?" He turned to John. "You might have made us miss the Home Edition with your desire to tell the truth!"

John turned away. The sense of failure that had been in possession of him since the production of *Milchu and St. Patrick* filled him now and made him feel terribly desolate. Whatever he did seemed to fail. He set off with high hopes and fine intentions, but when he reached his destination, his arrival seemed to be of very little importance and his small boat seemed to be very small and his cargo of slight value. Almost mechanically he opened Cream's letter. Hinde, having discussed other matters with Chilvers, called to John. "Come and see me in my room, will you, before you go!" and John answered, "Very good! He read Cream's note. Cream had suddenly to produce a new sketch, and he had overhauled John's piece and put it on at the Wolverhampton Coliseum. *"It went with a bang, my boy! Absolutely knocked 'em clean off their perch! I wish you'd do another! . . ."*

He enclosed postal orders for two pounds, the fee for one week's performance. John put the letter into his pocket and, nodding to Chilvers, now busily writing up the King and Lord Kitchener, he left the room and went to Hinde's office.

"I'm sorry, Mac," Hinde said to him, "I'm sorry I let out at you just now, but you gave me a fright. I'd have been fired if I'd let your thing go to press!"

"I quite understand," John answered. "I see that I'm not fit for this sort of work. I don't seem to be much good at anything!"

"What about Cream? He told me he'd done your sketch very successfully!"

John passed Cream's letter to him. "Well, you can do that sort of thing all right anyhow," Hinde said when he had read the letter.

"Cream re-wrote it," John murmured. "And even if he hadn't, it's not much of an achievement, is it? I wanted to write good stuff, and I can't do it. I can't even do decent journalism! . . ."

"Oh, those articles you do aren't too bad," Hinde said encouragingly.

"What are a few articles! The only success I have is with a low music-hall sketch, and even that has to be re-written!"

"Come, come!" said Hinde. "You're feeling depressed now. You'll change your mind presently. I daresay there's plenty of good stuff in you and one of these days it'll come out. You needn't get into the dumps because you've failed to make good as a journalist. God knows that's no triumphant career! Plenty of good writers have tried to make a living at journalism and failed hopelessly. Haven't had half the success you've had! Finished that new book of yours yet?"

"Very nearly!"

"I suppose Jannissary is going to do it, too?"

"Yes. I've contracted for three novels with him!"

"I wonder how that man would live if it weren't for the vanity of young authors!"

"I don't know," said John. "I'm too busy wondering how young authors manage to live!"

## THE THIRD CHAPTER

### i

THE money derived from Cream's sketch had compensated them for the loss of the money earned by Eleanor; but two pounds per week was insufficient for their needs, and, now that the bank balance was exhausted and they were dependent upon actual earnings, John had less time for creative work. Free lance journalism seemed likely to provide an adequate income for them, but he soon discovered that if he were to make a reasonable livelihood from it, he must give up the greater part of his time and thought to it. He could not depend upon certain or immediate acceptance of any article he wrote for the newspapers. Sometimes a topical article was sent to the wrong newspaper and kept there until too late for publication in another newspaper. Regularly-employed journalists, engaged to choose contributions from outside writers, were extraordinarily inconsiderate in their relationships with him. They would hold up a manuscript for a long time and then arbitrarily return it; they would return a manuscript in a dirty state, even scribbled over, because they had capriciously changed their minds about it, and he would waste time and money in having it re-typed; they even mislaid manuscripts and offered neither compensation nor apology for so doing. . . . In a very short while, John discovered that the more high-minded were the principles professed by a newspaper, the worse was the payment made to its contributors and the longer was the time consumed in making the payment. The low-minded journals paid for contributions well and quickly, but the noble-minded journals kept their contribu-

tors waiting weeks for small sums. . . . He could not depend upon the publication of one article each week. Could he have done so, his financial position, while meagre, would have been fairly easy and regular. There were weeks when no money was earned, and there were weeks when he earned ten or twelve guineas . . . gay, exhilarating weeks were those . . . and there were even weeks when he could not think of a suitable theme for an acceptable article. In this state of uncertainty and constant effort to get enough money to pay for common needs, the second novel became neglected, and it was not until several months after the adventure at Westminster Abbey that the manuscript was completed and sent to Mr. Jannissary. By that time, John was in debt to tradesmen and to a typewriting company from which he had purchased a typewriter on the hire system. The Cottenham Repertory Theatre had failed to arrange a London season, consequently he had had no further income from *Milchu and St. Patrick,* and Mr. Jannissary, when John talked about royalties from *The Enchanted Lover,* never failed to express his astonishment at the fact that the sales of that excellent book had not exceeded five hundred copies. He had been certain that at least a thousand copies would have been sold as a result of the boom in the *Evening Herald.*

"Why don't you put a chartered accountant on his track?" said Hinde when John told him of what Mr. Jannissary had said.

John shrugged his shoulders. His experience with the Cottenham Repertory Theatre had cured him of all desire to send good money after bad. He wished now that he had taken Hinde's advice and had kept away from Mr. Jannissary, but it was useless to repine over that. He turned instinctively to Hinde for advice, and Hinde was generous with it. He was generous, too, with more profitable things. He put work in John's way as often as he could, and in spite of the fiasco over the Abbey ceremony,

had offered employment on the *Herald* to him, but John had refused it, feeling that his novel would never reach its end if he were tied to a newspaper. When, however, the book was completed, he went to Hinde again and consulted him about the prospect of obtaining regular work. His immediate needs were important, but overshadowing these was the need that would presently come upon him. Eleanor in a few months would be brought to bed . . . and he had no money saved for that time. She would need a nurse . . . there would be doctor's bills! . . .

"I must get a job of some sort that will bring a decent amount of money," he said to Hinde.

Hinde nodded his head. "There's nothing on the *Herald,*" he said, "but I may hear of something elsewhere. What about a short series of articles for us? Write six or seven articles on London Streets. Take Fleet Street, Piccadilly, Bond Street, the Strand and the Mile End Road, and write about their characteristics, showing how different they are from each other. That kind of stuff. I'll give you three guineas each for them, and I'll take six for certain if they're good. If they're very good, I'll take some more. That'll help a bit, won't it?"

"It'll help a lot," said John very heartily.

ii

Soon after this interview, Hinde informed John that the *Sensation* had a vacancy for a sub-editor, and that Mr. Clotworthy was willing to try him in the job for a month. "And for heaven's sake, don't make an ass of yourself this time!" he added. "Clotworthy was very unwilling to take you on, but I convinced him that you are sensible now and so he consented!" John had taken the news to Eleanor, expecting that she would be elated by it, but when he told her that his work would keep him in Fleet Street half the

night, she showed very little enthusiasm for it. Her normal dislike of being alone was intensified now, and the thought of being in the flat by herself until one or two in the morning frightened her. "I shan't see anything of you," she complained.

"I shall be at home in the daytime," he replied.

"Yes . . . writing," she said bitterly. "People like you have no right to get married or . . . have children!"

He considered for a while.

"I wonder if my mother would come and stay with us?" he said at last.

"And leave Uncle William alone?"

"Oh, he could manage all right!"

"Don't be childish, John. How can he manage all right? Is he to attend to the house and cook his meals as well as look after the shop? It looks as if someone has got to be left alone through this work of yours . . . either me or Uncle William . . . and you don't care much who it is! . . ."

"That's unfair, Eleanor!"

"Everything's unfair that isn't just exactly what you want it to be. I'm sick of this life . . . debt and discomfort . . . and now I'm to be left alone half the night! . . ."

He remembered that she was overwrought, and made no answer to her complaint. He would write to his mother and ask her to think of a solution of their problem that would not involve Uncle William in difficulties. It was useless to talk to Eleanor while she was in this nervous state of mind. He could see quite plainly that decisions must be made by him even against her desire. Poor Eleanor would realise all this after the baby was born, and would thank him for not showing signs of weakness! . . . He wrote to Mr. Clotworthy, as Hinde had suggested, about the sub-editorial work, and to his mother about the problem that puzzled them.

iii

Mrs. MacDermott solved the problem, not by letter, but by word of mouth. She telegraphed to John to meet her at Euston, and on the way from the station to Hampstead, she told him of her plan.

"I'd settled this in my mind from the beginning," she said, "and you've only just advanced things a week or two by your letter. I'm going to take Eleanor back to Ballyards with me! . . ."

"What for?"

"What for!" she exclaimed. "So's your child can be born in the house where you were born and your da and his da! . . . That's why! Where else would a MacDermott be born but in his own home?"

"But what about me?"

"You! You can come home too, if you like!"

"How can I come home when I have my work to do? It'll be three months yet before the child is born! . . ."

"Well, you can stay here by yourself then!"

"In the flat . . . alone?"

"Aye. What's to hinder you? That's what your Uncle William that's twice your age would have to do, if you had your way!"

"I don't see that at all. He could easily give Cassie McClurg a few shillings a week to come and look after him while you stay here with us! . . ."

"I'm not thinking about you or your Uncle William. I'm thinking about Eleanor and the child. I want it to be born at home!"

"Och, what does it matter where it's born," John impatiently demanded, "so long as it is born?"

"You *fool!*" said Mrs. MacDermott, and there was such scorn in her voice as John had never heard in any voice before. She turned away and would not speak to him again. He lay back against the cushions of the cab and considered.

Eleanor would certainly be well cared for at home, but . . . "what about me?" he asked. He supposed he could manage by himself. Of course, he could. That was not the point that was worrying him. He hated the thought of being separated from Eleanor! . . .

"No," he said to his mother, "I don't think I can agree to that!"

"It doesn't matter whether you agree to it or not," she replied. "It's what's going to happen!" She turned on him furiously. "Have you no nature or pride? Where else would Eleanor be so well-tended as at home? . . ."

"It isn't her home," he objected.

"It *is* her home. She's a MacDermott now, and anyway the child is. You'd keep her here in this Godforsaken town, surrounded by strangers, and no relation of her own to be near her when her trouble comes! . . . There's times, John, when I wonder are you a man at all? Your mind is so set on yourself that you're like a lump of stone. You and your old books . . . as if they matter a tinker's curse to anybody! . . ."

"I know you never thought anything of my work," he complained, "and Eleanor doesn't think much of it either. I get little encouragement from any of you!"

"You get encouragement," Mrs. MacDermott retorted, "when you've earned it. It's no use pulling a poor mouth to me, my son. I come from a family that never asked for pity, and I married into one that never asked for pity. My family and your da's family went through the world, giving back as much as we got and a wee bit more, and we never let a murmur out of us when we got hurt. There were times when I thought it was hard on the women of the family, but I see now, well and plain, that there's no pleasure in this world but to be keeping your head high and never to let nothing downcast you. I'd be ashamed to be a cry-ba! . . ."

"I'm no cry-ba!" he muttered sulkily.

"Well, prove it then. Let Eleanor come without making a sour face over it. Come yourself if you want to, but anyway let her come!"

"I don't believe she'll go," he said.

"She will, if you persuade her!" Suddenly her tone altered, and the hard tone went out of her voice. She leant towards him, touching him on the arm. "Persuade her, son!" she said. "My heart's hungry to have her child born in its own home among its own people!"

She looked at him so pleadingly that he was deeply moved. He felt his blood calling to him, and the ties of kinship stirring strongly in his heart. Pictures of Ballyards passed swiftly through his mind, and in rapid succession he saw the shop and Uncle Matthew and Uncle William and Mr. McCaughan and Mr. Cairnduff and the Logans and the Square and the Lough, and could smell the sweet odours of the country, the smell of wet earth and the reek of turf fires and the cold smell of brackish water. . . .

"Have your own way," he said to his mother, and she drew him to her and kissed him more tenderly than she had kissed him for many years.

iv

When they told their plan to Eleanor her eyes lit up immediately, and he saw that she was eager to go to Ballyards, but almost at once, she turned to him and said, "Oh, but you, John? What about you?"

"I'll be all right," he replied. "Don't worry about me!"

"Couldn't you come, too?"

"You know I can't. How can I give up this job on the *Sensation* the minute I've got it!"

"Easy enough," Mrs. MacDermott interjected. "If you've only just got it, there'll be no hardship to you or to them if you give it up now!"

"I have to earn our keep," he insisted.

"There's the shop," Mrs. MacDermott insisted.

"I won't go next or near the shop," he shouted in sudden fury. "I came here to write books and I'll write them!"

"You're not writing books when you're sitting up half the night in a newspaper office!"

"I know I'm not. But I must get money to . . . to pay for! . . ."

"Are you worrying yourself about Eleanor's confinement, son? Never bother your head about that. I'll not let her want for anything! . . ."

"I know you won't," he replied in a softer voice, "but I'd rather earn the money myself!"

Mrs. MacDermott tightened her mouth. "Very well," she said.

"I've a good mind to let the flat till you come back," John murmured to Eleanor.

"What's that?" Mrs. MacDermott demanded.

"I was saying I'd a good mind to let the flat until she comes back. I could go to Miss Squibb's for a while. It 'ud really be cheaper! . . ."

"Would you let strangers walk into your house and use your furniture?"

"Yes. Why not? We shall be able to pay the rent and have a profit out of what we shall get for sub-letting it."

"Making a hotel out of your home," Mrs. MacDermott said in disgust.

"Och, we're not all home-mad," John retorted.

"That's the pity," his mother rejoined.

V

Three weeks later, Eleanor and Mrs. MacDermott departed for Ballyards. Eleanor had refused to go away from London until she had seen John settled in his work

and the flat sub-let to suitable tenants. She arranged for his return to Miss Squibb who, most opportunely, had his old room vacant, and she made Lizzie promise to take particular care of his comfort. "I can tyke care of 'im all right," Lizzie said. "I've tyken care of Mr. 'Inde for years, an' I feel I can tyke care of anybody after 'im. You leave 'im to me, Mrs. MacDermott, an' I wown't let 'im come to no 'arm!" She leant forward suddenly and whispered to Eleanor. "I do 'ope it's a boy," she said.

"Why?" said Eleanor blushing.

"Ow, I dunno. Looks better some'ow to 'ave a boy first go off. You can always 'ave a girl afterwards. Wot you goin' to call it, if it's a boy?"

"John, of course!" said Eleanor.

"Um-m-m. Well, I suppose you'll 'ave to, after 'is father, but if I 'ad a son I'd call 'im Perceval. I dunno why! I just would. It sounds nice some'ow. I mean it 'as a nice sound. Only people 'ud call 'im Perce, of course, an' that would be 'orrible. I dessay you're right. It's better to be called John than to be called Perce!"

"Why don't you get married, Lizzie?" Eleanor said.

"Never been ast. That's why. I'd jump at the chance if I got it. You down't think I'm 'angin' on 'ere out of love for Aunt. I'm just 'angin' on in 'ope! . . ."

But before Eleanor and Mrs. MacDermott went to Ballyards, they realised that John's sub-editorial work was hard and inconvenient. The unnatural hours of labour in noisy and insanitary surroundings left him very tired and crochetty in the morning, and he felt disinclined for other work. He had written his series of articles on London Streets for the *Evening Herald*, and Hinde had professed to like them sufficiently to ask for more of them. Twelve of them had been printed . . . one each day for a fortnight . . . and the money had cleared John of debt and left a little for the coming expense. Cream's two pounds per week came regularly every Monday morning, and this, with the

income from the *Sensation*, and an occasional article made the prospects of life seem clearer. "There's no fame in it," he told himself, "but at least I'm paying my way!" In a little while, his second novel would be published, and perhaps it would bring a reward which he had unaccountably missed with his first book and his tragedy. More than anything else now, he wanted recognition. Money was good and acceptable and he would gladly have much more of it, but far beyond money he valued recognition. If he had to make choice between a large income and a large reputation, he would unhesitatingly choose a large reputation. He longed to hear Hinde admitting that he had been mistaken in John's quality. Indeed, in the last analysis, it seemed that more than money and more than general recognition, he craved for recognition from Hinde. He wished to see Hinde coming to him in a respectful manner! . . .

But there was little likelihood of that happening while he performed sub-editorial work on the *Sensation*. Every night he and the other sub-editors, young and unhealthy-looking men, sat round a big table, handling "flimsies" and scribbling rapidly. They invented head-lines and cross-headings, and they cut down the work of the outside staff! When a nugget of gold was found in Wales and was pronounced to be a lump of quartz with streaks of gold in it rather than a nugget of pure gold, John had headed the paragraph in which the news was reported, ALL IS NOT GOLD THAT GLITTERS. He glanced at the heading after he had written it. "I seem to be getting into the way of this sort of thing," he said with a sigh. He put the paper down and got up from the table. The baskets lying about, full of "copy" or "flimsies" or cuttings from other papers; the hard, blinding light from the unshaded electric globes; the litter of newspapers and torn envelopes; the incessant *rurr-rurr-rurr* of the printing machines; and the hot, exhausted air of the room . . . all these seemed dis-

gusting. He shut his eyes for a moment. "Oh, God," he prayed, "let my book be a success! Get me out of this, Oh, God, for Jesus Christ's sake! . . ."

He understood the dislike which speedily grew up in Eleanor for this work. There would be very little fun for her, less even than for him, in a life that took him to Fleet Street in the evening and kept him there until the middle of the night. He must escape from it somehow, but in what way he was to escape from it he could not imagine. Vaguely, he felt that a book or a play would lift him out of Fleet Street and set him down in ease and comfort somewhere in agreeable surroundings; but it might be many years before that desired bliss was achieved. He would spend his youth in this atmosphere of neurosis and hasty judgment, and perhaps when he was old and no longer full of zest for enjoyment, he would have leisure for the things he could no longer delight in. And Eleanor, too . . . she would have to struggle with penury until she grew tired and lustreless! . . . "No, she won't!" he vowed. "I'm not going to let her down whatever happens. I'll make a position somehow! . . ."

Then Eleanor and Mrs. MacDermott went to Ballyards. He stood by the carriage-door talking to them both while the train filled with passengers, and as the guard blew a succession of blasts on his whistle, he leant forward to kiss Eleanor "Good-bye!" A tear rolled down her cheek. . . . "I wish I weren't going now," she said, clinging to him.

"It won't be for long," he murmured. "Will it, mother?" he added to Mrs. MacDermott.

But his mother did not make any reply. She sat very tightly in her seat, and he saw that there was a hard look in her eyes and that her lips were closely joined together.

## vi

He wandered out of the station . . . it was Saturday night and therefore he had not to go to the *Sensation* office . . . and entered the Hampstead Tube railway. On Monday, the agent would make an inventory of the furniture, and John would move to Brixton. Until then, he would stay at the flat, taking his meals at restaurants. He left the Tube at Hampstead and walked home. The flat seemed very dark and cheerless when he entered it, and he wandered from room to room in a disturbed state as if he were searching for something and had forgotten for what he was searching. A petticoat of Eleanor's, flung hastily on to the bed, caught his eye, a blue silk petticoat that he remembered her buying soon after they were married. He wondered why she had thrown it aside, for she was fond of blue garments, and this was new from the laundry. He rubbed his hand over its silk surface and listened to the sound it made. Dear Eleanor! Most sweet and precious Eleanor! . . . He left the bedroom and went into the combined sitting and dining-room and then into the kitchen. At the door of the tiny spare bedroom, he stopped and turned away. What was the use of wandering about the house in this disconsolate manner? Eleanor had gone and it was idle to pretend that he might suddenly come to her in some corner of the flat. It was much too early to go to bed and, since he could not sit still indoors, he resolved to go out and walk off his mood of depression and loneliness. The trees on Hampstead Heath stood up in deep darkness, and overhead he saw the innumerable stars shining coldly. In the dusk and shadow he could hear the murmur of subdued voices and now and then a peal of girlish laughter, or the deeper sound of a man's mirth. Young, eager-eyed men and women went by, intent on love-making, their faces shining with youth and the happiness of the unburdened. All the beauty of the world lay still before them, untouched

and undimmed, drawing them towards it with rich and strange promises of wonderful fulfilment. And no shadow fell upon their happiness to darken it or make it cold. . . . He could feel his heart singing within him, and he asked himself why it was that he should feel happy in this street, in which Eleanor and he had walked in love together, when he had felt restless and unhappy in the flat where they had lived and loved. He stood under a lamp to look at his watch, and wondered where Eleanor was now . . . what stage of her journey she had reached. The train had left Euston at half-past eight, and now the hour was twenty minutes past ten. Nearly two hours since she had gone away from him. Sixty or eighty miles, perhaps a hundred, separated them, and every moment the distance between them was lengthening. He could stand here, leaning against these rails and looking over the hollows of the Heath towards the softened glare of London, and almost tell off the miles that were consumed by the rushing, roaring train! . . . One mile . . . two miles . . . three miles! . . .

The laughter and the shining eyes of the young lovers made him feel old, now that Eleanor was not with him to make him feel young. He felt old, though he was not old, because he was lonely again, more lonely than he had been before he saw Eleanor at the Albert Hall. He had followed her as a man lost in a desert follows a star, and she had brought him home at last . . . and now she was gone from him, bearing a baby. Soon, though, very soon, the time would pass and she would return to him and they would never be separated again. He would fulfil his desires. He would write great books and great plays, and Eleanor would grow in loveliness and dignity, and his son . . . for he was certain that the child would be a boy . . . would reach up from childhood to manhood in strength and beauty! . . .

vii

The last post had brought the proofs of his second novel to him. He tore the packet open, and began to correct them at once. *Hearts of Controversy* was the title of the book, and it was dedicated:

To the Memory of my Uncle Matthew.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

### i

WHEN Eleanor's son was born, John was still in London. He had intended to be with her, but Mr. Clotworthy would not give leave to him because of illness among the staff. "I'm sorry," he had said, "but I can't let you go. You'd only be in the way anyhow. A man's a cursed nuisance at a time like that. When Corcoran comes back, I'll see if I can manage a few days for you!" John murmured thanks and turned to go. "I hear good accounts of you," Mr. Clotworthy continued. "Tarleton says you're working splendidly. I'm glad you've learned sense at last!" John smiled rather drearily, and then left the editor's room. So he was learning sense, was he? . . . A few months ago, had Mr. Clotworthy told him that leave to go to his wife was denied to him, he would have sent Mr. Clotworthy to blazes . . . but he was learning sense now, and so, though he ached to go to Eleanor, he was remaining in London. Tarleton . . . the most common-minded man John had ever encountered . . . said that he was working splendidly. They were all pleased with him. He could invent headlines and cross-headings and write paragraphs to the satisfaction of Tarleton, whose conception of a romantic love story was some dull, sordid intrigue heard in the Divorce Court. Tarleton always described a street accident as a tragedy. Tarleton referred . . . in print . . . to the greedy amours of a chorus girl as a "Thrilling Romance of the Stage," though he had other words to describe them in conversation. And John was giving satisfaction to Tarleton. . . .

He wrote to his mother and to Eleanor explaining why he could not immediately go to Ballyards. Eleanor could not reply to his letter, but Mrs. MacDermott wrote that she was recovering rapidly from her illness and that the baby was a fine, healthy child. *"A MacDermott to the backbone,"* she wrote. *"It's queer work that keeps a man out of his bed half the night and won't let him go to his wife when she's having a child! Your Uncle William isn't looking well . . . he feels the weight of his years and the work on him . . . and he is worried about the shop. But he's greatly pleased with Eleanor being here. Him and her gets on well together. He's near demented over the child! . . ."*

ii

His son was a month old before John saw him. Mrs. MacDermott led him to the cradle where the baby was sleeping, and as he looked down on it, the child awoke and screwed up its face and began to cry. Mrs. MacDermott took it in her arms and soothed it.

"Well?" she said to John.

He looked at the child with puzzled eyes. "Is it all right?" he asked.

"All right!" she exclaimed. "Of course, it's all right! What would be wrong with it?"

"It's so ugly-looking! . . ."

She stared incredulously at him. "Ugly," she said, "it's a beautiful baby. One of the loveliest children I've ever clapped my eyes on. Look at it! . . ." She held the baby forward to him.

"I can see it right enough," he answered. "I think it's ugly!"

"You don't know a fine-looking child when you see it," she answered indignantly.

He went back to Eleanor's room . . . she was out of bed now, but because the day was cold was sitting before a fire

in her bedroom . . . and sat with her while she talked of little things that had happened to her during their separation. "You know, John," she said, "you're not looking well. You're getting thin and grey! . . ."

"Grey?"

"Yes . . . your face looks grey. I'm sure that life isn't good for you!"

"I feel tired, but that may be the journey. The sea was rough last night, crossing from Liverpool to Belfast, and I didn't get any sleep. Mebbe that's what it is. I daresay I'll be looking all right to-morrow!"

"How long are you going to stay?" she asked.

"Well, Clotworthy told me to get back as soon as possible. Do you think you'll be able to come home with me at the end of the week?"

She did not answer.

"Of course," he went on, "we've got to get the tenants out of the flat first. I thought mebbe you'd come to Miss Squibb's with me till the flat was ready!"

"I don't think I should like that," she answered.

"No, mebbe not, but I'm terribly lonesome without you, Eleanor. It's been miserable all this while! . . ."

She put her arms about him and kissed him. "Poor old thing," she said.

"And I'd like you to come home as soon as possible."

Mrs. MacDermott brought the baby into the room. "John says he's an ugly child," she said to Eleanor, glancing angrily at her son.

"Oh, John!" Eleanor exclaimed reproachfully. "He isn't ugly. He's handsome! . . ."

"Well, I don't know what women call beautiful or handsome," John said, "but if you call that screwed-up face good-looking, then I don't know what good looks are!"

"I'm sure you weren't half so beautfiul as baby is," Eleanor murmured.

Mrs. MacDermott put the child in its mother's arms, and happed the covering about its head. "Eight pounds he weighed when he was born," she said. "Eight pounds! And then you say he isn't beautiful! And him your own son, too!"

"Oh, well, if you only mean he's weighty when you say he's beautiful, mebbe you're right! . . ."

"You're unnatural, John," said Mrs. MacDermott.

"Are all babies like that?" he asked.

"All the good-looking ones are. Give him to me again, Eleanor, dear!" She took the baby from its mother, and holding it tightly in her arms, walked up and down the room singing it to sleep. "He's asleep," she said in a whisper, coming closer to them. She held the child so that they could see the tiny face in the firelight. They did not speak. Eleanor, leaning back in her chair, and John sitting forward in his, and Mrs. MacDermott standing with the baby in her arms, looked on the child.

"I'm its father," said John, at last. "That seems comic!"

"And I'm its mother," Eleanor murmured.

Mrs. MacDermott lifted the child so that her lips could touch its tiny mouth. "Five generations in the one house," she said. "I bless God for this day!"

iii

"Will you be able to come with me to London at the end of the week?" John said at tea that evening.

"She's not near herself yet," Uncle William exclaimed.

"No, indeed she's not. You'd best leave her here another month," Mrs. MacDermott added.

"You're forgetting, aren't you that she's been here more than three months already."

"Och, what's three months when you're young," Uncle William replied.

"A great deal," said John. "Will you be ready, do you think, Eleanor?"

Eleanor hesitated. "I don't know," she said. "I don't feel very well yet. Can't you stay on a while longer, John? You know you're tired and need a rest, and it'll do you a lot of good to stay on for a week or two!"

"I must get back. I've a living to earn for three of us now!"

"I shall be sorry to leave Ballyards," Eleanor replied.

"There's no need for either of you to leave it," Mrs. MacDermott exclaimed. "Your home's here and there's no necessity for you to go tramping the world among strangers!"

"We've settled all that, ma!" John retorted.

"You don't like that life on newspapers, do you, John?" Eleanor asked.

"No, but I have to live it until I can earn enough to keep us from my books. It's no use arguing, ma. My mind's made up on that subject. It was made up long ago!" Constraint fell upon them, and John, feeling that he must make conversation again, turned to his Uncle. "How's the shop doing?" he asked.

"Middling . . . middling," Uncle William replied. "We're having a wee bit of opposition to fight against. One of these big firms has just opened a branch here. Pippin's! They're causing me a bit of anxiety, the way they're cutting prices down, but I think we'll hold our own with them. We always gave good value for the money, and some of these big shops only pretends to do that. But it's anxious work!"

"A MacDermott ought to be ready to fight for the good name of his family," said Mrs. MacDermott.

"Oh, I'm willing to fight all right," Uncle William answered.

"I know you are. I wasn't doubting you," Mrs. MacDermott assured him.

Their conversation became vague and disjointed. Several times John turned to Eleanor and tried to settle a date on which she should return to town, but on each occasion something interrupted them, and Eleanor showed no inclination to be definite. "There's no hurry for a day or two, is there?" she said at last, and then, pleading fatigue, she went to bed.

"I can't see what you want to go back to London for," Mrs. MacDermott said when Eleanor had gone. "The neither of you don't look well on that life, and you could write your books here just as well as you can there. Better, mebbe! Eleanor likes Ballyards. She doesn't care much for London."

Suspicion entered John's mind. "Have you been putting notions into her head?" he demanded.

"Notions! What notions?" she answered innocently.

"You know rightly what notions. Have you been trying to persuade her to stay here?"

"It's well you know, my son, I never try to persuade no one to do anything. I just let them find things out for themselves. It's the best way in the end."

"As long as you act up to that, you can do what you like," John said. "You may as well know, though, for good and all, that we're going back to London. I've a new book coming out soon! . . ."

"I wonder will you make as much out of it as you made out of your other book," Mrs. MacDermott said.

iv

There was a letter for John in the morning. His subtenant wrote to say that he liked the flat and found it so convenient that he was very anxious to know whether there was a chance of John giving up possession of it. He was willing to buy the furniture at a fair valuation! . . .

"Damned cheek," said John. He told the others of the contents of the letter.

"If we were to stay here," Eleanor said, "that offer would be very useful, wouldn't it?"

"It's of no use to us," he answered. "We're not going to stay here!"

In the afternoon, a telegram came from Clotworthy instructing John to return to London immediately. "Will you come with me or come later by yourself?" John said to Eleanor.

She hesitated for a few moments, then going quickly to him and putting her arms about his neck, she whispered, "I don't want to go back to London, John. I want to stay here!"

"You what?"

"I want to stay here. Oh, give up this work and stay at home. Your Uncle is getting old and needs help, and I'll be much happier here than in London! . . ."

"Give up writing! . . ."

"You'll be able to do some writing here if you want to!"

"Uncle William hasn't time to take a holiday. What time will I have to write if I take on his work?"

"He has no one to help him. I'll help you!"

"The thing's absurd!"

"No, it isn't. I like being in the shop. I've helped Uncle William a lot. I've made suggestions! . . ."

"My mother put this idea into your head!"

"No, she didn't. She's talked to me about Ballyards, of course, and the MacDermotts and the shop, but she has not asked me to stay here. It's my own idea. I like this little town, John, and its quiet ways and the comfort of this house. I've always wanted comfort and quietness, and I've got it here. I don't want to go back to the misery of London . . . always wondering whether we shall have enough money to pay our bills, and you out half the night. Oh, let's stay here!"

He put her away from him. "No," he said obstinately. "I'm not going to give in! . . ."

"I'm not asking you to give in!"

"You are. You're asking me to come back here where everybody knows me and knows what I went out to do, and you're asking me to admit to them that I've failed!"

"No, no, dear! . . ."

"Yes, you are. Because I haven't made a fortune at the start, you all think I'm a failure. Hasn't every man had to struggle and fight for his position, and amn't I fighting and struggling for mine? If you cared for me! . . ."

"I do care for you, John!"

"Then you'd be glad to fight with me . . . and struggle! . . ."

"Yes, I am prepared to fight with you . . . but I'm not going to take risks with the baby! . . ."

"What's he got to do with it?"

She turned on him angrily. "Are you willing to let him suffer for your books, too? Do you think I'm going to let my child go without things to feed your pride? . . ."

"He won't have to go without things. I'll earn enough for him and for you."

"Yes, I know. We've seen something of that already. Well, I'm not going back to London, John. I'm simply not going back. You can't expect me to go from this house where I'm happy to that little poky flat in Hampstead and sit there night after night while you are at the office! . . ."

"Other women do it, don't they?"

"Other women can do what they like. If they're content to live like that, they can, but I'm not content. I don't like that life, and I won't live it. You must make up your mind to that. It isn't necessary for you to go back to the *Sensation* office—you can stay here and help Uncle William!"

"Become a grocer! . . ."

"Why not? Isn't it better to be a good grocer than a bad novelist!"

His face flushed and he breathed very heavily. "You're all against me, the whole lot of you. You make little of me. I get no help or encouragement at all. My ma and you and Hinde! . . ."

"If you were good at that work, you would not need encouragement, would you?"

"I don't need it. I can do without it. I'll prove to you yet that I can write as well as anybody. Never you fear, Eleanor! . . ."

"I'm not going back to London," she said.

"Well, then, you can stay behind. I'll go back by myself!"

Mrs. MacDermott came into the room. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing," John replied. "I'm going back to London this evening. Eleanor says she's going to stay here! . . ."

"For good?"

"Aye . . . for good."

"And you? When are you coming back?"

"I'm not coming back. She'll have to come to me. You're always talking about the pride of the MacDermotts. Well, I'll show you some of it. I'll not put my foot inside this house till Eleanor comes back to me. It's me that settles where we live . . . not her . . . not anybody. Do you think I'm going to throw up everything now when I've made a start. I've a new book coming out soon. You know that well . . . the whole of you. I know you don't think much of it, Eleanor! . . ."

"I didn't say that," she interjected.

"But I think a lot of it. I know it's good. I'm sure it's good. And if it does well, I'll be able to leave the *Sensation* office, and we can live happily together . . . but you'll have to come to me. I won't come here to you! . . ."

He turned to his mother. "Mebbe you're content now,"

he said. "You've got your way. There's a MacDermott in the house to carry on the business when he's old enough. You'll not need me now!"

He went out of the room, slamming the door behind him, and a little while later, they heard him leaving the house.

"Wait, daughter," said Mrs. MacDermott, taking hold of Eleanor by the hand. "Don't fret yourself, daughter, dear. I lived with his father! . . ."

"But he always had his own way. You told me so yourself."

"Yes, that's true, but John has some of my blood in him, and my blood clings to its home. Content yourself a wee while!"

V

He met Uncle William crossing the Square, and suddenly he realised how old Uncle William was, and how tired he looked.

"Come a piece of the road with me," he said, putting his arm in his Uncle's. "Eleanor and me have just have a fall-out, and I want to walk my anger off. I'm going back to London to-night! . . ."

"You're going soon, aren't you?"

"Yes. I had a telegram from the office a while ago. Eleanor doesn't want to go home. She wants to stay here!"

"Aye, she's well content with us!"

"But her place is with me. I'm her husband! . . ."

"Indeed, you are. A wife's place is with her husband. It's a pity you can't agree to be in the same place!

"Listen, John," he went on, as they came away from the town and strolled along the road leading to the Lough, "there's a thing I'm going to tell you that I've never said to no one before. It's this. The thing that destroyed your father and your Uncle Matthew was their pride in themselves. They never stopped to consider other people.

They did what they wanted to do regardless of how it affected their neighbours or their friends. And nothing came out of their work. Your father died and left an angry memory behind him. Your Uncle Matthew died and left nothing but a wrong view of things to you. Your mother . . . well, I hardly know what to say about her. She's had much to thole, and it's made her bitter in her mind, and many's a time I think she's demented about the pride of the MacDermotts. I'm proud of my name, too, and proud of the respect we've earned for ourselves, but I'm old and tired, John, and I've nothing to comfort me, and the pride of the MacDermotts gives me little consolation for the things I've missed. I'd give the two eyes out of my head to have a wife like your wife, and a wee child for my own, but I've had to do without the both of them. You see, John, I had to keep the family going when the others failed to support it. I'd be a glad and happy man if I had my wife and my child in the shop! . . ."

"Do you want me to come home too, then?"

"Every man must do the best for himself. I'm only telling you not to eat up other people's lives when you're holding on to your own opinion. I daresay you know what's best for yourself, but I wonder whether you'll think that in ten years' time. Or twenty years' time. If you can comfort your mind with the thought that this world is a romance, the way your Uncle Matthew did, then you'll mebbe be content, but I never saw any romance in it, and the only comfort I get from it is the thought that I'm keeping up a good name. The MacDermotts always gave good value for the money. I wouldn't mind if they put that on my gravestone!" He changed his tone abruptly. "Do you think you're a good writer, John?" he asked.

"I don't know, Uncle William. I try hard to believe I am, but I'm not sure. Do you think I am?"

"How can I tell? I've no knowledge of these things, and

I can't distinguish between my pride in you and my judgment. I liked your book well enough, but I'm doubtful would I have bothered my head about it if someone else had written it. Is your next book a good one?"

"*I* think so, but Eleanor doesn't!"

"The position isn't very satisfactory, is it? You're going to leave that young girl for the sake of something that you're uncertain of?"

"I want to prove my worth to her!"

"You mean you want to content yourself. You want to make her think you were right and she was wrong!"

"I have my pride! . . ."

"Aye, you have your pride, but I'm wondering would you rather have that than Eleanor?"

They sat down on the edge of the Lough and did not speak for a long time. John picked up pebbles and threw them into the water, while his Uncle gazed at the opposite shore. They sat there until it was time to go home to tea.

"We'd better be moving," said Uncle William. "Are you settled in your mind that you're going back to London?"

"Yes," said John.

vi

"Good-bye, Eleanor!" he said when the time came to catch the train to Belfast.

"Good-bye, John!"

He took hold of her hand and waited for her to offer her lips to him, but she did not offer them.

"If you change your mind," he said, but she interrupted him quickly.

"I shan't change my mind," she said.

"Very well. Good-bye!"

She did not speak. She was afraid to speak.

"Well, good-bye again!" he said.

He turned to his mother. Her eyes were very bright, but there were no tears in them. She looked steadily at him.

"It's a pity," she said.

Her hand sought Eleanor's and pressed it. "We must all do what's for the best," she said. "None of us can do any more!"

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER

### i

He oscillated between an almost uncontrollable desire to return to Eleanor and a cold rage against her. Women, he told himself, always stepped between men and their work. Women drew men away from great labours and made creatures of comfort of them. They took an aspiring angel and made a domestic animal of him. He was prepared to endure hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake, but Eleanor demanded that first of all he should provide comfort and security for her and her child. She would gladly turn a creative artist into a small tradesman for the sake of the greater profit that was made by the small tradesman. He would not be seduced from his proper work . . . and yet, when he went back to Miss Squibb's after the *Sensation* had gone to bed, walking sometimes all the way from Fleet Street, over Blackfriars Bridge, he would spend the time of the journey in dreaming of Eleanor as he first saw her or as he saw her in the box at the Albert Hall when Tetrazzini sang. He would conjure up pictures of her standing at the bookstall at Charing Cross, waiting for him, or saying good-bye to him at the steps of the Women's Club in Bayswater or kneeling beside him in St. Chad's Church as the priest blessed their marriage or sitting before the fire in Ballyards holding her baby in her arms. And when these visions of her went through his mind, he felt an intense longing to go away from London at once and stay contentedly with her wherever she chose to be. Sometimes his mind was full of thoughts about his child. He had not felt much emotion about it when he was at Ballyards . . . he had thought of

it mostly with amazement and with some dislike of its shapeless face . . . but now there were stirrings in his heart when he thought of it, and he wished that he could be with Eleanor and watch the gradual growth of the baby into a recognising being. His work at the *Sensation* office had become mechanical, and he worked at the table in the sub-editors' room without any consciousness of it; but he consoled himself for the fatigue and the dullness by promising himself a swift and brilliant release from Fleet Street when his second book was published. Even if his book were not to make money, it would establish his reputation, and when that was done, he could surely persuade Eleanor to believe that his life must be lived elsewhere than behind the counter of the shop. He had written to her several times since his return to London, and she had written to him, but there were signs of restraint in his letters and in hers. He told her that he had made arrangements for the sub-tenants to remain in the flat for the present. He wrote "for the present" deliberately. The phrase that shaped itself in his mind as he wrote the letter was "until you come back to London," but he changed it before he put his thoughts into written words. She gave long accounts of the baby to him, and described her life in Ballyards. She was helping Uncle William who said that her help was very useful to him. They were going to fight Pippin's multiple shops and beat them. She had suggested some alterations in the shop to Uncle William, and he, agreeing that one must move with the times, had consented to make the alterations. She did not ask John to come back, but when he read her letters, he felt that she was preventing herself, with difficulty, from doing so.

ii

A month after his return to London, *Hearts of Controversy* was published. He took the complimentary copies out of their parcel and fingered them, turning the leaves

backward and forward, and looking for a long while at the dedication "To the Memory of my Uncle Matthew." How pleased and proud Uncle Matthew would have been of this book, but how little pleasure John was deriving from it. He hardly cared now whether it failed or succeeded. If only something would happen that would enable him to return to Ballyards and Eleanor with some sort of pride left! . . . Uncle Matthew's romantic dreams had remained romantic dreams because he had never left Ballyards; but John had gone out into the world to seek adventures, and all of them had ended dismally . . . except his adventure with Eleanor. He had pursued her and won her and made her his wife and the mother of his son, and she was still his, even although he had left her and was living angrily away from her. He remembered how he had wandered into Hanging Sword Alley when he first came to London, and had been bitterly disappointed to find that this romantically-named lane was a dirty, grimy gutter of a street. . . .

"I've been living a fool's life," he said to himself. "I had one great adventure, finding Eleanor, and I did not realise that that was the only romance I could hope for!"

He put the book down. "I'm not a writer," he said mournfully, "I'm a grocer. I'm not even a grocer. I'm . . . a hack journalist!"

He had written a tragedy that was dead. He had written a novel that was dead. This second novel . . . in a little while it, too, would be dead. Perhaps it was dead already. Perhaps it had never been alive. And he had written a music-hall sketch . . . that lived. He had done no other work than his sub-editing on the *Sensation* since his return to London, and he realised that he would never do any more while he remained in Fleet Street. . . .

Hinde entered the room while these thoughts were in his mind. "When's Eleanor coming back?" he asked, throwing himself into a chair in front of the fire.

"She's not coming back," John answered.

Hinde looked up sharply. "Oh?" he said in a questioning manner.

"I'm going to her . . . as soon as I can. I've had my fill of this life. Do you remember asking me why I didn't sell happorths of tea and sugar?" Hinde nodded his head. "Well, I'm going back to sell them. The author of *The Enchanted Lover* and *Hearts of Controversy* has retired from the trade of writing and will now . . . now devote himself to . . . selling happorths of tea and sugar!" He laughed nervously as he spoke.

Hinde did not make any reply.

"I shall go and see the man who has the flat to-morrow. He wants to buy our furniture. It's a piece of luck, isn't it? The only piece of luck I've had. . . . By God, Hinde, this serves me right. Eleanor always said I was selfish, and I am. I'm terribly self-satisfied and thick-skinned. I had no qualification for this work . . . nothing but my conceit . . . and I've been let down. I'm a failure! . . ."

"We're all failures," said Hinde. "The only thing we can do, all of us, is to lull ourselves to sleep and hope for forgetfulness. Compared with you, I suppose I'm a success . . . as a journalist anyhow . . . but this is the end of my work . . . this room, with Lizzie and Miss Squibb and sometimes the Creams. You've got Eleanor and a son . . . what more do you want? Isn't it enough luck for a man to have a wife that he loves and who loves him, and to have a child? What's a book anyway? Paper with words on it. All over the world, there are thousands and thousands of books . . . with millions and millions of words in them. What's the good of them? We make a little stir and then we die . . . we poor scribblers. And that's all. It's much better to marry and breed healthy babies than to live in an attic making songs about the stars. The stars don't care, but the babies may!"

"You're a cheerful fellow, Hinde," said John, rallying a little.

"Don't pay any heed to me. I was always a dismal devil at the best of times. You see, Mac, I've got ink in my veins. I'm not a man . . . I'm part of a printing press. That's what you'd become if you were to stay in Fleet Street. Go home, my lad, and get more babies! . . ."

iii

He wrote to Eleanor that night, telling her that he would capitulate. Immediately he had settled about the flat and had arranged for his withdrawal from the office of the *Sensation*, he would return to Ballyards. He would write no more books! . . . In the morning, there was a letter from Eleanor. She could hold out no longer. If he would come and fetch her and the little John, she would do whatever he asked of her. She loved him so much that she could not keep up this pretence of strength! . . .

He laughed to himself as he read her letter. "She wrote before I did," he said. "I suppose I've won. I suppose I held out longer than she did . . . but I don't feel that I've gained anything!"

The copies of *Hearts of Controversy* were lying where he had left them on the previous night. "I don't care what the papers say about them," he said to himself picking one of them up. "What's a book anyway when I've got Eleanor!"

He was able to arrange the sale of his furniture to the sub-tenant and get his release from the *Sensation* in less than a week, and he wired to Eleanor to say that he was coming home and would arrive at Ballyards on Sunday. "I'm going home with my tail between my legs," he said to himself, as he walked down the gangway from the Liverpool boat on to the quay at Belfast. He was too early for the Ballyards train, and he went for a walk to fill the time of waiting. He passed the restaurant where Maggie Carmichael had been employed, and saw that a new name was

on the lintel of the door. "Well, I hope she's happy with her peeler!" he said to himself. He went on, and presently found himself before the Theatre Royal, and when he glanced at the playbills, he saw that a Shakespearian Company were in possession of it. *Romeo and Juliet* had been performed on Saturday night, and he remembered the line that had sustained him after his love-making with Maggie Carmichael:

*If love be rough with you, be rough with love.*

"How can you?" he said aloud. "You can't, no matter what it does to you!"

He went at last to the station and caught his train to Ballyards. Eleanor was waiting on the platform for him. She did not speak when he arrived. She ran to him and put her arms about him and hugged him and cried over him. "My dear, my dear!" she said when she had recovered herself. He took her arm and led her out of the station, and they walked home together.

"It was terrible," she said. "I had to fight hard to keep myself from going to you. We've been very foolish, John, haven't we?"

He nodded his head.

They entered the house by the side-door and went into the kitchen where Mrs. MacDermott was preparing the mid-day meal. She waited for him to speak to her.

"I've come home, mother!" he said, going to her and kissing her.

"I'm thankful glad, son!" she replied.

iv

Uncle William took him into the shop, and they sat together on stools in the "Counting House."

"I'm troubled, John," he said, "about the shop. Pippin's have offered to buy the business! . . ."

"Buy the business. But we don't want to sell it!"

"I know that. They're threatening me. They say they'll undercut me till my trade's gone. I'm too old to fight them! . . ."

John called to his mother and Eleanor. "Come here a minute," he said, and when they had done so, he told them of Pippin's offer and threat. "What do you think of that?" he demanded.

"I think we should fight them," said Eleanor.

"So we will," John replied. "The MacDermotts had a name in this town before ever a Pippin was heard of, and the MacDermotts'll still have a name when the Pippins are dead and damned!" He stopped suddenly, and then began to laugh. "By the Hokey O," he exclaimed, "there's a romance at the end of it all!"

He looked at his mother. "I'm going to carry on the shop, mother!" he said.

She did not answer. She put out her hands to him, and he saw that she was smiling with great content. And yet she was crying, too.

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