

ALAS, THAT SPRING!

BY
HENRY MORDAUNT



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ALAS, THAT SPRING!

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BY

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PART I

CHAPTER I

“HEY! You there! You’ve no right to fish the-r-re! Go awa-a-ay—do you hear? Stop it—stop it, I tell you!”

The clear treble, with its long-drawn-out syllables, floated down the green rush-tufted slope to the river; piercing the swirl, the impatient mutterings round the great black boulders which blocked its quarter-way course; the chatter along the pebbly margin, where things were easy and clear going.

Teddy O’Hara—far out in the stream, her petticoats tucked into the top of her hip-high wading-boots, the tail of something suspiciously like a chemise well in evidence—pursed up her red lips and dropped a fly with the nicest dexterity in the exact spot where a salmon had that moment risen; then, as the cry was repeated, looked round and put out her tongue, grinning widely.

“The kid from Greylands,” remarked Honora, and turning lazily from one side to another—regardless of Denise, who lay with her head pillowed on her knees—she cupped her rounded chin in one

hand and threw a glance up the field, dipping and rising to the stone wall with the child's figure poised upon it.

Honora O'Hara—was there ever such a combination!—"But of course she'll marry; I won't have any daughter of mine an old maid, and I just love the name Honora," was what her mother had said, splitting the two with "Gertrude" as a peace-offering to the half-sister whose lover she had stolen.

"Cheeky brat! For the Lord's sake stop wriggling, Nora—my head was just right with your knee as it was," grumbled Denise, in her soft half-brogue; upon which Honora turned back, complacently stretching out her slender limbs, snuggling deep among the rushes and river mint and meadow-sweet.

Once again there came the cry, "Go away!"

"Guinea-fowl," murmured Honora sleepily.

"Come back," amended Denise; while the two small boys who had been lying on the bank kicking their bare legs in the air exerted themselves so far as to scramble to their knees and put their thumbs to their noses; then bumping against each other, rolled over in one of their interminable tussles, half affection, half natural pugnacity.

Immense masses of cumulus cloud, silver and pale grey, were piled along the horizon, billowing up round that small circle of world in which the young O'Haras disported themselves, lived, moved, and had their being with no single thought beyond it, for the moment; and it was always that with them

—the moment. High above was a clear blue sky, with wind-blown wisps of silver. On the opposite side of the water the osier beds showed upright wands of flame, russet and madder; far beyond these lay the mountains, the coursing-ground of cloud shadows, indigo blue, almost black. There was blue in the depths of the river, amber and olive and glints of pure light in the shallows: the green was intense, even for Ireland, for it had rained during the whole of the week before, and anyone apart from an O'Hara would have taken his or her death lying on the damp soil, despite its spring mattress of sun-warmed growth. But nothing harmed them, fearing nothing, reverencing nothing as they did.

“What's the good of fussing? Let's be happy while we can.” There you had the whole cult of the clan.

“If that kid falls off the wall on the far side, sure it's her that will be trespassin'!” yelled Teddy, and this jerked the boys to a semi-upright position again. If only she'd fall!

“The damned imperence of her when we've always fished here!”

“A fool of a girl—a kid like that!”

“All togged up in white, too! My God, whoever saw anything to beat that?”

“Who does she think she is, anyway, the little—”

Among themselves, the young O'Haras were anything but choice in their language; small wonder that the aunt in charge wrote to her step-brother-

in-law, far away in India, with nothing but the fun of it all, the lightly regarded expense, as his share of the family life:

“Derrick and Gerald ought to be at school, though of course I’d just hate to part with the darlings. But the truth is, they’re getting beyond me, and beyond everyone else too. The girls are bad enough with their language and their accents, but those two young imps of boys want a man’s hand over them. I caught Gerry matching himself swear word for swear word against one of the stable lads the other day, and upon my soul, I never heard anything like it; where he could have learnt it . . .” etc., etc.

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“Pure heredity; hanged if I wouldn’t back any son’ of mine for a loose-hung tongue against the whole field.” That’s what the fond father had to say at this juncture, flicking over the pages of the closely-written letter. “What a vile hand your sister Gertie does write nowadays! I can’t be expected to wade through this with all I have on my hands. I suppose if I send her a fresh draft to the bank it ’ull foot the bill, eh, what? Anyway, what’s the good o’ fussing. It won’t hurt the kids to run wild for a bit, run the liquor out of the blood while they’re young.”

“I’m never quite sure how old the boys are,” said Lady Taghmony, glancing up from under the hands of the maid who was piling her fine pale gold hair in a mass of curls round her small head, fram-

ing the tiny pink and white face with its brilliant blue eyes and half-pathetic, wholly impish mouth; the most irresponsible mother of six it was possible to imagine; a wholly fantastic, delightful incongruity in the way of mothers.

“But I rather like having babies,” she had said when someone commiserated her upon her fate. “I really don’t show it until just at the very last, and there’s nothing like it for clearing the complexion. Besides, they’re such darling cuddly things when they’re tiny; and really no trouble. I can’t make out why people make such a fuss about children being a trouble; after all, there are any amount of people with no kids of their own just longing to look after them.”

Oh yes, it was fun to have children—all a part of the fun of life. She didn’t mind the pain—was gallant enough for that; feared nothing, dreaded nothing, and forgot—with a genius for forgetting.

There you had her, slipping through Time like a silver fish in blue water. So much fun—fun to be with the children who adored and petted her; fun to be alone with her husband, adoring and petting with the perfect facility of a man of much and varied practice: “Of course, Muggins has shaken a loose leg, we all know that,” was what she said—using, as she did to everyone, her own special nickname, the origin of which was a joke between those two alone—fun to be adored; and if not exactly petted, waited upon hand and foot by every young man she came in contact with; extravagantly con-

sidered by her husband's A.D.C.'s, whom she herself chose for their looks. Fun to have everything all ways at once—forgetful of any scrap of life's gay kaleidoscope which happened to be out of the pattern at the moment—each moment the whole of life.

“I simply can't remember the children's ages—I never can remember,” she complained now, and with truth, for had she not on the way home last time—as a sort of apology for the delay of a fortnight in Paris—sent Honora, sixteen then and well grown for her age, a dozen pairs of kid gloves, lemon and white and silvery grey, fit for a child of six?—“only Edwina's,” she went on, “and that's because of her being born while dear King Edward was still Prince of Wales—I'd never have dared to ask him to be godfather if he had been king—and the lovely brooch he sent her for a christening present; such a frightful pity I lost it.”

“The year Ladas won the Derby, eh?”

“Yes—well, that shows you the boys must be getting on, nine or ten or eleven or something like that. Muggins, I really believe old Gertie's right and they ought to go to a preparatory school; they don't learn anything from those governesses. Governesses are no good, you know; if they're pretty they flirt with all the men about the place, and if they're not pretty no one takes any notice of them. I really think we'd better settle about a school; it would be a nuisance if they couldn't get into Eton.”

“Of course they'll get into Eton—all our peo-

ple always have been at Eton. Ten or eleven!—by Jove, it's impossible to credit it, with you looking like you do—I really believe you grow prettier every day, Di; 'pon my soul, there was never anyone like you!”

Lord Taghmony, sitting on the edge of his wife's bed swinging his feet, for they had just changed out of their riding kit, let his eyes run over the back of her white shoulders, the nape of her neck under its high-piled curls, for her maid was busied over the very last touch; then turned to the reflection of her gay little face in the mirror. “Lord, to think of all those kids! By God, I never saw a woman who kept her looks as you do, and you never seem to fuss about it either.”

“Oh, I don't know, one does feel so frightfully young inside. Nine or ten—! Really, Muggins, I think I'd like to have another baby—nothing but those squealing little failures of twins since Gerry was born such ages and ages ago.”

“Well, my dear, it might be managed. There's life in—”

“Oh, Holmes!” Lady Taghmony broke in with a sharp little scream. “How you tweaked me! There's one hair as tight as tight! You'll have to unpin that last curl. And, Muggins, do for goodness' sake go and have your bath, and don't shock Holmes into fits while she's doing my hair.”

“I like that, when you started on that blessed baby ramp. All I said—well, what the devil could I say? If I'd said—”

His Excellency broke off, and moving over to one of the long open windows which gave on to the wide balcony—with its massed maidenhair fern, its stone pillars and arches, the carefully-kept garden, with its eternally watered lawns and massed palms, immediately below them, and beyond all this the wide plains white with heat, the blue band of the mountains—stood staring out: thinking, planning; his rather too full, too red underlip protruding. He snapped his fingers and whistled to a puppy playing upon the grass, then swung round again; stumbled over his wife's ayah who squatted on the floor; and, cursing her good-humoredly, jerked up a pile of white muslin from her knee with the crop of his riding-whip, while a loosened roll of pale blue satin ribbon uncurled itself out over the polished boards.

“What the devil's this?”

“My dress for to-day.”

“Blue ribbon and white muslin, and you an old married woman, with the Lord only knows how many children!”

“I don't suppose He troubles His head about it, one way or another,” retorted her Excellency flip-pantly. “Anyway, I'm not going to dress like a frump, or look like a frump, or behave like a frump for anyone, so there!” she added, and turning her head, put out her tongue at her husband; not one day older, in all the essentials of life, than her daughter Teddy, hip-high in the swirling waters of the river at home in Ireland.

As her husband moved through the wide-curtained arch into his dressing-room, she called after him: "In that little matter we were speaking of: well, well, if you're a good boy we'll see what—" then, breaking off to glance back and powder her nose—they were all like that, hardly ever ending a sentence—laughed at Holmes's scandalised reflection in the mirror. Holmes, who had been with her ever since she married, would have died for her, and yet could never get used to her, never approve of her.

"Only a nice little baby, Holmes, just one this time, a *very* small baby," she insinuated, as wheedlingly as though it were all Holmes's affair. "After all, no one could object to an innocent little baby; why, that's what one's married for. If you were married, Holmes— Why, some people, even if they're not married, with a little, very little effort—"

"My lady!" broke in the woman in a panic of outraged propriety, with a sharply hostile glance in the direction of the bland ayah, winding up the blue ribbon between her brown hands, fingers and thumbs outstretched. "Your ladyship must remember that some of these black images understand good English more than they ever let on to."

"Pheugh, Arracon—Arracon has babies of her own; how many is it, Arracon?"

The woman, smiling her inscrutable down-glancing smile, held up four slender fingers, and her Excellency laughed.

“Oh, well, I’ve beaten her already, eh, Holmes?—and who would think it to look at me! La, la, what a hot day it’s going to be!”

She stood up, stretching, and moved across the immensely wide room, with its shining, lake-like expanse of bare polished floor; then stood poised, pirouetting in front of the tall swing glass, light as a fairy in her short white petticoat and apology for a bodice, tied up with blue ribbons over the shoulders.

“Who would think it to look at me? Come now, Holmes, who would?”

One of the A.D.C.’s had knocked at her husband’s door and was speaking in a low voice, interrupted by a loud burst of schoolboy laughter.

“By Gad, I never heard anything to beat that! I say Di—do you hear, Di?—did you ever come across anything to equal this? You know that long, sour-faced fellow Dalrymple—”

“No, no, your Excellency, really—I’d never have told your Excellency if—” broke in a young horrified voice. I entreat you, it’s not fit—I do beg of you.”

“All right, Fortescue, all right, though who the devil made you the censor of my stories—oh, well, your story?—and a damned good story too.” Lord Taghmony was still laughing. “You’ll have to wait, Di, that’s all. . . . Oh, well, Fortescue, look here, it’s a jolly sight too good to keep to myself.”

“I always knew he was that sort of person, any-

how,” came Lady Taghmony’s clear little voice, with a ring of mirth in it.

“What sort of person?”

“Well, the sort of person who would do the sort of killing thing that Billy’s been telling you of. Oh, for shame, Captain Fortescue! I didn’t think it of you, really I didn’t—a nice young man like you!”

.

Little wonder that the young O’Haras were what they were. Poachers? Oh, well, what was poaching? A part of life. Their mother poached, delicately, as a butterfly: nothing ugly there, for she was sweet and clean through and through; but still there were hearts, dreams, thoughts, belonging by rights to other women and feverishly misplaced. Their father poached, more grossly, persistently; and yet for all that he had made his wife entirely happy for twenty years, and there are few better men of whom one can say as much. The two of them were like halcyons on smooth and sunny seas, all sail set—no real cargo or ballast: nothing much in the way of principles: certain niceties, too oddly defined and intangible to be described as points of honour, and no maxims whatever: voracious of all that life had to offer, snatching where it was not offered; and yet with so much gaiety overflowing upon the immediate world around them, that it set one wondering what sort of people, take it all in all, are productive of the largest sum of happiness—others and their own.

“The cash in hand,” “the eaten cake,” you can’t have it both ways: the tragedy being that so many have it neither: too sad for earth, too glum for God.

CHAPTER II

HENRIETTA RORKE did not fall from her perch but stepped down from it into her own boundaries. For it was like this: the Taghmony estate of Clonross had a far longer river frontage than that of Greylands, miles upon miles of it, poor land, as often as not in flood, patched with bogs or bristling with rocks; useless from an agricultural point of view for anything but grazing, and yet with such blackcock!—and more than an occasional snipe.

For all this there was a Naboth's vineyard, one field wide and close upon half a mile in length, running along the river edge like a meagre arm, audacious and mocking, a thief of an arm: cutting into it from the Rorke estate.

The fishing was no better here than elsewhere; but it was here that the young O'Haras, with the perversity of youth—and there are some who never grow up—chose to fish; determined upon a greater persistence throughout these holidays, when, for the first time in the memory of any one of them, the long, low, cream-tinted house, with its cracked and discoloured plaster, its barrack-like stabling—all that neglected and heartbroken air of a forsaken home—was inhabited by others apart from the caretakers, Patsy Ryan and his wife, who had kept the pig in the morning-room like any lady.

During the week which had passed since they heard of it the O'Haras had haunted that strip of river, loudly ostentatious in their trespassing. On this day, for the first time, however, there were people to be seen, the first real hope of irritating anyone: men and maid-servants moving about, hanging blinds and curtains in the long, blankly-staring windows—"windows like the eyes o' widow women," as someone had said—other men in white overalls on long ladders, chipping away at the old paint, a couple of gardeners busy on the lawn.

Derrick and Gerry had spied out the land before breakfast that very morning, been the first to say, with any certainty, "They're there." Included in their report was the tale of a dolls' house standing in the yard, too big to go in at the back door. "A dolls' house of all things!" Just asking to have a stone hove at it, one of those tiny sparkling windows—for all the sun lay upon the back of Greylands—broken for it.

Gerry got it at the first shot, a fine throw; then, rendered careless by his success, had another try, missing the dolls' house and smashing a window in the mansion itself. After this two dogs tore out of the house barking, and a black man in a white linen uniform with a shawl oddly muffled about his shoulders came running to the door, shouting at them in a strange language; whereupon—bound in honour to show themselves afraid of nothing—they launched another handful of stones; harmful, this

time, to nothing more than the one immense pear tree—they knew those pears, too—which trembled out into a shower of petals, while a slender, pale-faced little girl appeared upon the step, also in white, with a green parrot upon her shoulder.

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The Taghmonys out in India playing at kings and queens—all dressed up in uniforms and cocked hats, white muslin and pale blue ribbons, with quaint black puppets for dolls—beating up a small frothy world of their own around them: a world of dancing and music and cards, gymkhanas, polo, races; flowers and fruit and flirtation and laughter—and a land like the daughter of the horseleech beneath it all.

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The pale, dark-haired child, Henrietta Rorke, a quiet, tense volcano of a child, in her immaculate white frock; the dolls' house, the black servant; the sunshine lying warm on Greylands' disreputable back with its bleak face astare at the river, the mountains beyond them.

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Five young O'Haras in shabby homespun, stained and faded to the tints of the mountainside, grey rock and reddish, greyish, green lichen, disporting themselves upon someone else's property, fishing in someone else's waters: bright blue sky, cumulus clouds of silver; racing shadows upon the mountainside; April airs, mild as milk; the river like life it-

self, hurried and intent upon its own affairs, hastening to an end of which it had no knowledge, with a present that all was delight.

These three odd little pictures, shifting and sliding, merge into one another.

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It was a good two miles' walk from "The Big House Up Above," as Clonross itself was always called, to the boundary of that narrow spit of Rorke property, and a blazing hot day. But for all that the thing had to be done.

"We'll learn 'em!" That was Teddy. They were whispering together at one end of the breakfast-table. The two small boys were still hot and dishevelled from the early morning reconnaissance; shoes and stockings dragged on anyhow in the hall, a wet lick of hair plastered off from their crimson foreheads, the backs of their hands moderately clean—and the less said about the palms of them the better.

Teddy's voice was shrill, and Lady Fair glanced up from her letters: "Learn 'em! Teddy, my darling, you can't learn a person anything—you teach."

"Oh, I know, auntie—but it's got a sort of smashing sound, different somehow. . . . What? A dolls' house! Good Lord!"

"If we don't start the way we mean to go on they'll get into thinking they own the world." That was what they said later on, up in the wide sunny schoolroom; for Clonross had no compunc-

tion at all in turning its broad and comfortably ugly back upon the scenery, woody mountain, and live impetuous river, sprawling its long low front in the sunshine; looking due west, with a flattish park clumped in elms and beeches; bog-land and a white road, tiny fields like green patches fastened round with rough grey stitches of stone wall; a placid stretch of lakes; dullish hills in the far distance.

“We always have fished there, and, begorra, we always will fish there.” This was Teddy.

“But such a beast of a walk,” sighed Denise, comfortably sunk into that hollow where the springs of the schoolroom sofa had given way in the most obliging fashion imaginable: Denise with her goldy curls and odd, half-awakened eyes more violet than blue.

Honora had been washing her straight black hair and sat drying it on the window-sill; the two small boys were on the floor, disentangling their fishing-lines.

“It ’ud never do to stop now!”

“Start in meek as Moses fishing in our own waters!”

“Well, those *are* our waters. Why, we’ve fished there for years and years and donkey’s ears. An’ that makes—what do they call it?—a right o’ way. The cheek of them to come back at all! Rorkes, whoever heard of Rorkes? It’s like an old crow.”

“O’Rorke’s no better.”

“Well, O’Rorke’s the proper thing. If they’re

ashamed of being Irish, whatever do they want to come to Ireland for?"

"There's a washerwoman down in O'Flarty's Bottom!"

"That's it, Brigid O'Rorke; likely enough it's her that washes the black fellow's clothes for him."

"An' the kids."

"Keepin' it in the family!"

"Lucky for her I didn't have my 'catty' with me, or I'd a picked that squawking green baste off her shoulder, sure as my name's Gerry O'Hara."

"You couldn't, a hundred yards or more."

"I could."

"You lie!"

"You're another!" They flung upon each other a tangled mass of bullet heads, legs and arms. Gerry's shoes, which were not yet tied, flew off, one alighting upon the open piano with a deep crash of bass notes.

Honora on the sunny window-sill combed her hair and sang on:

"When the man from County Clare
 Heard his mother called a mère
 Faith, he scathered all the features of his face—"

breaking off as Teddy interposed with a scream:

"My precious worms! Ach! You idiots! You've upset the tin! Can't you see that you're rolling yourselves over my worms? An' after I've been to all the trouble o' digging them an' all!" she cried; upon which the two boys parted, showing

a mingled pulp of grass and worms mashed into the shabby carpet.

“Worms! What the blazes do you want with worms? You can’t fish with worms.”

“Can’t I, though! If I can’t catch a whopper under their very eyes with one thing, I’ll catch it with another!” Teddy’s full-lipped mouth was tight-set beneath her snub, freckled nose—the nose that they all said was like nothing so much as a bit of putty thrown at a wall, for all the character and decision of the entire family lay with her. “Trust me, I’ll put the precious Rorkes in their place!” she added grimly, and, sitting down on the floor began to collect as much of her property as was negotiable. “Show them! I’ll show them!”

The general sense of antagonism towards the upstarts at Greylands was augmented by meeting Brigid Ryan at the drive gates, coming up to see if she couldn’t beg a wee bit of a cabin out of the people at Clonross.

“For sure they’ve turned me an’ Himself outer the place, sayin’ as how we kept it so as it wasn’t not fit for a pig. Now, did you ever hear tell o’ the like o’ that? ‘Not fit for a pig!’ Is it I, Biddy Ryan, as ’ud be afther ill-treatin’ a pig? You know me, Miss Honora, an’ Miss Denise, an’ I swear to you by the Mither o’ God, Miss Honora, darlint, an’ Maester Derrick an’ Maester Gerald—as is the dead spit o’ yer dear pa, fur the fine up-standin’ looks o’ you—as there did be some o’ the

finest an' handsomest an' best contented pigs i' the whole o' the county born under them there front stairs, or i' that quare bit o' a place wid the eight sides to it as these new people do be afther callin' the marnin' room. 'Marnin' room!' I ask you! An' wid no afternoon room to it at all, at all—an' no complaint from anyone o' the boneens as ever I heard on—not so much as a squeak—unless it were in the way o' pleasure at the sight o' their victuals, an' that no more than human—nor no complaint from any of us that ate them, nor from Monk the pork-butcher i' Castleford neither; an' upon my sowl, it's nothin' more nor less than the thruth, I'm spaekin', Miss Honora. Sure before God that ain't no way whatever fur upstarts comin' new into a country ter start on traetin' dacent people. 'Not fit for a pig,' indade! What sort a talk is that now?"

And this was not all. Mr. Rorke buying that farm called "The Place on the Hill" with the rest of the property had told O'Shaunessy that he must go unless he made up his mind to pay his rent, and regularly too.

Waving to the young O'Haras from the top of the muck heap in front of his house, O'Shaunessy had raced down to tell them of his troubles; scrambling over the broken ridges of stones which had once been walls, cutting the land up into small fields of twenty square yards or less: standing gesticulating wildly in the gay sunshine, a tall, gaunt scarecrow of a man, the torn sleeves of his ragged shirt

fluttering in the wind; his long, sallow, unshaven face, wide twisted mouth, and deep-set eyes bitter with rage, and yet, somehow or other, exultant with a sense of real dramatic grievance.

“Him carryin’ on as he’ll turn me out o’ me little farm, and me wid five little children no higher than my knee an’ another close upon us, praise be to God! The wee, miserable, forsaken bit o’ a place as me great gran’father and me gran’father, an’ me father too, have worn the souls out their bodies battlin’ wid, summer an’ winter, day an’ night—sein’ as how the land’s near as cruel an’ unkind as the English themselves, God blast the souls o’ the whole nation o’ ’em. Turn me out! An’ all fur a matter o’ rint! ‘If you don’t not pay your rint,’ that’s what he says, him down yonder,” he cried, jerking a blackened thumb with a nail like a Chinaman’s in the direction of Greylands, “when it’s you do know, Miss Honora an’ Miss Teddy—an’ you too, askin’ yer pardon, Miss Denise—an’ every other decent body too, as do be acquainted with me all the years as ever me an’ mine do have been on the place such as it is—an’ not worth a tinker’s curse at that—sure it’s never so much as a taeste o’ our money as they’ve ever seen nor looked to see i’ rent.”

“The cads!” Teddy’s chin went up with a jerk. “If they think they’ve come to a place where they can turn a man out of his house simply because he’s not got the money to pay them their beastly old rent—”

But it was O'Shaunessy's chin in the air at this, at much the same angle, too.

"Sure, Miss Teddy, I could pay their demmed rint an' be demmed to them, easy as fallin' off a wall; there's not one about these parts as couldn't tell you that. But who is it as 'ud be afther wastin' good money payin' rint ter the likes o' them, when there's not one among us as had ever paid rint to their betters?"

"Good for you, O'Shaunessy!" cried the young O'Haras at that; upon which the farmer's lean cheek flushed, his eyes kindled.

"Devil a O'Shaunessy for one!" he cried boastingly. "An' that's not all neither! Poor old Phemie Riley as has been grazin' of her ass on the front lawn o' the place has been tould to taeke it away an' keep it i' her own plaece, the body! An' afther all the years as it's been grazin' there, an' the smallest bit o' an ass ever was too—not a smaller in the whole o' the county round there don't not be, nor wiser neither. What in the name o' God is things comin' to, tell me that, Miss Teddy, if them as calls themselves gentlefolk can't not afford to give so much as the grazin' of an ass to a poor old widow body, with no more nor one field and a great dun cow ter eat the grass o' that clane as clane."

"Just like 'em. I've seen 'em. The old chap's as black as the Earl o' Hell's working waistcoat!" cried Gerry; upon which O'Shaunessy gave him a passing glance, sideways, like a magpie.

“Sure, he looked whitish, sorter whitish when he was speakin’ to me; but I’m not doubtin’ that was nought but the artfulness of him—there ain’t nothin’ them there sort o’ people ain’t not up to. But there you are: he do be afther wantin’ to play tennis on the lawn, that’s what they had the face to be afther telling her. Tennis-playin’ on the lawn! I ask you, what ’ud one small ass do against any reasonable people havin’ their bit o’ play on that, nor any other lawn, neither? As for me, I’ve the money to go to Ameriky, so he needn’t be thinkin’ as how he’s got me there; an’ to Ameriky, which is a free country, I’ll go, sooner nor stay here an’ be put upon by a black man wid the devil’s own trick o’ lookin’ white at times.”

“Oh, but he can’t be black,” protested Honora, as they went on their way, turning back to wave to O’Shaunessy from the top of a heap. “He’s some sort of a relation of the old O’Rorke who used to live here; besides, the kid’s white.”

“The kid hasn’t been in India as long as he has, or anywhere else either; it hasn’t had that lot of time to soak black in,” asserted Gerry, with a mouth as long drawn and stubborn as O’Shaunessy’s own.

“What nonsense! You might just as well say that mother and dad will be black when they come back from India.”

“Yah-h-h! You might as well talk of mother and dad turning a poor old woman’s donkey out o’ the corner of a field just from nasty dirty spite, an’ for no other reason whatever.”

“Oh, well, if they want a tennis-court—” came Honora’s half-hearted, unfinished protest.

“Tennis-court! A pretty sort o’ a tennis-court! An’ who will they be getting to play tennis with them, that’s what I want to know! People like that!” retorted Gerry; while Derrick plodded on without a word, kicking at every clod he came upon, wrapped in one of those queer silences from which nothing, apart from physical aggression, could stir him.

A couple of hundred yards further on they heard O’Shaunessy hail them once more, and waited while he came shambling up to them, breathless and dishevelled.

He scratched his head, stooped to take a stone out of his brogue, and then launched out into some incongruous complaint against the nature of the land, the stones it held—“outer cussedness, nothin’ more nor less, for sure they do be growin’ like the hairs o’ me hed, an’ no counting them neither”—before plunging into what he had really come to say, his eyes narrow and twinkling. “If yez got speaking to Himself down at Greylands on what I said about my bit of money—little enough at that, an’ working day and night, an’ the childer keeping their belts pulled so tight that there’s nothing left for them to pull against, leather to leather—he might be afther makin’ more trouble about his damnation rint; not as the money’s worth countin’ by them as called themselves gentlefolk, though like enough him up at the house ’ud be raisin’ it on me

if he got so much as a squint at it, little more nor coppers at that.”

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Little enough to do with Henrietta Rorke, all this; for it is her story and no one else's, if one may judge the importance of one character in any drama by the depth to which the whole thing bites, the passion and suffering evolved; and yet, if it had not been as it was, the whole of it—a queer haphazard fabric, warp and weft, mountain and hollow, the contradiction of bog and rock, the wildness of the country, the queerness of the people, so completely baulking to anyone of Henrietta's nature—far too young to have outgrown that trick of puzzling over the contradictions of life—there might have been no story to tell, and the happier for her. As it is, place and people alike must be accepted, not so much as a part of it, as the curtain upon which it was thrown, making it possible.

CHAPTER III

MR. RORKE'S ancestry was Irish. Like all generally unromantic people, he had one clear streak of romance in his nature, and that was all for Ireland. During the few weeks that elapsed between leaving school, passing into the Indian Civil Service and going out to Bombay to join his father—for all his relations upon either side had, for years, lived, and moved, and had their being in India, thought of the remainder of the world as a part of India, speaking of England as home, and yet never truly at home there—he had gone over to Ireland, stayed one night in Dublin, and spent the ten remaining days touring the west—in particular Mayo, the home of his father's people.

This visit did nothing to impair his romantic conception of the country. The inns were dirty and ill-found—but if one went to live in Ireland one would not live at an inn—and for the rest, the scenery and the bland airs were beyond all expectation; while, needing nothing definite in the way of work or word, he found the people as seductive and soothing as their country.

Throughout close upon thirty years in India this impression had grown, for a retrospect is always more or less exaggerated, one way or another. He

had seen Greylands, which had been built by his great-grandfather, but once, going to lunch there with an almost incredibly old great-aunt, the last permanent inhabitant of the place, upon a still autumn day mellow with sunshine, mellow as the tongue of the ancient relative who had fed him upon traditionary tales of the full-blooded and magnificently extravagant O'Rorkes, one of whom, his great-great-uncle, had boasted that he could drive a coach and four through the streets of Castleford and break every shop-window at either side with his whip as he passed.

It was this gentleman who, in the course of a drunken debauch, had burnt down the old house, himself with it, forestalling his future life in the same way as he forestalled everything else.

As it was impossible to think of any head of the O'Rorke family without "a place" of his own to live in, the brother of the deceased, Standish O'Rorke—heir to wind and water and but little else—built the new house upon the old site; in a hurry, for he hated to be kept waiting, and badly, with poor material, owing to his shortage of credit and total lack of ready money.

Upon his death, his only son, also a Standish, and Philip Rorke's grandfather, taking possession of the few valuables which remained to the family, turned over the heavily mortgaged estate to his sister—with a tear in his eye, a noble gesture of relinquishment—as her share of the inheritance; and then, sloughing the black mud of Ireland from

off his feet, betook himself to India, where, having married the only child of one of the richest members of the old East India Company, he established a family which, while regarding the native proper as a creature totally apart and not altogether human, never so much as dreaming of the faintest encroachment upon his part, was yet more completely, in pomp, outlook, tradition and sense of value, native to India than to any other country in the world: presenting that curious anomaly, more common in those days than in these, of a strange people in a strange country far more settled and at home, far more confident of their position, and of far greater importance, than they could ever have been in their own.

It was in India that Philip Rorke's father and uncles and aunts were born, brought up and educated; it was there that his father married, visiting England—and it was nothing more than a visit, for the first and last time, upon his honeymoon trip, with a bride as completely Anglo-Indian as himself; while it was there that Philip himself was born, preceded by two brothers, both of whom died during the first years of their teens, a calamity which, likely enough, brought his parents to the point of sending him, the last born and only surviving child, home to school in England at the age of twelve.

Young Rorke had not liked England, or the ways of English people in their own country. The first real warmth of feeling or affection he met with was in Ireland six years later, and he never forgot

either it or the country which produced it—or something so like as to pass for it: “Sure, yer honour; it’s a sight for sore eyes to see one o’ the old family back about the place again”; “Sure, yer honour, but an O’Rorke’s welcome as the flowers in May to all that we can ever give him—little enough at that”; “Sure, it’s proud we are to see one o’ the old stock back here in these parts again, Miss Judy being no more than a female, an’ powerful old at that, small blame to her either, the body. A real lady if ever there was one!”

The whole impression, so artfully borne in upon him—and yet for no particular end, merely that pleasant words came easy upon the tongue—of his own family, never very popular or of first importance, being the only one worth considering in the whole county, or, for that matter, in Ireland itself, remained with him throughout all his years in India.

And yet, despite all this, India got him and held him throughout the best of his life. It was there that he married at the age of thirty-eight, losing his wife less than two years later, only a few months after the birth of his daughter.

Henrietta stayed on in India with her father. There was a good deal of talk of sending her home, but here it ended, for there was no one in particular to send her to; and likely enough Philip Rorke—it was his grandfather who had dropped the O’ immediately upon his arrival, with the shrewd remark that everyone looked upon an Irishman as fair

game—realised that he could ill endure the parting, being one of those unhappy characters constitutionally lonely, who lavish the whole of their affection upon one or at most two of their fellows; with no demonstration of feeling—rather with an odd sort of bitterness and self-contempt, as though this one soft spot were a weakness—a tendency to fault-finding, to hurting the thing they love as they would hurt nothing else in life.

It was only upon those rare occasions when she was ill—and illness took her in the same silent, desperate way as most of the joys and sorrows of life, so that if she were ill at all, she was as ill as anyone could well be—that the small girl realised, with a sense of almost awestruck wonder and delight, that her life was in any way precious to her father; while never, even if she had lived to an old woman, could she have forgotten one night, when, dragging herself out of a ghost-infected morass of fever, an almost unimaginable depth of darkness, horror, and stifling discomfort, she realised that her father was kneeling at her bedside, while the burning chip of a hand which he held pressed against his cheek was wet with tears.

She never forgot, she never could have forgotten; and yet not for worlds would they either of them have spoken of it: he of his agony of apprehension, she of her joy and amazement, her sudden sense of occupying some quite definite place in the world.

Years later, on the threshold of womanhood in India, the thought of it solaced her. “He did love

me once, he must have loved me—that time when I was ill at Peshawar. He never showed it then, never, never when I was well. Perhaps if I were ill now, perhaps—perhaps . . .”

But she never was ill again; nature never even gave her that much of oblivion to mental and spiritual suffering, having shut her up, as it were, in one of the most completely healthy bodies well imaginable.

She never knew what it was to be called by any sort of pet name or diminutive. From the time when, still the merest baby, she outgrew her ayah's blandishment, setting a mild and unvarying line of conduct and tone of voice—modelled upon her father's rather judicial patience—between herself and her native attendant, she scarcely knew what it was to be caressed; even the English ladies in the stations—which they visited but rarely, for her father's work lay for the most part in the wilder regions among a purely native population—took little notice of her after the first advances. For grave and a little judicial too, with her great hazel eyes, disconcertingly sincere, she was not the sort of child one could show off to, impress with the idea of how nice it would be to have a new mamma, and, by impressing her, impress her father; nor was she of the kind which naturally finds harbourage upon almost any sort of motherly bosom, merging itself with another family—gravitating towards creatures of her own age and kind.

Rorke was an upright man in mind and body,

outwardly stiff and cold, with an almost inhuman sense of duty; unpopular as all such men are. And in many ways his daughter by nature and upbringing was the same stuff. In her there was a blending of the mysticism and controlled passion of her mother's people, who had come from the Scotch Highlands: a passion and mysticism so much deeper than, and so infinitely further removed from, any easy outlet of words such as that which is afforded to the Irish.

It would have taken something in the form of a cataclysm for either of the Rorkes to let themselves go completely; not because they deliberately held themselves in, rather than any expression of emotion, any show of feeling, was so difficult. When it did come it was like the bursting of a dam, and here the difference between Henrietta and her father was this: the catastrophe the greater in that she held so much more, so infinitely much more than he did, some of the well-spring of life having run dry since those first enchanted days in Ireland.

Ah! There you have it: the futility of this "coming back," everything unchanged, and yet oneself so changed that all is changed; while, this time, Rorke had come back to live; must look upon the place, whether he wished to or not, with the appraising eye of a possessor. There was a great deal to be done, and he wished it finished with, quickly and well, as he would have had it done in India, for he had the knack of handling natives—though not, alas! the natives of Ireland. Moreover, though

by no means a poor man, he hated waste and idleness. That man O'Shaunessy, for instance. Why should the O'Shaunessys, who boasted of being "warm," have lived rent free for generations past? It was against all reason; they must see reason, they must listen to reason. So he thought, unconscious of the fact that he might as well have tried to stem the tides, force the river to flow up-hill instead of down, as expect any such thing.

Set these two where they chose to set themselves, or, rather, where the elder of the two, impelled by the romantic spirit which turns reason out of its course, had chosen that they should be set, among the O'Haras and their kind—for they, all question of breeding apart, were native to the soil as the veriest peasant—and some sort of tragedy becomes inevitable; not for those that deserve least, but for those that feel most.

Little Henrietta Rorke moved down the field towards the aggressors upon her father's property with that sort of stiff dignity so natural to a child brought up in the way in which she had been brought up—never to display any sort of embarrassment, to depend upon her own judgment and upon herself.

It was a little difficult, because the aggressors in this case were white, and she was not accustomed to white people of the lower class, as these must be, or they would not be behaving as they were; nor was she accustomed to young people. For all that, it never entered her head to let them be, or to call upon her father for support; she was mistress in

her own house, upon her own land, as she had been in their most permanent resting-place, fifty miles out from Karachi.

Honora had turned over again and lay facing her; the two boys squatted like imps of malice waiting to see what she would do; even Denise was awake and smiling.

“You’ve no business here,” said Henrietta. She had given up all that undignified shouting and did not speak until she was level with them: “It’s private property and you’re poaching.” Her glance was direct and grave, though not entirely easy, for here was something that puzzled her. The poachers were not altogether what she had expected, though in what way she could not have said; impossible to be much more untidy and shabby, more inconsequently of the vagabond type.

With a quick, supple movement Honora drew herself up and round, squatting like a tailor, and faced her accuser, her blue eyes twinkling, her small vivid face—carnation and white, set in a tangle of blue-black hair—alive with mirth.

“Poaching, are we? You don’t say so! Who’d have thought it?”

“That—that—” Henrietta hesitated, then pointed, having no idea whether the figure in the water was that of a boy or girl—“that one in the river has no business fishing there—these are private waters.”

“Pull it out,” put in Denise lazily, then added: “‘It’ sounds like a tooth,” which sent the boys off

into a peal of uncontrollable laughter, rolling over with their hands to their sides.

“You none of you have any business here; we won’t have tramps here,” persisted Henrietta, tense and white, for she had never before known what it was to be laughed at.

“Tramps, indeed!” flared Gerry, and flung to his feet, his small freckled face crimson. “Look here, you kid, who the devil do you think you’re speaking to—who the devil do you think you are, anyway? As if we were blackies! Don’t you go getting it into your precious head that just because you’re all togged up in white you’re God Almighty Himself—”

“Shut up, Gerry!” interposed Honora, but he ran on with:

“Oh, we’ve heard about you, we have; poking in here in Ireland where no one wants you, turning people out of their farms that were there before you were even thought of—you Rorkes, as you call yourselves! Caw—caw! Chucking poor old Biddy Ryan and her husband into the high road. Talk o’ pigs, begob, it’s you people that are—”

“Shut up, I tell you, Gerry!”

“Pigs! Pigs! Pigs! Rooting up everything with your beastly old—”

“Gerry!” screamed Honora again; then, as he went on, picked up a clod of grass and mud and threw it, missing the delinquent and hitting little Henrietta Rorke full in the face.

“Good Lord!” Miss O’Hara scrambled to her feet

in dismay, her face crimson; the boys ceased their laughter. In a moment there would have been all sorts of protestations and apologies, for the tribe was nothing if not generous, ready to admit a fault with no special burden of amendment on their conscience; Gerry, indeed, was already stuttering, the ready tears in his eyes, when the whole tide turned afresh with a shout from Teddy, desperately bracing herself against the rush of water, the run of a salmon, her rod almost double, reeling for dear life.

“The gaff, you fools! You idiots! The gaff, I tell you—the gaff!”

They were down the bank at that—all excepting Denise, who rolled over and lay down upon the edge—Gerry first, with the gaff, wading out to his sister, the water up to his waist; the others half in, half out of the water, dancing up and down upon the margin, screaming instructions:

“Let him run, let him run, you idiot!”

“Give him line—play him, play him!”

“You’ll break your line—he’s not half done!”

“Now, now—quick!”

“Give him more line!”

“No, no, no, get him—get him now!”

“Oh, get him—get him, you idiot, get him! . . . O-o-oh, Gerry, Gerry, you fool, you ninny, you!” This as the small boy missed his footing and floundered head foremost into the water. “You’ll lose him—you’ll lose him—oh, you young ass!”

“Mother of God, she’s lost him!”

“There—there, Gerry! Quick, Gerry! Well

done, Gerry—Gerry, you fool—you idiot! . . . Oh, the fool!”

“No, he’s got him—begorra, he’s got him!”

“Hold on, Teddy—hold on! Give him more line—a taste more line!”

“See him leap—a ten-pounder, I bet you! . . . Fourteen pounds—I bet you anything! . . . Oh, golly!”

“Now—now.”

Henrietta Rorke, one side of her face blackened with the soil which trickled down her neck and into the bosom of her frock, her head swimming, her ears ringing, felt herself possessed by such an access of fury as in itself scared her. She stood for a moment trembling from head to foot—forgotten by the uproarious crowd at the water’s edge; then stooped, and fumbling for a stone, without in the least knowing what she was doing, threw it, badly enough, so that it splashed into the river half a dozen yards below the O’Haras; picked up another and threw again, intoxicated by a wild ardour of battle, and by some chance but just missed Teddy O’Hara’s head.

She was stooping again, grubbing in the mud for another stone, when someone caught at her arm:

“I say, look here, no stones, you know! Cad’s trick, that!”

She jerked herself upright and flung round. “They—they—” she began; then broke off as the strange boy who held her dropped her arm and scrambling down the bank, began shouting with the

others: “Play him, give him line, you juggins! Teddy! Now, Gerry, now, now, young Gerry! . . . You ass, Gerry, you scum, you! Now—now!—Gad! You’ve got him! Well done, you—well done for a kid! . . . Cheero, Teddy!”

“Ronny! Hullo, Ronny! How did you get here? Ronny, by all that’s holy! We thought—”

“Turns a stone if it’s an ounce. . . . Look here, I say, Ronny—”

Henrietta Rorke put her hands up to her eyes, gritty with soil. She was choking with sobs, which tore her small chest, but she wouldn’t cry—she wouldn’t—she wouldn’t, not for anything on earth, not if she died for it!

The sobs became audible, she couldn’t keep them back, though by some immeasurable effort of will the tears still lay, flooding her eyes, without falling. If she had stooped it would have all been over; but she daren’t stoop, and held her head high, overcome by defeat. Beaten—beaten! And not only by these hooligans, these trespassers and poachers, who were somehow and mysteriously not altogether tramps, but by something more dreadful in herself; something which had robbed her of all self-control, driving her to stone-throwing—stone-throwing like a native!

And what was that she had shouted at the big girl as the clod hit her—lapsing into the native vernacular, shouting, throwing like a sweeper.

Where some would have burnt, crimsoned, she

felt herself stiff and cold with shame, as cold as though her limbs had been dipped in icy water. Moving away from the scene of her defeat, she stumbled a little, for her chin was still in the air, the tears level, like lakes in her eyes.

She heard someone calling, but she would not turn, dare not turn. Her home seemed endlessly far away, a life's journey, taking at its shortest, cutting diagonally across the fatal field. She would have given the whole world to be safe in her own room, her head buried in her pillows, but she would not run, must not let herself run—running away—everything was bad enough without that.

There was a sound of footsteps behind her and someone caught at her arm again: "I say, look here, what's wrong? Who the—have they been ragging you?"

She turned at this, her slight little figure stiff as a ramrod: there was a blur of violently green grass, blue sky, and blinding sunshine in her swimming eyes; mingled with it all was a boy's face, flushed with the heat, brilliantly coloured with crimson lips, sparkling blue eyes. The whole impression of this face—at once long and wide at the cheek-bone, the wide, full-lipped mouth, the high and not very broad forehead glistening with moisture, the thick dark hair pushed back from it—swum above her like a mirage: and yet more vivid than anything in life had ever been before, amazing in its colouring to anyone used to the blanched tint of the Anglo-

Indian as she was; though far more arresting, more wonderful, was the sense that here at last was something peculiarly her own.

All this was the more amazing in that, to the boy also—fatally volatile as he was—that first impression remained; at first a joy, then half-fearful, exasperating, haunting: the clear-cut impression of hazel eyes like a willow-shaded pool, long black lashes, a small oval face white as paper, a delicately curved, trembling mouth. He realised it all the more because, even then, though not yet sixteen, there was nothing he missed in the points of a girl, a woman, or a horse. This child was beautifully made: he had noticed the slim, erect figure in the straight white serge frock with the red patent leather belt, the turn of her ankle as he followed her up the field. But with him also there was more to it than this, something that he never altogether lost hold of: something which kept him for ever remembering Henrietta Rorke when he least wished it: something which kept her for ever cropping up in his errant memory, belittling other women; something which would never—excepting for a few hours at a time—allow him to be altogether free of her.

“They—they—” she began passionately, and was about to add, “threw mud at me,” when something drew her up with the sharp reminder that she must not tell tales.

“People have no business poaching.” She substituted this with dignity, her face raised to his; for

by this means alone could the tears be held back.

“Rotten! Oh, I say, how beastly rotten of them!” He was for once ashamed of his family. Someone had “chucked a clod”; he had gathered as much while they measured the salmon; hitting the “kid from Greylands.”

“Look here, I’m awfully sorry if they’ve been ragging you.” He was furious; there was Honora, nearly three years older than he was. Honora ought to have known better. As always when he first got home from Eton, he saw things from the Eton and the non-Irish point of view. Why couldn’t they behave properly, poaching, going about like a lot of tramps; what was old Gertie thinking of?

“It doesn’t matter,” began Henrietta bravely; “they’re nothing but—” “gipsies,” she was going to say, then broke off, for after all she could not place them; any more than she could place this tall boy, with his immaculate light grey tweed suit, white collar and dark blue knitted silk tie, his quick courtesy and kindness, in contrast to those others, who now stood hesitating rather awkwardly upon the bank of the river.

“Look here,” the boy spoke quickly, eagerly, “you’re Miss Rorke, aren’t you?” That “Miss Rorke” soothed her as nothing else could have done. “Then we’re near neighbours,” he went on, as she nodded, “and I most awfully hope we’ll be friends. My name’s Shaen—Ronny they call me; and that other lot—really they’re not half bad—are my

brothers and sisters. Look here—oh, I say!” He flushed crimson as Henrietta, bending her head beneath his ardent eyes, felt the tears flood down her cheeks and fumbled for her handkerchief.

“Look here, for goodness’ sake don’t do that; they’re not worth it.” He found his own handkerchief—cleaner than it would ever again be until the last day of the holidays—and pressed it upon her. “They didn’t mean anything, they’re really all right, only they make such confounded asses of themselves; and—well, the fact is,” he gave a half awkward laugh, “we’ve all regarded it as a sort of point of honour to poach. Look here, I’ll call them up now and make them apologise like blazes.”

“No, no, no!” She was overcome by an agony of shyness, but he had slipped a hand through her arm and held it as he called them up to him with an odd, lordly air; Honora, with her great black plait swinging below her waist; Teddy, dripping wet, staggering in her heavy waders; the two small boys momentarily awed by their brother’s disapprobation; Gerry with the salmon laid like a baby across his arm; Denise last, trailing along plaiting her hair.

Shaen introduced each by their name; he had Gerry by the ear: “If I catch you behaving like a cad again, by Gad, I’ll skin you alive.”

They were all extremely friendly, so friendly that Henrietta felt as though she had been spun round and round, come to herself in a giddy maze—certain of nothing apart from the touch of the tall boy’s

hand upon her arm. They wanted her to go home to tea with them, to stay to dinner, to stay altogether. "There are any amount of spare rooms; much more fun with us than stuck down here alone." There seemed, indeed, nothing that they would not have done; and yet not as a make-up, not that they were in the remotest degree ashamed of the way in which they had behaved; the only reference to it indeed was Gerry's mute, half-mocking offer of the salmon, at which they all laughed: "Like John the Baptist's head on the what's-its-name."

"Why in the world that clod hit you instead of Gerry, that's what beats me. The cussedness of it!" remarked Honora, with a sort of naïf wonder.

"Girls can't throw for nuts!"

"Oh, can't they—can't they?"

The talk merged into a discussion, with examples of the whole art of throwing—"Girls always throw like this, always!"—then ran off into a flood of questions in regard to their brother's sudden appearance.

"But there's no train at all. We were going on the car to meet the five-thirty. Joyce was taking the game-cart for your luggage. How the blazes—"

"I went on to Ballymacdaugh Junction in the express, then took a special back to Castleford."

"What!" Even they were aghast at that. "What! You never, you never! Ronny! Ronny! You must be mad!"

"The governor sent me twenty quid for my birth-

day; it only turned up the morning I left Eton. I couldn't blow it there. Anyhow . . . Oh, well, it was worth it: you should have seen old Brady's face when I got out at Castleford. Such a lark rattling along all alone in my glory—not really alone though, for I came in the guard's van and swopped yarns with him."

"A special—a special! You're mad!"

"You're mad, that's what you are, mad! My word, only to think what we might have done with the money!"

"You! I like that—you!" It seemed that they had almost forgotten Henrietta Rorke, all excepting this big boy, the boy who had told her that his name was Shaen, and whom they called Ronny. And this was as confusing as everything else about them. If his name was Shaen, Ronny Shaen, who were these others whom he spoke of as his brothers and sisters: "All we O'Haras," Teddy had said boastingly, "all we O'Haras poach like blazes."

"It must be tea-time."

"My back's rubbing against my front."

"And only the mingiest sandwiches—that Brigid thing's as mean as mean—since breakfast."

"Did you have any lunch, Ronny?"

"Rather!—ran pretty well the whole way here to shake it down!"

He had not forgotten Henrietta; his hand had slipped from her arm to her shoulder, then to her neck, lying warm under the mane of brown hair.

“Come along—come along!”

“If she won’t have the salmon we’ll make that old beast Brigid cook it for schoolroom supper.”

“You’d better come too—you—what’s your name—Greylands’ kid?”

They were straggling off in the direction of Clonross, friendly but indifferent. “Why don’t you come?—do come; I’ll drive you home in the car.” It was the big boy who pleaded with her, really wanted her. “Have you ever been on an outside car? I’ve got a spanking little mare of my own. Come along, I say, do come!”

“No, no—no!”

“But you’ll come another time—you must. We’re going to be friends, you know—tremendous friends! Promise me that, promise—you’ll come another time?”

She looked up at him, her whole soul in her eyes, so plain to see that young Shaen was struck with the feeling of being up against something he did not understand; but she did not speak, only nodded, her tremulous lips tight set.

“Well, anyhow, I shall come over and see you, so there!”

She nodded again, with another long intent gaze; then broke from his hand and turned away, leaving him with that oddly baulked sense of being out of his depth; wondering what she really thought and meant, and how—and this was strangest of all—how he himself struck her. Though, of course,

with those others behaving as they had done, it was little wonder if she was off the lot of them, “the young fools!” he thought angrily.

“Come along, Ronny, buck up, Ronny!” They had moved away, all excepting the mute Derrick, who still hung close to his brother.

Henrietta did not look back nor wave, did not hesitate, walked straight on. Shaen had never seen such a girl and yet, somehow or other, they were friends. He liked her most awfully, he decided: there was something about her, something he couldn't get at. Anyhow, it was no good just standing gorming there, letting her go in that way, and he ran after her.

“Look here, what do you want to go off like that for? I don't even know your name. I can't call you Miss Rorke if we're to be pals.”

“My name's Henrietta.”

For a moment he was taken aback. “Lord, what a mouthful! But they don't call you that?”

“Yes—of course.” She flushed, hating that he should find anything that he did not like about her.

“Well, I shan't anyhow—Henrietta—Henry—Harry. . . . Look here, I say, I shall call you Harry. . . . No, I won't, I'll call you Hal—Hal, may I, do you mind awfully?”

“Of course not.”

“Then—good-bye, Hal—dear Hal.” He glanced back, saw that the others, apart from Derrick, were well away, with their backs to him, and catching up her hand, held it to his cheek and kissed it. “I'll

come to-morrow—don't forget; you mustn't ever forget," he whispered; then, as she turned away again, rejoined his small brother, clouting him genially over the head.

"Do you ever open your mouth excepting to put something into it, eh, you young blighter, you?"

"Not often."

"Well, don't: see here, *don't*, that's all I've got to say."

They strolled on, Derrick just a step behind, as he always was, aglow with a sense of pride at being somehow or other in his big brother's confidence.

As to Shaen, he glanced round again and again at the small white figure moving diagonally along the narrow field, through a gate into another field at the end of it, and up some steps in the sunk fence on the lawn. Was she never going to turn, never—the queer little thing! He felt unaccountably stirred. Only a kid, too—he to be upset by a kid like that, feeling all anyhow; he who had danced with, made a sort of love to, women—married women at that. He could have shaken her, the perverse little wretch!

Almost at the door she turned; there was a mass of blackish ilex behind her, and he could see her wave a tiny hand, pale as a wind-shaken willow leaf against the darkness.

"She's like a mermaid," said Derrick.

Shaen was silent; she was at the side door by now—would she turn again—would she? Queer how his heart was going, very fast, pounding, then

stopping as she stopped; pounding on again and falling back into an accustomed dull sluggishness as she disappeared into the house.

For a moment or so he and his younger brother moved on in silence, Shaen making the pace, hurrying where he had dawdled; then, remembering what the other had said, he turned his head over one shoulder and stared at Derrick.

“A mermaid—what the devil! Why, mermaids have tails, you young ass!”

“Not that, of course—anyone can see that.”

“Oh no, merely a rumour! Mad! You’re all mad!”

“All the same—of course I think she’s awfully pretty—for a girl; but something, you know, like a mermaid about her eyes; sorter sad, like that bitch of Fred Joyce’s. And—oh, I don’t know—a sorter under-the-water look.”

“Ass! You don’t often open your mouth, young Derrick, but when you do, you jolly well put your foot into it,” jeered Shaen, and swung on whistling, slashing at the tall growth at the edge of the road with his stick. It never did to let a kid know that you agreed with him, and yet—and yet—“mermaid’s eyes—sorter under-the-water look.”

There was something in it, he thought, and made up his mind that he would make use of the fancy as his own, next day: riding over to show her his horse, himself upon it, cheer up the poor kid. It must be pretty dull there in that dreary, half-empty

house, he thought; for to Lord Shaen, with his youthful arrogance, any home devoid of his own particular contemporaries and types was counted as a prison.

CHAPTER IV

HENRIETTA was late for tea. It was her own peculiar duty and pleasure to pour out tea for her father; her whole life was, indeed, set round with the small, grave duties of a woman, punctually attended to. And yet, on this particular afternoon, knowing the hour as she did, she passed through the long hall with that damp, frowsty smell, which she associated with pretty well all the houses "at home"—a bare, ugly, badly-lighted place, divided up by pillars of artificial marble, the walls cut into recesses, all alike occupied by broken-nosed, blank-eyed busts poised on more sham marble pillars—and up to her own room, facing west at an angle over the stable yard. Nothing frowsty here, but a magnolia tree in full bloom drenching the sun-soaked air with perfume.

Her old dolls' house still stood outside the back door. It had been brought from India because she could not bear to part with it, for though even there, with their constant moves, it had spent most of its time in store, it had always been something to come back to; more, had stood for home itself. For, somehow or other, the homeless child's imagination had fitted Greylands—of which her father spoke with that air of slighting indifference which

he gave everything in which his feelings were involved—to an enlarged scale of the prim, Queen Anne villa, attractive to her childish mind because of its very difference to, its neatness in comparison with, the houses to which she was accustomed.

She knew now that she did not really care for it, that its glamour was all gone; and suddenly, in the midst of the maze of happiness which flooded her—the slighting thought that they might be glad to have the stupid old thing at some hospital or other—she was overcome by a sense of that pain and loss which comes with the realisation of something or somebody outgrown: a feeling of blank loneliness such as might overwhelm one upon opening the door of a room where one has made certain, certain sure, of dim lights, a fire, companions, laughter, and found it empty, stripped: with echoing bare boards, ash-bestrewn grate, the teasing rattle of mice in the wainscot.

Poor old dolls' house! Poor old thing! she thought, feeling that it was hard to be outgrown like that for no fault of one's own. For this was what happened; reproach herself as she might—and it hurt her loyalty—she had outgrown it, as in reality, only she had kept on pretending, she had long ago outgrown the doll which she had brought away too, because it seemed unkind to leave it behind—or so she had told herself.

She looked at it now, propped up on a table in one corner of her room, staring in front of it with a queer air of amazement and outrage, a look of

being completely taken aback in its wide blue eyes, its once pink cheeks faded with the vicissitudes of travel and climate.

For a moment Henrietta gazed at it with a sort of contempt—a contempt that was not for the doll, but for herself. To think that she had ever cherished such an object! Then, overcome by the dumb appeal of the thing, by her own need to lavish affection upon something if not someone, she moved across the room, picked it up, and hugged it to her breast, shaken by a feeling which she could not have put in words.

The next moment she knelt down, and, pulling open the bottom drawer of a large bureau in which all her odds and ends of treasures for which there was no particular place or use had been laid, took a roll of embroidered silk, all birds and butterflies and lotus-blooms, from out of its folds of tissue paper, and unwrapping the doll, rolled it all up again and placed the whole thing at the very back of the drawer.

When she went down she found her father with the tea-things pushed to one side of the table and a mass of papers laid out in front of him; for they were camping in an uncomfortable sort of way in the dining-room, vaguely uneasy in and uncertain what to make of the chill, faded drawing-room; with its ghostlike atmosphere, its sweet, frowsty perfume of old ladies; its spindly chairs and unnecessary tables; its desert of pale-tinted carpet, the pile worn grey in certain places where long-dead feet

had tapped and fidgeted in the front of accustomed seats, at a time when people had their own chairs, sat where they had always sat, kept their hands still, and tapped their feet beneath their flowing skirts.

“Of course when I started writing, the ink-pot was thick with some sort of fluffy mess,” Mr. Rorke complained. “Can one ever get clean ink in this country, or do these strange creatures who pass for housemaids inevitably empty their dust-pans into the ink-pot? I got out some clean blotting-paper yesterday, too, but someone’s used it for soaking up tea or some such slop—born messers! I must tell Mardi not to let them touch any of my things. Don’t attempt to drink that tea, Henrietta; I suspect it’s what they’ve kept steaming on the kitchen stove since their own dinner-time.”

“Oh, father, I’m so sorry! How stupid of them! And I’m late, I’m afraid.”

“Oh, that’s all right.” He never worried nor questioned her; gave her the liberty of any grown-up and perfectly unrelated personage; but for all that, she saw him glance at her for a moment, almost curiously, with his peculiarly clear grey eyes, and answered the glance which—in his way of never expecting anything from anybody—was studiously devoid of demand.

“There were some people, children and—and things”; she flushed, hesitated, and pulled herself together. Her father hated anything in the way of broken, sloppy talk, and yet there had been no real grown-up people in that party on the river-

bank, no one—she was conscious of a certainty of this—so really and truly as grown-up as herself; though plainly enough Honora was, in point of years, far older, as tall and well developed as any woman, with the eyes of an indifferent infant; and even Denise no longer, outwardly, at least, altogether a child. “They were poaching on our part of the river; I went down to stop them.”

“Oh.” She had her father’s full attention; but it was not for any precise information as to what had happened; she realised that he knew this already, but rather for the way in which she had met a crisis that he waited, his pen in his hand. It was tragic to think how well she knew him, his thoughts, his standards, his every shade of feeling apart from that relating to herself.

“Well, did you achieve your end?”

“They caught a salmon first.” She crossed the room and rang for some fresh tea, mindful, with a sense of weariness, how often the people on board ship had impressed upon her that in England or Ireland one always had to be keeping the servants up to the mark.

“Do you think they’ll try it on again?” There was a gleam of amusement on her father’s face. She would like to have answered with pride that they “would never dare,” but she couldn’t.

“I think as long as they know they oughtn’t to—” she began slowly. “If we gave them permission, perhaps, very likely, they wouldn’t want to. It’s a long way.”

“Where did they come from?”

“A place called Clonross.”

“Gipsies—working-class children?”

“No—all ragged, but somehow different. A big boy came up later.” Henrietta paled a little, stiffened as she always did when she found it difficult to say anything, and ended in her father’s own non-committal manner: “Quite decently tidy.”

Mardi had entered, stood waiting, and Mr. Rorke turned to him: “Do you know who lives at a place called Clonross?”

“It belongs to the Lord Taghmony, sahib, him who is now out in Bombay. There are at home now his sons and his daughters and one mem sahib.”

“What is their name?”

“O’Hara, sahib.”

“Oh, of course! There you have your rapscale lions, Henrietta. The Taghmony lot.”

“He—the big boy—said his name was Shaen, the others called him Ronny.”

“The Lord Shaen,” put in Mardi. There was no bazaar here in this weary land where his master had chosen to plant himself, but for all that, it was part of his duty and pride to know everything about everybody, no matter how great the difficulties might be. “Him the Right Honourable Earl Shaen, eldest son of my Lord Taghmony.”

“Oh . . .”

Mardi hesitated; there was so much that he could tell, it seemed almost a waste to be with a master who was so little curious about his fellow-

creatures in general; for all that, he did not venture further.

“The sahib rang?”

“No, I rang,” put in Henrietta, with that sort of decision which threw the Irish servants into a state between hysterical laughter at “the knowingness o’ the cratur’ ” and open revolt. “I want some fresh tea: and the sahib says that his tea is not fit to drink, that it has been standing. You ought to know better than that, Mardi.”

She spoke judicially and calmly; the management of servants had been a part of her daily life; one must be firm with inferiors, and yet never give oneself away, lose patience. That this same detachment and self-control did not hold good in every emergency was likely enough owing to the fact that in little Henrietta Rorke’s life there had been, so far, but little of the personal element of human emotion; or even more likely, that in some direction or other youth must be served, find its outlet; for it is impossible to encompass the whole of young life—its excitements, its passions, its ardours—within the narrow-ring fence of perfect behaviour.

“The cook person,” explained Mardi with dignity, “is an uneducated and impossible-to-work-with woman. She prepares the tea herself; if I go to prepare the tea for the sahib she threatens to pour the boiling water over me, using such words as it is impossible to repeat.”

“Well, bring some decent tea at once, and I my-

self will speak to the cook to-morrow,” said Henrietta, calm and mistrustful of all excuses.

Her father glanced at her curiously as the servant left the room. What was she going to make of this new life, these new responsibilities? He was so used to her, had so completely expected her, as it were, to take up the *rôle* of a mature and self-sufficing womanhood, that he often failed to realise her as a child, small, and in appearance almost alarmingly fragile. He had seen the young O’Haras before, however; recognised them that afternoon; watched from an upper window their encounter with his daughter. A wild lot, “hopelessly Irish”—that was what he had said to himself—and yet with some element of youth, that carelessness of youth, which was completely lacking in Henrietta.

Almost for the first time in their full and engrossed life together he wondered if he had not, maybe, expected too much of her. Sometimes, indeed, it had amazed him to look back and realise what a baby she had been when she first took so much upon her small shoulders; for how long it had been, “Now, Henrietta”—and always the complete name, no sort of diminutive or term of endearment—“I depend upon you.” And for how much, too, no end to the measure and scope of it: his pride, almost hobby, this—to try her to the utmost, sure of response. Six or seven years old and it was already her task to look after So-and-so;

to keep an eye on such and such a thing while he was away; to let him know if anything went wrong—and, later, to keep it from going wrong—“Make them feel your hand over them.” She must be sure that any chance guest, who might arrive while he was from home, was properly entertained, given the right cigars, the right whisky; vigilant with an eye on the stables as well as the house, the corn-stealing proclivities of the syces, making sure that the ponies were properly exercised; while he had taken it for granted that she was entirely capable of all arrangements for meeting him with the entire retinue, a hundred miles or more away from home, at a day’s notice, all ready prepared for weeks in camp.

Oh yes, he had tried her to the uttermost. In some ways it was involuntary; but not in all, for he liked to show her off by his show of indifference. “Oh, Henrietta’s no fool,” he would say, when people dared to remonstrate with him. “A’ baby? She wouldn’t thank you for that. I never knew anyone more competent to look after herself and the rest of us too.”

It had been a sort of boast, and he had never had a doubt about the rightness of it all until a couple of days earlier, when he had come across the whole O’Hara crew swarming over an outside car in one of the narrowest streets in Castleford, screaming instructions to one of their number inside a pastry-cook’s shop, flushed and excited, regardless of everyone apart from themselves.

“Real Irish,” and yet of the very essence of life and youth.

He glanced at Henrietta sitting erect in her chair, her small white hands laid out along the arms, her clean-cut little face paler and graver than usual; for she was shutting back a host of strange new dreams, emotions, tremulous excitements.

“It might be rather amusing for you to make friends with the Clonross children, eh, Henrietta? You need some friends of your own age. You’re an old-fashioned piece of goods, you know.”

The delicate colour flushed up into her face as she rearranged the tray with careful fingers and began to pour out tea from the fresh pot that Mardi had just brought.

“Well?—though of course it’s your own affair.” For once he was almost sharp with her; it struck him that she was a little slow, a little irresponsible, that—and here was irony indeed—there was at times an irritating lack of childish spontaneity about Henrietta.

“I’m not very used to children.” For a moment she hesitated, her eyes downcast, her lips tightly folded; then, quite suddenly, she looked up at him with the first confession of being completely and pathetically at a loss that he had ever seen upon her face. “I’m afraid I wouldn’t know what to talk to them about. I’ve never—you see, father, it’s like this: I never have had any other children to play with.”

That look touched him, came back to him as they

sat at dinner that night—the two of them alone in the dining-room, with candles burning in the great branching silver candelabra, and stiff bouquets of flowers in cut-glass vases islanded upon the vast table, showing Mardi's effort at the old tradition, while a half-undercooked, half-overdone meal displayed the cook's temper—so that he made the suggestion of taking her over to England with him. "I must go to London to buy some decent furniture, get them to send over some decorators."

"Couldn't you find anyone in Dublin?"

"My dear child, don't you realise that it's hopeless? Everything is hopeless in this country when you come down to wanting any job done, well done and finished out of hand. They can't finish with anything—even a grudge—leave it clear cut, that's what's wrong with them. I shall get some English servants over too; it's impossible to go on in the messy way we're doing now. You'd like to come, eh?"

"I don't know—I don't think so, father, thank you very much. I—" She hesitated, at a loss for words, then wound up with: "I think I'd better go on getting used to it," puzzled by this strange land where everyone wanted to do everyone else's work, leaving their own undone—though there was, for all that, something warm and human about it.

"If we could try them a little longer, perhaps I'd get to understand them better," she said.

"Henrietta"; her father put out his hands towards her, and getting up, she moved round the table to

him, laid her own in it, the rarity of the advance leaving her dumb; while as for him, he could find nothing to say beyond the repetition of that little sentence which had somehow hurt her: “An old-fashioned piece of goods, that’s what you are, eh?”

CHAPTER V

MR. RORKE was away far longer than he had expected, delayed by the fact that English methods were not, after all, so expeditious as his exasperation with everything Irish had led him to expect; for beneath his outward patience lay the weakness of sudden despairs, a complete washing of hands.

He had thought of Henrietta more, perhaps, than usual; thought, but not worried, for she was accustomed to looking after herself, being left alone. He found himself wondering if she really was too old for her age, if he had been wrong in some way in his methods of upbringing. "What she wants is more young companions," he thought then, coming home, finding that his ideas had been met—more than met—half-way; was in some queer fashion, of which he himself felt ashamed, resentful, apprehensive for his own peace, his own place in the child's affection.

And yet it was upon this arrival home—with, for the very first time within his memory, no small, solitary figure watchful upon the doorstep—that—and here again, literally for the first time, or he could not otherwise have remembered it as he did with so large a measure of self-reproach—he heard Henrietta laugh as a child laughs, a wildly excited and joyous child.

Every window and apparently every door in the house—for he could hear their “bang, bang,” echoing through the entire building—was open as Rorke drove up to Greylands; passing along the folding loops of the drive, with glimpses of it given and snatched away again; making for the back door, for the sweep in the front had been newly metalled, and was, as yet, hopeless for a motor.

Such glimpses as he caught of the front of the house showed it dead, not a workman in sight; the back, on the contrary, was all alive and blowing, so to speak, with three rosy-faced, untidy, capless servant girls, leaning as far as possible out of three separate upper windows, shrieking pleasantries to one of the painters, who lounged against the lintel of the back door, allowing himself to be served with refreshment and affection, exuberant blandishments, by the cook—a stout, red-haired woman who looked as though she had been giving what she herself called “a taeste o’ a wipe ter the floor” with her own person.

A disreputable jaunting-car, plastered with dry mud, stood in the yard, and a thin-skinned chestnut, hitched to a ring in the stable wall, kicked and fidgeted, tormented by flies; while a tattered figure in a long-waisted, fully-gored woman’s coat, seated upon the mounting-block, a polishing-brush in one hand, a brown riding-boot in the other, intermittently soothed the thoroughbred: “There, there, me darlint, don’t be afther mindin’ them bastes o’ flies, the devil’s own bastes they do be. . . .

Whoa, then, whoa—steady on there!” and shouted hoarse encouragement to a couple of half-grown wire-haired terriers which, having dragged a small rug from a pile—likely enough brought out with the transitory idea of a beating, thrown down and forgotten—were whirling round and round, worrying it between them; while a stable lad, leaning over the lower half-door of the stable, looked on, grinning and smoking, taking his pipe from his mouth and squealing with delight, beating on the top of the door as the rug parted between the two.

A waggon, still half laden with trusses of hay, stood beneath the open door of the loft, a velvet black square in a dazzling white wall; for the whole yard was flooded with sunshine, illuminating the scraps of paper which whirled in the wind, the shreds of blue and crimson wool scattered by the dogs with the rug; etching out the loose straws in lines of pure gold; gleaming on a pool of scummy water which lay in the middle where the grating of the drain was stopped.

It was all light, colour, and noise. The white curtains flew pennant-fashion out of the windows, while the maids in their bright-coloured print gowns hung, like overblown blossoms, still further out over the sills, shrieking with a new note of admiration, excitement:

“Ach, there now, look at him!”

“Begorra, now look at him there!”

“Mother o’ God, the limb! See that now!”

“There—there now, did you ever set eyes on the

like o' that—Patsy—Jimmy—see now, see there now!”

“Bless us an' save us! Cooky! Cooky! Look there now—a-ah! Sure, it's destroyed he'll be!” The whole chorus rose in a shrill crescendo as a small boy leapt from the darkness of the loft door, snatched for the rope depending from a swivelled iron bracket at the angle of the roof above, caught it, and swung wildly for a moment—all legs like a spider—then steadied, dropped among the hay, scrambled over the edge of the cart, and raced like the wind across the yard, with another small boy, who had flashed out from the stable door, close upon his heels, diving under the cook's arm and so into the back door.

There was more laughter, more applause, interspersed with loud laments from the painter as an overturned tin of paint disgorged itself in a thick green stream round his feet.

The whole thing, lost and caught up again by the loopings of the drive, set itself vividly in Rorke's disgusted mind—so much as he did not seem to notice then he remembered later—all colour and noise and “commonness,” as he would have said; there it all was, at one moment, flashing and complete; the next cut off, wiped out, as it were; nothing more than immobility, emptiness, blank silence left. The maids who had hung from the window vanished so suddenly that one might have looked on the ground for the halves of them, snipped off at the waist; while the tattered effigy on the mounting-

block—a wizened something between a young boy and an old, old man, senile decay and early childhood—darted forward, picked up one riding-boot, upon which the puppies were now concentrating, cuffed them apart, tucked it under his coat, and stood ludicrously bobbing to the master, one finger to his forelock, his slits of eyes darting from side to side in his spit of a face.

“Fine dawgs, yer honour; the maekin’ o’ foine dawgs entirely is them two, savin’ yer presence, yer honour.”

Rorke’s face was—they said later, whispering among themselves—“like one o’ them there fine grey pennibs the quality uses,” as he pointed with his stick to the other boot, the rags and brushes on the mounting-block.

“They’ll have those next,” he said; “take the boots indoors and clean them in their proper place.”

“Yes, yer honour, for sure, yer honour.” Patsy, his ragged coat flapping, the collar up over the back of his head, ran, low and small, shambling across the yard, swept up his impedimenta and disappeared into the stables. The groom vanished; the painter was mounted upon his ladder, green paint dripping from the hem of his white trousers; while, with the bewildering effect of a stout body in a dirty mauve print, making itself “as thin as a rasher o’ wind,” the cook slid out of sight, the back door—as though in itself a conspirator—closing silently behind her.

The next moment, however, it was flung wide

again, and Mardi ran out with a gesture of despairing obeisance for his master.

“Take these bags, and then see that the man has something to eat before he goes back,” said Rorke, and stepping into the passage, he moved along it to the back hall, a wide whitewashed place, with bacon hooks along the beams and an immense table at which, in the good old days, all who pleased, workmen, beggars, poachers—likely enough with a hare or brace of trout in their pockets—could sit down to cold meat, bread and cheese and a “drap o’ summut.”

It was in passing through this to the inner, chilly front hall with its effigies—an incongruous medley,—Plato; a long-dead O’Rorke, once Chief Justice of Ireland; the Duke of Wellington and a peculiarly battered female figure labelled “Spring”—that he heard that laugh, at the end of a fusillade of slams; a cry of, “Caught—caught!” and then the laugh, wild with triumph.

The next moment the door from the lobby at the foot of the stairway burst open, and the same small boy who had dropped from the loft shot through it, one arm torn from out his coat, one stocking down round his ankle, and Henrietta Rorke hanging on to him, whirling round with him.

Henrietta! Henrietta! Eyes and cheeks ablaze, her hair in a tangled mass around her face, her blouse out of the back of her skirt, a hole in the heel of her stocking.

They hurtled forward on to the floor together,

Henrietta on top, silent now—while the boy squealed and gurgled—presumably tickling him. Henrietta! Henrietta of all people! The name beat in a sharp staccato through Rorke's mind, punctuated with a fusillade of exclamation marks—and that alone shows how unaccustomed he was to any such display.

It was the others, surging in upon them, that gave the alarm; for alarm it was—and here was another rub. Rorke himself had, often enough, called "Cave!" at the sight of his parents, but that Henrietta should be alive to like alarms—this was too much! Henrietta whom he had never even attempted to curb, pathetically enough because she did not need it!

"I say—oh, I say—Hal!"

It was a tall girl who gave tongue, almost a woman, with a swinging black plait. The rest of them were there, flushed and dishevelled—youth as he had admired it in the streets of Castleford, a little sour to the taste here in his own house; not altogether—any part of it, combined with that scene in the back-yard—a pleasing welcome for a tired and fastidious man.

All the same, what pleased him least, what really hurt him, was his daughter's sudden jerk back to her old self; he liked her best that way, but he did not like her to be that way because of him—this was the fact, altogether unreasonable.

"We were playing," she said lamely. Hang it all, what else could she have been doing? thought

Rorke; and were these others meant to think that she was not allowed to play, making him out a household tyrant?

“So I perceive.” His voice was like ice. “But won’t you introduce me to your friends?”

She began with the tall girl, leaving the eldest boy—almost a man and the most distinguished-looking of the whole oddly distinguished crew—to the last; and yet, even in the midst of this breaking off to wail:

“I didn’t know you were coming; oh, father, if only I had known you were coming!” cutting him deep with the sense of an ill-timed arrival, when all she thought of was his writing-table without its usual vase of flowers; the unreadiness of the servants; her own dreadful omission—aye, and loss too—in not being at the door to meet him; all this combined with a desperate impatience to be rid of these others so that she might minister to him, lay herself out to please, practise her household art. Why, his bedroom was all anyhow; she had seen it that morning and spoken about it; but speaking once was no good at all, nothing more than a prelude to standing over Mary the housemaid, seeing the thing done.

That was all, her one preoccupation, while the memory of having invited the O’Hara party to stay to tea lay heavy upon her. But it is this sort of misapprehension, this web of misunderstanding, which is so fatal, so hopelessly entangling to people—people of a certain proud and sensitive type—

who are unfortunate enough to be fond of one another.

Rorke shook hands all round; later on at tea Honora declared that he gave her two fingers, no more. All the O'Hara children, adoring their own parents, criticised them as they criticised themselves, and could have had no idea of the wave of resentment which swept over Henrietta at Honora's words.

Anyhow, the afternoon was, somehow or other, spoilt. It was the first time Henrietta had really unbent, and now she was up again, straight as an osier; terribly polite, terribly much the hostess; altogether too much for her guests, with no idea of how desperately hard she was trying to do her duty; keeping it up to the very end—even to going out with them to the car, watching them harness the chestnut, seeing them off, waving her hand as they looped their way down the drive. Take it all in all, though, it was little wonder they could not understand such complications, for if they had wanted to get rid of anyone—above all, kids like themselves—there was nothing simpler than to say so: "Look here, you young 'un, you, you hook it!" adding by way of a frill: "I'm about fed up with you," or any little thing like that, just to round it off.

Shaen was riding; by the time the others were gone, and she went out into the loose box to see him saddle his mare, Henrietta was white as paper, physically cold with impotence and depression.

"Look here, is he rotten to you?" said Shaen.

“Don’t you mind him if he is; parents are the limit sometimes, though mine are decent enough, I’ll say that for them. But, by Jove, if he bullies you—”

“Father! Why, he’s the best father in the world; he lets me do anything I like—there was never anyone like him—never—never! How dare you! I—I—”

Henrietta was all aflame, realising for the first time that there was something that they did miss between them, her father and herself.

Shaen had made an altogether false move, and it might have been fatal—in her cooler moments it would have been—but just now she had been too much excited, was too suddenly chilled, douched, as it were.

“I’m awfully sorry, I didn’t know—I—” he began, then broke off as she began to cry, a streaming flood of silent tears.

He took her in his arms at that, with no sort of awkwardness at the sight of her tears, and this stamped him for a woman’s man, even then. As to Henrietta, the red-haired Irish cook had held her to her own voluminous bosom one day when she fell down and cut her knee—that was why she could not bear to think of her being sent away, replaced by an English servant—but that was the first time, literally the first time, that anyone had attempted to comfort her in any such way.

This was different, however, altogether different; as different—well, as different as this boy was different to anyone she had ever seen, or so much as

dreamt of: so kind, so wonderfully kind, no one had ever said such nice things to her before; and not only that, but so nice to look at, so splendidly handsome and brave—"gallant" was the word she wanted; with such a perfume, aroma about him and the clothes he wore. And how childlike that was: the delight in nice, clean-smelling people, the thrill over something that was surely cigarette smoke; for, like so many old-fashioned children, Henrietta Rorke was exceedingly young for her age.

"Now, don't forget, you darling, you're my sweetheart for ever and ever. And look here, Hal, it would kill me if you chucked me, do you hear that? I could not stand it—simply couldn't stand it. I never loved anyone like this before. I knew that the very first time I saw you. Feel my heart, put your dear little hand against it—there, there, that will show you—if ever I catch any other fellow kissing you . . . Well, if I do, that's all! . . ."

"They won't, they won't!" cried Henrietta, stiff in his arms from a very excess of feeling, shaken from head to foot. "I'd die before I'd let anyone else kiss me."

"To kill myself"—"to die"—there was youth, holding life slackingly and slightingly; just to get away out of it if you don't like it, how easy it all appears in the teens!

They clung together, while Shaen ran on, Henrietta's wet cheek pressed against his. Her heart, unlike his, felt as though it had stopped beating, keyed up to such an intensity of emotion as it was. Her

father loved her—of course he loved her—and yet there had never been anything like this. If love like her father's—and oh, he did love her! expressing nothing, displaying nothing, outwardly cool, almost indifferent—was yet love, and there was no doubt about it, how doubly, trebly love was this, with all its protestations and plans; the passionate clinging and vows of this wonderful boy; the throwing of himself upon her mercy—hers, Henrietta's—the quick, soft outpouring of words, to which after that one fierce protest, “I'd die first,” she herself added nothing.

Up to this it had not been altogether easy for Shaen. Henrietta herself had not been easy, with a strange, unchildish dread of allowing herself to feel too much; a deep distrust of herself; a shrinking, half-wild instinct for keeping herself apart, preserving herself; a mistrust of putting her dreams to the test of reality; for since that first day, though she had thought of him constantly, woven all sorts of fairy-tale dreams about him, she had scarcely spoken to him.

He had ridden over to Greylands the day after the poaching affair, and seeing him come up the drive she had gone sedately enough to the door to meet him, the small, grave hostess of so many receptions, with no thought of flight, until an overwhelming sense of shyness, of her own deficiencies, swept her round and up three flights of stairs to the attic, before he had time to so much as set eyes upon her.

She had heard the servants calling, and drawn

herself in upon herself with an extraordinary sense of suffering and fear; as though she were hugging her outer self round some innermost core, her real self, all that mattered of herself—small and frightfully sensitive, sensitive to rawness, and altogether unprotected save for this shell-like crust. Supposing that she went down to talk to him and found nothing to say; supposing he discovered her to be nothing more than a “little silly”—what would she feel like then? His own brothers and sisters spoke a different language, the outcome of a totally different life: and of course that was the proper sort of life and language, thought Henrietta. She herself was “dreadfully different,” people had always said that—“different” and “old-fashioned.” She had not minded then, but how awful it would be if the boy found her out! For the first time in her life she was overcome by that one passionate desire of every normal child, to be precisely like the rest of the herd.

The servants had relinquished their search, with a desultory call here and there, rising to a series of shrieks under the pressure of half-crowns from Shaen—reckless as his father, and with no youthful awkwardness over the bestowal of tips—then falling away again.

Craning far out of the attic window, peering through the pillars of the ridiculous façade with which some Early Victorian Rorke had endeavoured to smarten up Greylands, Henrietta had seen the boy on his bay mare galloping away down the grass at the edge of the drive and felt that life was at an

end; flagellating herself with self-reproaches. How could she have been such a “little silly”—such a dreadful little silly? Never again—never—never!

But when he had come again next day—stung to that sort of persistence that was his father’s in any pursuit of petticoats—the same thing happened; yet again, a third time, when he walked over, cutting up across Naboth’s vineyard, mounting the sunk fence, so unexpectedly that he was almost upon her, bolting in among the cold, shining laurel leaves of the shrubbery. She never forgot that. It had been raining, and the drops ran down the back of her neck; the touch of the leaves was cold as metal against her face.

After that there had been a lull; then the O’Hara girls came upon her shopping in Castleford, stiff with shyness and insulted pride, for Mardi was with her, and the street boys called after them, followed them.

They made her get out of the old basket carriage, a survival of the Miss Judy days, on to their own jaunting-car, and drove her back to Clonross, keeping her to tea, showing her the dogs and the ferrets. She was unbending over the horses, for she had learnt to ride almost before she had learnt to walk, when Shaen, who had been out for lunch and tea, joined them, and after this she was tongue-tied.

He was annoyed with her, and he showed it; for what was the use of having a grievance if you did not air it, make everyone else feel it? He had gone to call on her, bending from his height as though

she, a mere kid, were grown-up,—and there were plenty of grown-up women ready with a welcome for him, he could tell her that—and she had run away, hidden. Such cheek! Oh, well, he'd show her. He had been out to lunch with a pretty, gay woman who had treated him like a man, a woman old enough to relish his boyish essays at flirtation—the older they were the greater his charm for them, though he missed this. Anyhow, it wasn't likely that he'd lie down to let a bit of a girl walk over him, he thought, for he realised his position, the value of his title, his own good looks; though only, to do him justice, when he felt himself, with a sort of amazement, put upon or passed by.

He dropped his air of sullen pride later on, for Henrietta's intense shyness gave her so complete an air of not caring that, quite unintentionally, she beat him at his own game. When it was arranged that she should come over next day and ride with them he proffered his own mare, almost eagerly, as though it were she who was doing him a favour.

This sort of thing had gone on throughout Mr. Rorke's absence, with Henrietta, scared saint, palpitating on her pinnacle.

With her there had never been any schoolmistress or school friend to tap the fountain of her affection, run it off. There is no sense in saying that children do not love ardently, engrossedly, for they do. When a boy and girl declare, "I can never, never love anyone like this again," they are right, for there is never again anything like this first love:

so complete, so uncalculating, at once so sensuous and pure. We laugh at ourselves in later years recounting our own experience, trying to belittle it, meanly and faithlessly enough, knowing all the while that never again have we touched such heights, such ecstasies.

Henrietta had not realised what it meant, thought of it all as a dream, apart from real life. Her father had always filled her horizon, filled it still so far as she knew. When he arrived home that afternoon she had included Shaen in her general desire to be quit of her guests, alone with her father.

Now as Shaen, at last, after many good-byes, took his departure, turning back and waving again and again, she suddenly remembered her duty. Poor parents, unhappy parents!—when they come to this; slipping back into a drab place among the other dull duties, remembered by an effort.

Not that it was like this with Henrieta Rorke, save for a moment. The springs of her affection ran too deep for that, and after all, out of the whole world, two people are not too many to be loved at once; there are some who have hearts like hotels, always full, with a constant coming and going. Philip Rorke was by no means put on the shelf; was not—never would be, could be—moved from his place. Wistfully looked to share it with another—ah yes, that was true enough, or if not to share, and this was impossible from the first, and Henrietta knew it—how well she knew it, how eager she was to smooth over any possible rub—

to leave the same level free for another, just one other.

Even this was postponed, however, for young Lord Shaen went back to Eton the day after Mr. Rorke's return. And though Henrietta by no means forgot—indeed, in thinking of him, shades of expression, words, glances, the whole effect of him, as it were, came out the more clearly, like a distant landscape to a long-sighted person—his very wonderfulness placed him a little apart in the world of dreams, while her father was still there: her daily companion, with those demands upon her to which every true woman, even the child-woman, is all too ready to respond.

The household at Greylands began to run more smoothly after Mardi went back to India—wilted with the damp. When they choose, Irish servants can show themselves the best in the world, and the staff, under Henrietta's supervision, took, as the red-haired cook said, "a round turn" upon itself, attributable, or so Rorke thought, to his threat of an importation of English; though it is more likely to have been the outcome of a wave of extravagant affection and loyalty to Henrietta herself; an almost childish delight in being ruled by a child—"the maistress," as they called her.

Meanwhile the difficult question of her education was more or less solved by Lady Fair suggesting that she should ride over to Clonross each day to share the O'Hara's governess, already overwhelmed with five pupils of widely diverse ages;

the sort of education which resembles nothing more than a handful of grain flung out to a yardful of fowls—peck or not peck, as you please. Perhaps, on the whole, however, it was the best thing possible for Henrietta, bringing her into close contact with youth as it did; the real source of any knowledge she gained, about this time, being due to her father's lessons in mathematics; and later on, though not for some while yet, the Greek, Latin, and English literature imparted by the oddly mingled efforts—the sort of showing off one against another—of the Protestant rector and Roman Catholic priest at the little village of Clogrhoe.

CHAPTER VI

THROUGHOUT the following Christmas holidays Henrietta scarcely saw Shaen. When they did meet, found themselves alone together, he was condescending: "Well, and how's my little sweetheart?" sort of thing; as though he felt her always there, ready for him and his kisses. It was not until he got back to Eton that he was struck by the fact, in glorifying his affair to other boys, that there had been no kisses; that Henrietta, conscious of some change in his attitude, had held herself proudly, shyly apart.

This realisation came to him the more oddly in that during his actual stay at Clonross, it had seemed as though all the indifference was on his own side: he had been sorry for "the little thing," but he could not be bothered with girls, that was the fact.

Suddenly, inexplicably, he had felt himself to be grown-up, leaping forward years in front of her; engrossed with his hunting; going to dances that were in no sense of the word children's dances—where no one would have thought of inviting the little Rorke girl—with other Etonians whom he had staying with him at Clonross.

"Pretty kid, eh?" she herself heard this: he might have been showing off the trifles on his mantel-shelf. "Pretty vase, eh?"

No wonder that she was utterly bewildered, remembering all that he had said that afternoon in the stables at Greylands; then again, early next morning, when he had come to wish her good-bye, whistling under her window long before anyone was up; the hush of dawn with its gossamer mists, etherealising, sanctifying their passionate adieux, impressing even Shaen with a sort of solemnity.

Going back over it, with that cruel memory for words, that sense of amazement which comes to people who themselves feel more than they can express—for take it all in all, Shaen had too many “feelings” to feel anything very deeply—it was small wonder that Henrietta’s bewilderment increased rather than diminished. It seemed, indeed, as though she had dreamt something almost too good to be true.

By Easter the kaleidoscope of Shaen’s feelings—a different arrangement of the same colours, few and crude—had again shifted. Eton had broken up early on account of an epidemic of measles, and, as it happened, none of his friends were at liberty to come over to Ireland and stay with him; hunting was over, and he did not care for fishing. There was nothing to do—actually “to do”—but there was Henrietta, and he realised her afresh, as it were; still condescending, and yet a little baulked by that air of hers, that standing apart, self-poised.

The schoolroom holidays had not yet begun, and this irked him, for he had an idea that once he

came home, they all ought to be free to devote themselves to him.

Miss Griffin, the governess—meagre, insistent, and boring, with a long face and teeth like a horse—teeth from which the young O’Haras declared that they commuted her age at something well over fifty—held on to her pack, partly out of sheer obstinacy, and partly, poor woman, because she found the holidays already a great deal too long for her purse. As far as her pupils were concerned, however, the sum of achievement was even less than usual, for Shaen was continually in and out of the schoolroom.

Quite suddenly, in that puzzling way youth has, he had let go of his newly-acquired manhood, was ill-tempered, *difficile*, petulant, and altogether a child. “More of a spoilt child than all the rest of them put together,” as Lady Fair said, at her wits’ end between them.

It was then that—unsubtle person as she was—she hit upon a subtlety, a truth which expressed Henrietta Rorke to a shade.

“Really, that child is like the touch of a cool hand on one’s forehead, after the rest of you.”

She was, indeed, worn out between her pride in the sporting attainments, the pluck and high spirits of her charges, and despair over the handling of them: first shooing them on, and then trying to draw them back. Her whole policy was blurred by the thought of how different it would have been if she, herself, had married Taghmony, and these had

been her own children; far less in number—two, say, crystallised to perfection, a sort of compound. For, good soul as she was, running them over in her mind—Honora, Shaen, Denise, Edwina, Derrick, Gerald, it was impossible to decide which she could best do without. She had, indeed, no taste for doing without; dreaming of life with Taghmony and yet reluctant to give up the sentimental memories of her own husband, a far more comfortable partner.

In the middle of the holidays there was news from India that Lady Taghmony had given birth to another son. You would not have thought that this could have affected any one of the haphazard household at Clonross, but for some inexplicable reason Shaen chose to take it as a personal insult. “They’re old enough not to go on making asses of themselves”—that’s what he said, scowling and jealous.

There were more rows, an endless succession of rows, and reconciliations—if it were possible to apply such a word to the calm forgetfulness with which people, fighting like cats and dogs at one moment, would be addressing one another as “darlint” the next, walking about with their arms round each other’s necks.

It does not call for much imagination to picture how bewildering this sort of thing seemed to little Henrietta Rorke, brought up to control herself; suffering agonies of shame over any lapse from the standard which her father maintained with no apparent effort; more and more bewildering as Shaen

went on from bad to worse; “working himself up,” as Lady Fair said, something in her own sporting make-up, fearful of, and yet eager for, the climax.

It was three days after the news of the arrival of the last O’Hara, during the morning hours in the schoolroom, that the storm burst.

Again and again Miss Griffin had ordered Shaen out of the room, going on from a weak, “Don’t you think it would be nicer if you were to leave us to get on with our work, Lord Shaen?” to a petulant, “I will not have you here. I refuse to have you coming in here in this way, upsetting your brothers and sisters,” though in her heart of hearts she could never altogether disregard the fact that he was a lord, veered from cringing to the perverted snobbery of being as rude as possible to anyone with a title: “I don’t care if he is a lord—an earl; it doesn’t prevent me telling him what I think of him!” was what she told her friends.

As often as not Shaen mocked or mimicked; on this particular morning he chose to behave as though she were not there; did not so much as glance at her: sitting on the window-sill, swinging his legs; teasing the others, who were really trying to work, as well as people so completely out of the habit of any such thing could do—thinking they were working, but on the whole doing very little more than repeat the same thing again and again, very fast, with their thoughts elsewhere—for they had been promised a half-holiday if they got so much done, a

proof that even "the Griffin" was beginning to feel worn down with it all.

It was a glaring hot day and they were all on edge, the sun streaming in at the schoolroom windows, where the springs of the blinds were broken or the blinds themselves torn off the rollers: while a bluebottle buzzed maddeningly between the upper and lower half of one, pushed as wide open as it would go. Honora was conning over French verbs with a muttered sing-song, and Denise lying down with the pretence of a backache, learning poetry in her own fashion, half under her breath:

"And then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And then and there was hurrying to and fro—"

the two of them nearly grown up, physically women; sharp as needles, full of charm and intelligence of a sort, yet ignorant as hens. The two small boys were doing their sums, squeaking their pencils with careful deliberation; and Edwina, the one with the most character of all the girls, reading aloud. She could not pronounce her "r's," and every word with an "r" in it, Shaen repeated after her, with a derisive little laugh.

It was an impossible pack to teach, in the variety of the ages involved, in every sort of way, even under the best conditions. On this particular morning it was all beyond words. Miss Griffin's voice grew shriller, her face flushed with nervous exhaus-

tion, a sense of complete helplessness; for she could not turn Shaen, almost a man, bodily out of the room, and was too much on her dignity to box his ears—though that would have been the best thing to do, self-control being nothing accounted of with the young O’Haras; if you did not “make a row,” your feelings passed unnoticed.

Henrietta Rorke was trying to master her own French lesson, her fingers in her ears, and so missed a good deal of what was going on. Shaen realised this, and it exasperated him, in conjunction with her attitude, more than anything else could have done; so that from muttering he went on to shouting his mockeries, the tail of his eye on her small white figure, her bent head; the soft mist of brown hair, with the two hands thrust in among it, completely hiding her face. Confounded cheek of the kid to go on mugging like that when she ought to be laughing at him, Shaen, showing off—and, truth to tell, a little ashamed of it, though unable to stop: starting off on a new tack, which had nothing whatever to do with Teddy’s rendering of Green’s English History.

“Awound the wugged wocks
The wagged wascals wan
A wuwal wace—

“Shut up, do—do shut up, Ronny—how can I go on, Miss Griffin, when that ass Ronny—”

“Awound the wugged wocks, Wonny dear, Wonny,” repeated Shaen; upon which Teddy hurled

a new dictionary with a sharp corner, hitting him on the side of his forehead, almost in his eye, drawing blood.

“By Gad, I’ll teach you, young Teddy!” cried Shaen, and, making a plunge for his sister, foiled Derrick, who, with his slate on his knees, was tipping his chair as far back as possible, both feet on the top rail.

They came to the floor together, but as Shaen fell he caught at Teddy’s hair, and she was forced to give to the pull or have it torn off her head.

The rest of them were on their feet in a moment. Miss Griffin was screaming; Gerry squatting in his haunches like a little old man at a dog-fight, hissing and clapping, his hands between his knees; while Derrick, underneath the other two, gasped and grunted, drumming on the floor with both heels.

Henrietta backed to the window. If it had been on the ground floor she would have jumped out of it: come to that, she was as near as possible doing so, regardless of the drop. She felt physically sick, wild, imprisoned, stifled, for she had caught a glimpse of Shaen’s face, crimson with rage, his eyes oddly glassy, his mouth working. To the end of her life she never really forgot him as he looked then. She would try to forget, be very sure that she had forgotten, but for all this it was fixed on her mind: would come back to her, in their tenderest moments like a crude coloured shutter—the sort of thing one sees outside the lower-class restaurants

in Italy, illustrative of the rudest passions, greed, savagery—pushed in between herself and the Shaen she loved, almost worshipped.

And all for what—why—why? She had not mastered, as she did later, the complete futility of any such question. For it was always like this with the O'Haras; there was no following them, accounting for them.

She had seen them angry scores of times, fighting mad, throwing things at each other; and with good effect too, for in that family there was no one who despised you like the person you missed. All the same, there had never been anything to compare with that look upon Shaen's face, showing him—as we all, at some time or another, are shown, the face of the person we love best, have imagined we know through and through—as a complete stranger; and more than a stranger: someone whom we could have never even visualised, with whom we could never, under any condition, mix.

It was impossible for her to realise how little it had to do with what had occurred, a sort of outcrop or eruption of something as confounding to Shaen himself, despite the black dog on his back, as it was to everyone else, a tearing of the veil of civilisation, a sudden outcrop from those depths—dark, passionate, primitive, and without reason—which lie beneath the outward lightness and good feeling of the Irish; rendering them liable to “go off the deep end” suddenly and with no sort of warning, for no immediate or discoverable reason.

Teddy and he were inexplicably tangled: Teddy kicking with a fine display of leg, her left arm across Shaen's face.

It seemed to Henrietta Rorke that they were tearing and growling like animals; Miss Griffin was still screaming, Derrick grunting. The sunshine beating into the room was thick with dust from an ancient Turkey carpet degraded from the dining-room; the air was stifling like a blanket laid over her face; but for all that she shivered as though someone were trickling icy water down her back.

There was a sudden piercing, long-drawn shriek; the door opened and Lady Fair came in; while the combatants dropped apart, sated, as it were, and Derrick crawled out from under them, with a long-drawn whimpering complaint like a beaten dog.

Teddy sat up straight, both legs stuck out in front of her, sobbing with rage or pain, or both, her hand to her arm.

“He bit me! The beast—the beast, the great beast!”

Shaen, rising to his feet, shrugging his shoulders back into his coat, turned sideways to dust it, straightening his tie.

“Cut my head open—the vixen—bitch! By God, if—”

“Ronny—oh, Ronny! Ronny, how can you?” wailed Lady Fair; while Miss Griffin broke in with a rasping whirr of words, more like an alarm clock than anything human.

“It's impossible to do anything with Lord Shaen

in the room. I never saw such children—never—never! Lady Palmer's little boys—everyone knows how successful I was with them—and Mrs. Cleevenden-Herries' little girl—writing to me always—such affectionate letters. I've never been among such people before, and if Lord Shaen's allowed to come into the schoolroom, Lady Fair, I must resign—I must resign—there's nothing else for it. I can't go on like this, it's wearing me out. They're difficult enough as it is, and so backward—I never met such backward children; and the way they behave—their language! I've always heard that the Irish—”

“Shut up, for God's sake shut up!”

“Ronny! Ronny! To speak to a lady like that!”

“A lady, pheugh!”

“To behave like that to your sister—a big boy like you, almost a man!”

“She chucked a book at me. Look there—it might have put my eye out”; he pointed to his forehead, throwing back his hair, that one odd lock which had a way of falling over it, wiping the thin stream of blood from his eye. His tone was sulky, but he was bitterly ashamed of himself, overcome with shame, a sense of queer flatness, emptiness: angrily conscious of Henrietta Rorke, seen sideways from the corner of his eye, a streak of white rigid by the window. “You row me, but what about them, eh? Hell cats, that's what they are, your precious girls!”

“Anyhow I’d rather be a cat than a dog—a mad dog!” cried Teddy, who had dragged up her sleeve and was ostentatiously sucking her arm. “I’ll have to go to Paris, that’s what I’ll have to do.” She made a grimace at her brother, all real sense of injury gone in a moment.

“Serve you right, sucks for you—never been to Paris yet—little boy!”

“Ronny!”

“If Lord Shaen’s allowed to come into the school-room at lesson time . . .” Miss Griffin was still running on.

“For heaven’s sake someone open that window and let that blue-bottle out!” cried Lady Fair. “Stop that noise, Derrick, stop it, I say! And Henrietta!—Heavens! look at that child! Henrietta, what is it? Ronny! Ronny!”

But Shaen had swung round before the words were out of his aunt’s mouth, seeing her sway though he was not looking at her—would not allow himself to look at her.

Henrietta Rorke fainting! “Fainting dead away, stiff as a poker, just because we were rowing!” The thing became a legend in the O’Hara family.

At the time it was too real, too frightening to amuse them, though they tried to laugh it off afterwards—“Fainting like an Early Victorian heroine”; she was so stiff and deadly white, so like death—and indeed that was their first amazed and terror-stricken thought: death there among them all, touching one of themselves—death, actual death,

and little Henrietta Rorke. The Griffin slammed it into them! shutting it into their awed consciousness like the slammed lid of a box, the snap of a lock: "You've killed her between, you!"—while Lady Fair, usually so irresolute, took the reins into her own hands clearing the room with a curt: "Nonsense! The child's fainted, and no wonder with this heat. Out you go, all of you, and call Nanny."

"To faint—to faint because we scrapped—ragged—rowed!"

What puzzled them was the fact of her proven pluck; there was not a horse in the stables she would not have ridden, they knew that. Only the day before they had been experimenting with an antiquated fire-escape from an upper window, and Hal had gone down the shoot first, without a waver.

"And then to faint!" No wonder that they were bewildered. Shaen himself was ashamed and penitent, in some queer way impressed.

All the same, he took it for granted that the thing would blow over as everything did—more especially in face of the peace-offering with which he fortified himself for his next meeting with Henrietta; for he was accustomed to the O'Hara greed for anything in the way of a present, had an almost pathetic belief in its efficiency. He had at first tried to forget, and then really forgotten the way in which she had turned away from him when she awoke from her faint, the feeling she gave him of being irredeemably and forever far away from him.

Easter had fallen early that year; added to this, his holidays were pushed forward by the epidemic at Eton, so that he had already been at home for three weeks before the Indian mail, which synchronised with his birthday, brought the usual cheque from his father, who gave with a gesture even to his own son despising single figures.

This had been the evening before the scrap—the day after the cable which announced the arrival of yet another brother. Deep in a trough of depression, he had nearly torn it up, with the odd idea of spiting his people for making such asses of themselves, unable, for once, to think of anything which he particularly needed for the expenditure of such a sum.

This difficulty was now solved. He went off to Dublin next day, getting the train fare and a night's expenses at a hotel out of his aunt on the pretence of seeing a dentist, and spent the whole twenty pounds on a little diamond and sapphire pendant in the shape of a heart for Henrietta, with a comfortable feeling of "That settles that."

He rode over to Greylands with this directly he got home, and finding that Henrietta was not in the house, tracked her down to the edge of the river, where he discovered her sitting among the rushes: not even fishing, just sitting there—the strange little thing!—still very white and wan, still somehow different, far away as it seemed.

Without a doubt as to the reception of his gift, of its healing powers, he dropped to her side and put

his arm round her waist. Even when she shrank away out of it he only laughed, flushed and self-confident.

“Just you see what I’ve brought my little sweetheart back from Dublin,” he said, and, pulling the blue morocco case out of his pocket, opened it, flashing the trinket to and fro in the sunlight. “I say, it really is pretty decent, isn’t it? Look there now—look, Hal! I wonder if you’ve got a chain? I’ll have to get you one if you haven’t. Look, now, it just catches—”

He broke off, suddenly aware of Henrietta’s silence. She was sitting very upright on the bank of the river, her legs straight out on the slope in front of her, her hands pressed down between her knees, while all about them was the scent of rushes and crushed river-mint. During the best years of his life Shaen remembered that, for colour and perfume came back to him more clearly than anything else, less blurred than human expressions or memories, where people slid in and out of each other’s places so quickly: more poignant by far than words; flowing in a perpetual bright, trickling stream throughout every emotion among his own set.

“I say, Hal, it’s for you, you know; aren’t you going to look at it? I bought it on purpose.”

At that moment she would have given anything to turn her head and look, not at it but at him, to behave as though everything were the same. But she daren’t—she was stiff with apprehension. His voice sounded like the old Ronny, but how could

she know—how could she? “It will kill me if I see him looking like *that*—like he looked then,” she thought in her desperate child’s way.

“I say, Hal—Hal darling”; he was humble and deeply in love with her, as always when she was angry or apparently disregarding. “I say, you’re not in a paddy with me still! Look here, I went to Dublin on purpose to buy you something to make up for . . . Oh, hang it all, Hal! After all, it was Teddy, and not you—but anyhow, I’m most awfully sorry we scared you. We’re savages, that’s what we are; it’s no good thinking anything else, that old ass Griffin’s right. Look here, Hal—Hal, you must look at it, now I’ve bought it for you. I spent all my birthday money on it—I thought you’d like it. It mayn’t be up to much, of course, but I thought—oh, hang it all—I thought you’d like it.”

He longed to put out his hand and turn her face towards his. But he, too, was scared, unsure of himself; all his gay confidence gone.

“Anyhow—you might at least look at it.”

Something in the misery, the sense of failure in his tone, drew her, and she turned her head, looking, not at the trinket in his hand, but at him.

“Oh, Ronny, why—why—” It was impossible for her to put anything of what she meant into words. Why were things as they were? Why, oh, why was he so different to what she thought him? Her eyes were swimming in tears, and for a moment or two she could see nothing beyond that last vision of him, like a mirage in a lake. Then her

gaze cleared, and she saw that it was the old Ronny, flushed, eager, penitent, his eyebrows oddly raised, his brows wrinkled.

“Oh, Ronny, Ronny, why did you? Why—oh, why?”

“I thought you’d like it.” He had no thought apart from his peace-offering; to his mind, with the values to which he was accustomed, it seemed impossible that anyone should be regardless of such a thing. As though his thoughts drew her’s, she looked down at it.

“What is it—why—”

“Oh, well, I got in such a paddy—scared you, and all. I bought it as a—oh, look here—you know—a sort of make-up. I say, see here, Hal”—he turned it, flashing—“It’s not so bad, and all for you.”

Now that she was looking at him something of his old self-confidence crept back into his voice, and after all it was a jolly fine present. There had been other things, cheaper, which looked almost as good, he might have kept back at least a third of his birthday money.

“I can’t—”

“What! Can’t what?”

“I can’t—I don’t want it, Ronny. I—I don’t want anything from you, ever. I never want to see you again.”

Something in her almost overwhelming longing to let herself go, to weep upon his shoulder, the realisation that much of her horror of him had

passed, whipped her into a sudden spurt of temper.

“You ought to give it to Teddy. It’s Teddy you—you—ugh!” She could not bring herself to say it.

“Teddy! Teddy! My own sister!” He was honestly amazed. “I’ll be hanged if I will! Why, she chucked a book at my head—she began it! She! . . . Give it to Teddy—that young ass Teddy! A thing like that!”

They had both risen, were standing facing each other, trembling from head to foot. For that moment all Shaen’s contrition, his tenderness, had gone; his face was crimson with passion.

“Look here, are you going to take it or aren’t you? It cost twenty pounds, I tell you—twenty pounds! Now are you going to take it?”

“No.”

“What!”

“No.”

“Say that again and I’ll chuck it into the river, I swear I will! Now, are you going to have it, young Hal—are you or aren’t you?”

“No, it’s Teddy’s!” Henrietta’s head was turned obstinately away; she made herself obstinate; there seemed nothing else for it, the only sort of shield she had.

“Hang Teddy! Will you or won’t you? Now, now. Look here, by God, I mean what I say! Will you have it—will you?”

“No!”

“Then I’ll show you—by Gad I’ll show you!”

Look here now, look here I tell you—I'm going to chuck it—I'm going to!"

One hand was on Henrietta's arm; he raised the other with the trinket in it, and swung it round and round.

"There, that'll show you!"

It was out of his grasp almost before he knew what he was doing, circling once with its gay flash, darting to meet its own reflection, while Henrietta Rorke tore herself from him, turned aside, and flung herself face downward on the bank, shaken with sobs.

Shaen was on his knees at her side in a moment. "Hal! Hal! 'Don't cry, Hal darling! I was an ass—a silly ass! Look here, I really thought you meant it, didn't care for it. I'd spent all my birthday money on it, and it made me mad. Hal, Hal dear, my little sweetheart!"

He was trying to pull her hair aside from her face, drawing it back from her neck, pressing his hand in between her wet cheek and the fragrant mint, the dark rushes damp with tears.

"Hal, I'll get you another—don't cry. For God's sake don't cry like that! I'll raise the wind somehow—go to Dublin to-morrow. There's another almost like it—I couldn't make up my mind at first; I'll get that."

He had raised her somehow, exhausted by emotion, was sitting on the ground, holding her against him.

“Of course I’ll get you another—there are lots of others. Only the worst of it—such a beast of a price!”

“It isn’t that—oh, Ronny, don’t you see it isn’t that—the locket thing?” She clung to him desperately now, all barriers down, with a feeling as though her heart were being torn out of her body in that agonising and hopeless struggle of youth to make itself understood: the last hope for most of us, burying youth amid its ruins.

The explanation in reply to his puzzled—“But look here, old girl, I can’t make head or tail of what you’re driving at,” was lame enough; they were deadlocked against the sort of thing we learn to slide past in later life—that eternal difference in character. The “why?” “why?” as insistent in his mind as in hers.

She did not really care about the pendant, was not humbugging there; he realised this with an added respect, profoundly puzzled as he was. She did not even care very greatly for the way in which he had treated his sister, though his own face burned at the thought of it—behaving like a kid, giving himself away.

What she did seem to care for, strangely enough, was the fact that he was not—well, not altogether unlike himself, but unlike what she had imagined him to be. Even while she clung to him, returned his kisses, he felt the futility of his perfectly honest protestation:

“But I never pretended to be anything different to what I am—you know I didn’t!”

They parted upon that, their love and bewilderment alike deepened, at once further apart and nearer together than they had ever been before.

PART II

CHAPTER VII

THE more intense emotions of youth come in waves : ebb and flow. If the current has a mind to keep to itself it is—and happily enough—crossed and re-crossed by others, more or less diverted by some general trend. Reading of child suicide, we instinctively picture a still pool overshadowed by dark rocks, stagnant, dim, and enclosed; a young life with no sort of mental change to match its physical growth; isolated by chance, or its own over-sensitive desires, obsessed by some one idea or another, overwhelmed by it.

Henrietta Rorke was of the type which suffers, but without brooding. There was something clear in her vision: that delicate poise with which, save in the most desperate issues, her mind matched her body. Even her love for Shaen was wholesome, entirely natural, for the age at which our latest civilisation chooses to fix the rise of passion is altogether artificial.

Meanwhile the constant companionship of the young O'Haras was good for her, though they never got much further with each other. If there was one of the family with whom she was inclined to make special friends—and, taken all in all,

friendships and great passions inhabit different houses—it was Derrick, the dreamer; though this was one of those things which came to more in the expectation than the fulfillment.

In thinking of him she found herself perpetually wondering what he thought, filling his mind to match his face: the wonderful dark-lashed grey eyes, the full-lipped sensitive mouth, clear in her vision.

Even when they were together, and he was still silent—for he alone of all the O'Haras possessed that art—he would seem such miles away that she pictured him the habitant of some fine fairy world such as that into which she made her own deliberate and delicious retreats.

“If he'd only tell to me, I'd tell him,” she thought again and again; while again and again she would find herself driven back upon herself with much the same sort of answer.

“I was just thinking what sort of a pudding Brigid would be giving us for dinner,” or “I was just thinking it was a week since we had hot scones for tea, and maybe—” etc., etc.

During the next few years—as Derrick failed her more and more completely—while, often enough, Shaen spent no more than a week or two of his holidays at Clonross, and the rest of the O'Haras remained as a whole, no one especially apart—her need for companionship was met by her father, their mutual affection, still and deep, a trifle cold as depths are. Far behind, and yet of real impor-

tance in her life, came her two tutors—an odd triangle this, the two men, equally ungainly, middle-aged, black-coated, and little Henrietta Rorke, reminiscent in her delicacy of a wood-sorrel flower, the most delicate of all blooms.

It would be untrue to describe Father O'Sullivan and the Reverend Arthur Fielden as friends, for, given the ear of a third party, they would abuse each other with no sort of restraint. The difficulty was to find any third party with any sort of understanding. This it was, combined with their mutual and passionate love for literature, above all, the classics, which drove them back upon each other for company; so much so, that having parted from one another an hour earlier—or likely enough passed, cutting each other at twilight in the main street of Clogrhoë—one would come battering at the other's door somewhere between ten and eleven, an hour when the bucolics launch out upon their first sleep and the brain of reader or thinker starts out to work—irritant and insistent as the sound of a mouse nibbling the wainscoting—driven forth by sheer mind hunger.

“Devil a mite o' sleep would I be gettin' till I'd convinced you, mis-educated as you are! But maybe you've come to your right senses by now.” O'Sullivan would bellow, pounding on the rectory door. Or Fielden, in his turn, with his sharp, irritated rap of a voice, his short, dry cough, would reopen some argument upon the parsonage doorstep, pushing his way into the hallway, then the study; as

fiercely in earnest, both of them, as though such questions as the quantity of a Greek name were a matter of life and death; while their respective housekeepers, filling the lamps afresh before they themselves went off to bed, groaned over the waste of good oil put to no better end than to talk by.

To do them justice, they never disputed over religion, never so much as touched upon it: likely enough forgot all about it, for they denied themselves nothing in the way of argument.

“Sure, it’s the good God that gave us human beings the power o’ spaeach for fear that we’d be getting too fond o’ one another, forgetting Him; an’ faith an’ indade there’s little enough of love or friendship as is not schattered by a wag o’ the tongue.” That was what Father O’Sullivan said, with no notion of keeping his own unruly member between his teeth, more particularly with a fool of an Englishman who had the temerity to set up for a classical scholar.

A queer couple, queerer still in contrast with little Henrietta Rorke’s clear lines, grave eyes, and quiet, considered use of the right word, pointing like a white finger at their queerness, bellowings, splutterings. Big men both of them: Fielden bony and ungainly, with no more meaning in his outline than any prehistoric monster, joints which cracked at every movement, an intellect which worked like a powerful but ill-oiled windmill; meagre and embittered by the loss of ideals incompatible with every fact of life: O’Sullivan rotund and rosy, with em-

purpled cheeks like a turkey's wattle; philosophical and genial, his conduct and religious beliefs comfortably fitted to a working formula made out by others; accepted with a shrug, yet still accepted, leaving his mind free from every sort of speculation outside his calling.

It was O'Sullivan who instructed Henrietta in Latin, while later on Fielden drew her from English literature to Greek. She was only a little girl—yes, to the very end really and truly nothing more than that—yet the emulation between the two clerics held some curious personal element. They were at their very best in their arguments when Henrietta was present, listening to them, her chin cupped in one hand, her elbow on the arm of her chair, her passionately intent gaze turning from one to another, while they “showed off”—there is no other word for it—just as much as Shaen did, in his own crude way, half boy, half any sort of animal. For that was how she affected men, so surely that she might have grown into one of those rare women whose power is without end had she but known it, or—the last thing she would have thought of—cared to use it. As it was, she was blinded by gratitude—gratitude of all things!—to the first man who stooped from among the Olympians, or so she thought, to love her: fated by her own humility, for any woman who shows herself humble with the man she loves stands foredoomed from the outset.

Most clearly of all this power of impressing herself was shown by her own father's attitude to-

wards her: his way of regarding her seriously, as a personality, actually wondering what she thought of him: never for one minute taking her for granted, as a complementary edition of himself—the coarser elements sponged down like a water-colour—in the way most men have with their own daughters.

When Henrietta was fifteen, Clonross was shut up for a whole year, and though Mr. Rorke talked of a governess at Greylands, the thing went no further. For the atmosphere of Ireland was soaking into him, with no real warmth, little more than a scornful hopelessness regarding the people whom he grew to resemble, while Henrietta's entire education fell between the two parsons, her life as empty of women as it had been in India.

Once again she grew accustomed to doing without young people. It seemed that the lighter sides of life came and went, like the flash of a swallow's wing, leaving her untouched, ripe—for what? Oh, well, other things—passion and pity, the whole fabric of Greek tragedy, more than half lost in this senile second childhood of a world which wants everything made pleasant for it.

As to Shaen, she told herself that she had forgotten, and there is no surer way of remembering. But her pride was hurt; he was so seldom at Clonross, and when he was she saw so little of him; flashing by, riding or driving with his sisters' grown-up friends. They were like butterflies, she herself a moth; she felt that, though she thought too little of herself to put it into words. Even when

the O'Hara girls came over to Greylands with their stories of balls and picnics, innumerable flirtations which sounded so risky and were yet so safe—for their gaiety and shallowness, the perpetual play of emotion, the outlet of continuous chatter floated them free of passion, like leaves dancing on the edge of a whirlpool, too light to be indrawn—she was still apart, the listener, the onlooker.

There were, it is true, intervals, days and weeks, when this forgetting became a reality. She was keenly interested in her work, with the two clerics; beautiful words, above all, beautiful sentences, affected her like music; the pursuit of knowledge held the delight of the chase. It is possible that she might have developed no further than the student, apart as a cold current in a warm sea—for there was no demand made upon anything more than her intellectual sympathies—had it not been for the recurrent memory of Shaen, like a breath of southerly wind, a perfume from some flowery isle, something apart from every day life; bewilderingly not belonging to her, and yet changing her.

Her pulses beat less smoothly when she heard Shaen's name; the news that he was anywhere near, anywhere in Ireland, blew a sort of fire into her veins, so that she was unable to keep still, to settle to anything, to sleep at night; lying awake on her side with one hand under her cheek; not so much thinking as listening, staring out of the window into the darkness, the mist or the moonlight; not looking for anything, with no definite thought or ex-

pectation, but—strangely enough—just listening, listening and waiting. They were wonderful nights these; sometimes there was the heavy scent of magnolia, the rustling of birds throughout the short hours of darkness, never quite asleep: or again the wild wind from the Atlantic, miles away, the tree-tops rocking like ships, the actual twang of salt in the air, white upon the polished top of her dressing-table.

One night when Shaen was in Dublin, no nearer than that—and she had no thought of linking the two—her restlessness overcame her so that she got up, slipped on her riding things, leaving her hair in two plaits as it was, and going out to the stable, saddled her horse—a grey half-bred Arab, her father's present—and rode away towards the lakes.

It was midsummer; the clumps of trees gave out a hot breath as she passed them; with each puff of wind they were like sleep-laden people, slow-turning, heavy and warm. They and the soft-breathing cows which rested beneath them were all alike one with humanity, a little gross: but the breath of the ground, the thick grass, meadowsweet and sorrel and wild parsley, was chill and pure and apart: the dew so heavy that it lay thick upon her hair, blurred her eyelashes.

The moon, pale yellow and almost at its full, hung clear above Clogrroe, its reflection in the river cut to a half lemon of light by the arch of the sweeping low-spanned bridge.

There were still a few small lights burning in the

cabins along the village street. The more humble and poverty-stricken the place was the more sure the light: for ignorance fears the darkness, and in the smallest houses there are the most children, and people like children.

The sound of Grizel's hoofs was muffled in the thick, dampish dust; but for all that the people snuggled lower, clasping each other, for there was little enough of that chill and splendid isolation of sleeping alone at Clogrhoë at this time; while not for worlds—not for all the curiosity of Ireland, the love of playing with fire—would they have drawn aside the blinds, looked out.

Mr. Fielden, catching the sound of hoofs, half raised himself as though to rise from his bed, then lay down again: the rider had already passed, and whoever it was, he or she would be pretty sure to come back the same way, making for the bridge.

He caught the sound more quickly next time, and, slipping on an overcoat went to the front door, almost flush with the road, a foot-wide strip of pinks and thrift up against the whitewashed walls at either side of it, the only garden.

Henrietta drew rein and he put both hands up to Grizel's mane. He himself was tired and languid, drenched with a strange sense of sweetness, as though drugged by the night air.

For a full two or three minutes they neither of them said anything. Then Fielden spoke:

“You mustn't let yourself do this sort of thing, you know.”

“What—riding at night?”

“That—oh, that’s nothing”—he gave a clumsy flap of his large hand, a dry bark of a cough—“to ride—but to be driven out—” He hesitated, plaiting and twisting at Grizel’s mane, one shoulder raised, his head bent. When he spoke again his voice was so muffled that she could scarcely catch what he said, those gruff, snapped-out sentences which he used when he felt anything apart from intellectual anger: “To let oneself be driven out—bad, that; can’t have that, you know. . . . Only two things get anyone out of bed at night, this way—despair or the restlessness of hope; bad, both of them. Go home to bed and sleep, child; sleep, sleep, sleep; never let yourself get out of the habit of sleep. . . . And see here,” he raised his face, a face like a coffin, nose all end and no bridge, wide, twisted mouth: “If it must be—that sort of thing, you know—choose despair rather than hope. But don’t let yourself feel, Henrietta—don’t let yourself feel—above all on a summer’s night. No one’s worth it, no one on God’s earth.”

“I’m all right, I’m quite happy, there’s nothing—” Her words dragged: she was overcome with a sudden sense of futility, loss.

“You think you’re all right. But you’ll never be happy, Henrietta Rorke—never. Only fools are happy, and you’re not that. Ecstasy and despair—there you have it, your fate, you with your eyes. If there was any way in which I could make you happy—but I can’t do that, no one can, and some

brutal, blundering boy—ach! Never dare to think you're happy, remember that, too. My God, Henrietta, how young you are! And yet in twenty-five years you'll be as old as I am—ten years and all of life worth living over. 'Fools and children are mankind to weep the dead and not the flower of youth perishing.' You know that, eh? Go home to bed, child, go home to bed." His voice changed, he smacked Grizel on the neck. "Get on with you now; what good will you do at your lessons tomorrow, to yourself or anyone else either? Tell me that."

He watched her go, and then, instead of turning back into the house, walked up the village street to the bridge, his coat-tails flapping round his lean legs in their shrunken pyjamas of drabbish flannel.

At the bridge, he folded both arms along the parapet and leant his heart hard upon them, as though he were pressing something back, staring down into the water.

CHAPTER VIII

IN the April of Henrietta's sixteenth birthday Lord and Lady Taghmony came home from India "for good," as the silly saying goes.

At once popular and despised, they had lived in the world they had made for themselves, with the real India lying like a dark lake beneath and around them; its horizon untouched, its depths unplumbed, its even more dangerous shallows uncharted.

Throughout their entire stay there, they had carried with them—as they would to the world's end, desert or pole—that curiously English blend of Bond Street, Paris, the hunting-field and country-house. Up to the very end Lady Taghmony remained safely, obstinately untouched—save when such ugly facts as gross infidelities pricked through the protecting atmosphere of cobweb and sunshine represented by her own set; as for his Excellency, even when he was impelled by his desires to roam outside of his, he did so in a way so usual as to have become almost orthodox; so much so that his adventures might—at least in England—have passed unnoticed by the exercise of a modicum of discretion.

He was, however and alas! never discreet; there was a childish something, nearer bravado than

candour, in his amorous adventures; while he made the fatal mistake of believing that because he was away from his native country he could do as he pleased. “Everyone does. By Gad, the things I’ve seen and heard since I came out here!” that was his argument, forgetting that every man of high position carries his own petty parish with him; while the higher he is, the farther away from home, the more marked he becomes.

When censured, at first in a polite and roundabout way—for his excursions were so glaring that it became impossible for anyone in authority, even so far off as Whitehall, to pretend to ignorance—he was honestly aggrieved:

“What the devil does my private life matter to them, so long as you don’t mind, Di? If women will make asses of themselves—throw themselves at my head—”

“Was there ever any man that didn’t say that?” Lady Taghmony laughed, dressing for dinner, rising up out of the sheath of white and silver which her maid had just slipped over her head. Her laugh was as pretty as ever, but it was harder. It showed how much she had changed when she added: “I’ll call you back when I want you,” to the discreet Holmes. Three years ago she did not in the least mind what she said in front of anyone; but then she really had believed, tricked herself into believing, that her husband just, as he put it, “played about”—all men “played about,” it was no use imagining things. She had shaken silken scarves between herself and

the ugly world of fact, those sort of gross facts revealed by the reports of the divorce court, like a toreador playing with a bull, like a child who knows that there is such a thing as death but cannot connect it with itself or anyone belonging to it. But now, little by little, things were being pressed home. She grew thinner, and there was something just a little, ever so little, strained and tucked in about her, as though she were actually drawing herself together over something—in the same way as the ungainly Fielden—a sense of loss, an ache: a memory which felt as though it were in the heart, actually in the heart, cankering it, and nothing whatever to do with the brain.

That last baby had died when it was just over a year old, and with this had gone the old, complete knack of forgetting. Perhaps in some way or other it had driven her to expect more from Taghmony. It seemed, indeed, during the few weeks of retirement, curtailed on account of her social duties, as though she drew far enough apart from her husband to see him clearly, and for the first time. Apart from this, when his first grief had passed, and it was genuine enough, he grew bored; it was ridiculous to mope; someone must make an effort or he and Di would go mouldy, mewed up together. He instructed his A.D.C.'s: "Look here, I count on you fellows to do all you can to cheer up her Excellency," he said; and so, having done his duty, miserably uncomfortable in the shaded atmosphere

of his home, he started off again on his questing, more openly than ever.

A few months more and an affair with a woman not altogether white was brought home in an ugly way to Lady Taghmony, so sharply that with a sense of dreadful clearness she realised that this “playing about” did, actually, mean everything. For one moment only it was like the smell from a drain—then she turned away from it. “It doesn’t do to get ideas into one’s head,” was what she said to herself, uneasily enough.

“Oh well, all men are beasts”; and again: “Of course, he doesn’t really care for them”—these thoughts in themselves marked a descent. Still she waved her scarves, silk and tissue; was furious when it was suggested courteously, yet very firmly, that her husband would be better at home. They were beginning to pretend, even to each other. They had been used to recount their flirtations, laughingly, with as much honesty as people ever do show in telling of such things. They did not speak of them now; in so far as she was concerned they had ceased; for, “He might imagine that I was like that too,” this was the thought, smirching everything: an unfair thought, for Lord Taghmony, however he might flutter round other women, adored his wife, and, realising that he adored her, looked upon that as quite enough in itself.

Still, as the atmosphere around her changed he kept things more to himself and the adoration less-

ened. "Hang it all, one never knows what women are thinking of, what ideas they'll get into their heads." All of which meant "how much they knew."

Definitely recalled to England, having lived chastely for a month, perhaps more, he was outraged: turned to his wife for comfort, as he always had done, forgetting all that had gone before, helping her to forget. But not altogether, for she remembered enough to ask herself where was the use of worrying.

They were met in Paris by their two eldest daughters and spent a month there before going on to London. Both girls were beautiful, with the beauty of perfect health, milk-white skins, carnation cheeks, glowing long-lashed eyes; and Lady Taghmony—for even up to now there was no trace of petty jealousy in her nature—was almost pathetically eager for them to be happy. "Have a good time while you are young," this was her reiterated advice: over forty herself, and yet, for all that, haunted by the feeling that her youth was somehow or other being nipped in the bud: frightened by the sense of something lost in her old light-hearted faculty of enjoyment.

It was the prettiest sight imaginable to see the three enter a ballroom, both girls a head taller than their exquisite little mother, all alike equally delighted when they were taken for sisters. "And really we almost might be," Lady Taghmony would

think, glancing at their reflection in those long mirrors so popular with the French.

That was at night. During the interminable hours of hard spring sunshine she shrank from any such test—and this in itself was frightening, giving her the feeling of a lost child, fearful of looking behind it in the dark, most fearful of the very fact of fear—contented herself with admiring her daughters; their young men and her young men keeping a little apart, ranged in two perfectly friendly camps. If eyes, or even more fancies, did stray—and she grew to look for this, hating herself for it—it was always one way, from the mother to the daughter; for she had none of that fine intellect which keeps men enwrapped, away from youth.

She did not see a very great deal of her husband—though he had never before bought her so many presents—and there was something lacking in her world, almost but not quite filled when Shaen came over and joined them for a week: not quite, for after all he and his sisters and friends were all so young, so easily young, had jokes of their own which she could scarcely follow, though mother and son were the greatest friends imaginable. He called her “Di,” and that pleased her—quite disproportionately—petted her, loved to take her about with him, show her off like a toy: wear her as a gay feather in his cap, so different to other mothers!

He, too, however—and were all men getting to be like that?—had a trick of slipping away from

her; and there were long intervals when she had no idea where he was and what he was doing. He himself, after any separation, however short, was overflowing with things to tell her; but, much as Shaen talked, he never *told*, accounted for himself or his time. His mother had been married for twenty years; but only now, when her son pointed the difference, did she understand the real gulf which lies between men and women: poles apart, however much they may pretend to the contrary. She had been so sufficient to herself, had such a good time, with not a moment for putting two and two together; but now, while her husband went his own way and her son started off upon his, a baulked expression, as though she were continually looking for something she could not find, came into her forget-me-not blue eyes.

She had lived for admiration and amusement, and had nothing in common with the women of her own age; had always seemed so airily supreme like a queen of the fairies with her little court, that now, bereft of this, she set out upon a race with youth; not in emulation but only, pathetically enough, because she loved the breath of movement, could not bear to be out of things, friendly as a child; restless and gayer than ever: her tinkling laugh a little louder, her speech more reckless.

They came to Clonross the first week in July. Lord Taghmony had lingered in London because he felt that the India, or Colonial Office, must have

something in its mind for him; but there seemed nothing, and he could not understand why.

They brought a large party over with them; towards the end of the month Shaen, who was now at Sandhurst, joined them, with some of his friends. The house was packed; there were picnics and tennis-parties almost every day, dances or theatricals every night. The Irish servants revelled in it all, Clogrhoe was swept off its feet. There was no chance of anyone else getting anything done, no taste or time left for ordinary commonplace jobs. The second crop of hay, thick as the tresses of a woman's hair, was left uncut, because the Taghmonys had taken it into their heads to lay out a golf-course. There was nothing out of the ordinary in this; but why should Mr. Rorke's most valuable cow be left to die, unattended, at the birth of its first calf because there was a ball up at the big house that night—what on earth had the cowman at Greylands to do with the ball at Clonross?

Even the postman was consistently late; one day it was that he had turned back to Clogrhoe half-way through his rounds to post a letter for Honora: "A love-letter, I'll go bail, by the glance in the bright eye o' her." That seemed to him, delighted with his own knowing, to be more than enough of an excuse; perhaps it was, but why should he be an hour behind time because Lord Shaen had a cocker spaniel pup "die on him."

Greylands itself was wrapped apart from those

“mad Irish,” while Mr. Rorke looked down upon them with a scornful melancholy, fully as Irish, had he but known it. Henrietta was not yet “out,” had no part in the gaieties; and just now the O’Hara girls were in too much of a whirl to have time to spare for confidences. They would pass Henrietta in the village street going to her lessons and wave their hands, galloping by, or swarming over an outside car: “Hullo, Hal! Why don’t you come and see us, eh, Hal?”

Shaen arrived, but she saw nothing of him, save in the same sort of way, passing in a cloud of dust and speed, driving his own little two-seater motor, a new acquisition this, with a lady at his side.

One day after Teddy arrived home from school she and the two youngest boys found time for an afternoon’s fishing on the edge of Naboth’s vineyard. “We waste all our holidays being sent on rotten messages,” this was the burden of their complaint. “Never a moment to ourselves to do anything. Honora and Denise spooning about, sending us all over the shop with notes—that Denise making an ass of herself over young Blake!”

“Looks like an underdone ham,” put in Derrick, “all sort of pinkish.”

“And Ronny!—Ronny’s the limit, makes me sick, no use to anyone; forever mucking about with that Arbuthnot woman—as old as the hills, fifty if she’s a day. Gerry found one of her curls fixed on to a hairpin in the bathroom the other day, pinned it on to the tail of Ronny’s evening coat—my word, there

was a shindy, no mistake about it! Ronny! Don't talk to me of Ronny!"

No one had. Not a word out of Henrietta, not to save her life.

So it was Mrs. Arbuthnot she had seen in the car, a vivid pink and white beauty of eight and twenty—a hard age that—with hard blue eyes and yellow hair.

Lord Taghmony, having relinquished any more serious pursuings for the moment, frightened into a sort of propriety by his wife's threat of a divorce—the pathos of this from Di, made for all the bright, light things of life, and really so easily satisfied—flirted with the young girls, who thought him a dear, while his nineteen-year-old son devoted himself to a married woman.

“And very good for him, too: he won't get any harm from me,” that's what Mrs. Arbuthnot said, and meant it; careless of the fact that there is more than one sort of harm, which a mature, conscienceless, and technically virtuous woman can do to a young man—the slaughter of those innocent “ideals,” for instance.

Mrs. Arbuthnot had a very precise formula as to what she would and what she would not allow; a precise line drawn, with infinitesimal difference between herself and others whom she spoke of as “that sort of woman.”

Young Lord Shaen could spend all his time and money upon her; kiss her hand and sometimes her cheek, if he went about it with sufficient diffidence.

She had only laughed, indulgently enough, when, lying at her feet under the trees which shaded the river-banks at Clonross, he had taken off her shoe, held her silk-clad feet between his hands and kissed them. After all, they were pretty feet, and he was a nice boy, a “someone”—“out of the top drawer,” she called it, little snob that she was.

Then Arbuthnot appeared upon the scene, and she played Shaen for all she was worth, having a dispute over a dressmaker’s bill with her husband. She stayed on in the single room which had been given her on her arrival, though Lady Taghmony offered her another, and Arbuthnot was turned into the bachelors’ quarters; if he came to her door it was locked. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, that would hold water in the divorce court, but it did him good to be irritated like this, to wonder whether she were alone or not.

Taken all in all, it was an amusing game, until Shaen lost his head, in a dark cedar-shaded corner of the terrace, during the interval in a dance one night. That in itself, with her husband sitting on a bench just below them, did not matter, was part of her plan; she had taken the boy there on purpose to pay her extravagant compliments, make Arbuthnot, fifteen years older than herself, jealous. But Shaen showed himself tiresomely too young for the game, ignorant of the rules—her rules—and went just too far: so far—with loud-voiced audacities and snatchings, taking everything for granted—that there was nothing for it but to sacrifice him, throw-

ing him to the wolves in the shape of little Arbuthnot, uncommonly quick up the terrace and over the parapet, with an ugly biblical word for his wife and threats for Shaen, who defied him; declaring that they loved each other and didn't mean to stand any interference, throwing down the gauntlet with:

“An' you can take any damned proceedings you like, so long as you take yourself out of this!” Very well done, too, and a credit to his sire!

Shaen knew that it was well done, glowed with it; and yet it was then, there and then, that his charmer did the unforgivable thing—after all, what else could she do?—how was it possible to be dragged through the divorce court for a boy of nineteen, whose people were as impecunious as most of their kind?—and laughed; laughed at him—Shaen!—and not at her husband, a terrible little ass of a city man.

“Jimmy, Jimmy—my dear Jimmy! How perfectly ridiculous of me! But for a moment—just a moment—he really did scare me! No wonder I screamed—feel how I'm trembling—how silly!—from head to foot!”

She was clinging to her husband's arm, laughing a little hysterically, and how well she did it!

“It's really not his fault, poor boy—champagne and all that. My dear Jimmy, you can't possibly pick a quarrel with a child. Spank him? . . . well, I suppose that's what he does deserve—poor dear!” She laughed again—“cackled,” that was how Shaen thought of it then, savagely enough,

that silvery laughter he had so greatly admired. "But our host's son, and all that, so awkward!" she went on.

"Ought to know better? Of course, but there's his upbringing—these wild Irish! I'm sure he'll be frightfully sorry when he's had a good sleep, got over it. Ronny dear—don't be ridiculous; Jimmy, he's only a child." She laid one hand upon Shaen's sleeve. "Go off to bed now like a good boy, and we'll say no more about it. We're not angry with you, not really angry; but for your own sake, my dear"—she was very gentle, very motherly—"do remember that grown-up men don't treat ladies like that."

Later on she rubbed it into him: "Led you on? How can you be so silly! That's what comes of being kind to a boy like you, allowing oneself to be bothered."

"Look here, do you mean to tell me you don't love me, after all there's been between us?"

"There hasn't been anything between us"; she looked him up and down, contemptuous and coarse and cruel as such women are. "How could there be! Why, you're not even a man!"

She might as well have struck him across the face—better, for he was more of the age for this, than for such an insult as she gave him.

He thought of all sorts of things later: to have taken her by force, raped her, defaced her, then laughed at her; thrown in her teeth the unvarnished truth of the things he had done, the things he knew

—he, Shaen the Blood, the admired of his kind—
“Not even a man!” As it was the monstrous impertinence of her words left him spluttering, his face crimson, amazed out of all speech.

“By God, I’d like to show her!” he thought, even then in a queer, muffled way, as though his veins, overcharged with blood, stifled any clear thought; while the very coolness of her, patting her hair as she spoke, turning her head sideways to a mirror; her whole appearance, so exquisitely neat and poised, her jewels, her fragile mauve and silver gown, her clear-clipped speech, her complete finish and grown-upness—and he was still young enough to feel this—armoured her, iced her over, so that he turned away without another word, shaking from head to foot.

“Little beast!” he thought; then again, “All women are beasts!”

He did not mean it, however, as was clearly shown by his next move: for he made his way straight to the stables, in his dress clothes as he was, and saddled his horse himself. When Tim, his special groom, offered to help, he cursed him, tugging savagely at the girth-straps.

“Sure, you’ve got ’em too tight, yer honour me lord.” Tim was aghast; but as Shaen turned upon him: “What the hell do you mean? Do you think I don’t know how to saddle my own horse?” he dropped apart: stood silent at the stable door, scratching the side of his face as he watched his master gallop off across the park, white as a lake

in mist and moonlight : distressed but not surprised, for were not all the real quality mad?

Shaen made straight for Greylands with no thought of having behaved badly to Henrietta—taking the hurt from one woman for another woman to heal, as is the way with such men; regardless of the hour—between two and three in the morning.

He was still sufficiently master of himself to dismount before he left the soft grass of the park, tie his horse to a tree and make his way on foot into the courtyard; for that meant intrigue, and as old nursery pictures were framed in straw and ribands, so was the life of every one of the O'Haras framed in an odd mixture of simplicity and intrigue, a second nature.

He remembered Henrietta's window. The magnolia tree was past its first bloom, but a few brownish blossoms, of a sad and faded sweetness, hung among the shining leaves, and picking one he threw it in at the open window.

It alighted on Henrietta's bed. She was awake in a moment and put out her hand, thinking that it was a bird which had fluttered in, frightened, or with a broken wing; then, bending over it, she caught the scent—a perfume like death—and knew who had thrown it. And this is love, that quick, sure leaping of thought, fear, apprehension, or delight to one person and one alone.

She slipped out of bed and went to the window;

bent out of it with her hair hanging thick at either side of her face.

“Hal!”

“Ronny—what is it?”

“Come down, I want to speak to you.”

She hesitated, her chin on her hand. “I don’t think so—not now, Ronny.”

“You might.”

“Why—what is it?”

“Oh, everything’s perfectly rotten. Besides, it’s ages and ages since I saw you.”

She made no answer to that: a mistake: her mistake, always, for some horses must be driven with a jerk of the reins, a snick of the whip, “keeping them up to the mark,” as people would say, and that’s what Shaen needed. It would have been far better to have reminded him of the fact that he had made no attempt to see her, though he knew where she was almost any time of day, a saner time than this.

She said nothing, however, because, with the moonlight on his handsome uplifted face, she thought that he looked sad—how puerile women are! Again, he needed her, and that in itself was a balm which made it impossible to be unkind to him; while, apart from all this, those who really suffer seldom administer reproach.

“Come down for a minute—just one minute. I promise to let you go in one minute.”

“To-morrow—any time to-morrow, Ronny.”

“Look here, Hal, if you don’t come down now there’ll be no to-morrow, anyhow, so far as I’m concerned, I can tell you that. I can’t stand it any longer—”

“What?”

“Oh, everything—that rotten lot up there!” He jerked his head sideways, towards Clonross. “Hal darling—do come down and talk to me for five minutes. I swear I’ll put an end to the whole damned thing in the river if you don’t. Look here, you don’t believe it, but I swear it—I’m full up!”

At this a sudden picture crossed her mind—a picture of the little pendant shimmering through the air and vanishing under water. Suppose . . . She dare not finish the thought.

“All right, I’ll come.”

She slipped on some shoes and a white woollen dressing-gown and went down to him.

He caught at her arm as she opened the door and held it tight. “Hal—oh, Hal!” he said—for once he had no other words. Come to that, what was there that he could tell her of the insult which had burned through and through him? He still felt weakened by it; queerly chastened and wiped out, as though he wanted to lay his head against her breast and rest there, silent.

When they had made their way to a bench under a medlar tree on the side lawn, he pulled her dressing-gown closer about her, drew her nearer to him. It did him good to feel himself the protector: this was what it meant to be a man, looking after

a dear little thing like Henrietta. . . . This, and not those other feelings, inspired by “that woman”—giddy drunken feelings. Henrietta Rorke . . . “Like a cool hand on your forehead,” he remembered that.

“Put your hand on my forehead—feel how hot it is! I’ve been dying to see you, to have you to myself like this. One hasn’t a moment’s peace up there, with all those people everlastingly on the go, the women like a lot of screeching parrots—painted, dressed up, not caring a hang for anyone but themselves—hard as nails. I don’t wonder at fellows getting fed up with it all, going into a monastery. A jolly good life too, a monk’s, with no one to worry you; by Jove, that’s what I’d do, if I wasn’t going to marry you.”

It was out almost before he thought of it. All the same, he was delighted with the idea; so much so that he began to tease her a little condescendingly—and how healing it was to be able to condescend once more!

“What would you say if I went into a monastery, eh, sweetheart?” He raised her chin and smiled into her grave eyes. “I wonder if you’d care—miss me,” he went on, and then, as she was still silent, was seized with a sudden panic—she could have mastered him then, by her silence, had she but known it.

“Hal—Hal—look here—” He broke off, at a loss for words, struck dumb by the idea that a second woman—no, not a woman, a child, the child

of whose adoration he had made so sure—could repulse him on this same night. “Look here, Hal, you do love me—you do?”

She nodded at this, her gaze intent upon his face; still without speaking, for the more she felt the more difficult words seemed.

“Well, then—oh, hang it all—” He was half laughing, still anxious. “If you chucked me now I couldn’t stand it, simply couldn’t stand it!”

The sudden realisation of the possible truth of that careless, oft-repeated phrase caught at his heart, appalled him. We all have the trick of some such saying: “I couldn’t bear it,” “It would kill me”—but to find ourselves up against the stark truth, the reality of any such thing as the truly unbearable, to realise its existence, is like pushing our way through a veil of sunshine—just teased by the dazzle, nothing more—and finding ourselves in the cold twilight of the gods, our feet upon the crumbling banks of a dark lake of unimaginable depth.

There was something of this Celtic twilight in Shaen himself: a substratum; not exactly depth, more like the strange shifting of a quicksand—eager emotions, panics, such as those which overcome a child.

“If you turned me down I simply couldn’t bear it! Hal, Hal!” He was terrified by the possible truth of his own words: what happened if you could not, really could not, get what you wanted more than anything else in the world.

“Hal, you’ll marry me, when we’re both properly

grown up—you will—you will!” He turned sideways, holding her a little away from him, searching her face: “You must, by God, you must! I’ll make you—do you hear?—make you! I couldn’t do without you! Don’t you realise that? I couldn’t do without you! Hal, do you hear, Hal?”

He actually shook her; there were tears in his eyes, running down his face. Then, as she was still silent, he repeated, again and again, amazed and desperate, totally at a loss to understand her silence:

“You must—you must—oh, don’t you see—don’t you realise, I can’t do without you? Hal—Hal—”

“I daren’t—I—Ronny, it frightens me. You—you—” Her words came with difficulty, almost in a whisper.

“What—what is it, my darling? Tell me what it is. Look here, Hal, you will, you will?”

“It’s—it’s—”

“You don’t care.”

“Yes, I do care. I do— It’s dreadful to care so—so frightfully. Oh, Ronny—” She was shaken from head to foot. “Oh, Ronny—Ronny!”

It seemed as though some wall, some dam of feeling, so intense that it had shut back all expression, broke within her. The tears rolled down her cheeks.

“It’s not that I don’t love you—I do love you, I do—I do—I do—love you so that it hurts. Ronny, Ronny!”

She had her arms round his neck, straining her-

self to him, while he covered her face with kisses, buried his own face in her soft hair.

“Those women—those women up at Clonross, all stinking of scents. . . . But you, you and your hair, Hal—Hal, my darling, like rosemary, your dear, dear hair—”

“When we’re married—when—” He hesitated, holding her hair in his hands, crushing it against his cheek; overcome by a sudden glowing shyness.

“When we’re married I’ll sleep like this, with my cheek on your hair—when we’re married—when we’re married—” Quite suddenly, as though the pent-up stream of words had been released, he was full of plans; there was no end to his airy structure piled up storey upon storey; while she with her arms around him, his head upon her shoulders, added no single word to the structure, holding herself breathless and rigid, like a child watching the uncertain growth of a castle of cards.

By the time they drew apart the air was chill, with that strange aloof chilliness of dawn, a new indifferent day purged from the heat of all that had gone before was upon them. The hot breath of the trees was soused with damp night air; there was a whisper of wind among the velvet-like mass of elms at the side of the lawn, a twitter of half-awakened birds, the sighing, broken note of a wood-dove; a faint grey mist hung between the deep blue of the night and the rose and gold of the morning.

As they rose from the bench they could see that the grass beneath their feet, white with dew, was

strewn with small dark objects the size of a bean. Shaen stooped above them, stirring them idly with his foot.

“What the deuce are they?” he asked. Then answered his own question. “Why, they’re bees—dead bees! What—”

“It’s the medlar, look!” Henrietta pointed to the tree beneath which they had been sitting. “The flowers are full of honey and the bees are at them all day—the whole tree’s alive with them and their humming. They get drunk with it, drunk with too much sweetness, and fall down here—then, when night comes, the cold and damp kills them.”

She spoke slowly, shivering a little, for she herself was chilled and stiff, and the sight of the dead insects hurt her.

“Oh, well, they’re only bees,” said Shaen; “nothing to look so sad about—a little less honey, that’s all; not much loss either—beastly sickly stuff!”

CHAPTER IX

SHAEN was to have come over between tea and dinner next day. That night, when Henrietta told him that she was at her lessons throughout the morning and afternoon, he had been impatient and scornful: "Oh, I say, I can't wait till then! Cut them out. What's the good of them? No one was ever the happier for all that piffle—all the learning in the world." When she declared that they must be gone through, he had threatened to come over before breakfast, and they had both laughed, realizing that it was already less than five hours to breakfast: clung together shaken with laughter; for there was something in the very thought of the hour which gave them a sense of wildness, a feeling as though they were fey, clear apart from the everyday world.

"Between five and six to-morrow—oh, well, to-day—but it seems years and years off! What the devil can I find to do with myself up to between five and six?"

All the same, he did not come at five or at six, and next day Gerry rode over with a note saying that they had started a tennis tournament early in the afternoon; the beastly thing went on till dinner-time, and he, Shaen, couldn't get out of it. After dinner they had all gone out on the lakes; some ass

had fixed it up—he had nothing to do with it—an awful bore—an awful bore! He repeated the phrase twice, but if he had not said it at all the contents of the whole untidy, carelessly-folded note would have run truer; somehow, though she could not have said why, the excuses and apologies hurt her more than his actual absence.

It was three days before she saw him again. She was on her way home from her lessons, crossing the bridge at Clogrhoe. He was riding with a lady who went on without realizing that he had stopped. She drew rein just past the bridge, sitting loosely leant forward, her white-gloved hand on her horse's neck, waiting for him. It was very hot and the dust was thick on the road, blowing over the bridge. Henrietta was wearing her school frock of brown holland with a brown leather belt, her hair in two tight plaits so as to keep it away from her neck. She was, as usual, exquisitely neat, but somehow colourless and ineffectual, or so it seemed to Shaen, careless of the reason: for it was those three days of constant watching, waiting for him which had wiped her out.

“Hullo, Hal! I meant to have come over. I wanted to come, but all sorts of things have been happening; one's time's not one's own you know. . . . Oh, hang it! Stand still, you brute, can't you?” His horse, a strong chestnut, splotted with dark patches of sweat, was curvetting all sideways, across the bridge. “Look here, Hal, I want to know when am I going to see you again? What—

Hullo, we must get out of this.” He broke off as a yellow waggon laden with sacks came to the narrow bridge, lumbered towards them.

They moved on together. Henrietta had a feeling of being very small and dusty, and somehow inferior. She had never seen Shaen looking so handsome. He was flushed with the heat, riding without a hat; his hair, damp with sweat, was pushed back from his forehead, his bright blue eyes sparkling. He had good hands—long-fingered, muscular hands—and they looked well upon the reins. Always inclined to arrogance, he sat his horse as though it were part of himself: adding its strength and speed, muscle, bone, proud impatience, distended nostrils, to his own structure; twice as arrogant, as though twice the man, on horseback as on foot.

It seemed as though this horse of Shaen’s, half Shaen himself, was bent upon treading Henrietta Rorke into the dust, pushing her back against the end of the bridge so that its rider’s long brown boot brushed her cheek.

“Oh, I say, Hal, I’m awfully sorry!” He spoke carelessly, touching his horse’s side with his spur so that it reared, overhanging her, the muscles of its hindquarters swelling out in smooth sweeps like the sheath of young horse-chestnut leaves. Its chest was flecked with foam, which blew across Henrietta’s lips: she felt as though she were being overpowered by horse and rider, ridden down, made nothing of.

There was an elder bush overhanging the last buttress of the bridge, thick with dust and creamy blossoms, hung round with flies: the atmosphere about it was heavy with its pungent, bitter-sweet scent. Shaen's dogs, a pointer and Irish terrier, had run up, hot and dusty, and were sniffing at her legs. She loved horses but she was frightened of dogs, and these two, with their bloodshot eyes and hanging tongues, overwhelmed her.

Shaen's companion had turned, moved towards them. Her bay mare lifted its feet high, held its head in the air; its nostrils red and dilated, something scornful in its every movement: an air of never allowing itself to be really disturbed by anything.

The rider was, however, all sweetness: "Ronny, Ronny!" she cried, and then to Henrietta, bending over her, "My dear, I must apologise, but really, between my family and my family's dogs and horses no one is safe for a moment."

"This brute—a mouth like iron!" Lord Shaen, between reining back his mount and shouting at his dogs, affected an introduction: "Mother, this is Hal, Hal Rorke—you know Mr. Rorke."

"Of course!" Lady Taghmony stretched down her hand in its loose white gauntlet: "My dear, I've met your father in India, though I expect he's forgotten me. But why don't you come over and see us?"

"I'd love to!" Henrietta glanced up at her shyly: Ronny's mother!—this slim, girlish creature, with

the eyes of an eager, friendly child; and yet with something sad in them, something—what was the word?—"balked"—"bewildered." The fair hair beneath the grey felt hat was very faintly silvered; for no reason in the world Henrietta thought of the bees beneath the medlar tree, whitened with dew, drunk to death with sweetness.

"We've a dance next week, any age from six to sixty. You must come; I'll send a card for you and your father. But of course we must see a great deal of you; all the young people come to Clonross, it's what we're made for, *nous autres*."

She laughed lightly. Always, as Henrietta discovered later on, there was some such reference to "us others," "we old ones," that same half-pathetic challenge to contradiction in those forget-me-not blue eyes. "Heaven knows there's not too much youth and beauty in County Mayo these days."

"Are you forgetting yourself?" That, of course, was what Henrietta Rorke ought to have said; and might, with all truth, for to her mind Ronny's mother was the loveliest, kindest creature she had ever set eyes upon.

The atmosphere cleared around them as she spoke; her voice was like rain on the dust, tinkling among the dusty leaves.

"I'd love to come"—the child's face glowed, for she was like that, a child when she was happy—"but I don't know—I've never been to a party in my life."

"Then it's time you began," smiled Lady Tagh-

mony, and touched Henrietta's cheek with one finger, then adding: "We must be great friends, you and I, my dear," she turned her horse—all disdain, swinging round upon its hind legs, head still erect, scorning the bridle, pretending it was not there.

Shaen, elated by his mothers' plain approbation, stooped and laid his hand for one moment upon the nape of Henrietta's neck:

"My little sweetheart," he whispered, and followed his mother.

"My dear Ronny, what eyes! I never saw such eyes!" Lady Taghmony turned towards him as he ranged alongside her. "Why on earth didn't you tell me about her?"

"She's only a kid!"

"Idiot! My dear, that I should have borne such an idiot! She's the youth of the world, the dew of the morning. If I were as young as that, with eyes like that—" She broke off with a half sigh, which hung waiting in the air; for even from her own son—as a thirst-bound traveller in the desert longs for water—she longed for the sound of that: "What nonsense, as if you'll ever be anything but young!" But Ronny was not thinking of her, apart from her estimate of Henrietta, for he had a great opinion of his mother's judgment.

"I've never seen her with her hair like that before, it spoils her, but—oh, sometimes she looks all right; not bad eyes, eh?"

"It doesn't matter how her hair's done; she's that sort. It never will matter, with those eyes. You

mark my word, Ronny, there'll be no end to the broken hearts once that girl realizes her power."

This put everything in a new light, and Shaen rode over to Greylands next day, with the promised card for the dance. But Henrietta was not to be seen, though he waited, trying to entertain her father, conscious that he was doing so in a gallingly different way to that which he wished: for though his host had gained in tolerance during the last few years, it was the tolerance of a man who is both weary and contemptuous. Mr. Rorke had given up the idea of doing anything with Ireland himself, but for all that he regarded people like the Taghmonys as so many stones tied round the neck of the country.

"Henrietta's generally home soon after five," he said, "but there's no knowing; she and her two parsons get tangled up in all sorts of abstract discussions."

Shaen hated to think of it: Henrietta!—what was that his mother had said?—"the youth of the world," and those two frowsty old men! He gave up the idea of waiting, could wait no longer, raw with impatience, and rode to Clogrhoe in the hopes of meeting her.

In the village street he chanced upon Mr. Fielden, and asked after her, as bluntly as though the rector were a servant, there to obey orders, answer questions.

"She was with me up to an hour ago, then she went home." Fielden regarded him sourly, his ugly head thrust forward; no one on God's earth

had a right to be so well born—his own people were linen-drapers—so good-looking, well-dowered and arrogant as this young man on his chestnut horse, with no more grey matter in that handsome head of his than would go on the point of a pin. He, himself, had worked his way through Cambridge by tutoring young men like this; knew them through and through, or thought he did, with no belief in anything beneath the outward dash, the careless insolence.

Shaen was taken aback by his answer. If Henrietta had gone home an hour ago she must have been at Greylands while he was still there; he hesitated, puzzled and pouting, wondering what move to make next.

“You’ve missed her.” Mr. Fielden was pretty well as childish as he was, for all men are childish when they are in love. He had taken it for granted that his pupil would marry—not yet, of course, but some day; would have as soon thought of standing on his head in Clogrhoe street as aspiring to her himself—besides, marriage was a game for credulous fools, the attempt to weave an every-day suit of clothes from cobwebs, perpetuate what was, at its best, a fine frenzy. But the thought that this young cock-a-hoop should have Henrietta, with her fine intellect, her crystal-clear gaze, in addition to everything else, was beyond bearing.

“Confound it! How the deuce did I miss her? Which way did she go?”

“There’s only one way, as far as I know.”

Fielden's tone was as rude as it could well be. Father O'Sullivan was kinder when Shaen called upon him—unable to believe that Henrietta, even if no one told her, could have remained unaware of his presence at Greylands—but for all that he could give him no real help.

“Forever pursuing—the whole avocation of man!” The priest sighed and glowered as though over some luscious memory, then pulled himself together. “For those who have not given themselves to the Mother Church, that's to say,” he added; and something more about a laurel—some silly ass “pursuing a maid and clasping a laurel.”

He blessed Ronny before he went, as he blessed all the O'Hara family, regarding them *sub rosa* as of his own flock, for one after another, their old Nanny had brought them to him for a surreptitious “shmite o' the holy wather,” despite their elaborate baptism into the Established Church, godfathers, godmothers, silver mugs and all—even Teddy with an heir to the throne for sponsor—her own particular friends spitting in the infants' faces, to make good luck doubly sure.

CHAPTER X

SHAEN did not see Henrietta again before the dance. She went to Dublin with her father to buy a dress. A sort of fine cutting pride had come to her since that day when his horse pushed her back against the bridge—her head among the flies in the elder bush—covering her with dust and foam: for somehow or other it had seemed more Shaen than his horse. His mother was sweet and lovely, but just now, for no real reason at all, though she loved horses, Shaen revolted her because of his horse, his dogs, his arrogance of possession and strength.

She would not allow herself to feel at a disadvantage again—dusty, nobody. There was the question of a dress for the dance.

“Highish, I suppose—not altogether a grown-up sort of affair, eh?”

Her father’s suggestion was tentative; he thought that everything might be managed well enough by the little dressmaker at Castleford.

“I’m sixteen and I’ve not grown for a year,” said Henrietta. “I’m really grown up, and if you don’t mind I’d like a grown-up dress.”

He gave in—as he was always ready to do: “She knows her own business best, I suppose.” That, from her fourth year onward, had been his formula

for his daughter, the way in which he showed his affection.

Sometimes he would have liked her to appeal to him. In Dickens' books—and he had gone back to Dickens as the one author—daughters sat on their fathers' knees, coaxed them with their arms round their necks. He would have liked Henrietta to do this, forgetful that he, himself, had left her no reason for appeal. As to Henrietta, there was nothing she would have liked better; but it never even entered her head. The independence which he had so proudly impressed upon her remained a well-remembered lesson; though never really part of a personality which was made to lave itself in love and tenderness as in a warm pool; a purely natural desire, so completely part of herself that nothing could really harden her, make her safe. The more she was starved for love, the more she kept every sort of feeling to herself, the hungrier she became; fainting with hunger during those days of warm-blooded youth with its enigma of restless longings.

“A merciful Providence fashioned us hollow

In order that we might our sentiments swallow.”

Her father had taught her this in the days of red morocco slippers and white socks, and she never forgot it; though it did nothing to help her, only battered her down.

At times when she appealed to him for sanction or advice, and he replied that she must please herself, it seemed as though something caught at her

heart, held it painfully tight so that she could not speak, turned away without a word, and:

“She does not really care, does not really want my opinion,” he thought; then: “Oh well, every one of us has to learn to stand alone.”

And stand alone she did, as a hop plant will stand alone, to such and such a height, swaying to the wind. All very well this leaving of the youngest generation to itself. But there is such a thing as putting too much upon youth, expecting too much of it; far better to tie it loosely to some stake, giving it free play, letting it lollop, with the guides still there.

She looked dreadfully grown up in her ball frock. It gave her father an odd shock to see her white neck and arms, anything more than a small square or V-shaped opening. For men are extraordinarily sensitive about their daughters, much more so than the mothers, who strip them for the saleyard—courts and ball-rooms.

Not that there was anything immodest about Henrietta; but it was a grown-up dress, white tulle and crystal beads like dewdrops, and she was a grown woman with her hair in a knot at the back of her head. After dinner that night, for the first time in her life, her father got up and opened the door for her. This scared her. “Oh, don’t, father!” she said, glancing at him sideways, the tears in her eyes. If it was going to be like that, now . . . Oh, well, they were strangers, more strangers than ever, and there was an end to it.

He scarcely seemed to glance at her. When she asked him, with an air of elaborate indifference, if she looked “all right,” he answered:

“Oh yes, I suppose so; one loses the run of all these new fashions.”

She had been in every sort of difficulty over her dressing: what did one do with the sleeves of one’s chemise? And surely the little flounce of tulle round the arms should be less transparent. She stretched a scrap of lace across the bosom of her frock, ashamed of the white sweep, the double swell towards her breasts. The Dublin dressmaker had assured her that it was all right, but she did not know, was terrified of any indecency.

She had been taught to dance by a young person who visited Castleford once a week throughout the winter months. When a gentleman asked her for a dance, she must reply: “With pleasure.”

She repeated the phrase to herself again and again, until there was a sort of stutter in her mind and she realised that she could never say it, never, never. Besides, what was she to say if she did not want to dance? There was Billy Joyce, who got drunk at balls; how was she to escape dancing with people like that—“With pleasure”—“Without pleasure”? No, that was nonsense! “No thank you,”—how bald it sounded! There must be something else.

Her petticoat, too full for her narrow skirt, a sheath of white satin veiled with tulle, stuck it out; she realised this while she smoothed herself down

thoughtfully in front of the long mirror in Lady Taghmony's wonderful bedroom.

They were a little late, for nothing would hurry Philip Rorke in these days. When they entered the ball-room dancing was in full swing. Couples swept by them in a wash of warm perfume, the very sight of them made Henrietta giddy; she felt as though her brain swept to and fro with them, in a faint wash. It seemed impossible that she could ever recognise anyone: there were two sexes distinguished by their dress, nothing more; no real individual people.

Her dress was not a bit too low after all, that was one comfort. The two pins holding that scrap of lace—what Cooky, called in to see her dressed, described as “a thiaeste o' modesty”—were whisked out unseen.

The first thing was to say how-do-you-do to her hostess, she knew that; but Lady Taghmony was dancing. After a while, as her sight cleared, Henrietta saw her whirl past in the arms of a man as young as Ronny, with an upright crest of fair hair, holding her negligently as though to say: “You are a Somebody, but, all the same, out of it, the last generation.” She was dressed in palest peach-blossom satin, and laughed and talked as she danced; unable to let herself go, lose herself in that sort of ecstasy which enwrapped some of the younger dancers; her eyes ranged from side to side with that habitual air of seeking for something that was lost.

Despite the grown-up frock, Henrietta felt very small—a nobody. Her father was talking to another man. There were no chaperones to curtain the walls and doorways, and so disguise the fact that she was not dancing, remained unsought. She was overcome by an agony of shyness, conscious of the length of her bare arms.

“Look—oh, do look!” said Shaen’s partner, who prided herself upon her generosity to her own sex. “Who *is* that girl standing by the door? Did you ever see anything so lovely?”

Shaen whirled, twisted his partner round, and saw her. Henrietta! Henrietta, by all that was holy! His mother’s prophecy came back to him:

“Mark my words for it, there’ll be no end to the broken hearts once that girl realises her power,” and again, “those eyes.”

Did she realize it—did she? . . . Oh, well, it did not matter anyhow, for she belonged to him. But did she—realize it, belong to him? His every thought was blurred; for here, in the place of “dear little Hal,” was the complete, the grown-up young lady, more terrible than any goddess. Already people were staring at her. She stood there alone with such an amazing air of poise: stiff with shyness, had they but known it.

He had no idea she was so tall, and her height impressed him. There was a silver riband round her hair and across her wide forehead, her dim brown hair fluffed out beneath it; her small pointed chin was raised, her lips folded, her eyes glowed; he

had never seen her with so much colour, and in a sudden access of resentment he thought,

“She’s rouged herself.”

But her flush was sheer funk; the only sign of it, for she gave nothing away; there was no hint of where or how to pierce her armour. Her shoulders were rather sloping for a modern girl, her neck white and smooth; there was that sweep to the young firm breast which had frightened her. Quite suddenly Shaen felt himself prudish about this, half offended, as her father had been. Hang it all, she belonged to him!

“She looks like Daphne”—the girl he was dancing with was a pretentious gusher, all the same, it was the name that Father O’Sullivan had used.

Daphne, and that ass with the tree— Oh, they were dotty, the whole lot of them!

“Suppose we go on?”

“Awfully sorry, but must look after people—all that sort of thing, you know,” muttered Shaen; rudely, without even looking at his partner, shaking himself free of the hand on his arm, making a bee-line for Henrietta.

“Why are you standing here alone? Everyone’s staring at you.” He spoke angrily.

Henrietta Rorke turned aside and touched her father’s arm: “If we could find a seat—somewhere to sit down.” Shaen’s tone offended her: she did not want to look at him.

“But you’re going to dance with me.” Shaen’s eyebrows were raised; he looked surprised, taken

aback by her tone. “Of course you’re going to dance with me. I didn’t know you’d come, that’s all. Why didn’t someone tell me you’d come? And look here, we’ll find somewhere to sit till the next dance—we don’t want to stand here with everyone staring at us.”

“Hullo, Shaen!” Mr. Rorke turned round with his tired, mocking smile. “You’ll look after Henrietta, I suppose, find her some nice young men to dance with?”

“Yes, sir, of course—and there’s bridge in the library. I expect you’ll find my father there,” he said; then added, with a sharp note of irritation, turning aside, “I’ll be hanged if I do!”

“Do what?”

He had drawn Henrietta’s hand within his arm. She was still pulling a little apart from him, but she could not struggle with him there in front of everyone.

“Find nice young men for you to dance with—you’re going to dance with me.”

“You’ll have to dance with other people—you’re the host.”

“The host! I like that! If there is any host or hostess, it’s my father and mother, both busy enjoying themselves. If they’d done their duty do you think you’d have been left standing there alone? Now—how will this do?” He had found a corner in Lady Taghmony’s boudoir, shaded by a screen and plants in pots—ferns and rose-tinted geranium—on a three-storied stand, two chairs side by side.

“Anyhow, you’re going to dance with me—with no one but me, aren’t you, Hal?” He was coaxing and entreating, looking up into her face, caressing her bare forearm with one finger, settling the cushion behind her back with the other. “Always, always. . . . Look here, Hal, it ’ud drive me stark staring mad to see you dancing with anyone else. I wonder if you have the foggiest sort of idea what you look like. I tell you it knocked me silly when I saw you standing there.”

“Why—what?” Once again she was scared, feeling most dreadfully undressed, wondering what was wrong with her.

“The most beautiful thing I ever saw.”

She glanced at him sideways; no, he was not laughing, but there was something in his eyes which—though of course it was different, altogether different—reminded her of the far-off days when he had flown upon Teddy in the schoolroom. She turned away her head, the blood burning up over her neck and into her face.

“I was beastly rude to you, but it’s nothing to what I felt. Not rude—of course I don’t mean that, but—look here, Hal, as if I couldn’t stand anyone else looking at you: as if I wanted to wrap you round in something, pick you up in my arms and carry you off, oh, anywhere—up into the mountains—out on to the lakes. I say, Hal, you won’t dance with anyone else—you won’t, will you, darling? That’s settled; I couldn’t stand it, simply couldn’t stand it.”

“You must stand it, Ronny, you must.” She spoke firmly enough. But for all that she was, as always, profoundly confused by his words, the rush, the ease of them. If a person said a thing like that, “I couldn’t bear it,” looked at one with such pain and despair, they must feel it, dreadfully, truly. If he did not seem to care once he was away from her, seemed to forget, it must be that she in some way expected too much. She did not know the way in which men did behave, that was all. It was clear that she must learn; go to school on it, as it were. “It’s not much, just to dance—”

He broke in upon her at this: “Not much—how about me? You can’t know what it would be like, to see some silly ass with his arm round you, his beastly hot hands pawing you about. Oh, I know them. Their knees touch yours and they pretend it’s all a mistake; taking girls away into dark corners, making love to them, trying to kiss them—pawing them.”

It was disgusting that such things could be; for that moment he thought of them with loathing, purged of all such feelings himself.

“Look here, Hal—my precious, how smooth your skin is; I never felt anything like it—it’s like satin; and all those little veins in the hollow of your arm—I say, Hal, I couldn’t stand it; you dancing with anyone else I mean. You simply don’t know what men are.”

“I want to know—I must know, don’t you see—I must.”

“You—want—to—know—” He was amazed.

“Yes.” She spoke steadily, hesitating as always when she felt herself obliged to make a sort of stand. It was difficult to put what she had to say into words; apart from that, the touch of Shaen’s fingers upon her arm moved her so that her heart pattered rather than beat, almost in her throat, breaking up her words with a sort of “tremble.”

“I want—to get to know other men. I’m sixteen—I—” She hesitated, then went on, rather desperately: “I can’t let you fill up everything.”

“Fill up everything—how?”

It seemed as though she were torn between two instincts—no reason at all—the instinct to protect herself, make sure; and that other, stronger, instinct which bade her surrender herself to Shaen’s caresses, float upon them.

“To think about you all the time—you’ve got so many other people in your life. I’ve got nobody, don’t you see, and I can’t judge.”

“But how do you want to judge—what do you want to know, so long as we’ve got each other, so long as we love each other? Hal—Hal darling, what does anything matter but love; what else do you want?”

She shook her head without speaking, looking away from him.

“Hal, look at me—Hal, Hal!” He caught both her hands, held them tight, pressed together between his own, holding on to them, overcome by one of those sudden panics. “Does it mean that you don’t

care—that you're not certain of caring? . . . It can't, it can't! Good God, Hal, you're not going back on me now, I couldn't stand it—I couldn't, after all these years. Look here, Hal, there's never been any other girl I cared for, really cared for. What do other men matter to you, what can they matter?—they're not us."

"You've danced with other girls, gone about . . . Oh, but it's not that, only—don't you see, I don't know. I don't know! I don't know what men expect—have to give: that's why I don't want to care too much, care for nothing else—it frightens me."

"I can't see how anything matters, so long as we have each other, are going to be married."

"It does matter—if—if we were married it would matter all the more. Because—oh, don't you see, Ronny, I'd have nothing to weigh you against." She spoke with a sudden certainty, an impulse of profound wisdom: ceasing to pull away from him; looking him straight in the face. "It would be as hard on you as it would be on me. I should care too much—expect too much. I daren't—daren't do that."

"You can't expect too much. Anyhow, what can you want with other men?" He stuck to that.

"Just to dance with them, talk to them—Ronny, don't you see? I know nobody but old men. You're the only young man I ever knew."

"But you can dance with me." He was deeply puzzled; he couldn't make her out. What was it

she wanted? He himself, at that moment, cared for nothing else, nothing else mattered. "Feel my heart!" He caught her hand and pressed it to his heart, beating so that it shook him, the blood pounding through his veins. As his eyes dropped from her face to her neck he shivered. If anyone else got her, all there was to her, he couldn't stand it—couldn't; it would kill him.

"Anyhow, I can't dance with you all the time." She was right enough there, for it was before the day of such things as one partner for the entire evening. For all that, she felt the weakness, the half bending forward, then, dragging back of her words. But what was there for her to do? It seemed as though something had got hold of her, was drawing her like a loosened leaf, sucked forward by a draught of air, drawing the life out of and into Shaen, so that she was wrung by a desire to make herself very small, folded to nothing in his arms.

He was half upon one knee, upon the edge of the low chair at her side, one hand holding hers, the other arm round her waist, looking up in her face, entreating her, humble and adoring. No wonder that she laid her palm against his cheek, cupping the rather high bone, the clear flush of red and brown, all her weakness in the sighing, half-despairing utterance of his name:

"Oh, Ronny—Ronny!"

"If we told them we're engaged, really engaged, it would be all right. Hal, if we love each other, that's all right, we are engaged—we are. You can't

refuse me, because you said you loved me, you said it.”

“I know—but—” She broke off with no words left: it felt as though her heart and brain were a fan, winnowing to and fro in the hot, scented air.

“There is no ‘but,’ there can’t be. We’re engaged and we’re going to be married—we’ll tell everybody—that’s settled. You can’t dance with anyone else now. Hal, think of it, you and I—what a lark! In a year’s time you’ll be an old married woman; we’ll have a house of our own and hunt like blazes. Hal—darling—darling—my wife.”

He pulled her to him and kissed her, wild with excitement. “We’ll tell them all—that’ll make them sit up—engaged at your first ball, Hal, you darling, darling thing! One moment—that silver affair round your head’s got all rucked up—awful give-away that, but what does it matter?—they’ll all know.” He had drawn her to her feet, pulled her forward.

As they went out of the room another couple entered it—Honora with one of the Joyces. Shaen caught at his arm as they passed, laughed across at his sister:

“I say, you two, Billy, Honora, you’ve got to congratulate me—we’re engaged, we two, Hal and I. I say, Billy, you don’t know Miss Rorke, do you?” The words tumbled out one on top of the other. “It’s no good asking her to dance, she’s never going to dance with anyone else again.”

He was off before they could answer, dragging Henrietta with him. Honora's laughter followed them:

“Dippy!—mad as a hatter!”

When Henrietta looked back over that evening, tried to focus it in her own mind, nothing seemed clear or real. She herself was not real: she moved in a maze, walked upon air, and nobody else was real either. She and Shaen danced together throughout the entire evening. He announced his engagement to everyone, and everyone laughed at them. “You're mad, Shaen, that's what you are—madder than ever!”

Lord Taghmony had laughed more uproariously than anyone. Not so his wife. Looking back on it, Henrietta saw her as the only one who had not laughed, not at first, spontaneously, while her small face had hardened; the baulked, defrauded look in the pretty blue eyes sharpened, as she glanced from one to the other.

“What nonsense, Ronny! You're only a child.”

“That's good, from you! Why, it's you who believe in marriage, are always ramming it down the girls' throats.”

“For girls, not for men.” She was obstinately irrational. “How can you be so silly? What would I do—” She was going to say, “What would I do with a married son?” but caught herself up in time. It was hateful not to be able to enter into any one of Ronny's plans, to place herself among the middle-aged by any show of opposi-

tion; but a thing like this was out of the question.

“You must never take this son of mine seriously, Miss Rorke. Ridiculous boy, aren’t you, Ronny?” She tried to laugh, pass it off as a joke; and of course that was what it was, one of Ronny’s mad pranks. All the same, laughter had not been her first impulse; rather a strange, half-savage desire to shove this chit aside, actually shove—coming between her and her son.

“After all I’ve gone through, doing without him all these years!” she thought, with no memory of the fun of India—“stuck out in India,” she called it—her long youth with Taghmony, the adoration of other men.

Her husband had slipped away from her. Oh, it was no good pretending that he hadn’t, and she did not much care now that she had Ronny. But she must, she must hold on to Ronny—there was nothing else.

Other men came to her with what began like the old story—“You must have seen . . .” “Look here, Lady Taghmony, there’s something I want to tell you . . .” “Of course you’ve guessed . . .” The prelude was the same, but the main theme different. For in these days their confidences consisted in the tale of their affairs with younger women or girls.

She did not really want them; the disappointment was momentary, nothing more. But Ronny!—Ronny was different: he was her own son, and she couldn’t let him go. There was sex in it, innocent

and unguessed at; he took the place of her lost adorers; as so many sons do: those adorers she had never really cared for save as an excitement, embellishment—a regiment with banners.

She cared now; was greedy and savage as she had never been before.

Ronny did not mind what she had said, only laughed. She was a little darling, too pretty to be taken seriously, although she was his mother. He went on dancing with Henrietta, infecting her with his own spirit of gaiety so that she too had a sort of feeling that nothing on earth mattered apart from the fact that they loved each other; were young, gloriously young, with years and years and years of love in front of them. “Nothing can ever come between us—nothing, nothing,” she thought.

On her way home—they had a closed motor now, for “there’s nothing to life in Ireland except making yourself comfortable,” was what Mr. Rorke said—her father enquired, quite casually, as though it was of no more moment than a half-day’s excursion:

“What’s this about being engaged to that boy Shaen?”

“We care for each other: we want to be married.” Henrietta spoke flatly, chilled and exhausted by excitement.

“Oh well, I suppose you’re the best judge of your own affairs, so long as there’s money enough between you. Though it seems to me that you’re very young—aren’t you?”

He asked the question tentatively. He wanted to

say, "You're far too young," but that seemed too much like putting pressure to bear upon Henrietta, degenerating into the old-fashioned father.

"I'm out of it," he thought. "I've had my time." Young Lord Shaen seemed a bit of a flipitty-jibbety; but still, that might be the sort of man Henrietta liked. The truth, that this was the only young man his daughter had ever really known—did not occur to him: he had so scrupulously left her at liberty to choose her own friends, he took her opportunities for granted. Not that it would have made much difference: she was fated for Shaen, the moth for the candle. No use pretending that—because she was so quiet and reserved and seemingly well balanced—a little more opportunity for comparison, a few more years, and things might have been different, for they would not. Even supposed that she had hardened herself to save herself, what would have been left? A burnt-out shell, nothing more; for repressed fires are the most devastating of all.

Shaen appeared at Greylands late the next morning in a state of furious indignation. After doing and saying nothing to discourage him the night before, laughing at him, actually congratulating him, slapping him on the back, his father had absolutely refused to sanction the engagement. Dulled and sullen with the effect of late hours and too much champagne; with the thought of accumulating years and diminishing capital heavy upon him, as it was apt to be at such times—up to the luncheon hour let

us say, and Shaen had been stupid enough to choose the morning—there was no doing anything with him. “Making an ass of yourself before you’re properly out of the nursery,” that’s what he said. “If you go on playing about after that girl, after any sort of girl who means marriage, unless she’s a thumping heiress, I’ll stop your allowance. Pretty you’d look then, without a penny to bless yourself with. Anyhow, I give you fair warning. The Lord knows I’ve had bother and expense enough with you all. Marriage! At your age! Tommy rot! By Gad, if you came to me I could tell you something of what marriage is like—your mother with a tongue like a clapper, on at me all last night. Look here, Shaen, if you had a head like mine, splitting”—he was suddenly pathetic—“you’d know what it is—eternally bothered, pestered as I am, not a moment’s peace or quiet in the blessed house. Listen to them now, moving furniture or some such damned foolery! By God, only listen to that!” He put his hand to his head and groaned. “I’ll just trouble you to listen to that.”

There was a steady bump-bump in the next room, the piano being amateurishly moved back into its proper place.

“That’s got nothing to do with it,” began Shaen.

“Nothing to do with it! . . . You and your sisters and all your damned extravagance, dancin’, huntin’, racin’—never content to be still for a single moment! And then to come to me, talking of marriage! Drop it, I tell you, drop it! By

Jove, if you were in it for a week all you'd want 'ud be to get out of it, let me tell you that, young man."

He spoke of marriage as his wife did of India, the gay days wiped out. "Women are so damned unfair, they take the best years of a fellow's life," he complained, for their mutual genius for forgetting seemed to have swerved all one way.

"The mater's been getting at him," said Shaen, "but they'll repent it, both of them—they're jolly well mistaken if they think they can drive me!" He had never felt, or seemed, or indeed been, so determined: whatever they said or did he'd marry Henrietta. His quarter's allowance was all gone, and neither he nor Henrietta had enough money for a license or he would have married her then and there, in face of them all.

Mr. Rorke went over to Clonross and interviewed Shaen's parents. He had no great opinion of the young fellow, but this made him all the more determined to do what he could towards furthering the match. But it was all of no use.

"The boy's got to marry a fortune, a Yankee, or something like that," was what Lord Taghmony said; while his wife broke in to the effect that Ronny was "far too young to think of marriage for years and years to come."

Her small face showed a faint, cobwebby network of fine lines, her blue eyes were pitiful, her mouth obstinate, tightly drawn. "I'm sure you must agree with me, Mr. Rorke." Her lips parted

with one of the old winning smiles; she hated “those Rorkes,” who wanted to rob her of her son, but the old trick of fascination had become almost mechanical.

“They want as much for their gimcrack son as any old Jew collector for a curio,” thought Rorke; then again: “I wonder if she really cares, wonder if she could care; cold-blooded little customer, Henrietta—takes after me in that,” the while he burned with rage at the slight upon his daughter, was filled with longing to comfort her, pet her. If only he had known how to “get at her,” that’s how he put it to himself: if only he had begun earlier, if only they were not so queerly far apart, shy of each other . . . Oh, well, he supposed that fellow Shaen would find a way. Again and again he found himself wondering how Shaen made love to her, visualising her, his Henrietta, upright and remote as he himself had made her. Anyhow, he had done his best to help her to realize her wish and it was not his fault if he was to be allowed to keep her for a while at least.

CHAPTER XI

THE more the lovers were apart the nearer they were together, or so it seemed. When Shaen was away Henrietta had a sensation of being drawn out like the flame of a candle toward him; drawn out and out so that she felt as though there were nothing left of her, apart from this fine running flame.

As to Shaen, he was amazed at his own feelings. The fact of being kept away from Henrietta maintained him at a fever heat, which he took for constancy. "It's no good their trying to part us, I'm never likely to care a hang for anyone else," he wrote to Henrietta; for Lord Taghmony had not thought of interdicting letters, when letters were such a bore.

The truth was, Shaen had everything on earth that he could want, and this in itself lifted Henrietta above the common ruck. It was not all, though, for she was like nothing else in life to him—the sort of woman that men like him come back to, the most that can be expected of them.

Just now there were no other pleasures; he was half proud of, half scared at, his own indifference to everything in which he had once delighted; obsessed by the picture of his love as he had seen her that night of the dance, standing alone in her white gown with the dark-curtained doorway behind her;

by his mother's words, "There'll be no end to the broken hearts," etc.

Supposing someone else cut him out? He tortured himself with the thought of her in another man's arms; he had imagination enough for that, but not enough to realize the depth and breadth of her love for him. A good thing too! For once his condescension, his triumphant egotism was wiped out. He was utterly miserable, doubtful of himself and his own powers. "What the deuce can she see in me?" he asked himself and that alone shows the power which she had over him.

He was so engrossed that he forgot to get into any special mischief and, passing out of Sandhurst better than had ever been expected of him, was gazetted to a cavalry regiment, depressed by his own indifference regarding his uniform, for, like all the O'Haras, he loved clothes and everything in the way of dressing up.

It was quite soon after this that Lord Taghmony was given an appointment as Governor of one of the West Indian Islands; a come-down—though they lost sight of that after the first day or so. It would be fun starting afresh in a new place, with all the stir, the playing-at-dolls' pomp of Government House life.

"One will be *someone* there." That was what Lady Taghmony said, living over, once again, her best, her earliest years in India.

It was she who suggested that Ronny should be one of his father's A.D.C.'s. Lord Taghmony's

feelings upon the subject were mixed: a grown-up son might be in the way when one wished to “play about.” But there was another side to it: Ronny could keep his mother quiet and contented, leaving him to “shake a loose leg,” as he himself expressed it. The older he got the more this desire ruled him—to do as he liked, to have an unceasingly good time. It was the same with his wife, though in a different way. It was as if the two of them were drinking out of cups which must be continually filled up, so that they never quite reached the dregs. As years passed they became desperately flurried and eager over this, never able to rest, fearful of what they called “wasting time,” leaving any single hour unpacked with pleasure.

Lady Taghmony’s interest and pride in her girls was abating a little. Honora was engaged, would be married before they left England, and Denise had one specially suitable admirer. The girl’s lazy disinclination to make up her mind exasperated her mother, and she almost pushed her into his arms. Teddy was just coming out. She felt as though she had had enough of daughters, of all her children. “They were so sweet when they were little and I was kept away from them in that miserable India,” she thought; meanwhile all that she wanted was Ronny.

He himself was doubtful about the West Indian plan. “It would be different if I were married,” he said, with a cold, sidelong glance at his mother. “That sort of thing’s all very well if a fellow’s mar-

ried. I'd have my own home then, but a man doesn't want to live with his parents."

He was annoyed with her and her caresses; they meant nothing if she would not help him to what he wanted. As for his father, he was Puritanical in his disapproval of his goings on.

Anyhow he declared that he must join his regiment for a while at least: "then we'll see." That's what he said, determined to make his marriage with Henrietta the price of his consent. Lady Taghmony realised this. It seemed that everyone was getting very hard and cruel to her in these days. People's expression had changed, it was slighting; just a little contemptuous, or what was really worse, dutiful, unbiassed by glamour. She had been a good match-maker out of her own extravagant plenty. All that was at an end now and she grudged youth to youth. If Ronny turned against her, persisted in marrying that Rorke girl, it would be the last straw: "I couldn't stand it." It was the old phrase.

They were all over at Clonross for one week before Lord Taghmony took up his appointment; for the place was to be let and there was a great deal of packing up and away to be got through.

Shaen could not show himself at Greylands. "So long as his people objected to it, don't you think—not here, eh? For the sake of your own pride, my dear . . ." The sentence was not even completed, but it was the nearest thing in the way of a mandate that Philip Rorke had ever embarked upon with his

daughter. They were getting further and further apart, watching each other wistfully: like some divided couple, with the water widening between ship and shore.

“She thinks nothing, cares for nobody, but that young Shaen,” was what he thought. But he was wrong there, as he had always been in his estimate as to what youth wants: better, perhaps, to fidget with a child’s heart than leave it altogether alone, make no sort of claim upon it.

As it was, Henrietta—all sore for some sign of affection—thought of her father as indifferent, if not disapproving; or perhaps too indifferent for disapproval, wondering if he had greatly cared for her mother, knew what love was; thrown back for her one solace upon Shaen with no single interest between them—apart from feeling, maternal and passionate; with so much kept back, even then, for fear of boring him.

She would not allow him to come to Greylands, while she herself would not go to Clonross—she was too proud for that. But no pride on earth could have kept them altogether apart; they had one long evening on the lakes together and after that a wonderful early morning ride up the Slieve Myshall mountains, the short, slippery grass drenched with dew, the sheep all silvered over, still moithered with sleep; gathered together, standing staring.

The plain beneath them was veiled in blue mist, the lakes just one shade lighter.

Rather more than half-way up they came upon a

shallow cave in the mountain side; a plateau of greener grass in front of it, brocaded in harebells; a little lake black and shining like onyx, the water icy cold, as they found when they dismounted to drink.

“If only we could live up here. There are any amount of blackcock; we might bribe a boy to bring up bread from Clogrhoë twice a week and camp in the cave. We’d drive up a cow and tether it; I’d teach you to milk,” said Shaen, dreamily for him. In that mountain air, at once stimulating and soothing, the simplest life seemed possible. “Why should we live apart, make ourselves miserable, when everything might be so jolly easy, when we might be so happy? Come to think about it, we might do without that rotten allowance—that ’ud be one in the eye for my father.”

“Winter would come.”

“But winter wouldn’t last for ever.”

He was full of the idea, talked of it throughout the whole ride back, quieter and more wistful than she had ever seen him.

“I believe that’s the way to be happy. Just the one person one loves—the darlingest person in the world, and plenty of fresh air, no one else to come butting in. After all, it would be no one’s business but our own if we chose to live like that,” he said, as they parted on the road between Greylands and Clonross.

It seemed so easy like this, put into plain words: “No one’s business but our own,” so true, so obvious

—on the face of it. No wonder that youth banks upon the phrase. And yet how difficult to put into practise so long as middle age holds the purse-strings, ties youth up by them, entangled with innumerable small threads, necessities, obligations, habits; jerking up the cords tight, like an old lady with a string bag; knotting them with those ominous words, “the future.”

Everything was ready packed up at Clonross, and Shaen’s family expected him to leave at the same time as they did, expected him into it, as one might say. He was on the whole easy-going, used to running with the flock, and—oh well, it was useless to pretend that there was nothing in the world apart from Henrietta Rorke: a week of theatres and other gaieties in London with his people, there was some recompense there; and pretty rough luck to refuse them that, just before they sailed, he thought; and then again: “No knowing what may turn up, they may change their minds about Hal. I’ll give them a week, just one week to change their minds. Anyhow, I’ll be back within ten days. Hal, my Hal, you’ll never stop thinking of me for a moment, a single moment, will you?”

That was what he said, dashing over to Greylands in his little car at the very last moment, careless as to who saw him or what was said; finding Henrietta alone in the octagonal morning-room, drawing a little apart to look at her, with her head lying back upon his arm: “The loveliest eyes in the world, Hal. Deuced hard luck to love a girl

with the loveliest eyes in the world and have to leave her! Look here, I'll make you wear a green shade when we're married. I'll have no other fellow looking into them, losing himself in them as I've done. Hang it all, how is it possible to say good-bye—when all I want is to stay here with you, hold you in my arms, never to let you go! I can't stand leaving you! Why should I stand it? They've no business to ask it of a fellow. . . . Hal, Hal darling—my darling." It was always this, "darling—darling"; never "dearest," so much deeper, more significant: the two words so seldom used by the same person.

A wild, a ridiculously wild and passionate parting—for ten days only! Well, no, not altogether that, for time slipped away. Shaen found it impossible to come straight back to Ireland when his people left; ten days—twenty days—a month and more passed by.

"Never, never stop thinking of me—I couldn't stand that. It's bad enough as it is, stuck down here in this beastly hole, without a soul to speak to," he wrote from Aldershot, new to soldiering, delighting in it, immensely popular. "Helpless as a rat in a trap." Ah, well, he wrote when he was alone, and he could not be alone without feeling lonely; there are people like that!

Never, never to stop thinking of him! Little enough need to write that to Henrietta Rorke, with his kisses tingling afresh upon her lips at every reminder of him. Not really thinking, though—try-

ing to think, to focus things, their life together or apart—but in reality just feeling: with feeling like a warm wind sweeping through her, blowing out the curtains of her mind—feeling, remembering and living back.

There was this letter, one or two more, a long silence, and then, at the end of close upon two months, a short, almost illegible scrawl, filled with that obstinate, passionate desire for her presence aroused in him by any sudden opposition or difficulty.

There was some sort of climax in the trouble between his parents, and his mother had written him a letter, as frantic as any one of his own, begging him to get leave and come out to them, if only for a few weeks.

“I have nobody in the world but you,” she said, and added, “Perhaps if you were out here you could do something to keep your father within the bounds of decency. He must be mad; everyone’s talking. It will come to this very soon: they’ll be talking *of* him and not speaking to him—” Almost every word was underlined; and then, with a faggot of lines beneath it, came: “I know I shall go mad if I am left here alone with him. You must come—you must, you must!”

“I suppose I’ve got to go, but I must see you again first. I must—I must!” That was Shaen’s letter to Henrietta, the underlinings and dashes cutting the paper. “Ten to one I’ll never be able to

get home again, once I'm there. Anything may happen!"

The Celtic strain in his nature was uppermost; fate was against them. "Ten to one I'll die of fever; something's bound to happen. For goodness' sake don't let me down now; I have a sort of feeling that something will happen to come between us."

Mr. Rorke was in Dublin, Lady Fair at Clonross, having gone over to disentangle some of her own possessions before the new tenants moved in.

When Henrietta met Shaen at Castleford, driving the dogcart which her father had lately bought for her—something in the way of a consolation prize—the question was where were they to go—what were they to do with themselves? Shaen talked, ran on and on and on, but it was all on the top of himself; underneath there was that jammed-up feeling which comes to people who have a very short time in which to say everything that they want to say.

The same thing was tight in Henrietta's breast, pressing round her heart: she was stuffed very tight and buttoned down like an old-fashioned sofa or armchair. She could never tell Shaen how much she thought of him, make him understand; he would go away, and perhaps it was true that she would never see him again. The dark forebodings of youth were heavy upon her, for it is folly to speak of the young as being consistently hopeful.

He would go away and perhaps he would die.

Forgetful of her own life in India, Henrietta was terrified of the Tropics; that hint of fever had stricken her to her heart—that heart which seemed to be bared, literally waiting for the wound. Shaen would die, and the dreadful blank of his loss, the long waste of years, would be like a thicket of thorns, sharp with the remembrance of how little she had ever done to prove her love for him.

Even now she could not let him come to Greylands. To Shaen's mind the fact of her father being away from home gave them a wonderful chance. She felt herself grudging and cruel for opposing the idea; it was agony for her to refuse him anything; but here were her father's plain orders, as plain as he ever gave them, and the more binding for that. Anything which concerned herself alone, anything—and she had no faintest idea of all that "anything" might comprise—was Shaen's for the asking. "There's nothing I wouldn't do for him—nothing!" she told herself, with the desperate fervour of the inarticulate. All she wanted was some chance to show him a little of all that she found it so impossible to put into words.

Though it was the last week in September it was one of those breathlessly hot days of an Indian summer, unexpected and fierce as the passions of a later life. Henrietta drove slowly; they did not know what to do or where to go. It was difficult to formulate any special thought, for their love, the

near prospect of their parting, lay heavy upon them, weighing them down so that their very limbs were languid.

Shaen's stream of talk sluiced off him, leaving him profoundly distressed. He had a feeling that he would like to rest his head upon Henrietta's shoulder and groan; he was like Job. If he could have clasped her to him, pressed her lips to his, it might have assuaged his thirst; as it was, he felt parched up and empty and dull; he had never been like that before, and it frightened him.

"What the devil are we to do with ourselves?" he inquired disconsolately. "Aunt Gertie's at Clonross. You won't come there, even to please me, and you won't have me at Greylands—come to think of it, there's precious little you will do for me." He paused, stooping, hunched together at Henrietta's side; his handsome pale face, with a sallowish tinge, as it was apt to be in his rare moments of mental depression. "Hang it all, I didn't come over to Ireland to spend the evening with Gertie, clucking like an old hen!"

A sudden idea came to Henrietta. "Why shouldn't we have supper—a sort of supper picnic up on the mountains?" It was a tentative suggestion, for she did not know how Shaen would take it. As a matter of fact, he was so different to herself she never knew how he would take anything.

He was enchanted, however; the colour flooded up into his cheeks; it seemed as though his skin actually cleared; his eyes brightened.

“The very thing! Oh, I say, Hal, what a perfectly topping idea!”

“If I drop you at the gates of Clonross, and go back to Greylands, Cooky can get us some food ready, and I’ll get Jimmy to saddle Grizel while I change.”

“Hal—Hal—by Jove, you’re a genius! I’ll slip round to the stable and get Pale Ale, and come along the road to meet you.”

It seemed as though they were awakened out of a sort of trance, alive once more. Henrietta was singing as she changed into her riding kit; the whole world moved off to the same tune, and Jimmy broke off his whistle to grin, rubbing down Grizel with a soft cloth in her loose box, blacking her hoofs, polishing her bit. He knew what was up; they all knew—though goodness knows how!—identified themselves with the romance. “Miss Henrietta an’ the young lord”—maybe it was the red-haired cook who gave the hint: running out to the stables, smiling all over her face with the information that sandwiches and cake had been ordered for two.

“He’s back again—bless ’em an’ save ’em, the pretty dears!” She scurried, fat and short-legged, running like a beetle, with any number of little steps, to the front of the house, and leant out of the drawing-room window to tell the gardener, busy mowing the lawn. Patsy, the aged boot-boy, had to know. “It’s by the mercy o’ God that you gave that extry fine lick o’ polish to them there riding-

boots o' Miss Henrietta, for he's back—the young lord's back, an' it will be a quare kind o' a shame if there's not a wedding at Clogrhoe afore the year's out. I tauld ye that a whileen back; but there's none that listens to old Cooky come these days!" She tossed her red head; she wasn't old, and she knew it—not to say old—and love was in the air.

The sandwiches were a trifle delayed by all the talk which eddied round Henrietta. Not a servant at Greylands, with her head out of the window, not a stable lad or garden boy, but had his eyes on her—cunning and sly as small wild animals—when she rode down the drive to meet Shaen.

It was after five; there had been no time or thought for tea, but they stopped at a farm near the foot of the mountain for a glass of milk; Shaen—the man—with a dash of whisky in his.

It was so hot that they thought of it as summer; but autumn revealed herself with a veil of grey soon after six, spreading it out, all sun-shot, over the plains beneath them as they mounted, winding upwards very slowly, for the short sun-baked turf was as slippery as glass.

Their plateau lay full in the sun. Shaen took off the horses' saddles, knotted up the reins and let them graze. He and Henrietta lay flat upon the edge of the plateau and gazed down at the world beneath them: the shining lakes; Clogrhoe like a pale patch filled round with straggling grey wool stretches, wisps of smoke; the river a slender thread, and then a widening scarf of mist as evening fell.

Fell! Rose rather, slowly mounting, uplifting them upon it far above the world, with their own plateau—their own small lake, black and shining as a magic carpet. Even the horses felt the loneliness, the mystery; leaning against each other, keeping close to them.

Shaen, usually so demonstrative, had not so much as touched Henrietta's hand; they lay apart, with their limbs straight out, their chins cupped in their palms; while even he was silent save for an occasional long-drawn sigh, overcome by a strange sense of lassitude, dragging him down, pressing him into the earth. The heat of the day, even at that hour, added to the physical oppression. They could not see the sun set, nothing but a thick yellowish haze with a blurred core of crimson above the low-lying hill lands at the further side of the plain.

He gathered himself together suddenly, sat up.

“Look here, Hal, it's supper-time, but do you mind if I have a bathe first? I feel most frightfully slack for some reason or other.”

“All right, and I'll unpack the supper, so that it'll be ready when you are.”

Shaen had brought a bottle of white wine and a couple of bottles of soda-water in a rush basket, packed round with hay and hung to his saddle; they had tied a long string, fastened one end to a rock, and sunk them in the lake to cool. He fetched them now, put them down on the smooth turf where Henrietta was unpacking the basket, then hesitated a moment, staring into the distances below him, not

looking at Henrietta. "It doesn't seem real somehow, just you and I—and this." He waved one arm, speaking, with an odd sort of awkwardness, as though words were difficult, then went off for his bathe.

The tiny lake was in a hollow sheltered by black rocks. Henrietta heard a deep "P-f-f-lump!" as he plunged. "Supposing he were to sink; supposing he were drowned?" she thought: a stupid thought, for he could swim like a fish.

Cooky had given them an abundant supply, symbol of her overflowing heart: enough to live on for a week, thought Henrietta, remembering Shaen's wild idea of them setting up house together, or, rather, setting up cave-keeping here on the mountains.

He came back at the end of a short ten minutes, his hands full of harebells—how ridiculous to think that he could ever be drowned, that anything could happen to him with all that life in him; to keep on thinking that something *must* happen to him because she loved him! Drowning!—she had a horror of drowning: the dreadful chill of it, the indifference of the water which made nothing of you, the earth so different, with its grasses, its flowers.

Shaen was in his shirt and trousers, his dark hair wet, with little drops at the ends of it, his face shining and full of colour; the whites of his eyes were almost as blue as the iris had been half an hour earlier, all his lassitude gone.

He insisted on twisting the pale flowers in among

Henrietta's hair, hung them drooping above her brow: "Eyes like lakes, an' these thingummy-jigs hanging just the same way, reflected in them."

His cool hands, busied round her face, smelt of the water.

"I must go and wash my own hands," she said, and ran off, rinsing her face too, lying down on the warm rock at the edge of the pool, splashing water so that hair and harebells were sparkling.

By the time their little feast was over it was almost dark.

They had been very lighthearted, seized with a fancy for fancying: Fancy if we did this—fancy if we did that; "build a castle up here with precipices for battlements"—that was Henrietta's idea. Shaen picked up the ball, kept it rolling: "Fancy if we lived in the desert—somewhere in Arabia—pretty decent, that—tents like Arabs—hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of horses; mare's milk and potheen—we'd brew our own potheen. . . . No barley? Not grown there? Hang it all, we'd make it grow. . . . A harem in Egypt—how'd you like that, Hal? Queen of the harem?"

"Fancy if I were the Governor and you the Governor's wife—emeralds in your hair—those are the stones for you—emeralds, to go with your eyes more than half green! Fancy if we lived up here for always, never went down—clothes!—sheepskins in winter and . . . oh, the Lord knows what in summer! What was it Brian O'Flynn wore? The

woolly side out and the skinny side in—that's the idea."

With the end of the meal their spirits dropped; they were overcome by a sense of inexplicable melancholy, hanging over them, weighing them down. It was Henrietta who broke the silence.

"You must get the horses saddled, it's almost dark—we'll have to go at foot's pace all the way."

"What will they say at Greylands?"

"There are only the servants"—"Only the servants!"—there was youth for you!—"But if Lady Fair's at Clonross, she may be worrying."

"She doesn't know."

"Doesn't know what?"

"That I'm over here. Why should she? Shaen's voice was boyishly defiant.

Henrietta, who had pushed aside a small sunken rock and was on her knees burying the scraps of paper beneath it, raised her head and stared, peering at Shaen—it was dark enough for that. "But, oh, Ronny, she must know—you got the wine and stuff."

"I sent Tim in the back way for it."

"But the butler?"

"There's no butler—all the servants have gone; only Brigid and Tim; they'll never tell, trust them for that."

"But why—why?" She was puzzled, by Shaen, puzzled by herself. Why had she told no one that she was going out riding with him—just asked the

cook for sandwiches for two: scarcely even that. "You might cut enough for two"—no more, with no idea of their forming their own opinions, she who was usually so considerate of servants. Not that there was anything to hide, only . . . Oh, well, being there with Ronny, wrapped above the world, as it were, no one knowing of it, that added to the preciousness, the wonder. She did not want to deceive anyone, only to keep it to herself. But Ronny's aunt—that was a different affair; she liked Lady Fair, would hate her to feel hurt, out of it.

"Oh, well, we must go now—she'll be sure to hear and expect to see something of you. It will be dark, as it is, long before we get home." She turned towards the horses, then hesitated, glanced back.

Shaen was still standing at the edge of the plateau, dropping pebbles aimlessly into the depth beneath him.

"Ronny!"

He did not turn, and she went over to him, slipped her arm in his. "Ronny, truly we must go; it will be difficult enough getting down as it is. . . . Ronny dear!"

There was something heavy and unyielding about the very feel of his arm. "We shan't want anything more to eat to-night," he said, and it sounded as though he were arguing against somebody; standing there immovable, turned away from her: he who was, in general, so quick and responsive.

"No, but still . . ." Quite suddenly she was scared. "Ronny, Ronny, we simply must go!"

“I can’t see any reason”; his tone was sullen.

She tried to laugh. “Oh, but we must—”

“Why? Why? Tell me why?” He was still turned aside from her, looking away from her, with no sign of feeling her tug upon his arm: speaking in a detached, abrupt way as though to someone with whom he was feeling out of temper, had a grieving against.

“But we must.”

“Why—in Heaven’s name, why? There’s no must about it.”

“We can’t stay here all night”; her voice broke on a tremulous laugh.

“What’s the good of saying that? Why can’t we stay here—why?” He swung round and caught her by both wrists, as though he were suddenly galvanised into life; his heart was beating so that she could feel it shaking through him. “Look here, Hal”; he spoke hoarsely, so quickly that the words tumbled over each other: “they won’t let us do as we like with our lives. We want to do the right thing and they simply won’t let us. They’ve had their own lives and now they want to have ours! Hang it all! I’m grown up and you’re grown up. I’m a man and I have feelings like a man—things are just as bad for me as they are for any man, just as hard on me—eternally jaggin’ at me. Years ago boys of fifteen were married, counted as men. One’s people have no right to pretend that one’s a kid when one’s just on twenty—it’s a damned shame; just to please themselves—it’s rotten—rotten!”

If I lived to a hundred I could never love anyone better than I love you—want anyone more frightfully. And there they are, going on all the time bein' married and—oh, well, all that—going on and on after years and years of it; expecting us to play at being sainted kids! I can't stand it—don't see why anyone should stand it. Look here, why, at Sandhurst—oh, and at Eton—in my regiment, too—they talk about women all the time; the air's thick with it. Just women, not caring for anyone in particular. I don't want to make a beast of myself; I want to be married to you. A fellow doesn't feel like that, all over the shop, once he's married—even if we really belonged to each other it would be different.

“Look here, Hal darling, you can't understand because you're a girl; and girls like you—so frightfully pure—and sweet—and all that. . . .” His voice trailed off for a moment, then went on slurring words: “Oh, well, you simply don't know.”

His hands, sliding up Henrietta's arm under the loose sleeve of her riding-coat, were cold; it seemed that he was not holding her so much as holding on to her, clinging to her, his usually fresh-coloured face pale in that queer, unreal light.

They had caught the last rays of the sun, but it was all gone now; even their height, looking due west, did nothing to help them. The air was not exactly misty, more like a blue-grey veil through which their faces looked different, unreal to each other; that sort of light by which people imagine

that they can see a long way and are surprised to find themselves cut off with a horizon but little beyond their arm's length. Very soon now the evening would clear, determine itself into the night, as women settle down, quite suddenly, to middle age; people would light their little lamps in the cottage windows of the valley below them; the moon would rise, a sprinkling of stars pierce the sky.

Just now, however, they were cut off from the world as they knew it, from everyone in it. The horses must have felt the loneliness, for first Grizel and then Pale Ale neighed. Henrietta could not hear their hooves on the thick short turf, but she could hear their breath drawing nearer.

“Hal, Hal!” He made no attempt to draw her to him, but she could feel his fingers pressing deep into her forearm. “Look here, I’m going away to-morrow. I’ll be sailing in a couple of days. God only knows what may happen—I’m perfectly certain something will happen to keep us apart. Look here—Hal—Hal—you—”

He took one hand away from her arm and fingered the brooch in front of her white lawn blouse, panting as though he had been running. “If we really belonged to each other—really—”

Henrietta’s mouth opened, rounded as though she were going to say something, but no words came. She was cold from head to foot, with a chilled, stripped feeling, as though nothing but the evening air enwrapped her.

“Hal—Hal—this one night to ourselves—we’ve

never had any time to ourselves,” he muttered.

“I can’t—oh, Ronny, I can’t.”

“There’s a pile of dried grass in the cave. I noticed it last time we were here, and it’s still there, dry as a bone. It’s going to be a hot night—hot as midsummer; it can’t hurt you. We’ll get back in time for breakfast.” It seemed as though he insisted upon material trifles, rendering the abnormal normal in his own eyes.

“It’s not that, but . . . Oh, you must see, I—” She was going to say, “I can’t stay here alone with you,” but was checked by the childish idea that it sounded so like pretending to be grown up. After all, why should she not stay? He would not ask her to do anything wrong. Her thoughts, misty and blurred, wavered to and fro with her longing to show how much she loved him, trusted him, was willing to accede to anything he asked.

One must remember that she had no mother, had never even lived in the house with married people. She had pets, realized the bare facts of birth; for the rest, her knowledge of life was so fragmentary and broken up that none of the separate pieces fitted into each other. What did it matter whether she and Shaen were married or not if they wished to spend this one night up in the mountains together: there could be nothing wrong in that, nothing whatever. And yet, all this, in itself so clear, so certain, was confused, shaken through and through, by a multitude of feelings like shuttles racing to and fro through the main warp of reason, too quick

for her mind's eye to catch them; interwoven with her passionate desire to please Shaen, not to fail him in the one thing he had ever really asked of her, not to funk. . . . Ah, there it was, and with it, part of it, that scurrying sense of something that scared her, not so much in him as in herself, something altogether strange and overwhelming.

There were only two ways open to her, nothing between. She must run—not wait to get her horse, but run, trusting to her own feet—speed away down the mountain side as fast as they would carry her—or else stay, stay all night. And why not? “To camp out.” She tried to steady herself with the words, as Shaen, with his talk of dry hay; and all the while it felt as though her heart were loose, doing as it liked with itself.

“You said you'd do anything for me,” pleaded Shaen; “you said it, you know you did. ‘Anything apart from letting you come to Greylands while father's away’; you know you did! You can't go back on that—you can't go back on your promise—let me down now when I love you so frightfully.”

He touched her there; her pride in her given word, her far deeper humility. No one else loved her; what sort of price was she putting upon herself to this one person who did?

“Hal, Hal—if you love me!” He must have felt her weakening, for he was drawing her to him; she could see his eyes through the dusk, large and shining. “Hal—Hal, my darling, if you care for me—

I am going away to-morrow. If we once belong to each other I must come back. Oh, don't you see, I must, must come back, nothing can keep us apart after"—he hesitated a moment, his voice dropped; they were both panting now, trembling from head to foot—"after that."

There was no longer any argument of right or wrong, kindness or unkindness, in Henrietta's mind; it was as though her intensity of feeling, her love for Shaen, surged up like a great wave within her, taking her breath, holding her heart from beating, buffeting her out of all thought.

She let him draw her into his arms, hold her close, cover her closed eyes, face and neck with kisses; clinging to him as though she were drowning; the two of them so closely pressed together that it seemed as though their bodies were one, as though nothing could ever separate them again.

An hour later it was Shaen who was in her arms, asleep, with his head upon her breast. One of her arms enfolded him, with that queer motherliness which comes to women momentarily at the end of their passion; the other hand was upon his dark hair, smoothing it back from his brow; her own eyes were wide open, staring in front of her.

The moon was at its full, clear and hard in the pale indigo sky, framed by the dark mouth of the shallow cave. From where Henrietta Rorke lay there was nothing visible apart from this; the black arch of the cave, the clear sky; the moon cold and aloof, unsoftened by the faintest wisp of cloud.

It was like being on the very edge of the world, hung out on a balcony above space. A sense of deep calm, far more mature than her years, enwrapped her; everyone she had ever known, everything she had ever done or been, the whole fabric of everyday life, had dropped away from her, here at her lover's side, their arms enfolded; nothing mattered, ever could matter. With the arrogance of youth, even the humblest-minded, she felt herself armed against the world, secure for ever. More than once Shaen stirred, caressing her with sleep-laden words of endearment, then falling back into oblivion. She herself did not close her eyes; it seemed that this wonderful night might go on for ever, infinitely sweet and unchanging: as though she were embarked upon some strange sea, enchanted and shoreless and for ever calm; at once the journey and the journey's end.

CHAPTER XII

THEY said good-bye to each other where the road from the mountains and over the further bridge cut that serving Greylands and Clonross, running to Castleford in one direction, to Ballymacdaugh Ballina in the other.

Shaen had to smuggle himself into his own house, get hold of a change of clothes and a meal without disturbing his aunt, and make his way by car to Ballymacdaugh Junction, the only station where he could pick up the morning train.

They were both stiff with lying upon the hard ground, with its inadequate mattress of hay; and cold, for towards morning the air had grown dank. Their clothes hung damply upon them, and they were very humanly hungry.

Henrietta had thought that the whole world would be changed, set to a different tune from that one night. No wedding ceremony on earth could have made her feel more completely consecrated than the silence, the aloofness, the purity of the air; lying there in the intensely clear moonlight it had seemed that nothing earthly, no sort of jar or misunderstanding, could ever touch them again, blur their happiness; and yet from Shaen's first real awakening that's what it was—blurred.

Once up he was all impatience to be off: impatient with himself, with her; with the catching and saddling of the horses.

Looking back over that morning, there seemed to Henrietta so little that she could remember apart from this dulled and rather sullen sense of flurry.

One incident alone remained clear in her mind. Thinking that Shaen was still asleep, she was slipping away for a bathe in the little lake, when he turned, flung out one arm to the place where she had been and, opening his eyes, called her name, sharply, as though in a sort of panic.

“Hal—Hal! Oh, there you are! What are you doing? Where are you going?”

“I was going to have a bathe.”

“In the lake? You musn’t do that! Come back, you little silly! Do you hear—Hal! Why, you can’t swim—it’s deep as blazes, and you can’t swim! By God, it’s a jolly good thing I awoke when I did!”

She remembered this, for the poor reason that he did not seem to want her out of his sight, was frightened for her. For the rest, there was that flatness and confusion, that sense of illimitable weariness of body and soul.

Even when they parted—leaning towards each other, clinging together, their horses’ sides pressed close—it was still there, and Shaen, for all his irritation, felt it almost as much as she did: bereft of words, uttering her name with a sort of groan: “Hal—Hal . . .”

He wrote her a very manly letter immediately upon his arrival in England. He was at his best in that, and Henrietta kept it apart from all his other letters—badly written, slangy, with uncertain spelling—as a set standard of what he really was.

That was before he got his mother's cablegram, the actual morning upon which he was to have sailed:

“Don't come. Starting home to-day; can't stand it any longer.”

CHAPTER XIII

HENRIETTA RORKE and Shaen were married in the second week in December. In the short interval since that mad night on Slieve Myshall it seemed that Henrietta had grown: not only grown up—that was very evident—but increased in stature; perhaps it was that she had become even slimmer, held herself more upright than ever. Her oval face had lost the curves of childhood; it was paler than it had been, the colour came and went fitfully, her lips, the same smooth, pale red lips, were more closely folded; her hair—with no touch of any brighter colour, gold or red—intensified the brilliancy of her eyes, most often the colour of an unpeeled hazel wand, was drawn back from her forehead in a way which was at that time entirely out of fashion, twisted into a thick knot at the back of her head.

She had been a pretty, sedate child; she was beautiful now: so beautiful that strangers turned round and looked at her in the street; on the country roads the country people blessed her as she passed. Everyone, it seemed, was anxious to please her, stand well with her. Behind her back they might, and did, tattle, detract; but actually facing her they were deferential, on their best behaviour. All of this was in curious contrast to her own deep

humility, bewilderment: that sense of life as a strange house where she was never altogether at home, certain of what lay behind the doors she opened.

She could not master the point of view of other, ordinary people in connection with what she had done. Her father tried to explain it to her, but without much success. The fact was that he had impressed upon her so completely, and for so long, the necessity for independence, the right she had to form her own opinion, take her own line, that he was in the position of a man who has carefully locked up a box with some treasure in it and then lost the key.

She tried hard to master his point of view: she knew that what he said was in its own way right. But it did not seem right to her, and it was impossible for her to make herself feel that it was right; any more than it was possible to make herself feel that the thing which she had done was wrong.

She could never love anyone else in the same way that she loved Shaen, and it would have made no real difference if a clergyman of her own Church or any other Church had blessed their union. Her father had never instructed her in any of the elements of religion; she must abide by what her conscience told her, that was what he had said, and in this her conscience was clear. If she had been a selfish beast—she had a way of catching up Shaen's phraseology—guarded herself, ruled her conduct by the thought of what other people might say or think

—and in truth she had no conception of this as it might be—and he had gone out to the West Indies, perhaps died of fever, what would she have felt like then? Then, indeed, there would have been something with which to reproach herself. The fact that he didn't go after all made no real difference; she would have felt meaner still if she had held back thinking that he might not go.

This was one of the things that bewildered her, this and the way in which her father—who had always seemed so cool and cynical, had never appeared to care over much about anything one way or another—went to pieces over it all: his obsession with the fear of scandal, his grief; above all, his self-reproach. “It must be something in the way I brought you up. I muddled it somehow or other. I ought to have married again; got a woman to look after you. But I always thought that girls had . . . oh, well, a sort of instinct.” By this he meant an instinct for putting a very proper price upon themselves, and not that instinct, so very much stronger, which is—all said and done—responsible for the perpetuation of the race.

Still, artificial as his estimate might seem, it was right in so far as it went—the trouble is that it did not go further—had shown itself in the almost overwhelming desire for flight which had swept across Henrietta that night on the mountain.

Daphne and Apollo—the flight, the surrender, for ever balancing one against another, with the dip to the latter.

And here again was another reason and excuse— if one were needed, and this is in no sort of way an apologia. Throughout the last few years she had fed upon classics. It was with them that Father O'Sullivan sated his passion for beauty, keeping his own immediate life clean. There was no hint of anything wrong or unclean in all that he and Henrietta had read together: where every description of lovers and the way of love seemed part of the youth of the world, a blending of nature and the most exquisite art.

It was a different matter altogether when the Rorkes' red-haired cook whispered in the priest's ear that tale which she dragged into her confession, the outcome of an overwhelming desire to tell, to stir up a sensation, thinly disguised as a searching of conscience, a question as to whether she had or had not been right in the step which she herself had taken in the matter.

“Was I right to tell, Father?”—telling afresh—a needless repetition—with the question.

The fact is that morals in literature and morals in real life must be kept completely apart.

The mountain height, the moon, the clarity of the atmosphere, the stillness of the night—so far removed from stuffy rooms, drawn curtains, the whole furtive air of ordinary sexual intercourse, however hallowed—those two young things so beautiful and so desperately in love; the one—and even O'Sullivan realised this—so tragically doomed

by her very virtues—faith and trust, unchanging love—here, indeed, was the very essence of Greek drama; and yet because it was real life, not drama, to be counted as nothing more than sin, worthy of the wages of sin.

As a tale that was told, a picture of the Golden Age, it would have been wonderful—wonderful! As an achieved, present-day fact, however, it was something that shook the priest's rigid middle-class Irish morality to its very foundations.

There was pity, incredulity, rage against Shaen in his heart—why, she was nothing more than a child!—but over and above all this was the sense of something shamed and defaced, something which could never again leave him altogether free in his judgments of Henrietta Rorke; fixing her as someone to be watched—or say “watched over”: it sounds kinder, and one must be kind—forcing him into the estimate of her unchanging calm, as something almost brazen.

The whole thing got about somehow or other, was in the very air, so that it was impossible for Henrietta to remain untouched by it: showing itself in the way in which Father O'Sullivan shook his head over her, was, if not exactly more familiar, condescendingly pitying; in the Reverend Fielden's abrupt: “You mustn't think that I'd ever turn against you,” broken by the small dry cough of sheer nervousness. “H'm—h'm—poisonous tongues—evil speakers, slanderers. All the same . . .”

he crackled his long fingers, turned away his head, his whole ungainly body jerking in a way it had in moments of emotion:—

“Of course I know it’s out of the question—would have been—h’m—h’m—but if you could bring yourself to marry me it would make me the proudest man in the world.” All this was very well, finely done, but the end killed it: “It goes without saying—all that—never let it make any difference to me—even if I believed it, as I don’t—before God, I don’t believe it, couldn’t believe it—a pack of damned lies!”

“What?” Henrietta’s grave eyes were upon him, her face as white as paper. “Believe what?”

As he did not reply she pressed him to it: “What is it that you don’t believe?”

He hemmed and hawed, twisting himself from side to side. The fact was that he would not let himself believe: face it out. With Father O’Sullivan it was different; he didn’t like it, but he was ready for it, ready for anything in the way of human frailty; though each in his own way was filled with shame, and it was that which insulted her.

“What do they say—what is it that you don’t believe?”

“How could I tell you—low-minded brutes! They ought to be horse-whipped.”

“What is it? You’ve got to tell me now.” She was stronger than he was, and there was no getting out of it.

“That you were up in the mountains all night with Lord Shaen.”

“Well, I was—it’s true I was.”

He had known it the whole time, for after all he was no fool, and pure invention would have taken some entirely different form. All the same, he had not known that he knew, and it was dreadful how it took him aback.

Quite suddenly he veered off upon a new tack: an assumption of the whole thing as a mere childish escapade, blustering to convince himself. “Well, all I can say is you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Tomboy tricks like that! Out on the mountains all night! Tut-tut! You want a nurse, Henrietta, that’s what you want; you might have caught your death of cold: playing at gipsying—a great girl like you! Criminal folly, nothing more nor less! And everyone worried out of their wits about you. Really you ought to have more sense; remember that you’re no longer a child!”

“I’m not a child,” said Henrietta, a little paler than usual; with something in her quiet, steady glance which made his heart feel like a stone dropped plump into an icy well.

All this seemed enough for any young creature to master; and yet there was more to it than that, cutting deeper, leaving her, as it were, aghast: at the same time stiffening her neck, straightening her back, holding her even more apart from her fellows, and this was her first realisation of the enmity of the world.

It seemed that people could accept favours from you; seem to like you, really like you, and at the same time take a malignant pleasure in injuring you; be cruel to you, not because they hated you, but merely because, in some queer way, it pleased them to see you suffer, making them feel of more importance to themselves.

She had taken no real pains to hide anything, though her whole instinct was to keep her secret sacred between herself and Shaen. If she had been of a coarser fibre she would have been far safer: just a word to the red-haired cook, who had been at Greylands as long as she had, and led the household: “Be a dear, Cooky, don’t let on—” and they would have felt part of it all, done anything for her; in the same way as the little old postman with his “quare feet” and warped legs, who would walk miles out of his way, keep everyone else waiting, to post or deliver what looked like a love-letter for one of Shaen’s sisters, with her careless, “I know I can trust you, Denny, good old Denny”; or, “Look here, how can I keep *him* waiting all that while for a word of me?”

But Henrietta was different—fatally different, for you can rule the whole world by the merest pretence at taking it into your confidence. When she arrived home that morning she had moved as though in a dream, handing Grizel over to the stable boy—her shining flanks all rough with lying upon the grass, patched with damp—without a word: not

so much as a “Good morning to you, Jimmy,” unobservant of his sly twinkle, his whole air of wanting to be in it.

Cooky herself brought the young mistress’s coffee and bread-and-butter. “It’s tired out you must be,” she said, and waited in vain for an answer: the pathos of the whole thing being that she would have accepted anything then—with no deeper suspicion than the chance of the two of them making love, and overtaken by night upon the mountain—making a joke of it.

It was Henrietta’s silence that set her off thinking: she herself said that, later on.

“There’s something quare in what’s all boxed up inside, mark my word for it.”

Kate, the housemaid, started to run up the stairs in front of her mistress. “I’ll be drawin’ yer blind, Miss Henrietta; it’s slape you’ll be after needin’,” she said, and half turned, all solicitude; then ran on, baulked by her young lady’s blank stare.

Cooky ventured again, touching her arm. “Don’t be lookin’ so down-hearted, now, darlin’—it’s a long day as there’s no turn in it.” Maybe his lordship was leaving Ireland: that was all the thought she had to it—then:

“I’m not down-hearted.” Henrietta was dazed and unresponsive.

“An’ why should you be, for sure?” The woman fell back for a moment, then started off afresh: “A fine young gentleman if ever there was

one; an' no harm done, I'll go bail for that. Talkin' and talkin' as the gintry for ever do be talkin'—the sun down an' the moon up, afore you'd a moment to stop and think. But if so be that ever—” In one flash her mind had changed—if ever Henrietta needed her help, that's what she was going to say, and how significant that was!

She broke off, for her young mistress was half-way up the stair, dragging her feet wearily as though already half asleep.

Later on they listened outside her door, thinking that they might hear her weeping; but there was no sound, and when Kate opened a crack and peered in, there she lay, sleeping like a child, her cheek on her hand.

When she appeared among them later on in the day—gave her orders, did the flowers, all just as usual, starting off for her afternoon lesson immediately after lunch—she was more silent than usual; apart from that unchanged, outwardly serene as ever.

“No harm done,” the red-haired cook, every man and woman about the place, would have gone bail for this, with the smallest tarradiddle served up to whet their appetites for excitement and emotion.

Nothing came, however; she made no confidences. If she had seemed to pine they could have forgiven her, but she did nothing of the sort. If she had appeared happier or more unhappy they could have borne it; it was the sameness which exasperated them, strung them up. “She's a deep 'un, she is,”

that's what they said. From this they went on: "There's nothing as I'd be afther putting beyond thim there Protestants—"

"Nothing as they'll not be afther doin'."

Little by little they piled it on: restless for the want of some new outlet, interest.

It was this, and no real intentional malice, which led to Cooky's interview with Mr. Rorke immediately upon his arrival home; the nods and becks and wreathed smiles which ran like wild-fire through Clogrhoe.

There was an interview between the father and daughter: all the more terrible because of its reserve, that curse of inarticulation which bound the two of them. . . . How happy are the people who can "talk a thing out," with the dash of a housemaid emptying the slops!

He asked no questions: it was impossible to put the thing which he wanted to know, which really mattered, into words. His only refuge, a sorry one, lay in the appearance of things, an exposition on that public opinion which he, himself, had taught her to disregard: "Out all night in the mountains with a man, you can't expect people not to talk!"

A picture of Shaen, so extremely young and fresh; ardent and alive, flashed through his mind as he spoke, linked up with Henrietta as she sat before him—her slim white hands on either arm of the wooden chair, her feet crossed, her white dress—her quiet face and steady eyes. It was impossible—oh, impossible!—to associate what he him-

self looked upon as degradation with either one of these two. All the same, there it was: “What would people say?”

“He’ll have to be made to marry you”; he could not look at her as he said it, and just as well too, for he would have done better to strike her. All the colour went out of her face; she drew back upon herself as one might draw back from the thrust of a sword. Shaen was to be “made to marry” her! How amazing it was, when that was all they had wished for, to have it thrown at her like this—pressed upon him.

“I see no reason for that word ‘make.’” Even her father, who knew her, counted her so much more a complete woman of the world than she was—poor child!—found himself taken aback by this: the dignity of it.

All the same, there it was. That terrible phrase, “Make an honest woman of her”—got into his brain. “Make an honest woman of her!” Henrietta, his own daughter, only just seventeen and so extraordinarily beautiful, so . . . Oh, hang it all, there couldn’t have been anything in it; couldn’t—a silly child’s escapade, nothing more—completely virginal!

For all that, there were certain standards of behaviour: unwritten laws framed to meet them.

Henrietta stood aside. She would not write to Shaen, would not even answer his letters; was suddenly and dreadfully shy of him. Likely enough it was in this reserve that her strength lay, for when

Philip Rorke went over to England and saw the young man, he found him in a state of furious, half-sullen anxiety. "I've written and telegraphed—she's taken no notice. What—I mightn't exist! Marry her? What the devil do you mean by coming here and telling me I've got to marry her?" He was so raw and all on edge that it was impossible for him to speak civilly to anyone—above all, his elders. And there was his mother, on the top of everything else; but just arrived and in a state of hysterical excitement, making incessant demands upon his interest and sympathy.

"Got to marry Henrietta!" She was cold as ice—if she were not cold, could she have left his letters unanswered, after all that had passed between them—shown no sort of pity for him in the altogether damnable time he was having? All the same, cold as she was, it was Henrietta he wanted, the antithesis of his mother.

"Look here, sir—first of all everyone hammers into us that we mustn't marry; that it can't be allowed; that we're too young and all that tommyrot. . . . Oh yes, I believe you did try to straighten things out; but you didn't try hard enough—that's all . . . And now you come here and tell me that we've got to get married."

"I should have thought that you know why."

"There's no reason on earth, beyond what there's always been"; with a sudden flow of real manliness, Shaen lied; well, too, for an almost alarming frankness was at this time far truer to his nature.

“I want to marry, and I always have wanted to marry, the sweetest, straightest, prettiest girl in the world, and it beats me what you or anyone else is driving at with your ‘don’t’ one day and ‘must’ next. I may be a fool, but it’s all beyond me, hanged if it isn’t!”

“That night up in the mountains—you know, Shaen—”

“What the devil do you mean—what the devil are you getting at? If you knew that part of the world as well as I do you’d know that people are eternally getting lost up there—mist an’ all that. If foul-minded beasts want to spread a pack of lies over the country it’s got nothing to do with me—there are always people like that. But for you—you, Henrietta’s father—to come here an’ tell me that I’ve got to marry your daughter, by God, it’s too much! Hal! Hal!—as if she were some damned housemaid!”

He had just been called in from a game of tennis on the hard courts, and flung up and down the room in his white sweater and flannels, his hands deep in his trouser-pockets, his face flushed; a fine picture of youthful indignation and arrogance, finer still in his defence of the girl he loved.

“By Gad, I mayn’t be up to much, but I’m decenter than to go running about the country with a tale like yours. You’re an old man, an’ you’ve lived with Hal all her life, but I know her better than you an’ I know I’m not fit to clean her shoes for her, so there!—no, nor any other man either.

Whatever she did, whatever anyone said, it 'ud be the same—nothing could touch her.”

He turned and confronted Philip Rorke, his brilliant eyes very wide open. “Look here, I suppose you'll take my word for it?” he said, daring him to doubt him.

Odd that this should have hurt Henrietta more than all else put together. But there it was! When her father came back and told her what had passed—having taken his drubbing like a man, and thankful for it—that denial which had struck him as so right and proper, if not altogether convincing, seemed to Henrietta like a betrayal; filling her with a sense of terror, of being absolutely at sea, justifying the condemnation of the world—never altogether spoken, and that was the worst of it—for if Shaen himself found the thing too altogether bad for any acknowledgment, what, indeed, had she done?

Mr. Rorke cabled to Lord Taghmony; then, as there was no satisfactory reply, went out and saw him, and in two months the whole thing was settled, linked up in much the same way as that immortal tale of the pig that wouldn't get over the stile: “Fire, fire, burn wood—wood, wood, beat dog . . .” Henrietta's father impoverishing himself for the dowry, accepted on condition that Lady Taghmony was induced to return to her husband, who found life—every sort of life—tasteless without her: she herself consenting to return on condition that her son returned with her: Shaen making his own con-

dition of marriage with Henrietta: Henrietta herself . . .

Ah, there the sequence ended, for Henrietta made no terms whatever, set no special price upon herself, was married off as though in a sort of dream, mazed by the incongruity of everything. In the whole of this there was the one good point that Shaen found himself obliged to woo her afresh: while it was only at the very end of the short honeymoon in Cornwall that she really melted to him; overcame that sense of shame which had been driven in upon her.

“If a thing’s dreadful and shameful at one time, I can’t see that the space of a few months, any sort of ceremony, could alter it. It isn’t as though I loved you more. I couldn’t love you more than I did then. It all seemed so right, so natural that it must be right—I can’t understand.”

“I didn’t say it wasn’t all right.”

She was silent, for it seemed impossible to tax him with his denial. He had meant to do what was right by his denial—she realised this; that in some strange fashion it was a man’s way, a man’s code; her father’s attitude told her that much. But still, why—why . . .

“You don’t love me as much as you did. You don’t love me at all—you’ve stopped loving me!” Shaen challenged her, overcome by one of his sudden panics. “Hal, look here, look at me.”

It was in their sitting-room at their hotel, all plush and mediocre prints; an atmosphere of

frowstiness, because the salt-laden air, blowing in from the sea, a stone's throw away, dimmed its varnish and flattened down the plush, so that whenever the room was empty the hotel servants slipped in and shut the windows to save themselves trouble.

They were shut now, for the bride and bridegroom had just come up from tea in the lounge and omitted to open them. Shaen was in a mood for making love to Henrietta and she was stiffening against him. She did not mean to, did not realise that she did so; but still it was there, an outcome of that feeling of tightening, of holding back, wincing away, as though the things people said had chafed her sore, body and soul.

“You don't love me.”

“I do—I do—” She spoke the truth: she did love him, but in some queer way her love hurt her.

“If you love me, why are you so different to me?”

“I can't help it. I want to be the same, I want to—I am really—but everything seems different. I used to feel sure.”

“Sure of what?”

“That as long as we loved each other—everything was right. But now—” She spoke slowly, with difficulty. Then, quite suddenly, the words came in a short, illuminating rush: “It's all like writing between narrow lines, one has to go carefully—be thinking all the time.”

“How do you mean—us? Us being married?”

“Yes and—and—oh, life.”

“Our life together, do you mean?”

“I don’t know—I don’t know what I mean—what I feel—what’s right to feel, not—not—sort of shameful.”

“Everything’s right now,” said Shaen clumsily, with queer masculine self-righteousness, and she flushed, the colour flooding up into her face and down her neck.

There was a moment’s awkward pause between them. They seemed farther apart than ever.

Shaen was walking restlessly up and down the room. He flung open the window and leant out.

“It’s beastly stuffy in here . . . Oh, I say, let’s get out of this!”

The wind was blowing in heavy, distinctly separated booms, moist and mild. It billowed back the curtains and ran round the room, gambolling like some immense, soft-limbed puppy. The sea was like an echo in the wind—boom—boom—on the rocks below them.

They were in the new, genteel part of the town. The old town straggled out in a long semi-circle; the end twitched up into a rock-girt promontory, running out sharply into the sea, the better part of a mile away. There were lights along the water’s edge—on the steep hill at the back of the climbing town—not altogether steady, slurred by and winking at the wind: swaying lights on the boats in the harbour. Apart from this, the fringes and flecks of white foam, the whole of the outside world, was

shown in velvety, greenish black, like the darker shade of a yew-tree bark.

“For the Lord’s sake let’s get out of this,” he repeated.

Henrietta fetched a close fur cap and long, rough brown cloak from the next room, and they went out together.

The hall porter glanced curiously at Shaen, without hat or overcoat: “It’s raining, sir.”

“What the devil’s that got to do with you?” Shaen, thoughtless and inconsiderate as he might be, had, in general a charming manner with his inferiors, so that there was nothing that servants would not do for him. Even now, looking after the young couple, the porter in his own mind blamed Henrietta.

“Nags ’im, like enough. It’s them as are the naggers, them quiet ones; an’ ’im so young an’ open-handed when he first comed. Oh, well—when a man marries . . . eh, my dear?” He turned to a passing housemaid, smiling victoriously.

The two young people walked quickly, a little apart from each other, down the smooth wide road, with its sea-wall, its abrupt ending in the narrow, cobble-stoned streets of the old town.

The streets, with their small, bowing-forward shops—obsequious as tradesmen—were crowded, for it was Saturday night. Women with perambulators and baskets, young couples and hawkers, were as thick upon the road as the footpath. When a cart

appeared in sight, grinding and rattling over the stones, they were pushed back into a solid wall upon either side.

To escape this, Shaen and his wife turned into a street so narrow that you could touch the wall with your hands at either side; with steep steps back and up into the blackness of the houses, tall and ancient, and narrow cuts between them, one side running along the water's edge showing the white fringe of the sea. The rough pavement was greasy with damp, there were hardly any lamps, and Shaen clutched his wife's arm to keep her from slipping.

Once past the fine old church they came out on to a flattish sea-front, the strip of sand thick with small boats, larger boats and schooners riding at anchor in the bay.

They passed this and, taking a dog's-leg turn, reached the rock-fringed promontory and pushed their way up the hill, which rose sharply and dropped again to the sea.

They moved carefully, for here was a smooth stretch of grass where the fishermen laid out their nets to dry. Now and then they caught the sharp dracking sound of clothes hung on the lines, teased by the wind; while always, above all and through all, came that double boom of sea and wind, deepening as they climbed, blending to a roar as they stood above the immense jagged rocks at the sea side of the promontory.

There were ruins of an ancient chapel up here; the War Office had had it pulled down, started to

re-build it and then forgotten it, like a child playing with bricks.

On the very edge of the fall to the sea, stood a bench. Shaen and Henrietta moved towards it; they were tired with the long climb and thought they would be glad to sit down.

But it seemed that the wind, coming from all directions at once, forced them to stand upright; in some sort of way play the game—its game. It tore open Henrietta's cloak and enwrapped it scarf-like round Shaen's neck, so that they were forced to laugh; it was as though it said: "No manner of use trying to stand on your dignity with me"—ripping the little cap which had seemed so "tight set" clear off her head, whisking it away with a whoop of triumph.

The noise was terrific: the air stinging with salt. They clung together, laughing louder and louder, as though in emulation of the wind and waves. It was impossible to sulk or brood up there. A sense of immense cleanliness swept through and through them, so that they felt like large open rooms, with all the accumulation of rubbish—fears, regrets, and questionings—whisked out of the windows: emptied of all apart from the echo of their own healthy and youthful laughter.

The lights of the little town, back and below them, danced in the eddies of the wind; for those other lights in the bay leapt, sank, and leapt again, as though at something which they could not reach.

Boom—boom—boom!—it seemed as though the

wind and sea were laughing with them, an immense jovial laugh which cleared the lungs of the world, rid it of its phlegm.

Everything was too altogether jovial, hearty for passion. The faces of the young couple drew together, but a wisp of Henrietta's hair slashed in between them, whipped across Shaen's lips. Their clothes were blown up so that it seemed as though they were all heaped about their shoulders, leaving their legs bare.

"We'll be stripped if we stay here," shouted Shaen; and clinging together they turned, dipped to the landward slope.

In one moment, sheltered by the sharp crest of the hill, peace enfolded them: wrapped them round, patted them down like a nurse with her charges.

They reached the town, threading the narrow bye-ways which fringed the sea. Wherever there was an open space and a low wall they leant over it, with the spray beating up in their faces. Every now and then they were almost caught by an extra big wave; as it was, the upper part of their clothing was wet through and through.

They held hands and ran up the last short lap of road to the hotel. It was already dinner-time, and they hurried through their dressing, chattering to each other through the open door between their respective rooms. When they entered the dining-room their eyes were still shining. Shaen's head was held high: he had a fine colour in his cheeks; Henrietta's face was flushed. The rest of the guests

glanced up at them, with the vacuous expression of people who are absorbed in the one event of the day; then their faces brightened a little, and they wondered that they had never realized how very young and altogether remarkable these two were: so young that they sighed, feeling themselves hung round with cobwebs of years.

PART III

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was Henrietta's nineteenth birthday. She and her husband were staying in a hotel in Curzon Street; they had arrived back from the West Indies close upon a month before, and had not really unpacked because it was supposed that they would only remain a few days in London, then go over to Ireland.

They had all crossed together with a mountain of luggage, for Lord Taghmony had thrown up his appointment. In addition to her own baggage, Henrietta had a good many of her mother-in-law's belongings stacked in her room; for immediately upon arrival Lady Taghmony had decided that she must, absolutely must, run over to Paris for a couple of days to get something fit to wear, and asked Henrietta to keep an eye upon "just two or three things." "It's no use storing them for a couple of days, and no use keeping on a room, for I shall be going up to Scotland directly I get back," was what she said.

She had whisked her eldest daughter away with her. Honora's husband, who was in the Guards and stationed at the Tower, very dull and sorry for

himself, came to Henrietta with his grievances: as the whole family had got into the habit of doing. “She said two days, and she’s been away over three weeks, jolly near a month, and there’s no one to do anything with; everyone’s out of town and it’s damned dull. Nora does nothing but write for money. I don’t see why she should have all the fun with me mouldering here, eh what, Hal?”

“I daresay she’ll be back in a day or two now.”

“All very well; but it’s gone on too long. Look here, Hal, I don’t grudge her a bit of pleasure, but when she’s here there’s someone for me to go and dine with. Our flat’s really rather jolly when Nora’s at home, she always has some cheery soul or other to amuse a chap.” He didn’t want Henrietta to think he was that sort of silly ass who wanted to keep his wife everlastingly to himself. “Now—oh, it’s rotten! An’ after all, what does she want to stay in Paris all this time for? It’s all tommy rot about clothes, they couldn’t take all that time getting clothes; and between you and me an’ the wall, I don’t think my reverend mother-in-law’s an over good companion for Nora. When a woman of that age takes to gadding it’s some gad, and no mistake about it.”

“She’s a dear really, and anyhow, you know Honora’s devoted to you.”

“A queer way to show her devotion, leaving me alone in this stinking place. Look here, I sometimes wonder—’pon my soul I do—if women ever care for anyone but themselves. The Lord knows

there's nothing on earth I wouldn't do for Nora; and yet, look at the chaps who die, an' then their wives marry again pretty well before they've time to get cold in their graves. You're different, of course, but you—oh, well, it beats me!"

"What beats you?"

"Oh, well—the queerness of everything," he mumbled, flushing uncomfortably. His own wife was adorable with her soft Irish ways; but Henrietta was one of the most beautiful and wonderful creatures. He didn't know how to express it, but, "sort o' girl that makes a man feel a worm an' all that sorter thing. Frightfully clever, but never rubs it into you, don't you know," was the nearest he could have got to it; while Shaen . . . Oh, well, decent enough fellow, Shaen, awfully popular among men and all that; but . . . oh, well, too damned fond of fooling about among the petticoats. It wasn't playin' the game, 'pon his soul it wasn't, thought Captain Horsford, as virtuous as all men in love are: even an illicit love carrying its own sense of virtue, because everything about it is always so different to any other illicit love.

"Hang it all, there'd be a pretty kick-up if Nora came back and found me playin' about with anyone else."

"Bobbie, you oughtn't to say that; as if you thought she was—was—oh, well, playing about!" How many times Henrietta had heard that phrase during the last two years, and how much it covered! Generally speaking men were said to "play about,"

“shake a loose leg,” while women “kicked up their heels.”

There was never any expressed reason against this, providing that people were cheery and open over it, did not let themselves go, become dowdy or lackadaisical. Henrietta herself stood upon no high moral ground, and was too young, too puzzled over life, to fix upon any special rules for the game; what hurt her, almost personally, as it seemed, was the entire lack of loyalty; the belittling of all human affections and relationships.

Bobbie Horsford, a tall, heavily-built young man of purely Saxon type, was seated cross-legged upon a chair in her bedroom. The door was wide open, so it did not greatly matter; while there was something about young Lady Shaen which—to the practised eyes of the hotel staff—raised her above all suspicion, the possibility of any sort of familiarity. And this was fortunate, for Shaen was continually sending their relations and mutual friends, even his own special chums, up to see his wife in much the same way, and for much the same reason, as his father, who had been used to saying to his A.D.C.'s: “Look here, I count upon you fellows to amuse her Excellency.”

As a matter of fact he had been bustling out in a great hurry that afternoon, looking very smart and well groomed, when he met his brother-in-law upon the hotel steps.

“Very sorry, got to meet a fellow; can't wait, late as it is,” he had said, then added, parrot-like:

“Run upstairs and see Hal, there’s a good chap!”

Horsford had found Henrietta “upstairs,” as usual when she was not out of doors, for she hated public rooms, which she declared gave her the same sort of feeling as a photographic studio, and read and wrote a great deal in her own room. They had not troubled to take a private sitting-room, for the same reason that they had not properly unpacked; continually upon the point of going over to Ireland as they were, it did not seem worth it.

Lady Taghmony had asked her son and daughter-in-law to join her in Paris.

“She must be mad,” said Shaen, “when she knows that we’re just off for Ireland.”

He himself was away for several days, “You know that chap Merton who was at Eton with me—used to come over to Clonross? He’s married now and lives near Hereford, and I’ve always sworn to go and see him directly I got back to England; awful bore though, just when we want to get off.” That’s what he had said, then added: “No good dragging you down there, old girl; you’ll be wanting to get your kit ready for Ireland.”

He had been rather more affectionate than usual the morning he left; taken her out shopping and bought her a fine platinum chain for her neck, with what they called “bobbles” at either end of it—pearls set like acorns in a tiny cup of diamonds.

“It’s only people like you can wear simple things o’ that sort. After all, you beat every other woman

I know into a cocked hat for style an' breedin' an' all that," he had said, and meant it too.

Then, going back to the hotel for lunch and to collect his baggage, he had been freshly amused at the extreme deference with which the hotel people treated his young wife, her own cool, gentle dignity, and said one of those unforgivable things to which some impish humour, or sheer insensitive stupidity, impelled him:

"Lord, Hal! It sometimes comes over me to wonder what they'd all say—those kow-towing fools—the people at the drawing-room the other night—Horsford an' his lot, looking on you as a sorter saint out o' heaven; if they knew o' that night up on the Slieve Myshall. . . . Remember that, eh, old thing?"

He nudged her and laughed: then as he realized the sudden whitening and stiffening of her face, he laughed again, pinching her arm:

"My dear kid, do you think I'm likely to tell anyone a thing like that! Rather not! Our little secret, eh, between us two, eh?"

And yet he was not altogether unsubtle. In a queer, rather animal way there was a sort of naïve cunning in this allusion to the past. It helped him to remind himself of what he chose to think of as "Hal giving herself away"; made it easier to get rid of that uncomfortable feeling of being a beast in doing those things which it pleased him to do.

It also pleased him to pretend to himself to suspect her when he could remember it: "Once a

woman's let herself go" sort of thing; though Heaven only knows what desperate straits he would have been put to by any real reason for suspicion. As it was, he could afford to pretend because he was so sure of her, loved her better than he could ever love anyone else, counted upon her in everything—oh, immensely.

Even on this occasion of going off to see "the chap who lives near Hereford" he had held her in his arms, kissed her very tenderly, saying good-bye to her in her room after lunch.

"You're too pale by half, Hal. It's this beastly London. Never mind, we'll get away to Ireland directly I come back," he had said, with no hint of self-reproach for his share in her whitened face and lips, that strained look which always more or less annoyed him.

"After all, if she did kick up her heels a bit before we were married, that's my look-out; no use making herself miserable about it now it's all over and done with," he thought; and took himself off, aggrieved by the coldness of her good-bye kiss. "If I said anything, it was only in joke; why can't she take a joke like any other woman?"

It was scarcely an hour before his return that Henrietta received a complaining letter from her mother-in-law. "I don't think it was very kind of you not to let me know that Ronny was coming over to Paris. As it was, I only caught the merest glimpse of him in the Rue de l'Opéra. We were driving, and I could not stop the chaffeur in time.

He was coming away from the direction of our hotel and I expect we just missed him. Of course he did not leave a card, and one can't expect him to write. Men do so hate to feel tied; but I do think you might have sent me a line. I would have stayed in all day rather than miss him."

Henrietta had not questioned her husband. It was like him to take any sort of risk, such as going to Paris, with every chance of running against his mother, if it pleased him to do so. There was never any question of prudence. If he wanted anything, he made a bee-line for it; would have it in his own way and at his own time. But, again, Lady Taghmony, who was very impulsive and continually thinking of her son, might have fancied she caught sight of him among a crowd.

How well Henrietta knew the whole process! It would be: "Oh, look! There is a man so like Ronny," in a shrill, excited voice. Then a little later, "I saw a man so like Ronny." Then: "*We* saw a man so like Ronny"—dragging Honora into it. And so on until: "It must have been Ronny." "I am sure it was Ronny, so is Honora." Finally: "We saw that naughty son of mine in the Rue de l'Opéra. Fancy him never letting us know he was over in France! I daresay he told his wife to write and she forgot; such a dear girl, but so dreadfully jealous of me!"

That was Lady Taghmony's way, and she might have been right, but again she might not.

In any case, Shaen's description of his Hereford

trip was strangely vague and involved. As so often before, Henrietta did not dare to question him: frightened not of him, but of the truth—Henrietta, who had always loved the truth, taken it so entirely for granted—or perhaps even more than the truth, however hard, evasions, lies.

All that had been ten days earlier, and they were still in London. When he first came back Shaen had almost overwhelmed his wife with his attentions. He was like a child, ingratiating, continually watching her, trying to find out how much she knew. Then, apparently relieved of anxiety, he dropped away again. Anyhow, she was always there. He loved her, and she knew that.

There was never any man with so many engagements: “You must hunt up your own pals, old thing. Husbands and wives are not everlastingly in each other’s pockets in these days.”

That was what he said, regardless of the fact that Henrietta had been married before she was properly “out”; had never had time to make any friends; never been to school; was whisked away to the West Indies on the very top of her honeymoon.

He was going to dine with some of his old regimental friends—for he had sent in his papers just before they came home—on the evening of that day when Bobby Horsford sat in her room, “getting the whole bally lot off his chest,” as he had called it.

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They went down to tea in the lounge, and Bobby lingered on talking; it was seldom he found such a

listener. By the time he rose to go, with an air of manifest unwillingness, it was already past six.

“It is awfully good of you letting me bore you all this time, and, by Jove, never looking bored—that is the wonder of it. But I am off the string to-day, and at a bit of a loose end. Upon my soul, there doesn’t seem a single soul one wants to see back in town yet. Well, I suppose I must be going. I will look in at my club and see if I can find some other forsaken ass to have a bit of dinner with, then toddle home to bed.”

“Ronny is dining out to-night—” began Henrietta rather shyly. She did not look upon herself as an amusing companion, but still, it might be better than nothing, “Supposing we were to—” He jumped at it, didn’t even give her time to finish her sentence.

“Hal! I say, you are a brick! After the way I have prosed on and on, boring you to tears. Where shall it be—Jules’? You always get something decent at Jules’. Cheery crowd, and all that sort of thing; and something in the way of a show after? What do you say? Would it bore you? A theatre is a bit of a nuisance; you have to hurry over your dinner for a theatre. What about a music-hall—something of that sort? But perhaps it would bore you too frightfully? All very well for an unintellectual Johnny like me, but I daresay you would like something a bit more highbrow? Anything on earth you like, you know. Jolly lucky

for me to have the chance of getting you to myself, and most frightfully good of you to take pity on me.”

He was extraordinarily simple and deferential bent upon her pleasure. It touched Henrietta, who was not used to being very greatly considered. Not very long ago she had come across that thrillingly cruel saying of Flaubert's, regarding the mistress of whom he was growing wearied: that she lived in the back parlour of his heart and only came out on Sundays—and it had touched her with a personal significance.

She put on her very best gown to please Horsford—it was like patting a nice dog—creamy lace, with a loose train from the shoulders, and gold shoes and stockings. With this she wore a little, light tiara of small diamonds, like a spray in her fluffy hair. She was rewarded for her trouble by his pleasure.

“My word, you are a brick to have made yourself look so pretty—not that you don't always look that—simply top-hole.”

He was very careful to see that she had everything she specially liked for dinner; and then began to speak about Honora. “She isn't what you call a beauty, you know, but there's something about her—don't you think there is something about her, eh, Hal?” Henrietta agreed that there certainly was something; with that thought of a kitten which always came to her upon any mention of Honora's name.

She liked hearing her companion talk of his wife; there was something nice and wholesome about it. She liked dining out; she had never been to Jules' before—had, indeed, been to so few places, knew so little of the ordinary round of a woman of her station—and liked that too. In addition to all this, there was a sense of being well dressed, delight in the admiring way in which people looked at her. She was very simple and so much a child that there was real kindness in their glances.

They went on to a music-hall together, Bobby taking as much care of her as though she had been a bit of precious Venetian glass. They were rather late, and the entertainment was not of a particularly high-class type, but they were both young enough to enjoy it. There was a comic—vulgar, but not offensive, and really funny—man: one of those inevitable tramps, who begin to undress and do not quite undress, finding themselves entangled in layer upon layer of quite ridiculous underclothing.

Horsford heard his companion laugh, an irrepressible chuckle of delight. She was sitting like a child, with her hands clasped together on her knees, leaning a little forward; her face flushed, her eyes bright with amusement. He had never seen her before her marriage, and he wondered now what had happened to make her look as she generally did—so grave, so altogether grown-up; so pale, and, somehow or other, “shouted down” by what he called “the O'Hara lot”—always excepting his wife. “Why, she is nothing but a kid!” he thought, and

was overcome by a sudden fierce resentment against Shaen. "To leave her alone, mewed up, as he does, when she can be like this—a real cheery soul." There was his greatest meed of praise, "a cheery soul."

"I really don't know what there is to laugh at," said Henrietta, her voice broken with laughter, "but it is funny. And I do like silly things, really silly things."

The comic tramp was followed by a mediocre ballet. Then came a trio of really good gymnasts. This strung her up to such a pitch of excitement that she had no words left. Horsford, glancing at her, wondering if she were bored, realized that she was quivering from head to foot; her face raised, her lips a little parted, following every movement of the woman and her two male companions, who were flying from trapeze to trapeze, high above the stage; moving with the swift, sure flight of flying foxes 'twixt tree and tree: catching, hanging for one moment and launching forth again.

Horsford felt her hand catch his arm, and wondered if she was frightened. "It is all right; nothing ever happens," he said, and patted the hand upon his sleeve. But Henrietta had no thought of danger. Something in her education had taught her to love perfection of form, the beauty of swift, sure movement, and something in herself responded to it with a feeling as though there were electric wires between herself and those swift, white forms cutting the air above her. When they moved, she

moved—sharp and taut with life, cutting the air as they cut it: her heart went in front of her, with them and apart from herself, ahead of her—dropping with a sudden rush as they swung from hand to hand, from trapeze to trapeze, in a looped chain to the stage.

The lights went up in the auditorium: there was a mingled burst of music and applause as they stood there bowing, the woman dropping her companions' hands for one moment to brush her handkerchief across her lips. They were all three panting, so that Henrietta's own chest seemed to be torn. She could see the muscles in their arms and legs sink slowly back to the normal as they answered shout after shout with their little fixed smile and short, jerky bow. It seemed as though they were creatures of the air caught down from their own element; as though they could not "work" properly there, on those hard, deal boards; as though something in the very contact of earth drew all virtue out of them.

There had been one moment when the woman had seemed to fall from the topmost trapeze; the man nearest below had made a feint of trying to catch her, swinging forward and just missing her, so that they passed in the air. The other man was far away. It seemed impossible that he should reach her, but he did; catching her by her heels, carrying her forward with him, so that the two, with a sweeping parabola, caught at the same trapeze, and hung perched upon it, bowing, smiling—the light, con-

fident smile of the youth of the world; so different to that fixed, wooden demeanour, that slight dumpiness which seemed to overtake them with their descent to earth.

Horsford had taken one of the small boxes, and at that moment of intense strain, when even the most hardened theatre-goers caught their breath and ceased their trickle of talk, Henrietta had risen to her feet. She was still standing when the light went up. Her heart was back in her own body; her glance rested for one moment upon the performers, brooding and full of pity, then turned away because it seemed a shame to look at them so fallen, so changed—their feet in their soft, flat shoes, odd and stumpy like a kestrel's claws curved upon irresponsible earth—and swept the opposite boxes, into one of which a couple had entered just at that very moment the lights went up.

It was Horsford who saw them first. "By Gad, that fellow Shaen!" He repeated the phrase to himself, embellished with *the* adjective of the East End—sick with apprehension for Henrietta. "And a woman like that—all over her too!" he thought; for Shaen was so low in his chair that he was almost lying—the family had a phrase for this, "Ronny sitting back on his tail"—while their shoulders touched. Horsford felt sure that his arm was round the back of his companion's waist in the shadow of the curtain.

How much would Henrietta notice? Had she seen them? Hoping to God that she had missed

that special box, he plunged in to divert her attention.

“I say, what about coffee, or something of that sort? Or perhaps you have had enough of it? Nothing much coming on now.”

Even before he had finished speaking he realized that he was too late. The recognition was simultaneous, immediate. With a queer, sulky air, Shaen drew himself a little more upright, apart from his companion. Henrietta had her back to Horsford, but he could see from the curve of her cheek, the motion of her head, that she bowed and smiled; upon which Shaen rose more upright and jerked a bow, with the half-shamed, half-proud grin of a schoolboy caught out in some delinquency.

The woman at his side, glancing up, spoke to him, and Horsford saw that he answered without looking at her.

“Yes, I think, if you don’t mind, we will go now. We have seen the best of it.” Henrietta had turned, and was touching his arm.

The whole thing had happened in a moment, there was hardly a pause between his question and her answer. Her face was paler, as her companion helped her into her cloak she moved a little more slowly—heavily, as though conscious of a sudden sense of fatigue, but that was all.

She spoke very little as they drove home to her hotel. Horsford was accustomed to this; but with an odd sense of being puzzled, somehow or other out of his depth, he realised that her behaviour had

slipped back to the old Hal he had always known, meeting her for the first time just before she and her husband left for the West Indies—gentle and kind, but rather silent: the sort of woman to whom you found yourself telling all sorts of things that you would not think of telling to anyone else. Beautiful and wonderful—oh, of course, all that—and yet how pathetically different to the girl who, less than an hour before, had laughed so heartily over the vagaries of the not-very-comic man.

She thanked him prettily when he parted from her in the vestibule of her hotel.

“I have enjoyed it so much. It has been so gay,” she said, smiling; and yet with something dimmed in her glance as though a curtain had been rung down between herself and the girlish gaiety of an hour earlier; as though she, like the gymnasts, had dropped to her feet.

Bobby Horsford was no sort of a hand at phrase-making, and yet, turning down into Piccadilly and through Shepherd’s Market—with the idea of walking it off, footing it the whole way to the Tower—an idea came to him: “By Gad, it was like one open day in a close season!”

CHAPTER XV

IT was after one o'clock when Shaen came in and began tip-toeing about his dressing-room, as though in hopes that his wife was asleep.

Henrietta could guess the reason that he gave to himself, or others, for his late return—"Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb" sort of thing. She could almost hear him say it, with a laugh—as indeed, he had done—and it was dreadful to know any human being as well as this—most dreadful of all if you loved him.

She turned on the light and called to him.

"Hello! Still awake?" He pushed open the dividing door and came into her room in his shirt and trousers.

"Pretty well time that little girls were asleep, isn't it?" he added, moving over to her dressing-table. Whistling softly, he began to examine his own face in her mirror with an air of great nonchalance. "This confounded east wind cuts one's skin like the deuce, coming out of a hot room, and all that. Have you got any of your cream stuff here?"

"In a little white pot, to the left there, by my hair-brushes."

Henrietta was lying on one side, raised upon her

elbow. Shaen could see the reflection of her face in the mirror, but not its expression, shaded as it was by her loose hair.

She did not speak, and, as usual, he grew uneasy under her silence.

“Had a good time, eh? I saw you with Bobby.”

“Yes.” She was wondering what to say. Living with such an intensely reserved man as her father, she had grown to control her feelings so that it was almost beyond her power to express them. For Rorke had a horror of anything in the way of a scene, a horror which was not the outcome of coldness, though that was what it seemed; rather a deep-seated sensitiveness which made him feel personally shamed by any display of emotion; as though some lunatic had torn off his clothes in a public place. As to rows—“The sort of person who makes rows . . .” with the faint lift of the lip and nostril: there was nothing worse that Philip Rorke could say of anyone.

Never once throughout their two years of married life had there been any word of reproach, any sort of bringing to book by Henrietta. If Shaen defended himself, as he did by his very bravado, it was not against her accusations. And yet, before the end of the first six months of married life, he had launched out into a series of extravagant flirtations and adorations. He was like a monkey in a woodland of flowering, creeper-clad trees, flinging himself rapturously from one to another. There was no question of being unobserved, for observation

was what he courted: wearing each one of his fancies by turn, like a feather in his cap.

Apart from the fact that he neglected his wife in these pursuits, captures, retreats—flingings away, rather—they were at first too flamboyant to be taken very seriously; on the whole, more discriminating, because less coarse and more fastidious, than those of his father; for though the two of them ran among the beauties of the island like Samson's foxes among the corn of the Philistines, Shaen had stuck, on the whole, to his own class.

The place was small and there was a blaze of talk; it could not well be otherwise. But while people looked askance at Lord Taghmony, tightening their lips, shrugging their shoulders, giving him up, they were amused by Shaen; for here his candour and recklessness, the very extravagance of his adorations, his good looks, his charm and, above all, his youth—his wonderful youth—all helped him, as the very same qualities had once helped his father; so that they watched his progress like that of a comet—with interest, amazement, a sort of delight; while any young woman of his own set, with any pretence of charm, would have felt herself a failure had she not held his fancy for one afternoon at least. He kissed as the bee sips. “Is Lord Shaen”—or, even more tolerantly, “that dreadful boy”—“ever alone with a woman for ten minutes without kissing her?” They asked each other that and laughed: the elder men with jealousy and longing, and yet with a sort of tenderness.

Towards the end, however, the aspect clouded. There were things that he did not do openly, give them a chance to laugh at. A sort of furtiveness crept into his expression. He had been seen where he did not want to be seen; he no longer “showed off”—the feather was out of his cap, hidden beneath his cloak. There were times when he—it is an ugly word, but there is no other for it—“slunk” about his own special business.

How far things went nobody knew. He no longer made love openly, kept to his own set, or—to put it baldly—shade. But whatever had happened—and likely enough it was no very special interlude but a sort of continuous sliding in the wrong direction—he was very glad to leave the place; picked up the first chance of a board-ship flirtation with the glad alacrity of a man who changes a shirt overlong in wear.

The dark cloud lifted the very day they sailed; or so it seemed to Henrietta, full of new hope—that eternal mirage of a fresh start. The moods and tempers which had made him intolerable for the last few months were at an end. Flirtations were nothing. It would have been impossible to live with the O’Haras and keep any sort of faith in the entire constancy of one man to one woman, and there was something pathetic in the way in which Henrietta had come to accept this, her relief over the fact that the thing was once more open and above-board; for with anyone who talked so much as Shaen there is nothing more ominous than a sudden brooding re-

serve, a fear of any sort of questioning, flaming out in aggression and attempts at forced quarrels. And then, on the top of all this, that “tread on the tail of my coat” attitude of your typical Irishman, always most self-righteous when he knows himself to be in the wrong.

On this special night in their London hotel he leant forward to his wife’s mirror, smearing the cream on his face.

“It’s the hot sun and wind and then all this beastly grit on the top of it; plays the deuce with my skin; hurts like the very blazes when I shave.”

His head was a little bent, his brilliant eyes furtive, like a wild ingratiating animal. He moved his head from one side to the other, as though to get the light on the glass; watching his wife, wishing that she would look up, speak. “What the devil is she thinking of?” he thought angrily; then, unable to bear the silence, he launched out upon an attack of his own—swinging round, staring hard—daring her to condemn him.

“If you have nothin’ to say, what did you call me in here for, eh? I’m damned tired; I want to finish undressing an get to bed. If you’ve got anything to say I suppose it can wait till the mornin’, eh?” His voice rose sharply upon the last word.

“I have got something to say.”

“Why can’t you say it out then, an’ have done with it?”

He moved to the foot of the bed and stood there, staring at her, his face flushed with something apart

from fresh air—for he had had supper after the performance, and more than enough to drink—thinking all the while, and angrily enough, that Hal “drove” him into things.

“Come to that, I’ve got something to say to you, too.” He pushed forward the complaint which had come into his head for the first time that moment.

“Look here, I don’t care to have you knockin’ about with that chap Horsford while my sister’s away. I don’t like it, do you hear? If you want to go to a show why don’t you tell me, and not go dashin’ off with another man. Honora wouldn’t like it, an’ I don’t like it either, hanged if I do! He was sneaking in when I went out this afternoon. Came up here, I s’pose—sitting in your pocket all the evening. I don’t choose to have my wife talked about, an’ I won’t have it. D’you hear? I won’t have it.”

He spoke loudly, working himself up like a naughty child. Half-way through his speech he had realised that Henrietta’s eyes were upon him, and this made him uncomfortable, for he could not bear to feel that she was judging him; would have given anything to have put her out of temper, in the wrong.

“If you want to carry on with anyone, you might at least have the good taste to choose someone apart from my own brother-in-law.”

“Ronny, why do you tell me lies?” She spoke very quietly, and he realized with a sudden sense of ridiculous futility that she had scarcely heard

what he had said, was not to be drawn by any of this talk of Horsford. Once more he tried to fix her, but it was no use, his gaze shifted.

“Tell you lies? What the devil do you mean?”

“To-night—”

“That’s good! By God, that’s good! What about you, eh?” He tried to bluster, shouting, heading her off. “What about you an’ that ass Horsford? What about you two sneaking off together?”

“There was no sneaking about that, and you know it.” Henrietta’s voice was cold: quiet as she was, she could not, would not, endure injustice, even from Shaen. “I was alone and he asked me to dine and go to a show with him. As for receiving him in my room, you yourself met him on the steps and told him to come up here, you know you did.”

“Oh, I did, did I? Who told you that?”

“Bobby.”

“Oh, and so you take his word against mine?”

She made no sort of answer to this, and it seemed as though he had triumphed in this matter of Horsford, drawing her on to speak of him; almost excusing herself. Yet he was not sure. These silences of hers bogged him. He sheered off again.

“Well, I’ve had my say, and now for yours” After all, he would have it out, hanged if he wouldn’t.

“You told me you were dining with some of your old fellow-officers, going on to the theatre with them; that you had a box together.”

“Well, and how d’you know I didn’t dine with them?”

“I don’t think you did.”

“Well, if I didn’t, it’s no business of yours. Look here, Hal, if that’s all you’ve got to say, let me tell you once for all, I’m not goin’ to be catechised, dictated to by you, or by anybody else either.”

“Ronny, you must not lie to me. You mustn’t.” She made the appeal desperately. “I don’t ask you questions about what you have been doing. I may not seem to mind, though I do mind—frightfully. It is like being skinned alive to hear people talk about you, as they do talk about you.”

“Oh, that! They will talk anyhow, fast enough.”

“But don’t you see? Don’t you see how it hurts me?”

Her lips tightened with pain. It did hurt her horribly, had hurt her all this while. Somehow or other it was like being pushed away with old winter clothes no longer needed; all her niceness, fineness, crumpled and soiled; like being jammed into a drawer anyhow—trapped—giving her a strange frowsty feeling as of something degraded and useless; sapping her self-confidence, always so slight.

It was not so much what she had seen on this particular night, or that affair in Paris, which had driven her to speak; rather the fact that the pain, cumulative as it was, had reached a point past all bearing.

“It can’t go on; I can’t bear it any longer.”

“You seem to have borne it—whatever you imagine you have to bear—pretty well so far, to look at you.”

Shaen spoke insolently, but for all that he was uneasy. Hang it all, he didn't want to be a beast to Hal, but she drove him to it. Queer how he cherished that idea. A perverted sense of shame overruled him, as it does all intensely vain people, and it is this which makes them so hopeless. If they are ashamed, they are ashamed of the wrong things. Men more than women, for a woman's vanity is for the most part connected with personal appearance. Shaen's shame lay now in *feeling* ashamed—mean. What was it his companion of that evening had said to him upon parting? “Poor Ronny! Looks as if you were in for a wiggling. A will of her own, that lady—more than you have, my dear.”

“All tommy rot about bearing or not bearing—all this giddy martyr business.”

“All the same, there are things that I will not bear.” Henrietta had raised herself upright in bed. She was hardening, as all very gentle people will harden, quite suddenly, to anyone who tries them too much. If only she did not care for him the way she did, even then, standing there flushed, handsome, sullen, so very much of the spoilt boy—far more her child than her husband. But for this moment the caring stiffened her, giving her something more to fight against.

“When you spoke the truth it was difficult

enough, but now . . . Oh, it's impossible! You lied to me when you said you were going to Hereford and went to Paris, and I can't think . . . Look here, Ronny"—she spoke almost as if she were the guilty one—"I don't think that you went alone? If you did, why should you not have told me, gone to see your mother?"

"How do you know I went to Paris?"

"I know."

"Madame 'Know-all,' eh?" Underneath the sneer was a sense of profound discomfort which exasperated him.

"You lied to me when you said you were going to spend the evening with your friends. I told Bobby that, and what did he think? That I lied too? I can't even defend you, support you; I am helpless."

"What the devil has it got to do with you how I spend my evenings? As for that ass Bobby—"

"Ronny, Ronny, can't you see what it means?" Her voice broke, her anger and resentment overcome by a sense of anguish. "It isn't so much what you do, but the other thing. If I can't believe you, don't know when you are telling the truth, it is almost hopeless; there is nothing to hold on to. We might as well live in different worlds. And it used not to be like that. You did all sorts of things that hurt me, but you laughed and joked about them; you never used to lie. Now you don't even wait for me to question you. You lie—just lie, as

if . . . oh, as if it were a sort of game to lie to a wife.”

“Look here—stop that!” Shaen was working himself up. The blood surged into his face. “I am not goin’ to be called a liar by you or anybody else. All this row because I took another woman to the theatre. What about you, eh? What about you?”

His voice rose to that shrill, excited note which broke the Irish softness whenever he was angry or on the defensive. “Anyhow, I don’t choose my own sister-in-law to play about with.”

“You choose the most notorious woman in the whole of London.” Henrietta’s tone was icy.

“What do you mean?”

“Ronny, do you really imagine that I have never heard of her? That I have not seen her photographs in all the papers? That I should not have recognised her even if I hadn’t heard the people in the next box speaking of her?”

“Well, what about her? Out with it!”

He moved over to the side of his wife’s bed and flung out one hand with a dramatic gesture, palm uppermost; quite suddenly he was past caring for anything. His nurses while he was still in petticoats knew this stage; his teachers, his tutors. “Goes clean off his head; no doing anything with him once he lets himself go.” That was what they said—what all this working up led to. And yet it was not altogether a letting of himself go; more, it

was the deliberate making for a point where he didn't care a damn for anything or anybody, reaching it with a sense of triumph, the wild security of one who has scaled a height.

It didn't matter how Henrietta looked at him, thought of him, now, how he hurt her. All his love, real enough in its way, was wiped out of him; he was unhampered. If she chose to get in his path, she must expect to be hurt. What business had she interfering with him, dictating to him upon the course he chose to take with his pleasures? Champagne, and then whisky, and on the top of that a sort of blind rage against this slim, cold woman with those condemning eyes, filled his head. He put one finger in the top of his collar and dragged at it. He couldn't see her very plainly, his sight seemed blurred, but he knew what she looked like, a jolly sight too well.

“You abuse me and then you start off and abuse my friends. I won't have it, do you hear? I won't have it! You can keep your tongue off Miss Cristal. She is as good a woman as you are, anyway—come to that, a damned sight better!”

If Hal had spoken then it might have stopped him, but she could not. She was overwhelmed, swept down by the noise he made, his attitude, so threatening—and it is true he did threaten; he wanted to hurt her, would like to have taken her by the throat, shaken that fine, keen, quiet life out of her. What right had she, or any other woman either, to sit there looking so altogether superior?

Such airs! His rage surged through him in wave upon wave; his face was crimsoning, his eyes glassy.

“How dare you! How dare you, I say!”

As he leant forward it seemed as though his mad passion swept through her, like a hot wind, leaving her empty of thought, with a queer, dull sense of re-living something that had gone before. Henrietta found herself struggling against the same deadly faintness which had overcome her that far-away day in the Clonross schoolroom when Teddy had thrown a book at her brother, cutting open his forehead. By an effort of will she held herself upright; her shoulders raised, her whole figure stiffened by the fact that both hands were pressed palm downwards upon the mattress. In the same way as when one is losing consciousness under chloroform, they seemed all of life left to her; if she once ceased to feel them she would fall, lose herself, beaten under by her husband's passion.

When Shaen was altogether normal he was destitute of imagination. In moments of passion—love, anger, hate—he saw things clearly, almost poetically, in images, as he saw his wife now: so upright, slender, and unmovable in her white nightgown: so apparently cold, untouched: “Like an icicle—a confounded icicle!” he thought. And it was this, with her silence, that swept him on to the last insult.

“You! You to talk! I like that! Fay Cristal may not be up to your highbrow form; but, by Gad, my lady, she has one pull over you. She was married when she was sixteen. . . . Oh, well, I sup-

pose you were—but all the same, it was jolly different, for she knew *nothing*. I have her word for it. Do you hear that? Nothing. Get what that means, eh? Married a blackguard—everyone knows that—but innocent, as innocent as a babe unborn. And now you to talk! You of all people!”

“What do you mean?”

More than once there had been allusions, half jokes which hurt horribly; hurt because of the way in which they were degraded, dragging down their love, all that it meant to her. But nothing like this.

“Well, you . . . Talk of stones and glass houses!” He laughed, a harsh, forced laugh. “Let me tell you this: there isn’t one man in a hundred that would have married you after what happened—not if you had gone on your knees to him, you and your ramrod of a father.”

Her gaze was extraordinarily steady and penetrating. As he dropped a little from his giddy heights it appeared to reach him, pierced him.

“Pretty thick!”—he shouted it to help himself—“from a woman who passes the night with a man before she was married to him—so damnably easy, too. I daresay if the truth was known, those confounded priests you were so thick with—”

“Stop! Do you hear me? Stop!”

“Well, you shouldn’t start abusin’ other women—”

“That’s enough. You had better leave the room now.”

“I shall do as I jolly well please. Anyhow, you know how I feel about it. It strikes me I have been

pretty decent, all said and done—decenter than most of the fellows I know.”

His voice dropped sullenly; he was overcome with shame. Henrietta drew up her knees with a feeling of stiffness—as though she had been physically beaten—and dropped her feet to the floor, mechanically feeling about for her slippers.

“What the devil are you doing now?”

As she did not answer he caught at her arm. “You’ll damned well stay where you are. And jolly well remember this: you are my wife, and you’ll do—”

He broke off suddenly, scared, brought back to himself by something—God only knows what—in her face; his own memories, the feel of her smooth bare skin beneath his fingers—and dropped her arm.

“Get back to bed. I’m going.” He spoke hoarsely, as though his voice were broken with shouting; and something else with it, his blind, unreasoning fury spent, gone out of him.

He hesitated a moment and turned towards the door; then altered his course and moved over to the mantel-piece, draggingly, as though he, like Henrietta, were overcome by an almost unbearable fatigue, and stood there staring at the articles upon it—a vase, a couple of books and some photographs. There was one of himself that he had sent her while he was still at Sandhurst, taken in his cadet’s uniform.

He took this up, held it away from him and stared

at it as though he were long-sighted; then broke into a short laugh.

“Lord, what kids we were!”

Replacing it, he turned and looked at Henrietta in a dazed sort of way, as though he were only just realizing her presence; realizing himself, coming back, as it were.

“Both of us pretty green, eh?” A jolly sight too young. Why, you—”

He broke off and moved towards her.

“I say”; he spoke awkwardly, hesitating. “Why, it’s your birthday! I did remember, only—” He broke off again. “I—I—” He put his hand in his pocket and brought out a small packet; hesitated for a moment with his eyes upon her—like a dog that wants to wag his tail and make friends and dare not—then put it back again.

“You shouldn’t start naggin’ a fellow directly he comes in.”

Henrietta could not speak or move. She had thrust her feet into her slippers, but she could get no further, felt as though life had been drained out of her.

“You had better get back into bed. You’ll catch your death of cold sitting there.” Shaen spoke with a sort of awkwardness, wondering what it had all been about—a “knocked on the head sort o’ feeling,” as he himself would have described it. He moved a step nearer. “Why, you’re shivering!” And, indeed, she was shivering so that her teeth chattered, though not with physical cold.

As she did not stir or speak he put his arms round her—wondering if she would repulse him—and lifting her back into bed, covered her up, then glanced round with a sense of helplessness.

“You ought to have a hot-water bottle, or something hot to drink—somethin’ o’ that sort. Shall I ring for them to get you some tea?”

She shook her head, and again he hesitated; put out one hand, drew it back, and finally tiptoed from the room turning out the light as he left it.

He had an idea that he would not shut his eyes. “I will just lie down for a bit,” he thought. The moment his head touched the pillow, however, he was in a deep sleep; awaking soon after five with a sense of suffocation, almost as though he had been stifled: lying there for a moment struggling to remember something that had happened, something disagreeable. It came to him with the grey light through the open half of the window, the realization of the wall at one side of his narrow bed.

He was sleeping in his dressing-room: they had had a row, Henrietta and he. It was odd how when he was away from her, engrossed in other things, as in Paris, he almost forgot her; but when they were anywhere near each other, as now, he was acutely conscious of her. More conscious than ever, with that feeling of being wrenched in half, of that division unaccounted for by time or distance, which comes to young married people when they are so spiritually separated as to choose to sleep apart for the first time; a choice but little less significant than

their first singling out of one another as life partners.

The vague sense of something wrong with which he had first wakened was flooded in upon by the memory of what had occurred, the things he had said to his wife, and he was overcome by shame.

When he threw himself upon his bed he had been stunned by his own fury, as heavy as a man after some sort of seizure. His mind cleared now, preternaturally, as it will at dawn. He had the instincts of a gentleman, and yet when he was angry he said and did things of which it was impossible to believe that any gentleman could be guilty; was amazed at himself until such times as he argued them away or forgot them. In general, he was, in his own careless way, kind-hearted, would have hated to have seen anyone suffer; but then, again, there were times when all that he wanted was to hit out and hurt.

The old Nanny at Clonross had said that he was possessed of a devil; that was what it must be. With a sense of the utmost despair he thought of himself as doomed, fated; some day he would kill himself, or someone else. It was all beyond him. With this thought came that old overwhelming sense of panic. The grey dawn was horrible to him, so chill and indifferent. He was utterly alone in the world. No one cared for him enough to do anything for him; his mother's love took the form of for ever teasing him, but fraying him out like the ends of a piece of ribbon. That woman, Fay

Cristal, how greedy she was! And not a bit afraid of her greed, her passion—well able to keep a hold upon herself all the while. With him it was different; once set going he ran away with himself, trod down everyone in his path, and was sorry for it afterwards—half scared all the while.

There was no one on earth who was really of any use to him apart from Henrietta. That woman of the island—with her privet white skin and great dark eyes, showing greenish shadows underneath them, less pronounced around her nostrils and across her crimson upper lip—he had been mad about her. What a liar she was, doing it so well, carefully and coolly! When he lied it went to his head; he piled his fabric so high that it toppled over; and yet up to a year ago he had been altogether intolerant of liars as something outside the pale. It had not been because of Gabrielle's lying that he had been glad to leave the island, see the last of her. He liked a spice of the devil in a woman, or so he told himself; the real break had been over an ugly trick in eating, a sort of sucking-in of the teeth—he could not stand that.

There was so much that he could not stand. He liked women with hot, unrestrained passions, but in all such women were other crudities which he literally could not put up with. Fay had proved herself, so far, the best of them, as delicate as a cat in her ways. All the same, Fay had no business to speak of his wife as she had done.

Ah, he was sick of everything and everybody—most sick of himself, with the stale taste of too much liquor in his mouth.

If Hal turned him down, really turned him down, he was done for. He must go and make it up with her this minute. Of course she would forgive him; she always had done—forgiven and forgotten.

He jumped out of bed and moved towards the dividing door. Seeing that it was shut, and not remembering having shut it, he was once again panic-stricken, this time lest it should be locked—but no, it opened in his hand.

“Hal, are you awake?” He whispered the words, heard her answer “Yes,” and, turning on the light, entered the room.

She was lying on her side, apparently as he had left her; the clothes so undisturbed that it seemed impossible she should have stirred. Her face was paper white, her eyes dark with shadows.

He tiptoed over to her bed. Why, he could not have said, but there was something in the very atmosphere of the room which awed him.

Her hand was lying upon the outside of the coverlet. He hesitated a moment, then stooped his head, kissed it and tiptoed out of the room, turning out the light as he went, and threw himself upon his bed, shivering from head to foot.

When he woke again the sun was streaming into the room and everything seemed different. He jumped out of bed and went to his bath, was in it

almost before his brain had cleared itself from sleep. As he plunged about in the cold water a sort of memory returned to him. That row with Henrietta. . . . Oh, well, she shouldn't aggravate him as she did. He had been a bit nasty, but it was all over and done with now. A topping morning. Sunday, too. They would go to Tattersalls' and see what horses they had there.

He called out to his wife to ask her if she was getting up, and she answered that she was almost ready, so much as usual that he thought, "Oh, that's all over, anyhow."

When he had finished dressing he went in to her room and found her tidying over her dressing-table. She was wearing a white serge dress with bronze shoes and stockings; was as neat and well finished and cool-looking as ever—"Good old Hal!" Shaen remembered having a scene with the woman on the island, and how she had gone to pieces on the top of it—her hair disordered, her clothes all anyhow, looking as though they were ready to fall off her.

He put his hand lightly upon his wife's waist and kissed her cheek.

"Come along—I'm famished," he said; "and look here, old thing, I was thinking—" He was on the point of telling her about Tattersalls' when he realized something about her—it was impossible to say what; she did not draw herself away from him, had even smiled; but all the same, there was a

feeling as though a cold air passed between them, separating them, filling him with a sense of vague discomfort.

He caught her arm and pinched it in a hail-fellow-well-met sort of way. "Forget it, my dear, forget it," he said, with a sense of handsome apology, adding something to the effect that he had been a "bit on" the night before.

She did not go to Tattersalls' with him, had a fancy for the open air and a seat in the Park. When he protested that there would be nobody there at this time of the year she said that was what she liked. And yet it could not be sulks—he was sure of this—for she herself suggested that they should dun Aunt Gertie for lunch in Onslow Square, meeting him there at one-thirty.

He was quite certain of this, that she was not sulking, and yet throughout that day and the two and three following it he was not altogether comfortable. She was not sulking—she gave herself to him willingly enough; but all the same, there was something she held back, something that, so far as he was concerned, had gone out of her. She was perfectly sweet as ever, but in some way she had changed.

He was very careful of her, attentive to her. Lady Fair had put a new idea into his head, and he chose to cling to it, use it as the reason for that difference which disturbed him.

“My dear, I’m sure”—Aunt Gertie had laid her hand upon his arm, flushing, smiling and important —“darling Henrietta doesn’t look a bit like herself —and I know that look round the eyes, you know. I’m never mistaken about that sort of thing, though I never had any children myself; lookers-on . . . you know. Well, it does seem ridiculous, pathetic, I call it—you two things, little more than babies yourselves—but there you are! You must take very special care of her, Ronny dear, but of course I can trust you to do that. I never knew anyone so devoted.”

Shaen was delighted with the idea. He had thought a kid might be a nuisance, but now it fitted in, explained everything: women are always a bit queer when they are like that. By the time they left for Ireland, at the beginning of the week, he was so sure of the truth of Lady Fair’s prognostications that he had completely forgotten there had ever been anything like a row with Henrietta. And yet his first instinct was right: something had gone out of her.

The mortality of the spirit of love is contained in a fraction of the whole feeling. There is so much that love can withstand, so much from which it can recover itself; but that one vital point—so different in different people and under different circumstances—is fatally vulnerable, out of reach of all recovery. It is no use talking of forgetting and

forgiving—that has nothing whatever to do with it; there is no question of malice: simply something dead, something which will fall down again whenever we try to pick it up—lifeless as a doll, a doll with the best part of the sawdust run out of it.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was a wonderful September. A blaze of heat hung over the entire country—the vale, the river, the shining lakes and mountains; the whole atmosphere, indeed, seemed to be steeped in those shades of blue most commonly seen in meadow flowers, wild scabious and harebells. There was a hint of speedwell in the sky—speedwell too fiercely touched by the midsummer sun—against which the mountains showed paler still, transparent and ethereal as the ghost of a promised land.

The O'Haras had always despised the lakes. But Henrietta loved them; their calm, their air of holding something of knowledge and wisdom in their depths, that look of a quiet face with folded lips. Maybe, though she would never have acknowledged it to herself, there was some quality in them responding to her own nature; as the river with its noise and turmoil responded to that of the O'Haras, whose incessant flood of chatter chafed her more than she was ever aware of.

It seemed that she and Shaen had never had more than a week or so to themselves since they were married. The *ménage* in the island had been full of constant turmoil and excitement, alternations

of every sort of emotion. Now, back in her father's house for the first time in two years, a sense of peace descended upon her.

The house itself, as bare and ugly as ever, had fallen into a far worse state of preservation; and yet, though so much smaller than Clonross, there seemed more room to breathe. If it could be said that there are spiritual as well as physical lungs, Henrietta's expanded here, her whole being seeming more at ease.

They stayed at Greylands but little over a week. For this time Shaen made himself contented; or, rather, he contented himself by using it as a sort of jumping-off place—riding, or driving his car all over the country to pick up his old friends or attend race meetings. He was kind to Henrietta, but the tenderness of atonement had too soon passed. He was so determined in his own mind as to what was wrong with her that it gave him a good excuse for leaving her behind. And yet, on the whole, his pleasures were healthy and harmless enough; for Ireland, the Irish air, Irish people seemed so native that they brought to him that sort of sanity which he lacked elsewhere.

Henrietta and her father walked and drove together. Philip Rorke had become very Irish in his half-humorous despair over everything Irish. For the rest, his reserve with his daughter still held; up to the very end of their visit he questioned her not at all. It might have been thought that he was

uninterested were it not that she realized the way in which he was continually watching her, trying not to appear to watch. It was the same with her two old tutors, Father O'Sullivan and Mr. Fielden. She felt herself standing apart from them; though she realized their desire to help and understand, to enter into her life, it was impossible for her to make any real move towards them, or anyone else, in spite of her passionate desire to merge herself, lose herself in humanity, wrapped round by the warmth of it.

The curtain which had seemed to descend between herself and her girlhood, that evening at the music-hall with Bobby Horsford, was still there, like a dark gauze, separating her from the rest of the world. Difficult, almost painful as she had always found it to express herself, to make any sort of confidence, it now became almost impossible. There were the same servants at Greylands. Cooky, with her flaming red hair, watched her with that half-sly, half good-natured interest of the Irish servant, in some ways like an ingratiating animal. Henrietta realized that she would have liked to have had it out with her, deluged her with excuses for having given her away to her father, welcoming any sort of an emotional scene. This, however, was the last thing that Henrietta asked for: it seemed as though she had been so badly bruised that she must hold herself apart from everyone.

Perhaps, on the whole, she was nearer to Fielden

than she was to anyone else. But though he came over to Greylands the day of her home-coming, they were unable to touch each other, until one evening when she went to tea at the rectory and sat with him for a long time, soaking in the atmosphere of that frowsty study where she had been used to do her lessons, or sit listening to his bitter arguments with Father O'Sullivan.

He made her get out some of the old classics and read over their favourite passages together on the pretence of testing her memory of Greek—those wonderful old stories of love, of a youth which transcends anything possible in these days. She had not forgotten; the fact was that she remembered too much—had that sort of memory which can prove itself a torment. The exquisite harmony of youth and love—a passion that however sensual in itself, was never altogether degrading, something that, likely enough, saved itself by dying young—the melody of all lovely things, the beauty of such despair as fills all classic literature, wrung her by its very apartness from the sordidness of that life which, however outwardly brilliant, belonged to the Taghmonys and their set.

When she left, Fielden walked with her to the bridge. They had sat late and the early harvest moon had risen, was reflected in the river by the shadow of the arch, cut into that same half-lemon of light which she had seen the night when she had

got out of her bed and ridden Grizel for miles; driven into the open by that longing for Shaen like a fever in her blood.

She and Fielden leant over the parapet without speaking to each other, and for the first time since she came back to Ireland the sense of human sympathy reached her, soothed her. It had always been like that with him—apart from the unfortunate day of his proposal—his very silence showing more understanding than the words of others; maybe because the two of them were foredoomed; he to a life which was altogether too long, she to one which was, on the other hand, too short for any true perspective.

The air was absolutely still. Though the moon was up there was still the lingering after-glow of an almost perfect Indian summer's day. A haze of gnats hung over the river, deeper here, less turbulent and rock-strewn than at Greylands, along that narrow strip of "Naboth's vineyard."

For a while there was silence between them, then Mr. Fielden raised himself with one of those odd, ungainly movements which gave the impression that he was worked from some central crank: could not even straighten his back without cracking his large fingers. Henrietta remembered how, as a little girl, she had laughed to hear his very ankles snapping as he moved along the passage to the door of the study where she sat waiting for her lessons,

He could not, indeed, bestir himself either mentally or physically without giving the impression of machinery getting itself slowly, and with difficulty, into gear.

Now, leaning over the bridge, Henrietta waited, hung in a sort of dream, while he gathered himself together for something which she knew he was wanting to say. The very silence of it all soothed her; she had an odd sort of feeling as though she might be very carefully and gently taken to pieces and put together again—and all the better for it. Of late she had got into the way of feeling afraid of what people were going to say, but there was nothing of this here.

Anyone less likely, from outward appearance, to be looked to for comfort than the Rev. Fielden could scarcely be imagined; and yet this was the feeling that he had always given to Henrietta. There are certain motherly women on whose ample bosoms even the most grown-up have a sort of desire to lay their heads; in the same way there was something in this elderly parson's mind upon which Henrietta Shaen's spirit sought for and found repose.

“You are not happy,” he said, “but that is not surprising. Very few people are—happiness has been invented. It's like time—in itself non-existent and yet regarded as absolute. Anyone who is, in this world, entirely happy or at ease must be mentally deficient, incapable of any insight into the lives of others.”

It was strange how this generalization helped her, smoothing her in with the rest of the world as it seemed to do.

“All the same,” he went on, in those short broken sentences which had always reminded her of a bark, “you have had something which very few people have had. You have had love. It’s an odd thing, but most of us count what we receive as the greater part of that gift. Believe me, it’s nothing of the sort—in some ways it’s no gift at all. It’s like wearing somebody’s hat or being fed with food which we are unable to assimilate, for it never really feeds us; it is too much or not enough, or expressed in a way which we would not have chosen. All said and done, all that really matters is the love we give. It’s by this that we grow, blossom and come to maturity. . . . Queer of me, an old fellow like me, to be talking of love. Oh, well . . .” He turned aside, hunching one awkward shoulder so that it half hid his face.

“It may be—a sort of blossoming.” Henrietta’s voice was low. She spoke very slowly, as she always did when she was trying to express any sort of feeling, get out any special idea. “All the same, it hurts. It’s like the birth of something—oh, something that’s dreadful—not life, more like knowledge.”

“All growth hurts. Life is extraordinarily consistent in its losses and compensations: the more you gain the more you lose; it’s a vessel which will

hold so much and no more. There are thousands of people in the world who never feel anything very much—more like plants than human beings. You must always remember this, that you have had the supreme gift: the gift of feeling, of realizing the Christ-like meaning of that misused word ‘*passion.*’ ”

Something in Henrietta’s youth rose up against this inhuman use of the past tense. “You speak as though it were all over and done with—my happiness, I mean,” she said.

“Tut! Why do you talk like that?” He was impatient with her. “You were not born for happiness; you know that—you of all people!”

“I want it—oh, but I want it!” She made one of her rare gestures of emotion, raising her hands and dropping them again on the stone parapet. “There are other people—Shaen’s sisters—”

“My child, you can’t hold it—what they call happiness—there’s too much of you. With them there is no knowledge of the difference between enjoyment and happiness; they ‘*enjoy themselves*’—heavens, what a phrase that is, expressing the people who use it! Your sisters-in-law! Why, you know yourself they feel nothing as you feel it. They run themselves out in words—the whole family runs itself out in words. How, when you are so unlike them in every other way, should you want to be like them in this? You have had your hour—more, ah, my dear, more than so many. We

say that 'everything comes to those who wait': it would be truer to say that we go on waiting until we forget what we are waiting for."

His voice was unutterably sad. It was of himself he was thinking and not of the girl at his side, leaning forward on his arms, folded upon the parapet of the bridge as if, in that old way, he was still holding himself together over something or other; some feeling which if once let go would break through the hard crust of his exterior.

"You have got to start upon something else now."

"I am only nineteen."

This simple statement fell upon Fielden's ears with an almost unendurable pathos, but he would not allow himself to sympathise with her. There were certain forms of suffering which could be alleviated by treatment, there were others which called for amputation. Henrietta had "built her house upon the sand"; he could have told her that from the very beginning. To his precise mind, Shaen's type was beyond hope—nothing could be done with it; a drunkard or a criminal was far more amenable, for here there was something definite to work upon.

"You'll have to start again. You have your intellect, you can use that. You can go back to your old studies, enlarging your scope in every direction."

"You speak as if it were the end of everything. After all, I love my husband and he loves me.

“Oh, well—that sort of love, but it isn’t enough for a woman of your type.” He was obstinate about it.

“All the same, there’s nothing else.” Henrietta spoke beneath her breath, her words so little audible that Fielden leant towards her to catch them.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I have banked it all upon this one thing. I can’t help myself. It’s like this—if I lose him there will be nothing left.”

“Oh, well! If you feel like that—and I had hoped it might be different—there’s nothing for it—nothing!”

He drew himself upright, with that odd, brusque gesture, snapping his fingers. At the back of his mind all this while, impersonal as he believed his advice to be, was the hope that she no longer cared for Shaen. As she had dropped to him it seemed impossible to believe that she could not soar above him, cutting the blue of the purely intellectual air. Quite honestly he believed that this was the only thing for her; and yet at the back of it all was a far more human feeling: that if she could once shake herself free from what he honestly regarded as an obsession they might recapture some of the delight of those old days when Henrietta had proved herself the most responsive pupil that the most exacting tutor could wish for; meeting him half-way, throwing her whole self into the lessons which he taught her; hanging on his words with her grave eyes full

upon him; regarding him as the source of all knowledge—an intoxicating diet for any man, even one as remote from human passion as he honestly believed himself to be, despite his jealousy, even in those far-off days, of those hours which she spent with O'Sullivan—a jealousy that showed itself apparent in his unreasonable contempt for all Latin authors.

CHAPTER XVII

HUSBAND and wife had one ride together before they left Greylands. Pale Ale was no more, having had his back broken for him out hunting by a friend of Denise's, whose husband was quartered at Lichfield.

What Denise had said to him was: "If you want to know what sport's really like you ought to go out to Mayo. It's something like there, different to your dull, slimy old Midlands. Och, they give me the creeps, the blackness and dampness of them!"

The young man had protested that Ireland was damp, but she had her answer ready: "It is the colour of the damp that matters, not the feel of it. Anyhow, you go out to Mayo. I bet you anything you'll never look at huntin' anywhere else again—just slithering around anyhow. You can get lodgings in Clogrhoë, and there's still a skin or so in the stable at Clonross. Likely enough you'll break your neck over the first bank, but that's your lookout."

The young man had done her bidding. He had been quite sure that he could ride anything, and ride it anywhere; knew how a horse ought to be bitted, and had insisted upon a curb: then, when Pale Ale

topped the first bank—all four feet bunched together in the way that only an Irish horse knows—he had lost his head, and mishandled his mount so that it fell, hunched up in the ditch at the further side.

“A good life lost for a rotter,” was all that Denise had to say about it, wondering that the young man ever dared to show his face again. He protested that he thought she would be glad to see that he was unhurt, and this was the end, for she gave him to understand, as brutally as only a pretty woman can, that she never wanted to see him again, dead or alive.

Shaen was righteously indignant. “Why the devil doesn’t she stop fooling around with other men now that she’s married?” was what he said.

He now rode a bay, Quicksilver, while Henrietta was mounted upon Grizel, a little fat and out of condition, for she had scarcely been used since her mistress was married.

Shaen suggested riding over the plains and up the Slieve Myshall to their old haunt. To his amazement, however, Henrietta did not jump at the idea. “There’s no understanding women,” he thought. “One gets it into one’s head that they are so damnable romantic, but, they’re not really—hanged if I think they care much for anything or anyone, apart from themselves.”

“Oh, well, just as you like!” He answered her sulkily, quite unable to understand why, since that

night in the London hotel, she had so obviously shrunk from all mention of the past.

All the same, he gave in to her suggestion that they should ride across the bridge, through the village and into the plains which lay beyond it. There was always a good gallop to be had there. "And we might go on and see the Blakes," he suggested, his face brightening at the very idea. For he was restless, and eager for company and diversion; every year less contented with the companionship of one person alone, unless the *tête-à-tête* had some spice of danger and excitement—to be alone with a woman whom he knew he ought not to be alone with, that was a different affair altogether.

At the end of the bridge—the very place where Henrietta had first met Lady Taghmony, where Shaen's dogs, Shaen's horse, Shaen himself had given her that feeling of being altogether overwhelmed—they were stopped by Father O'Sullivan, who beamed upon them both. To his mind Henrietta's sin was fully atoned for; and after all, Shaen's position excused everything, for he had all the extravagant reverence of the Irish lower class, but a few years ago, for what he called "real gentry." He stood with his hand upon Grizel's neck, looking from one to the other, his small eyes—with the great cheeks swelling up beneath them, almost extinguishing them—alight with curiosity. He was like an old woman, a Mrs. Gamp.

"I congratulated you upon your marriage," he

said. “But now—two years—tut, tut!—there ought to be something more to congratulate you upon.”

Shaen grinned and flushed, glancing at Henrietta; for he had an idea that the priest’s words would evoke that confession which he was quite sure would have to be made sooner or later. But she said nothing, and he contented himself with a meaning look at her old tutor. “What’s the saying?” he said. “‘Shure patience and per-sevirance got a wife for his Riverence.’”

“My lord, my lord! we don’t think or speak of such things.” The old man threw up his hands in mock horror, and Shaen laughed.

“Oh, well, I wasn’t exactly thinking of wives—but there are other things, you know. Just you wait a bit, Father.”

Father O’Sullivan turned from Henrietta and looked at him meaningly. “You’ll be afther having the old Nanny who brought you all up—there’s nothing like a faithful nurse and one that knows the ways of the family.”

Shaen laughed. “To take it off for a lick of holy water, eh, Father?” he said, and rode off, with a boyish air of triumph.

“That was one for him,” he called out to Henrietta, as, once clear of the bridge, she came up alongside of him. “We used to be baptised, christened, whatever you call it, with no end of a fuss and bother—godfathers and godmothers, and

lashin's of champagne drunk—and then Nanny would creep off with us before anyone was awake, and see to it that old O'Sullivan gave us what she called 'a thaeste o' the holy water.' ”

“She is a dear,” said Henrietta, and broke off; began again, “If ever—” and lapsed into silence. She had so often thought of having a child, longed for it, with ridiculous recurrent memories of that staring doll which she had adored, brought from India with her to be dethroned upon the very first day she met Shaen. But now, quite suddenly, like a blow, came the realization that she did not wish for a child that would not be hers alone, or even hers and Shaen's—that it would bring with it other qualities, maybe the whole O'Hara temperament; that, after all—she had no real reason for this, but the thought was absolutely clear-cut—she would not have time to bring it up. Odd how, as long as ever she could remember, there was this thought of there not being a great deal of time for anything. It gave her no special sense of hurry. It was not like a short day or an overcrowded hour; in fact, contradictory as it seemed, the shortness of time gave her time; for her thoughts were uncrowded with any special planning for the future.

It was a ten-mile ride to the Blakes', and tea-time when they got there. The whole family were out in the garden: crossing the lawn and meeting them was like stepping into the sea and finding oneself immediately overwhelmed by the waves, sweeping

one down and under, taking one's breath. There was Mrs. Blake and two unmarried daughters and her son's wife, a couple of grandchildren, and several undistinguished young men in flannels who were staying in the house; other girls, and the wife of the neighbouring clergyman—a darker, quieter blot in the ebullition of excited talk and brilliant colour.

They flowed over and around Henrietta; they talked to her and about her at the same time; they talked of what they had been doing and what they were going to do; the last game of tennis, the last picnic and race-meeting—a sort of good-natured quarrelling, interspersed with a torrent of questions.

Shaen seemed to be able to manage them; or rather flowed in with them, became part of them. With Henrietta it was different. Later on, amongst themselves, they spoke of her as being “slow in the uptake”; perhaps that was it, or more likely the habit of thinking what she was saying. For not for one moment did they think; turning on their talk like a series of taps, but rarely reaching the end of a sentence, and regardless of the answer, if any, to a question.

She drank her tea almost in silence; it was the only thing to do. To talk at all was like talking against an orchestra. There was more laughter than she had ever heard before, even with the O'Haras; and it might have been this—if there is any truth in the laugh-and-grow-fat maxim—which led to the exuberant figures of Mrs. Blake and her

family: Mrs. Blake herself, more like one of those large, old-fashioned dressing-tables draped in muslin over some bright-coloured material—a bow-fronted dressing-table—than anything else.

Half-way through tea a newcomer emerged from one of the open French windows and moved across the lawn towards them. A slender woman in a pale pink muslin dress, without a hat, her open pink parasol like a flower at the back of her head.

“Mrs. Arbuthnot,” said Mrs. Blake; “of course you know Nina Arbuthnot?” She did not wait for an answer. The others were shouting, “Come on, Nina!” “Buck up, Nina!” “There’s no cake left; the tea’ll be cold.” “What on earth have you been doing with yourself?” “She’s been asleep! Fancy going to sleep in the afternoon—wastin’ the best of the day, lazy wretch!” “Hello, Nina! Hurry up! Here’s Shaen, you remember Shaen and what fun we used to have at Clonross?” “Do look at her! Getting herself up like that for tennis!” “The lunatic! Anyhow, she’s simply got to play.” “Do you hear that, Nina? Can’t sleep all day, you know—got to do something for your living!” “Only look at her—making a procession of one!” “Of all the swank!”

The lady thus addressed, exhorted, criticised, hastened her pace no whit. Henrietta had an idea that she cherished an exact picture of herself as she looked, moving slowly across that wide stretch of smooth turf.

When she did arrive at the tea-table no one intro-

duced her, and Henrietta realized that she and Shaen had met before and that he was not over-glad to see her again. For his face flushed and that rather heavy, blank look came into it, the expression of a spoilt child confronted with something he does not like. She herself vaguely recognized the newcomer, but whether as a type or an individual she could not say. She might have met her in the West Indies or in London; she might equally have met her in any centre of civilisation—anywhere where there was no chance of discomfort or ruffling; for she was evidently one of those women who set sail in calm weather, in warm seas and beneath blue skies alone—sliding away from all that is disagreeable or difficult.

The instant she appeared everybody began to wait upon her. She was supplied with tea and cake. A footstool was brought for her feet, a cushion for her back. But she took it all for granted, with a little nod, an absent shallow-sweet smile, engrossed in a half-mocking study of Shaen's sullen and contemptuous face.

“Such years and years since we met, Lord Shaen. I wonder if you remember it? Those delightful days at Clonross.” She sighed, her blue eyes flooded with something that might have been tears for the tender memory of a youth that was past. “And we were such friends too!”

Shaen did not answer, but he laughed—one of his ugliest laughs, short and contemptuous. A hot flush, something that could be in no wise mistaken for a blush, rose up in Mrs. Arbuthnot's face.

Henrietta, watching her, realized the perfect skin, which lasts so long because it is so thick. Her whole face and figure gave the impression of something hard and unyielding, something harder than flesh, with its wonderful pink and white skin covering it like a kid glove. There were tiny pencilled lines under her eyes, one very fine at either side of her mouth; otherwise she seemed unchanged from the beauty whom she now remembered as having seen riding and driving with Shaen when she herself was still a little girl, years and years ago, or so it seemed.

“You men are so hard. . . . It is strange how we women cherish memories. I suppose we have not so many good times in our lives, and so we remember them more; but I shall never forget those old days.”

“I’m not likely to forget either.” Shaen was lolling back in his chair, staring at her insolently. “As for you, you seem to me pretty well the same, and it strikes me that you will always take care to have a jolly good time of it.”

“I don’t think I’ve had a very good time. I don’t think anyone could say that.” Nina Arbuthnot’s voice was pathetic. Once again there was that hint—just a hint—of tears in her eyes, and Mrs. Blake bustled into the conversation.

“Indeed, she has had a dreadful time. Perhaps you haven’t heard, Ronny—” Her voice dropped to a sort of whisper, altogether audible to the whole party. “Too awful! Her husband—men are so inconsiderate!” Somebody else spoke. Henrietta

gained the idea, not from any one thing that was said, but rather from a rush of innuendoes and hints, that Arbuthnot had committed suicide, in, as Mrs. Blake said, the most untidy manner. One of the young men of the party muttered something in Henrietta's ear: "Beastly shame! In her own drawing-room, in front of her and all!" There was something else about the "mess," something more ludicrous still about the carpet; and she realised that poor little Arbuthnot, tubby, good-natured, and unimportant—save as the holder of purse-strings and settler of innumerable bills—had been inconsiderate enough either to cut his throat or blow his brains out over his wife's new carpet. They even mentioned the colour of it—"pale grey, too!"

The bereaved wife, meanwhile, sat with her pleading eyes full upon Shaen. Every now and then she raised one slender, well-kept hand and patted the curls at either side of her forehead.

"Anyhow, the past is over and done with," said Mrs. Blake, putting an end to it all with sweeping geniality; and the strain—a strain to all save Mrs. Arbuthnot herself, who sat looking the part, feeling herself the heroine of the moment—broke.

They began speaking of the tennis tournament which was to take place the next week, arguing and arranging—one of those half-quarrelling, half-flirting verbal battles to which Henrietta was so well accustomed. Quite suddenly some one of them remembered her presence sufficiently to enquire whether she played, but did not wait for an answer;

breaking in, with a vehement expostulation upon something which the rest of the party seemed to be settling among themselves.

“I say, I won’t play with that Matheson woman—that’s flat! She’s hopeless—more like a performing elephant than a woman. Hit? I daresay she can hit, but what’s the good if the balls go in the wrong direction? Oh, well! let Vincent play with her. Vincent likes fat women!”

“Not on the tennis-court, though. I prefer my grass-rollers distinct from my players.”

“If we play tennis on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, what about the gymkhana?” They were deep in another discussion: the ponies they were to ride, the sort of programme which would give everyone an equal chance. Mrs. Blake turned to Henrietta: “Such a pity you don’t ride,” she said vaguely.

“Why, she rode here!” They seemed to be surprised at that. But, starting to place her for the gymkhana, were once again diverted by someone else’s insistence upon the discussion of prizes.

Mrs. Arbuthnot was leaning forward towards Shaen, poking at the turf with the tip of her parasol, her head drooping, her eyes raised.

“You are angry with me,” she said. “I don’t think that’s very nice of you after all these years. That evening, you know—you must acknowledge that I was in a terribly difficult position—daren’t risk any sort of a scandal. You will realise from what they have been saying what my husband was

like. You won't believe it, perhaps—you blame me for everything—but really and truly I was terrified of him. Often I used to lie awake for hours and hours, frightened of going to sleep, frightened of what he might do to himself"—she paused, and her voice dropped—"or to me. And after all, you were such a boy—such a darling boy, I hated to let you down, you can never know how I hated it."

"I'm not a boy now," said Shaen.

Her voice had been one long murmur, like the cooing of a dove. His was sharp and contemptuous, so loud that the others turned and looked at him, but only for one moment, reverting again to their own discussions—laughing and wrangling.

"I don't think you would speak like that if you had any idea—the faintest idea—of what I have been through."

"Look here, I'm not a boy now." Shaen repeated the words with significant emphasis, raising himself upright in his chair and leaning forward towards her.

"I know. You're married, aren't you?" She glanced towards Henrietta. "She's very pretty. She looks so young and, somehow, so placid. I don't suppose she has ever been through any of those dreadful crises, nerve-storms, that we women who care too much suffer from. Ronny, Ronny dear, look here, I want you to forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive."

"I know," she sighed. "Of course, since then you must have realized how I was driven. . . ."

Yes, that's it—driven. My dear, if you knew one half of what my life was you would be sorry for me."

"Well, you're free now."

"Yes, I'm free now," she said; and added in a lower voice, with downcast eyes, "but too late!"

"Too late for what?" Shaen's voice had dropped. There was something at once amused and excited in his look. He was always so extraordinarily transparent, so very much of a boy—not altogether the public school boy, but the small preparatory urchin who is for ever on the look-out for what he calls a "do." If Henrietta had happened to glance at him that moment she would have known that he had something in the way of what he called a "lark" in his mind.

"You're still most frightfully pretty, you know that, I suppose. I cannot make out why you should say it's too late for anything. . . ."

His tone had that sort of slighting condescension which would have been like a whip to Henrietta; but Nina Arbuthnot's sensibilities were as thickened as her skin. She might be out all day in the wind and rain and show no signs of it—pink and white as ever: and her soul was like that too. Nothing had ever really touched her, while she was so greedy for praise that she had become indifferent to the form which it took. For throughout those three or four years which had passed since she last saw Shaen there was no sort of way in which she had not coarsened, hardened.

“It would be nice to have a chat over old times,” she said, and then added tentatively, in a rather louder tone: “There are peaches, you know, just a few of them, very little ones, sheltering under the leaves of the walled garden. No chance of finding them unless one looks for them oneself.”

She rose and glanced at him. Dense enough in some ways, in the finer and subtler things of life, Shaen was quick enough to follow the lead of any pretty woman.

“Anyhow, we might see,” he said.

They were moving away together, when Nancy Blake called after them: “Ronny, Ronny, look here! You must play! It’s no good thinking of having you for a partner next week unless we have some practice together.” The others joined in:

“Look here, we can’t have you two sneaking off together. Nina, Nina!—Shaen!” they called after them, giving every sort of reason why they must join the general herd; but Nina Arbuthnot shook her head smilingly. She was standing out on the lawn now, away from the shade of the cedar where the others sat. The sun was at the back of her; her pink skirt, flounced to the waist, looked like a pale-tinted rose against the light; her parasol, thrown back over one shoulder, acted as a frame to her face. Her hair, which was a trifle yellower than it used to be—showing almost brass-like in a room, under artificial light, or in the shade of the trees—shone like finest spun gold in the light of the sun, already low, its beams level with the flower-

beds, touching the top of the golden rod, the clumps of wine-coloured dahlias, the crimson mass of Virginian creeper draping the side of the ugly old house.

She waved her hand to the group beneath the trees; and laughing, without any attempt to reply, turned away at Shaen's side; the two tall figures dogged by their long shadows which stretched for one moment almost to Henrietta's feet; then moved on, following their owners and away from her.

There were three tennis-courts lying beneath a sunk fence. The children drifted away, intent on their own amusements, laughing, shouting to one another; Henrietta could hear them, winding in and out of the shrubberies. The young people, after a great deal of friendly quarrelling, arranging and rearranging of sets, began to play. The clergyman's wife had gone away and she sat alone by Mrs. Blake's side, watching the game. It seemed that there must be years between herself and the others—with the sunk fence as an emblem of separation—and yet likely enough she was the youngest of any of them. Mrs. Blake, whose great idea of conversation consisted in a volley of questions, ferreted out her age and was amazed at the answer.

“You couldn't have been more than seventeen when you married! What a baby! And dear Ronny—of course we all of us love and adore Ronny, but really it seems as though he never can, or will, grow up—a real Peter Pan, don't you think? But I love young marriages—so charming to see

young people happy, so much more romantic.”

She rambled on and on, or rather round and round in a sort of spiral; her fat, contented voice with its rounded curves matched her person. It was impossible for Henrietta to follow all that she said—for trivialities repeated, heaped up one upon another, are, after all, more difficult than what Mrs. Blake herself would have described as “intellectual conversation”—and she could not play tennis in her habit and long riding-boots, so that there was nothing for her to do except sit helpless, while the even, mellow brogue enwrapped her till she felt as though she were entangled by innumerable threads of Berlin wool.

She even had a sort of mental picture of it in the way that such things often came to her. Many, many years ago, someone had taught her to make balls by winding different coloured wools around and about a small cork until it was solid and round, elastic and bounceable. She visualised herself as the inner core of just such a ball, with Mrs. Blake as an immense skein of shaded wool, running out and out, showing no visible lessening of size. There was something else, too. At a small travelling show which had camped at Foxford—two vans and a tent, one elephant and a mangy camel—the “star” had been a tall, cadaverous man who pulled the end of a narrow strip of coloured paper out of his mouth, and went on pulling, until it lay in a heap about his feet, mounted to his knees—pink and yellow, pale green and pale blue. There you have

something of Mrs. Blake and her flow of conversation.

Henrietta was still child enough to feel the difficulty of making any sort of a move; besides, how would it be possible to find her husband? It seemed awkward and gauche, like the stupid, jealous wife of fiction, to ask that someone might be sent to look for him: still more hopeless to go herself. The sun sank so that it was no longer possible to see to play tennis, and the whole party came up the steps from the sunken lawn, dropped on the grass at their feet, arguing, expostulating. The two children reappeared and tumbled over them. Someone went to the house in search of claret cup, while Mrs. Blake ran on with a stream of warnings against the damp grass, the fatal effect of cold drinks upon people so over-heated as they were, reminding them of the hour and the necessity of dressing for dinner. But no one took any notice of what she said, and as it seemed more natural for her to go on talking than to remain silent it did not greatly matter.

The shadows under the trees merged into the general greyness. The warmer tints in the garden, reds and purples, were blotted out; though here and there the paler flowers, the evening primrose and the white tobacco plant, with its intoxicating perfume, broke the general tone, the wash of velvety grey.

The whole party was at length gathering itself together, collecting its belongings, when two figures emerged from the shrubbery and moved slowly

across the tennis-court; all the colour wiped out of them so completely that they were scarcely distinguishable from the slender clipped yews which dotted the higher ground at the far end of the court—were like “trees walking.”

There was a fire of chaff as Shaen and Nina Arbuthnot joined the rest of the party straggling towards the house. Half-way across the lawn they met the butler with his tray and a large jug of claret cup and glasses, and helped themselves to drinks; gathering together in the thickening gloom, regardless of Mrs. Blake’s prognostications of a spoiled dinner and ruined appetites.

It seemed to be taken for granted that Shaen and his wife were staying to dinner; but to Henrietta’s relief her husband supported her in her refusal, and they moved round to the stable-yard to fetch their horses, surrounded by an expostulating throng, which waved and shouted to them as they rode away into the autumn mist that swam lake-like across the park, with the heavily-foliaged elms floating like galleons upon it.

It was just before they reached Greylands that Shaen told his wife that he had asked Mrs. Arbuthnot to come on to Clonross.

“She seems to have nowhere particular to go when she leaves the Blakes’—regularly at a loose end. Jolly unlucky for a woman like that having no one to look after her. Pretty, too, eh, Hal?”

Henrietta agreed that she was pretty, and Shaen laughed rather headily. “Knows it, too!” he said,

and added something about there being a little account still waiting to be settled; then broke off, laughing again, putting his horse to a gallop along the soft turf at the edge of the drive.

CHAPTER XVIII

Two days later Henrietta and her husband went over to Clonross, where Lord and Lady Taghmony were already established—as much established as they could be anywhere, for they were possessed by that sort of fever of restlessness which comes to rather mindless people in middle age. They could not endure being left alone, even with one or two of their own relations; they must have the constant stimulus of strangers who didn't know them too well; to whom they could relate such things as they had told their older friends and their relatives again and again, wearing them out, so that in time it seemed as though they would be overtaken by the fate of all people eaten up with egotism, possessed of a grievance to which they could find no one of their own set left to listen—those old ladies in hotel drawing-rooms, those dreaded old men in clubs, who, buttonholing the merest stranger, will pour out the tale of their most intimate affairs—a habit as fatal as dram-drinking.

On the last morning at Greylands breakfast was later than usual. When Henrietta entered the dining-room the long table and crumpled table-cloth were bare save for a jar of marmalade, a loaf of bread and a few plates, flung down just as they had been taken off the tray. The whole room had

that desolate look of a place which has been done over anyhow—a lick and a promise, and not much of that. Indeed, the entire house had depressed her since her arrival: coming back to it like this was in many ways profoundly saddening. It seemed gaunter than ever, and she was conscious of a feeling as though she had somehow or other failed in her duty to her father. It was dreadful, to think of him after his life in India—the scope of his influence, the beauty of his surroundings, the order and formality of it all, even when they camped out—living in the way he did now, at the mercy of Irish servants, of whom he appeared to have grown so profoundly contemptuous that he had ceased to battle with them: giving them up in despair, half enjoying the disorder, with the gesture of one who says, “I told you so.”

He was out in the garden now, prodding up weeds on the ill-kept lawn with his spud; not keeping to one part of it, but moving to and fro. He himself, like the house, had aged a very great deal more than the years warranted. At least, it was not so much that he had aged as that he seemed to have let himself go, along with his immediate surroundings. Henrietta had noticed that instead of reading after dinner, as he always had done, he dropped asleep by the peat fire, which was kept continually burning on the dining-room hearth; for he had given up using the library, and submitted to spend the whole day in one room—a decree of the servants, this—with the table not altogether

cleared, and the cloth turned back at one end.

When his daughter spoke of it all it seemed that he did not want to be troubled: "Indeed, it isn't worth bothering about," was what he said; overcome by the fatal, half-despairing indolence of that country which had stood for the enchanted isle of his earlier life.

Henrietta joined him in the garden and, slipping her arm in his, they walked to and fro together without speaking.

The summer had broken only that night, with a storm of wind and rain. It was fine now, but the air had changed. It was distinctly cooler, with an autumnal scent of decay, sweet and sad. The sky, in parts more brilliantly blue than it had been, was piled with clouds—hard cut, shining white clouds, backing the mountains; the mountains themselves, less than twenty-four hours ago so fairy-like, solid and menacing, were of the darkest indigo blue.

It was only just as the rough servant-girl, with a cap on the back of her head, bawled from the open French window to tell them breakfast was on the table, that Mr. Rorke broke the silence.

"You know this is always your home. I don't want to interfere—I can't interfere." He gave the gesture of the person who brushes something aside, and then patted the hand which lay upon his arm: "Anyhow, you know, this is always your home. You can always come back here. Young people—as young as your husband—are often enough wearing to live with. But there you are! Do what you

like, my dear; of course, you must always do what you like.”

“He is three years older than I am.” The words were out before Henrietta realized what she was saying: were, indeed, uttered with a sense of surprise. For she, herself felt much as her father did, that to be continually in Shaen’s company was like spending your time with a high-spirited and obstreperous child.

“Yes, yes, my dear, I know that; but still, age does not go entirely by years, and somehow or other—of course, I don’t know, it may be the life in the West Indies, the heat and all that, though you’re used to that—of course I may be wrong—but it seems to me that you look tired, just a little tired. Anyhow, here we are, the old man and the old house.” He turned his head aside in that odd nervous way which accompanied any effort to express his feelings, and added: “It was never very gay here, but it seems as though all the sunshine had gone out of it now, without you.”

In all their life together he had never said as much, put his affection into so many words. Even upon that occasion, years ago, when she was a tiny child lying near the point of death at Peshawar, it had been his look, the caress he gave, which spoke for him.

She slipped her hand along his arm and laid it in his, without a word, for there was something in her throat which prevented her from speaking—anyhow, there was no need for words. How much

had passed between these two, how infinitely much, with never a word said! She often looked back on it now: those long evenings when they had sat either side of the fire, each with a book: glancing up now and then to exchange a smile or glance: those meals passed in a silence which had never weighed in the very least upon either of them.

Henrietta had been so impressed by the fashion in which the O'Haras had talked. She remembered that too, and it amused her. How young it all seemed: the way in which she had imagined that because they spoke so much more than she or her father, gave expression to every mood, every thought and feeling, they must therefore feel a great deal more.

They had finished breakfast when Shaen came down, looking very fresh and alert, as he always was in the morning. They were leaving at eleven and he had not begun to pack.

“Somebody must put my things together for me: perhaps you will see to it, eh, Hal? And I say, could you run the car over to Clonross? I promised Flynn to go down to the kennels and look at some new puppies he has been braggin' about. Tell them that I will be over some time in the afternoon. . . . Oh, and by the bye, you might tell them about Mrs. Arbuthnot. She will be there some time about tea-time, I expect. I absolutely forgot to let the mater know—”

“She won't mind? . . .” began Henrietta tentatively.

“It’s no good her starting to mind what I do”; his tone was at once restive and sullen. “If she wants me to put in an appearance she knows she has got to make things pleasant. And just see what sort of a bedroom she gives her. She has got a way of filling up the house with her own friends, and I suppose all the others have come over with a pack yelping at their heels as usual. I never knew such a family as mine—impossible for them to move unless it’s in coveys. Oh, look here, though!”—he was half-way out of the room when he turned back—“if you could go round by Castleford on your way—it would make a bit of a drive for you—you might see if my gun-case is at the station, and call in at Harvey’s for some cartridges.”

Even then he turned back once again: “Oh, I say, Hal, supposin’ you get your father to lend you the outside car and I will take the motor, then I can go on to the Blakes’ after the kennels, pick up Mrs. Arbuthnot and bring her over—only for goodness’ sake don’t forget to tell the mater; it will come better from you!”

That afternoon at the Blakes’ was a sample of the life at Clonross, though here the ease was more on the surface, less evenly diffused. The younger members of the party were happy enough, lived in the day and for the day. With them that old belief that “nothing is worth worrying about” still held, but it had slipped from Lady Taghmony along with the rest of her kingdom, while the old sunny sweetness and irresponsibility had been followed by

that period of feverish gaiety, striving after youth.

This, too, was now past. In these days she was peevish and shrank from noise, unhappy if she were alone and yet unable to endure the contrasts of youth—the bitterness of feeling out of things. It seemed impossible for her to allow herself to float into the quiet haven of middle age, and she was washed to and fro like flotsam 'twixt sea and shore.

Lord Taghmony appeared and disappeared at intervals. By this time he was flagrant in his faithlessness, made no pretence of affection for his wife. He had loved her for close upon twenty years, with interludes—intimacies with other women, which had, in reality, left her untouched; the loss of her beauty was, however, fatal.

“A man marries a woman for her looks, her skin, her figure. It's all bunkum to pretend he doesn't. All your 'parsons, and people like that—they're just the same as everyone else; the only difference is that they're such damned humbugs. When the thing you're bargained for ceases to exist, where's the sense of pretending that it's still there? Might as well try to live in a house that is falling about your head. She has got you children; why can't she make herself happy with you?”

He had said that once to Shaen, brutally enough, for it was always “your children” now, never “ours.” He had been fond of them when they were little—small flourishes around his greatness. In these days, however, they were a constant reminder of all that he had lost: gaining by love, by

their own attractions, that for which he found himself obliged to pay a higher and still higher price—pursuer instead of pursued.

He and his wife did not quarrel in public—they were just a shade too well bred for that. But there were intervals when each addressed the remainder of the party alone: when each was pointedly deaf and dumb so far as the other was concerned; moments when the feeling of there having been some sort of row echoed like a shot through the house.

On the whole, however, a sort of dreary indifference hung over them both, as though they had come to the end of feeling. Sometimes it seemed to Henrietta, realizing them intensely as she did—so sensitive to the moods of others—that their fluctuations of temper, dislike, or irritation ran through her, shook her as though it were part of her own life; and this, indeed, was what things seemed likely to come to between herself and Shaen: an intolerable staleness, their only hope—and this for her no hope at all—the continual lighting of fresh fires upon fresh altars.

In these days her mother-in-law clung to her; had lost that air of rather scornful, quick impatience which she had been used to show her. For the first time she was beginning to realise her eldest son was less than perfect, though even now she would not have acknowledged it. “You don’t know how to manage him, that’s what’s the matter,” she would

say; forgetting how impossible she had found it to manage her own husband.

But all the same she clung to Henrietta. “Do you know what Gerty said to me about you in one of her letters when we were in India? That you were like a cool hand on the forehead; and somehow or other I am beginning to think that she was right. I get so tired now, so frightfully tired, and they all talk so loud, much louder than people did in my day. We were too much in India, we were too much away from the children. All the same, they used to adore me when they were little; but everyone changes. I don’t believe they care a pin for me now.”

It is dreadful for a woman to think that even her own children have no love for her. All the needs of Lady Taghmony’s nature, once so easily satisfied by the admiration of her own little circle, gathered to an almost rapacious demand for the affections of her children; above all Gerry, whom she tried to imagine was still enough of a baby to be pulled upon her knee and kissed, clung to; Gerry!—in his first term at Eton and at his most off-handed age.

Denise had two small children, babies who spent most of their time with their paternal grandmother, for she herself could not be bothered with them, though she had been too lazy to take any precautions against having them; not like Honora, who had decided that she was too busy to find time for

babies: "In the hunting season there's the hunting, and at other times— Oh, well, there's always something," that's what she said.

"The babies are never well when they are with mommy"—that was Denise's complaint of her own mother. "She gives them all sorts of sweets and things, and then there's trouble with Nurse."

All said and done, the life of Clonross lay in stratas. For the moment Denise's children were staying in the house; but they lived, moved, and had their being in the nursery under the vigilant eye of a trained nurse, continually at war with old Nanny. "It will be different when Master Ronny's got a baby of his own," that was what the old woman said. "Begob, we'll be after showin' yez what a baby's like then! Them two of Miss Denise's do look to me as though you'd kept sittin' on 'em, the poor pale things!"

The next strata showed young people of the party: Honora and Denise and their husbands and friends; Edwina and her friends; and, for the first week or so, Derrick and Gerry. It was difficult to move without finding oneself entangled in some game or sport, the youngest footman bowling to the two boys, or the groom muzzling ferrets. The last batch of puppies was entrusted to Henrietta, for someone must watch to see that they did not lick the dressing of wood-ash from off their freshly-bitten tails. There was also a hedgehog which had been found in a ditch blinded by some accident.

"If you keep on stroking it, it won't curl up and

the bandage 'ull stay on," that's what Gerry said. "Just keep it on your lap—you can stroke while you read."

These, however, were the interests of extreme youth. Alone with the boys, Henrietta would have been completely happy; but there were the grown-ups to consider.

Life repeats itself. . . . But no, it is not even as sane as that: rather it stutters on, like a person seemingly unable to come to the end of a sentence; with sudden confused rushes into something unconnected with all which has gone before. For it seems that life and the ordinary human mind are unable to run smoothly for more than a very little space, reach confusion long before they reach anything else.

At the end of a fortnight there was a dance—much the same sort of dance as that which had taken place the night when Shaen rode over to Greylands, some time after midnight, and called Henrietta down from her room; the night when they had seen dawn break from the bench beneath the medlar tree; seen the grass covered with the frozen bodies of the bees which had rioted throughout the long hours of sunshine.

A small dance with a few outsiders, including the whole Blake party, dropping in after dinner. As usual, the O'Hara party had stirred up the whole countryside; every man, woman, and child was engrossed in them and their doings alone. Nothing ran smoothly for anyone else. "The only blessing

is we got the harvest over before they came”—that’s what Mr. Rorke said—“with every man taking himself off on pretence of being urgently needed at Clonross.” Denny, the postman, was later than ever, not on account of love-letters this time, but rather because he had to stay and have “a mite of talk” with Denise’s nurse to “put her in a good frame for them poor unfortunate children,” was what he said.

The summer had gathered itself together again. The air was warm, permeated through and through with that faint odour of decay, the smell of apples. In between the dances the young people wandered in and out of the open doors.

It seemed that Shaen, save for one dance with his wife, was spending the whole evening with Nina Arbuthnot. For once Henrietta was unable to make him out. She felt certain that he was not in love with the woman. At the same time, he seemed unable to bear her out of his sight, though there was something cruelly contemptuous in the way in which he paraded the evident victory which he had gained. For it was like that now—the one noticeable difference in the whole thing. Mrs. Arbuthnot was in love, as much in love as she could be. Her senses were stirred; she was excited, shaken out of herself, madly jealous of the girls of the party.

Honora and Denise were scornful about it—“What people call the ‘dangerous age,’ I suppose!”

that is what they said; and wondered how Shaen could make such a fool of himself: contemptuous as youth is of those who seem to have passed the first bloom and yet allow their emotions to become evident. “Playing at being young—a sort of ‘spring chicken,’ ” was another phrase which they used regarding her.

But in this Henrietta realised that they were mistaken. Whoever was playing now, it was not Nina Arbuthnot. Life, as it seemed, was taking its revenge on her at last. She had been so scornful of women who let themselves go, showed that they cared for a man, allowed themselves to be injured or found out. All this was past, and it seemed as though she had come to a sort of belief that you could gain anything by persistence, by showing yourself willing to take any sort of risk, by—what she would have called in the old days—throwing yourself at a man’s head, a sort of brazen openness.

No, Henrietta had no doubt about her. But Shaen—Shaen whom she had seemed to know almost too well—baffled her. He was obsessed, he was triumphant. But there was more to it than this—a sort of excitement held him, as a man who has fought with rapiers holds his adversary at his mercy. . . . No, no—far more crude than that!—a boy holding a sparrow with a string to its leg, letting it hop—hop—no more flying, its flying days done. Now and then, more particularly towards the end,

he showed himself abominably rude to Mrs. Arbuthnot; as though pricking at her here and there out of sheer wantonness, jerking his string.

Once when she tried to bring him to book he turned round upon her with a look of insolent scorn. "You asked for it," he said; "go on asking for it all the time." He had all an Englishman's contempt for the woman who gives herself: that "middle aged governess" streak, that, as some modern writer declares, may be found in all his countrymen, strongly developed at the back of his own wantonness—at once desiring and despising.

Henrietta danced with Bobby Horsford. It was towards the end of the evening, and she was hot and tired—wearied out with the noise, the constant movement. They came out of the window of the drawing-room where they had been dancing, and moved down the steps across the short lawn which separated the house from the first terrace.

"The tobacco plants are still in bloom in the long border. If we lean over the wall, we shall get the scent of them." That was what she said. Bobby was a comfortable person to be with—one did not need to explain things to him. If he did not understand, one just left them or meandered on, and he never even thought of taking offence. There was no need for Henrietta to tell him that she wanted something apart from humanity—something pure and sweet and growing. He would not have understood what she meant if she had done so, though he might have soothed her with his kind:

“Oh well, life is pretty rotten, but, all the same, things generally turn up trumps in the end.”

There was the same bench from which Arbuthnot had heard Shaen's declaration four years ago; though—and there you have it, that stutter, which repeats, without ever getting anything quite the same—it was Mrs. Arbuthnot and Shaen, absent from the last three dances, who were in possession this time: or rather, to speak more precisely, she who sat there, with her hands pressed down upon the stone at either side of her, looking up at Shaen, who leant against the curving buttress of the high wall.

“After all that's been between us!” was what she was saying. And he laughed: that sort of laugh which is so killing to any woman—the laugh of a man who has had everything he wants and is at an end with her.

“You are a cad!” she said, “a cad!—to make a woman care for you, and then to behave as you have done. You can call yourself what you like—no titles on earth would make you any different. A cad—a rotten cad!”

She beat her hands up and down upon the bench, and Shaen laughed again. Henrietta could see the way in which he tossed his head, throwing back that lock of hair which still refused to remain closely plastered down like the rest, covering his head in a dark, smooth casque.

“Anyhow, you can never say that again—that I'm 'not a man'—I've proved that, eh?” His voice,

his whole pose, was triumphant; he swaggered without moving.

“If I hadn’t thought that you really cared, that you were different to other men, do you think I—” She broke off in a passion of tears.

“My dear girl, come to that, no man is different.”

Horsford, who had turned a little aside from his partner, had his head bent, shading a match to light his cigarette, not altogether hearing what was said, did not realize who the couple beneath the terrace were. Just as he was beginning to chuckle over “some ’un gettin’ a wiggin’,” Henrietta turned to him, laid her hand upon his arm.

“I think we will go back to the house,” she said.

Even then it was not until they were half across the lawn that the knowledge of something of what had happened flooded in upon him. It seemed as though he were fated to be with Henrietta at moments such as this—he who hated anything in the way of a scene, as only your complete Anglo-Saxon can. Not that there was anything of that sort here: afterwards he felt that it would have been easier if there had been. Honora stamped and wept over her troubles, and there you had something to soothe, something to “get around,” as it were. But no one would have dared touch Henrietta when she was as upright as she was now, walking by his side, back to the house.

It was only as they came into the light, flooding from one of the open windows, that he realized her deadly pallor, the expression of her face as she

turned to him with a smile, her eyes wide and dazed as though she had been actually and physically struck.

“Look here, Bobby, I’m awfully tired. I don’t think I will dance any more to-night. You won’t tell anyone, will you? I will just slip round to the side door and in up the back stairs to bed. No one will miss me.”

She had no idea of making a martyr of herself, but Bobby Horsford felt the desperate pathos, the undeniable truth, of that last sentence, and cursed the O’Haras and their lot—always excepting Honora.

“I shall miss you,” he said. “Everything is different when you are there—sort of runs in tune, you know. But, by Jove, you do look done up! Go on up to bed.—I wonder if you would care to have Honora look in at you—see if there’s anything you want?”

She shook her head without speaking; and with a dull feeling of hopelessness—which in some way responded to hers—he shook his also. It was no good offering her Honora; it was no good offering her anyone or anything—even that fool Shaen, who had spoiled his own pitch. Life was rotten: and, after all, there were times when there seemed no possible chance of things turning out right, even at the very end.

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When Shaen came up to bed it was already daylight. Henrietta lay upon one side, her face turned

away from the window, her eyes shut. Thinking she was asleep, her husband crept in softly, without speaking, turned back the clothes and lay down beside her. Through her closed lids she felt his eyes, quick and bright, upon her face, knew exactly the sort of humour he was in—something between excitement and triumph, mingled with uneasiness. For it seemed as though he could never deceive her without that feeling of a truant boy, half frightened, half desirous of being found out so that he could brag of his doings.

As to Henrietta, her mind was working with an almost incredible swiftness, as it could do; for it was the putting of things into words, alone, which came so difficult to her. She knew that Shaen would sleep late, probably till close upon eleven; that Lady Taghmony would be down early, or, rather, earlier than the young people, for she was restless in these days, had gone back to her early-rising habits of those old days in India.

At half-past nine Henrietta went down to breakfast. Shaen had not stirred as she got out of bed and slipped through to his room to dress having gathered her own clothes together from out of drawers and cupboards.

Lady Taghmony came into the dining room a few minutes after her; Lord Taghmony was already there, reading the *Field*. He had a sort of fancy for his daughter-in-law—"Hal never gets fussed," that's what he said—and had looked up

smiling when she came into the room, then buried himself in his paper as his wife appeared.

A few minutes later Bobby Horsford joined the party. Then Mrs. Arbuthnot and Denise's husband, Captain Armfield. Henrietta was glad of this; it helped to make the thing she had to say more natural, for she shrank, with the intense repugnance of a proud woman, from any sort of scene, from the appearance of going off in a huff, though she must go. She could not just stay on as if nothing had happened: must have time to collect herself, for it was impossible to think clearly, frayed round by the whole O'Hara party. Fortunately they did not seek for motives, and she slid her own small plans easily enough into the general conversation. Now that the dance was over she would drive over to Greylands, leaving the bulk of her things at Clonross, and spend two or three days with her father. She had an idea Mrs. Arbuthnot glanced up at her, curiously, sharply; but no one else took much notice of what she said, all alike too much engrossed in their own plans or grievances; flat and depressed after the excitement of the night before, the constant succession of late hours. And, after all, Henrietta always took her own way, quietly and most often alone: they were used to that. There was no change in her appearance, exquisitely neat and dainty as ever; she was no paler than usual. If she had been dying, indeed, they would scarcely have noticed it; or if they did, sympathised, with

an easy "What a pity!"—picked up the thread of their own affairs pretty well where they had dropped it.

Horsford offered to drive her over to Greylands, and she would start early. Why not at once? There was nothing to do, and they were both longing for fresh air. She wondered if it would be difficult after the evening before and came to the conclusion that it would be easier with him than with anyone else: there was no need for any explanation, and it was certain that he would not worry her with questions.

Half an hour later as she came downstairs, followed by a servant carrying her bag, she found Mrs. Arbuthnot busy with the flowers in the hall.

"I told Lady Taghmony I would do them for her," she said; "everybody seems to have gone to pieces this morning."

She had filled a tall vase with Michaelmas daisies, stood back from them with her head a little on one side surveying her work. She was dressed in a mauve pleated skirt and lawn blouse to match. Henrietta had an idea that she had chosen those special flowers and started the decorative scheme in the hall with a purpose, an eye to special effect, judging from the way in which she glanced up the stairs as Henrietta opened her door and came out upon the landing. Her eyes and cheekbones were a very little reddened: she had that alert and nervous air of a small dog, ready to snap.

“Oh, it’s you! Lord Shaen’s not going with you then?”

“Oh no. I’m only running over for a day or two to see my father. I have been away from him so much, you know.” Henrietta spoke lightly, determined that she would not allow the other woman to guess at her knowledge of the night before, imagine that she could drive her away, hurt her; for to anyone like Mrs. Arbuthnot triumph meant far more than happiness or love.

“Shaen’s in bed still, fast asleep—lazy wretch!” She turned away as Horsford came round to the front door with the outside car; then hesitated, standing in the porch, glancing back at the other woman. She was carrying a parasol and handful of flowers, reason enough for not offering to shake hands. “Good-bye. I shan’t be likely to see you again,” she said, with that calm, limpid glance which always made the other woman feel uncomfortable, set her wondering how much she knew, and, moving down the steps, swung herself up on to the opposite seat to Horsford; while the servants fastened her bag between them, and the little grey mare, which was Shaen’s newest and most precious possession—bought because he wanted it, and given to her to ease his conscience—snatched at the bit, taut and trembling to be off.

CHAPTER XIX

SHAEN appeared over at Greylands between tea and dinner that evening. He rode straight into the stableyard and flung his reins to Jimmy as usual—morosely silent, regardless of the groom's ingratiating grin—then passed through to the back of the house—for once without so much as a glance towards Cooky or the other maids, hovering with a half-smile, expectant of the usual careless greeting, smile, familiar word of chaff for which they would have hung about, neglecting their work, throughout the entire afternoon.

Rorke was out. Shaen realised this as he passed through the servants' hall, saw the little group gathered together at one end of the long table being entertained by Patsy—the farrier from Clogrhoe, Denny the postman, and a couple of old women—all five of them drinking coal-black tea out of their saucers, one old woman supping with her pipe still in the corner of her mouth, their heads inclined, their long mouths drawn down, their under-lips projecting; their eyes bright with curiosity over some piece of gossip which Denny was dealing out to them in his raucous brogue, breaking off as Shaen entered:

“Begob! It's the lord from above!” scrambling to his feet with that bob that was half a curtsy;

gathering his long coat about him, grinning and pulling his forelock, his eyes all ways at once. But Shaen had no word or look for any of them, passing on into the hall with a flushed and scowling face, shouting for his wife.

She answered him from the drawing-room, and he entered that pale apartment, stood just inside the door, glowering at her: vital, handsome and hot-blooded; so overwhelming that those pale ghosts of little old ladies who—or so Henrietta had always felt—haunted the place, shrank back, rustling among the faded curtains, melting into the small, tightly-buttoned, stiff chairs; for none of the men had ever entered this room in the good old days, keeping to their own place, round the dining-room table—or under it—in the gun-room, the hall or stables; choosing the company of the grooms rather than that of their own womenkind, while the young ladies simpered and chattered and sewed; comparing their love affairs, in that octagonal morning-room where the O'Brians' sow had followed them.

Shaen did not remember having ever seen Henrietta there before, and this conjoined with her attitude, took him aback. For she was sitting on the step of the open French window, her hands folded in her lap, doing nothing, in that quiet way so unintelligible to any O'Hara, immensely busy over nothing at all from morning till night, in precisely the same attitude as that in which he had found her that day when he flung the little pendant into the Moy—and it was things like these, pictures, ex-

pressions, which he remembered far more than other people's words.

“What are you doing here?”

“Nothing, but I wanted to be alone.”

“That's one for me, I suppose? All the same, that's not what I meant. Ugh! what a wretched barn of a place this drawing-room is! It 'ud give me the jim-jams if I had to sit here. What the devil do you choose it for?”

“No one ever comes in here. The servants have a sort of an idea it's haunted. I used to sit here when I was a small girl, wanted to think out something, make up my mind.”

“What do you want to think about, make up your mind about now?” he questioned her uneasily; for Horsford had looked at him “damned queerly” at luncheon-time. “You think a jolly sight too much, that's what wrong with you, Hal. Sure to goodness everything is plain enough sailing now!” He flung it at her with an—“I say so, so take it at that—all plain sailing.”

Henrietta turned away her head, her hands clasped in her lap, her fine, pale profile outlined against the dark ilex on the farther side of the lawn, slim and small in her plain white serge: so slim and small and quiet that Shaen was conscious of that feeling which overcomes a man who is trying to hold, or manipulate, something too fine for his clumsy finger and thumb—you simply couldn't get hold of Henrietta, pin her down. It was exasperating, but there it was; and it was this which

drew him back to her, more especially when, as now, he had come to the end of any other woman, of a grosser, more blatant type.

He moved across the room and leant against the window-frame, glancing from her round the room. No wonder that the servants regarded the place as being haunted! It gave him the creeps, with its queer air of waiting until all the living people were gone, to start whispering—a shocked, sibilant whisper. For every scrap of furniture, every fold of drapery in the place, was queerly human in its own shadowy fashion, as though the people who once used the room had, in some way or other, dissolved into it, amalgamated with it; the very scent of the room seemed different to any other—a mingling of pot-pourri and death.

For the moment Shaen was deeply depressed, sated; more than a little disgusted with himself. As always at such times, his Celtic fancy began to work. Old Nanny's tales of the Little People and other hauntings came back to him. He was overcome by fear for the future, a sense of complete distaste for the present.

“Look here, Hal, why did you go off like that? What the devil have I done now? I suppose it's got somethin' to do with me? Why, your father's not even at home—I could tell that by Patsy's beano in the servants' hall. Hang it all, it isn't fair to go off and leave a chap like that, make me look like a fool—an' when we'd been gettin' on so smoothly, all so jolly together.”

“I was on the terrace when you were talking to Mrs. Arbuthnot last night,” said Henrietta. She spoke almost beneath her breath, for it was dreadful to her to have to drag things out into words, the light of day.

He flushed crimson, staring at her, his blue eyes wide with the bright prominence which they showed when he was in any way taken aback:

“For how long?”

“Only a minute.”

“Well, what about it, eh?” His voice had that high, half-hysterical note.

“I think there must have been a good deal between you for her—her—to speak as she did.”

“How?”

“As if she were—” Henrietta was going to say “hurt,” but, after all, it was not that, and she substituted “wronged, insulted.”

“Well, and what did I say?” He questioned her uneasily.

“You laughed!” Her voice was scarcely audible.

He laughed again now, though his face flushed even more deeply. “Well, that ’ull show you! If a man laughs at a woman there can’t be much between them, eh?”

Henrietta rose to her feet and stood against the opposite side of the window-frame, facing her husband, her hands pressed back at either side as though she were drawing herself away from him, her face very white.

“You might have said anything—anything, and it

would not have given you away like that—oh, horrible!”

“What do you mean?”

“The insolence, the cruelty of it.”

“My dear girl, Nina Arbuthnot is jolly well able to look after herself, let me tell you that.”

“Oh, it was not her I was thinking of.”

“Well then, what—”

“For you—you to be like that—crowing! Crowing over a woman who . . . Oh, there was no mistake about it.”

“Look here, Hal! You talk of my being insulting. . . . You remember that night when I rode over here after a dance, the night we sat under the medlar tree? Oh, well, I suppose that Arbuthnot woman had insulted me then, pretty well as much as any woman can insult a man.”

“That doesn’t make any difference.”

“How d’ye mean—it doesn’t make any difference? Good God, you don’t imagine that I care—care twopence for the woman!”

“Oh, don’t you see, it’s worse if you don’t! I know you don’t, and that’s what makes it so awful—the ruthlessness of it. I know now—on that first day we met her at the Blakes’ you had something in your mind, and you have just gone on. . . . It isn’t like you—it was never like you—unless—unless—”

“What?”

“You can hold to revenge, the meanest sort of revenge, though you can’t hold to anything else.”

“Well, that’ll show you—people can’t hanky-panky with me.” He was actually pleased with himself. “But I’ve done with her now. I said I’d pay her back, an’ I’ve paid her back—it’s finished with. I swear to you, Hal, I’m speaking the truth. I never want to see her again. She’s taken herself off this afternoon—she’d that much sense anyhow—left before I did. The whole thing’s at an end—over and done with—and no one any the worse for it.”

She did not answer this but looked at him curiously, her hazel eyes full upon him. “No one any the worse for it?” Was he so hardened, so insensitive, that he could really feel that? Or was it a sort of pagan unmorality which made it impossible for him to judge between right and wrong? But no, not that, for how quick he was at judging and condemning a woman!

“It would have been better if you had cared,” she said.

“Well, anyhow, it hasn’t hurt her; put her in her place for once; sort o’ place she ought to be in—Piccadilly, for instance. Look here, Hal, d’ye mean to say you didn’t realize that’s the sort she is—would have been all along if she hadn’t been so damned careful to take everything and give nothing?”

“Ronny, do you still mean to say you can’t understand that I’m not thinking of her?”

“What is it, then?” He stretched out one hand

to take hers, and, finding them pressed back against the shutter behind her, rested it on her shoulder, smoothing down her low collar.

“Look here, Hal darling, don’t let’s quarrel over a woman like that—she’s not worth it. I tell you I don’t care a twopenny damn about her. You and she—why, you’ve only got to look at yourself to see that you’re not in the same class—no reason for you to start on getting jealous of anyone, my dear, much less a—”

She drew herself away so sharply that she stumbled against the step, and putting out one hand to catch at the shutter flung it out between them, dispersing a cloud of flies, already settled there for the winter.

“Don’t touch me—I don’t want ever to see you again—ever—ever—ever!” she cried, and slipped past him out of the room.

So there was an end, for the moment. He could not run over the house halloaing for her, to find himself confronted with a locked door and all the servants gaping and chattering. How unjust women were! Hang it all, he had broken with Nina Arbuthnot!—had explained clearly enough in all conscience that the whole thing meant nothing more than what, in the old days, he would have called a “do”: the paying back of that unforgettable insult. It was not as though he cared a hang for her!

All the way back to Clonross he told himself this,

repeating it again and again, with a vague idea that, somehow or other, Henrietta ought to be pleased at the way in which he had asserted himself.

Throughout the next three days he sulked, made no attempt to see his wife. Then Lady Taghmony intervened. Something was patched up between the two, and Henrietta came back to Clonross—or, rather, the shadow, which might be called “the appearance” of Henrietta—“just to let people see there’s nothing really wrong between you.” That was what her mother-in-law said, wheedling her, working on her pride, her affection, with: “It would break your father’s heart if there was any serious trouble between you and Ronny—poor Ronny! He’s so perfectly wretched, you know.”

And wretched he was, there was no other word for it. At a complete loose end, all conciliation and diffidence and tenderness towards his wife as in the old days—the old beginning to the old end; while in the old way, also, Henrietta melted towards him, wondering where she had failed him: feeling him more of her child than ever—much, much more, and there was the difference: comforting him until he was so much at ease that the whole Arbuthnot affair was blotted out from his mind, his very memory.

They stayed on at Clonross till the end of November; then the Taghmonys left and the young couple went back to Greylands for a while. By this time Shaen was once more becoming restless, continually receiving letters from London; irritable

and discontented. He seemed to have lost his old taste for hunting. "Always the same people, the same giddy round," he said. Very soon, almost immediately after Christmas, he went off to London. "Just for two or three days. There are things to be settled, people I must see. No use draggin' you over there, Hal. I know you hate London. And anyhow, it won't be more than a week at the very most," was what he said. He had completely forgotten that notion of Lady Fair's, that Henrietta was about to have a child: was not in the very least disappointed at his mistake, for the simple reason that, having served its purpose, the idea went clean out of his head, was replaced, now, by the belief that nothing could be nicer for her than to stay on in Ireland with her father.

CHAPTER XX

IT was an elusive spring. The snowdrops and aconites were out before the end of January, dotting that dark green lawn which remained unfaded throughout the entire year. The air was so mild that it was possible to sit out of doors basking in the sunshine that flooded the stable-yard, the whole of the back of the house. After this, however, came snow, cold winds, sleet; and, following upon that, endless beating rain, with something insistent and personal, cruel, in its force; the sweep of it finding out every crack in the old house, slicing its way in beneath each defective slate, pouring down the pipes, soaking the ground beneath; ceasing, when it did cease, just enough to drip, drip, drip—with a sound far more deadly than the rain itself, utterly at variance with the human pulse, with every other sound in nature.

The noise of the rain penetrated through Henrietta's dreams; streamed through everything that she thought and said and read, punctuating everything in the wrong place, beating a devil's tattoo to the youth and vitality which seemed as though it were being washed out of her.

Battalions of clouds moved across the mountains, grey vapours swam above the river and

loughs. If the sun did shine for an hour it showed the whole countryside sodden with rain, glinting in puddles. . . . An hour?—ah no, it was never that: a quarter at most, and then the whole thing started over again, with tearing sheets of rain.

Riding along the roads—for she was possessed by a restlessness which would not allow her to sit quietly at home—Henrietta met people coming and going to the markets and shops or about their business in the fields, all alike drawn down with the rain. The girls' white ankles gleamed, their carnation cheeks glowed beneath the hoods of their cloaks, heavy with rain, pulled up over their heads. The better-off men were enveloped in as many coats as an onion; the poorer swathed in sacks which left their legs unsheltered, their trousers glued around them. The proud who went in shoes were the worst off of all, for Malony the cobbler bought up all the chemist's spare pasteboard bottle wrappings, for re-soling them with: "An' no other leather ter equal it in the whole of County Mey-ooo," he would say.

Henrietta tried not to watch for Denny, struggling up the drive, "with the soul washed clear out of him," as he said. But somehow or other she was unable to keep away from the window on the staircase, the only window which looked that way. The days when he did not come stretched like a decade before her. She endeavoured to believe that he kept the letters until there were enough to make the journey worth while; but in the same moment

she realized the days which slipped by between each letter, apart from bills, receipts, advertisements or begging epistles.

It seemed, indeed, as though the world had been washed away from them, as though they themselves were being beaten into the earth with no one to help them, intolerably remote. The very kitchen, warm and bright with its glowing fire, where the servants laughed together, joking with the stable-boys and Patsy, might have belonged to a different world. For they burned coal there, coal which spluttered and blazed, glowing red, not peat, as they did in the dining-room—for no reason save that they had never burned anything else; peat which may be so cosy for any two to sit close gossiping over, but which has no power to brighten or warm a room overhung with that sort of gloom, that sense of waiting for something, which oppressed both Henrietta and her father.

They had a box of books from Dublin each fortnight; by the time it reached them the books in their sodden box reeked of that damp which seemed to have become the universal uniform of the place, and everything in it. The daily papers—the *Morning Post* and *Pall Mall Gazette*, of necessity a day late—were in a pulp before they reached them.

Henrietta could not settle to read. She opened one book and then another, but it seemed impossible to reach the end of them. In those novels which moved slowly towards that conventional happy ending, which so many people like to have depicted for

them, she felt something of the unreality of life, or was set wondering what was wrong between her and Shaen—how it was that they had missed so much; while the sadder ones, more particularly the Russian and Scandinavian literature, with its air of tragic fatality, hurt her, and she could not afford to be hurt; travels were too detached; biographies told of other people's lives, and, with the egotism of youth, she was engrossed in her own.

She and her father spoke less and less to each other, for they had reached a point when there seemed nothing left to say. It had become impossible to talk of commonplace things, and they shrank from all that they were really thinking about. If they could once have let themselves go, stormed against anything—even the weather—it would have been better for them. During their solitary walks Philip Rorke would curse his son-in-law, the whole Taghmony family, but he kept his curses to himself. Always over-punctilious over that question of interfering with the conscience, the mental liberty, of anyone, he never allowed a single word of disparagement to escape him; never even inquired whether Henrietta was hearing from her husband, never allowed himself to so much as glance at the letters, few enough in all conscience, which Denny brought her.

Lord and Lady Taghmony were over in Paris, together for a while until some sort of quarrel, or some new fancy, whisked Lord Taghmony away to Algeria. Henrietta had but few letters from her

mother-in-law. Sometimes she enquired after Shaen, lamenting that he would not write, blaming Henrietta for telling her so little; at others she took on a pathetic pretence at knowing all there was to know about him, as though she herself heard from him every day. His sisters seemed to know even less than his mother. Now and then there was a hasty line, generally asking her to see about something at Clonross, which ended with: "What in the world is Ronny doing? We never see or hear anything of him nowadays." Again, there were letters which included some message for Shaen himself, concerning some horse or dog, some question of mating or breeding—which the whole family discussed with equal openness—showing that there was an idea that he was fairly often over in Ireland.

There were irregular letters from Shaen himself, sometimes two or three in one week, mere short scrawls. He was always just coming back to Ireland—just coming, but never came. Apart from these small groups of letters, there were intervals of three or four weeks without a word from him. One letter was headed as having been written from Denise's house in Norfolk; but there was a note from Denise herself by that very same post with a message to Shaen—careless Shaen! so stupid, or was it willfully cruel?—in his intrigues.

Rorke must have known something of what was going on. He could not have helped knowing, feeling it through and through him, loving his daughter as he did. But for all that he made no sign. "If

she wants to tell me anything she will." That was what he thought, suffering acutely, with a feeling as though his whole soul were being drawn out of his body towards her.

It was the last week in February before the rain really ceased. Even then it seemed as though the weather could not make up its mind to be fine, for the sunshine was broken by intervals of dull, brooding, thundery and overcast skies. And yet with the cessation of that wall of rain, interspersed between them, or so it seemed; or, worst still, that nerve-chafing drip, it seemed as though Henrietta and her father awoke to something more like real life; began slowly and with difficulty to drag themselves out of a water-logged grave.

The first sign of the change came with Henrietta's suggestion that they should ride together. Before this she had dreaded imposing the deep melancholy of her moods upon her father more than was absolutely necessary: while he himself had equally dreaded inflicting his company upon her, made sure that she wished to be alone—the tragically ridiculous pair. Now, once again, they rode and drove together, and there was some sort of comfort in that. With the first few fine days Mr. Fielden and Father O'Sullivan also emerged, coming over to Greylands to tea, dropping in during that hour when a fire was still so welcome, though the drenched skies outside were blue with the lengthening days, merging into a pale primrose, washed-out vermilion; for it seemed as though the elements

themselves were anæmic, drained of all vital colouring—everything, indeed, apart from the grass, wickedly green.

Quite suddenly Henrietta's mood of deadly acquiescence in things as they were, broke, and she was overcome with a far more healthy resentment. It was impossible that the position between herself and Shaen should go on. The feeling of spring in the air whipped her into a new, raw life; a sense of her own pain, the tragedy of the unmated or mismated. She realized the insult which lay in being left there until she was wanted, like a piece of luggage—to be called, or even sent for. If he still loved her they must live together. Thinking it over, she realised the strangeness of the whole position: the fact that there had never been any real break between them, and yet by every letter she received from him, by every one of her own replies—each time more difficult and strained—there was evidence of a widening breach.

For two or three days she carried the thought of all this in her mind, going over it to herself, taking out the facts and looking at them squarely. Strangely enough, that deadly longing for her husband which had overcome her during those months of rain was lessened by her more practical realization that now or never was the time for some *rapprochement* between them.

The difficulty of putting the thing into words, of embarking upon any discussion of what her father had tacitly acknowledged to be altogether her own

affair still remained. We all know how, when any expression of a wish or feeling gets to this stage, one is balked by it as one may be by a quite easy jump once missed; how, when the thing does get itself into words, it comes with a rush—as shocking as the betrayal of something essentially private, as unexpected by oneself as by everyone else.

Henrietta and her father had dined together without saying much: as always, polite and considerate to each other. Indeed, their whole intercourse began to carry something of the aspect of a formal reception for two; as it must do when people, nearly related in every sort of way, find some subject impossible of discussion between them.

They had sat over the fire after dinner trying to read. It was so mild that the long window close to Henrietta's chair still stood open, and the air entered in great soft puffs, filling the room with the breath of spring; bringing with it the sound of the river, still heavy in flood.

The parlourmaid brought in the tray with whisky and syphons before she went off to bed, and Henrietta got up to mix a drink for her father, standing on the hearthrug for a moment looking down at him. It came out then, quite suddenly—that familiar phrase of the O'Haras so alien to her and her breed:

“I can't stand it!”

Philip Rorke put down his tumbler on the table by him and drew himself upright. “Thank God!” he said.

For one moment Henrietta stared at him, missing his meaning; then, realizing his sense of relief that the long silence upon this one thing which really mattered had been broken between them, she dropped to her knees at his side and laid her head against his shoulder, while he put his arm round her, patting her awkwardly.

“There, there, there. . . .” Her tears were like the breaking of a drought. He felt this and had the sense not to try to check them, his paramount idea of encouraging everybody to keep the firmest possible hold upon themselves for once in abeyance. As she became a little calmer he spoke.

“Something had got to happen,” he said. “Things could not go on as they were. I have been feeling that—been feeling the whole thing—too damnably! You realize that, don’t you, my dear? I daren’t interfere—daren’t!” He hesitated, then added with a bitter laugh: “It seems to me like a sort of creeping paralysis; one ought not to allow oneself to feel like that—so dead scared of interference. It was my duty to have spoken long before—tried to help you, but . . . Oh well, you know what I am. I thought it was best to give you your own way—that old saying, you know, ‘Never put your hands on the reins when another person’s driving’; but I have been thinking—my dear, believe me, I have been thinking—” He put up one hand and held it against her hair, pressing her head to his shoulder.

“You know that I care, you know how much I care. And yet it seemed impossible—out of the

question—for either of us to say anything—show anything. I ought to have helped you long ago. I tried to help you, but I went about it the wrong way. My one idea was to give you what you wanted, to help you to marry Shaen, when the thing that I ought to have done was to insist upon you waiting, knowing more of each other. . . . Cowardice—nothing more nor less than cowardice. But there, I've failed—always failed—with you as with Ireland. I was all right with India; I didn't care for India."

"It would not have made any difference."

"You would have loved him anyhow, that's it—eh? Oh, but you can't know that. . . . If I'd been a different sort of father—"

"I always cared for him. I never could care for anyone else. But it is not only that—there was no one else."

"You mean that I never gave you the chance of meeting other people?"

"No, no, dad! You mustn't think that—never think that." She raised her head and pressed her cheek against his. "If I had met all the men in the world it could have made no difference to my feeling for Ronny—I know that. Nothing could have made any difference—nothing. Only it seems as though from the very beginning—the first day I saw him—everything was settled. . . . Not for him," she added in a lower voice, "but for me."

"You mean that you would never have married anyone else?"

“That I never could! Oh, it wasn’t my doing—had nothing to do with me—there was no reason or choice. It was just there—the feeling of belonging, I mean; I could do nothing with it.” She spoke with a passion unusual to her. It seemed as though the repression of all those long months had broken at last: months and months when she had set her mind, not on living the full life proper to her youth, but rather on enduring; though never altogether resigned, for that is indeed a tragic quality which comes with years and not with months—resignation, the tombstone of hope.

“Nothing could have made any difference—nothing! People speak of things being pre-ordained—I suppose it was like that.” Her voice dropped; she spoke in that hesitating way, groping for the words to express her feeling.

“I don’t suppose that I was ever happy; I don’t think I ever expected to be happy. Somehow or other I don’t believe that I thought for one moment that I was meant for it—perhaps love never does mean happiness, I don’t know. Mr. Fielden was talking of it the other day; he said that we all expected to be happy—but I don’t think I did. I don’t believe I thought about it. All I knew was that I loved Ronny. Oh, I don’t know—it wasn’t even that—consciously, at least. There was simply no one else in the world—one could think of nothing else, feel for no one else. It was like a wind that takes away one’s breath. Anyhow, there it was—is—”

“You still care?”

“It is no question of caring.” She spoke almost beneath her breath. “I don’t know that I do care. It’s all so different. I used to want almost more than anything to feel his arms round me, his head on my shoulder. I don’t think I want that now. Oh, I don’t know what I want. . . . But there could never be anything in its place—that’s what it comes to. I don’t want to do anything. I don’t care about anything. I can’t make myself take an interest—I can’t. I have tried—tried terribly hard—oh, long ago out in the West Indies. I knew it was dangerous to think of and care for nothing apart from one person, but I couldn’t help myself. It seemed as though I were fated—made for nothing else.”

“If you realized that he still cared for you—or cared for someone else—would that make any difference?”

“No—that’s just it.” Henrietta was crouched on the hearthrug at his side, leaning against his chair, her eyes on the dying fire—the grey and orange of the smouldering peat. “I know he cares for other women, but all the same I know that he will never care for any other woman in the way he has cared—still cares—for me. . . .” She hesitated for so long that Rorke thought she had changed her mind about saying anything more. He would not prompt her. He had seen more of her inmost thoughts than he had ever seen before, and he was half ashamed, as one who—with no ex-

pectation of any such thing—finds himself upon holy ground.

The wind outside was rising, blowing in the curtains, rounding and bellying like the sails of a ship; catching up the ash on the hearth in spirals, scattering it over the hearthrug, over Henrietta's dress—silk of that deep plum colour which Shaen had once loved to see her wearing.

She stooped her head lower and flicked off the ash as carefully as though it were the only thing that mattered; then went on very slowly:

“As much as he can care—but it's not enough for me; because he must have change—other women. I am there at the back of his mind, or his heart, as the one to come back to if he were ill or in any sort of trouble. I am not enough for him because of that—other women—and now . . .” Once again she hesitated, then spoke more quickly in a low-toned rush of words:

“He is not enough for me, because there is not enough of him. Not because he is not here—not because he doesn't write, but just because of that. . . . And there never can be anyone else. So—oh, there you are! One must stay like this, I suppose—emptied out.”

She rose to her feet and turned her back on her father, laying her head upon her hands, clasping the high mantelshelf.

“It's like being dead,” she said.

Mr. Rorke got up and stood beside her, facing the other way. He would not look at her; was

determined not to seem to pry, to probe her feelings. For all that, he had pulled himself, for the time at least, out of that lethargy into which the soft Irish air had drawn him.

Something had to be done; things could not go on like this. Quite suddenly, for the first time in all his intercourse with his daughter, he was overcome by a sense of responsibility. He hated interference, and yet now, as it seemed, it was “up to him” to interfere. All these years he had done wrong. His boast of giving Henrietta a free hand, without encroaching upon her liberty of thought or action, was at an end. With a sense of passionate self-reproach he realized that it had been nothing more than weakness, the taking of the easiest way.

He stood so upright that it seemed as though the last six years or so were sloughed off him. In India he had been regarded as a man of quick, clear decision, a man who was by no means to be trifled with. After all, it was not only the Irish air that had changed him but his sentiments regarding Ireland, combined with the sudden cessation of a fixed routine of work. He picked up the scattered threads of himself now, saw himself as clearly as he had once seen others, and arrived in one moment at a clear-cut decision as to what was the best thing to do—or rather attempt to do. For how was it possible to be altogether decisive in any matter where his son-in-law was concerned? “You may lead a horse to the water . . .” etc. It was impossible for this old adage to be more completely ap-

plicable than it was here. There was something else, too, about “drawing water in a sieve.” But now, at last, he realized his own duty in the matter.

“Look here, Henrietta, that husband of yours has been away quite long enough. People drift apart and begin to see things out of all perspective; but it’s impossible to say that your married life is at an end when you are only nineteen.”

“I know that—as long as he wants me—”

“He has probably got himself entangled with all sorts of new people. You know he is very like a child in a great many ways—lives in the moment. Actually you are younger than he is, but in so many ways you are much older. You have the better head of the two, and that gives you a sort of responsibility. Look here, it seems to me that we have all got hopelessly tied up—you and I here have been stagnating; that’s it, there is no other word for it, stagnating. We have let ourselves go; we have got to pull ourselves together now. I believe that everything will come right. It mayn’t be in altogether the same way as you had once thought; but married life is like that, my dear—an everlasting picking up of threads, starting again.

“We are depressed—hopeless things, nerves!—every trifle worries us. What I suggest is this: let’s go over to London, pick up that truant of yours and go to the Continent—not to any lonely place where there is nothing but scenery to depend upon, but somewhere we’ll get plenty of amusement and interest. That’s what you want, too. Oh, it’s all

my fault; I've let you in for it. You are old before your time. We will go to Monte Carlo; everything will look different in the sunshine. We will make a splash for once, and have a good time together. I want to get to know Shaen better; and just at first, anyhow, it will be easier if I'm there—he'll have to pull himself together too—if I can't grease the wheels somehow I can't be much good for anything. You must give us this chance, my dear—a chance for both of us, myself equally with your husband. We've got to look after you; and see here, Henrietta, you have got to learn to let yourself be looked after. 'Pon my soul, I believe that's pretty well the most necessary characteristic for any woman—a *volte face* that for me, eh?" He glanced at her, smiling; a glance which he took care to keep to the surface alone, determined not to see too much.

Henrietta's face brightened. After all, she was such a child. The very idea of going abroad, of being in the sunshine once more—real sunshine, not damped down as it was in Ireland—appealed to her like an open door to one too long house-bound. And perhaps, with her father and Shaen together—who knew what might happen? She had honestly believed herself at the end of hope, but that was all nonsense. No one is ever completely without some belief in a fabulous eternity if in nothing else: no atheist altogether an atheist when he reaches the end.

"If he would come—" she began hesitatingly.

“Oh, he must come! Don’t you worry about that, my dear. We will sweep him off his feet, carry him away before he has time to think of it. Look here, we won’t even tell him we are coming—”

“We had better do that.” A sad prudence possessed her in spite of everything. There were so many other people in Shaen’s world; it would be a fatal mistake to start off with anything in the shape of a surprise visit, disturbing him when he least wished or expected to be disturbed.

Rorke agreed. “I daresay you are right. We’ll send him a line to tell him we are coming without giving him time to answer.”

So it was as bad as that, then! He was surprised at his daughter’s worldly wisdom, aghast at this fresh evidence of what she had been through. For what can be sadder than to knock at the door of a heart where you rightfully belong—tentatively, fearfully; conscious that there may, likely enough, be someone else in possession?

CHAPTER XXI

THREE days later, having given Shaen no more time than was necessary to engage rooms, Henrietta and her father crossed to Éngland and were met by him at Euston.

Shaen kissed his wife more quietly, in a way more tenderly, than he had done for a long time—almost clung to her for one moment, as it seemed; then he collected their luggage, saw it on a taxi and got in with them; seeming altogether older, less excited and buoyant—though his eyes were restless—less “all on the top” as they used to say of him.

“I couldn’t get you rooms at the place I’m in, it’s full up, but I have got some at Brown’s Hotel. It’s no distance from Jermyn Street and it’ll be much the same thing.”

His look and tone were uneasy. It seemed as though he had lost the greater part of his old confidence, that he could not even feel sure of being believed, and Henrietta was puzzled, unable to realize whether he was or was not speaking the truth. If there was no reason for keeping apart from her, there also seemed no reason why he himself could not have moved to Brown’s.

He went with them to the hotel. There was

some talk of tea, but it was agreed that it was too late for that, and Rorke suggested that he should go back to his own hotel to dress, then join them at dinner and take Henrietta to the theatre.

“I’m awfully sorry, but, you see, I didn’t know you were coming. If you had let me know a little earlier . . . it’s like this . . .” Shaen moved uneasily; his vague glance just touching his wife’s face, then turning away again. They had sat down in the lounge, gathered stupidly round a little wickerwork table, while their luggage was taken up to their rooms. He was tipping this table to and fro; it was the first thing upon which his eyes had really fixed themselves, and it seemed as though nothing on earth mattered apart from the hopelessly ridiculous task of trying to make it stand upon one leg. A matchstand and some newspapers on the lower shelf slithered to the floor, and he stooped to pick them up with a sharp exclamation of annoyance.

Henrietta had a feeling that everything must be far worse than she had thought, that he himself was frightened at the gulf which had opened between them; for his excuses were so unready, he was so palpably and desperately ill at ease.

“I’m most frightfully sorry, but the fact is that I am absolutely fixed up for dinner—something I can’t get out of—too late to get out of,” he said, raising his head, his face still flushed from stooping, and glancing at his wife with something like entreaty in his eyes, as though begging her to come to his rescue.

“To-morrow, then,” she said quietly, “it will do just as well to-morrow. I really am very tired. Perhaps you will come round in the morning, directly after breakfast—that is, unless you are full up.” It was difficult to speak naturally, for knowing his character—too dreadfully well as she did—she yet knew so little of his movements, of his life during the last two or three months, that to suggest their doing anything together seemed like trespassing on the time of a perfect stranger. All the same, there was that look of a child who has got himself into some sort of a mess, scared and uncertain. The feeling came over her that she must, somehow or other, take hold of him and, ridiculous as it seemed, take care of him—an old sort of feeling, as though all the responsibility rested with her. The common idea of a wife depending upon her husband, looking to her husband for guidance or advice, was ridiculous. It seemed that marriage meant nothing but the perpetual mothering of a child whom it was impossible to spank, to dose and put to bed. Her heart ached for him. What had he been doing? To what had he committed himself? There was something—she was perfectly certain of that.

“You will come round to-morrow morning?” she repeated.

“I don’t know if I can. Look here, Hal, I’ve got frightfully tangled up. There are all sorts of things—engagements, and all that. As a matter of fact, before I knew you were coming, I had pretty well fixed to go over to Ireland. There’s something

that Harris"—the agent at Clonross—"has been on at me about. One of the farms has fallen vacant and there has been a lot of trouble with tenants. He will be mad with me if I fail him—I really did promise. Anyhow, I'll ring you up in the morning. I hope you won't think me frightfully rude, sir," he went on, turning towards Rorke, "but if I'd had the faintest idea . . ." He broke off, and once again his glance sought his wife's face.

"That's all right; arrange it between you. We have been making great plans, Henrietta and I. She'll tell you all about them. I've some letters to get off before dinner—anyhow, I'll see you again."

He nodded and turned away. A feeling of flatness, a sense of having arrived at a complete *cul-de-sac*, overcame him as it had done his daughter. Seated at a writing-table in the smoking-room, he found it impossible to concentrate his mind on his letters. Somehow or other it was all like waiting for the bursting of a thunderstorm. What had that fellow been up to? Something that he was thoroughly ashamed of, there was no doubt about that—more than half bored with, and yet unable to break loose from. He realized how his glance had sought his wife's face. Well, there was only one hope for it, they must find their own way out; happily enough with a husband and wife both young, both perfectly normal, this might be easier than with any other two people in the same position.

Directly his father-in-law had gone Shaen got up.

“Look here Hal, I’m frightfully sorry, but I can’t stay now. Dinner at seven, and all that—I wish to goodness you’d let me know before.” His tone took on a sudden sharp resentment, as though that idea of bolstering himself up with a grievance had come back to him once more—the old idea which he had so often depended upon. “These sort of surprise visits are never any good. Anyhow, what’s the idea of it all?”

“Will you come upstairs with me? It’s impossible to talk among all these people.” She was in despair at the turn things were taking.

“I can’t come now—I tell you I’ve got to dress for dinner. To-morrow morning—I’ll ring you up to-morrow morning. Anyhow, I’ve told you I’ve got to run over to Ireland. There are all sorts of things to be seen to.”

Henrietta rose and stood facing him. She had hardened, stiffened. There must be some break in this intolerable network of evasion. She could do nothing for Shaen, desperate in some queer way as she knew him to be, if he refused to see her, just slipped away, went back to Ireland the very day after she crossed over to London! She did not greatly care what people said or thought, but this was beyond everything: it would set the whole country-side talking. Besides, they would be no further forward, just changing places like buckets in a well.

“Shaen, it can’t go on like this. I’ve been thinking it over. We’ve been talking it over, father and I.”

“Oh, you’ve been talkin’ it over, have you? Don’t you think it would be best for us to keep our own affairs to ourselves?”

“I don’t want you to take it like that, Ronny.” She spoke very gently, for she realized the state that he was in. “We were only making plans, because it seemed that things could not go on as they have been. We were planning father and I, to go abroad together and to try and persuade you to come with us.” She hesitated, and then went on, with that intense difficulty, that slowness which hampered her in moments such as these: “Ronny, we didn’t seem to have quarreled when you left, but now . . . Oh, I don’t know what’s happened! We are miles and miles apart from each other. Dad thought, and I thought, if we all went away together somewhere, where everything was different, we might pick up some of the threads again—”

“I don’t see what you mean”; he spoke obstinately. “People don’t live everlastingly in each other’s pockets these days.”

“I know, but it’s close upon three months—”

“Three months!” He repeated the words after her as though he himself were appalled. “Three months—nonsense!—Oh well, all the same you’ll have to wait for a little. It’s not my fault, I tell you—there’s this business—all sorts of

things. . . .” He seemed somehow or other as though he were at his wits’ end, as though he didn’t know what to do or say.

“Ronny, we must talk things over. If you can’t come to-morrow morning—”

“Well, if I catch the eight-thirty from Euston, cross by day, you see . . . Anyhow, the sooner I go the sooner I’ll be back.”

“I must speak to you before that.”

There was something desperate in her tone. If she let him go now, go over to Ireland—or wherever he was going, there was that thought too—she would lose him altogether. She might be able to do without him; she believed she could do without him, in some maimed, broken-winged way, but he could not do without her. He had said that himself—speaking the truth for once: “I’m all over the shop without you.” She had done wrong to allow herself to remain away from him as she had done—so like her father in that horror of interference. The fact that she had always been expecting him to come back to Ireland was no excuse for her; they had better have crossed on the way than that she should have remained, as she had done, overwhelmed by a sense of inertia and depression, moping through life like someone who had been too badly hurt to venture upon any new effort.

“You are going out to dinner; are you going on to anything else afterwards?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Well, then, come back here. I must have a talk with you—I must.”

“Can’t it wait till I get back from Ireland?” He was tipping the table again, his head bent.

“No, it can’t wait, or rather if it waits as long as all that it will be the end of everything.”

“Look here, I may be very late.”

“I don’t mind; I’ll be in my room—you can come up there.”

“Look here, Hal. I’d rather not.” His face flushed heavily. “I don’t want to be a beast—come up to your room—not now—not till everything . . . Oh, till something’s been cleared up.”

“But I want you to come. I ask you to come.” She hesitated, and then added with the extremest difficulty: “You can’t be so very late after all—long before bedtime. I sit up reading and writing till all hours—oh, very often.”

She was horribly embarrassed. She must have this quiet talk with him, and yet she shrank—more than words can say—from the idea of what might seem like an attempt to win him back by any appeal to his passions. Why could not things be open and candid between them, as between any other man and woman? . . . Oh, but it was impossible—she knew that; for the threads of their life together, of their relationship, of their natural feelings and desires ran through everything, shaking them so that any clear judgment became blurred,

confused, just when it was most needed. But still, whatever claim or appeal she could find it possible to make must be used. It was impossible for things to go on as they were, with Ronny looking so dreadfully miserable, so hopelessly beaten and shaken by something—what, she could not say.

“I have not very often asked you to do anything you didn’t want. I ask you now. Come up for half an hour this evening, or—” once again she hesitated, “if you prefer it, there won’t be many people about then, we might find a quiet corner here.”

“No, no. That’s all right, Hal. I’ll come.”

He half turned away, then looked back. “I know it’s an awful lot to ask you, but if you’ll only try to believe me, things will straighten themselves out.” He took up his hat and brushed it round meditatively with one hand. “I wish to goodness people would leave one alone,” he jerked out. “I don’t mean you, of course not you, but other people. Oh, well, anyhow—about half-past ten, eh? Will that be too late?”

“No, that will be all right.”

He moved away, and Henrietta, after sitting for a moment weighed down by a feeling as though, somehow or other, virtue had gone out of her, so that it was impossible to move—desperately tired and dispirited—dragged herself to her feet, collected her belongings, gloves, cloak and books, and moved slowly towards the lift and up to her

own room—a large, double-bedded room. Shaen's hotel might have been full, as he said, but there was space enough and to spare here.

She crossed to the window and stood staring out. It was raining, and the street below was like a canal shining in the lamplight, with the taxis like incandescent water-beetles darting to and fro along it. If only by some means or other she could get at Ronny, she thought; her brain struggling wearily to put herself in his place, to realize what he was going through; what he was planning; to meet him half-way and, if possible, help him.

With all this she felt curiously detached, as though she were dealing with a stranger whom she was impelled to assist out of sheer humanity. There was no need for Ronny to have felt any sort of hesitation in coming up to her room; for it seemed as though nothing—nothing in heaven or earth, in their minds, their wills, their physical desires—could ever bring them together again.

It was just eleven when he appeared. His face was flushed, his eyes bright and a trifle glassy, all his dejection gone. He had, indeed, the whole air of a man who has dined well and taken a fresh hold upon his affairs.

He came in briskly, with a half laugh. "The people downstairs—it's such a damnably respectable place—looked at me very suspiciously: queer thing if a man can't have an assignation with his own wife!"

He moved over to the fireplace and sat down in a low chair, stretching out his hands to the blaze. It was so damp and cold that Henrietta, beaten down by fatigue and depression, feeling herself chilled to the bone, had ordered a fire; apart from this, it seemed so much more easy to talk in a room with a fire. She realized this, and the way in which her husband was influenced by his surroundings, warmth and brightness: the sort of mood which came to him when he entered her room, remarking on the comfort, the peace: "You always seem to be able to make any place decent."

She took another low chintz-covered chair and sat down opposite to him. The feeling of being almost a stranger was still there, in the face of his changed mood—all the more so in that there was no longer any of that unhappy appeal in his glance, such as had struck her so poignantly a few hours earlier.

"Now," he began cheerfully, "what are all these plans that I'm to hear of?"

"We, father and I, thought that if we could go abroad, the three of us—"

"When?" Shaen's voice was sharp, his expression had changed.

"Well, at once. Anyhow as soon as possible."

"Look here, Hal, I've told you I've got to go over to Ireland. I'm tied up for the present. It's impossible to get away anywhere else. Even when I come back—" He broke off, as though he were

for once at loss for words, the upper lip of his long Irish mouth drawn downwards, his whole look sullen and obstinate.

“I know, but that won’t take you very long—three or four days—and then we might start.”

“I can’t be ready by then.” The shallow excitement had faded out of his face. “Look here, Hal, it’s impossible to keep pace with all these sudden ideas and fancies. I had settled to go over to Ireland, partly because I thought you would be there, and now this has upset everything.”

He stared at her hardly, with such an air of braving something out that she felt sure he was not speaking the truth—at any rate the entire truth.

“Why couldn’t you have stayed where you were, and then there would have been none of this fuss. All the same, I might go with you later, though I don’t fancy these family parties are ever much of a success. I’ll see—I won’t make any promises,” he added condescendingly.

“Ronny, we’ve got to pick up the threads of our life together somehow or other.”

“Oh, all right, all right! We needn’t go over all that again,” he broke in impatiently. “Anyhow, where do you want to go?”

“Somewhere where there would be plenty for you to do; plenty of amusement; a bright sort of place. I’d like that too: it’s been pretty dreary at Greylands all this winter. Dad thought of Monte Carlo. I know you love it and—”

But Shaen had jerked himself to his feet, and

stood with his back to the fire, staring down at her, his face dark and flushed.

“Why—in the name of all that’s holy—Monte Carlo? Monte Carlo!” He repeated the words after her, as though half stupefied, hesitated for a moment, and began again: “What a perfectly rotten idea! You and old Rorke and Monte Carlo! No, my dear, we simply wouldn’t fit.” He laughed rudely, as though he had some idea of making a joke of it all, getting the better of it by mockery.

“I—I must have something different,” said Henrietta. She spoke with a sort of desperation, very unusual to her. “Look here, Ronny, I must—I’ve—I’ve come to the end of things.”

For one moment Shaen eyed her sideways curiously, as though something in his own mind made him suspect her. She knew that look, a look which said as plainly as words: “What the devil are you up to now?” and a sort of obstinacy stirred within her.

After that one glance he had turned aside and stood with rounded back, fingering the stupid hotel ornaments on the mantelpiece.

“I see no reason why I shouldn’t like Monte Carlo. I love sunshine and flowers and warmth. If we go anywhere we might as well go there. You always liked it—you said you liked it.” She felt that she was speaking stupidly, and yet she could not shake herself free of this sort of dull repetition.

“I can’t see any reason for going anywhere,” muttered Shaen, with his head bent.

There was a moment’s silence, then with an effort, as though she had been tied to her chair, Henrietta rose, put one hand on his arm.

“Look here, Ronny. Can’t you do something—shake yourself free?”

“Free of what? What the devil d’ye mean?” He flung round, confronting her defiantly; his eyes wide and staring. “What are you driving at now?”

“Oh, well, you know.” She made a gesture of complete hopelessness. “I can’t put it into words, but it’s there—things have got to a hopeless *impasse* between us. If you won’t meet me half-way, if you won’t do anything I ask, it will be better to give it up.”

“What do you mean? Give what up?”

“This pretence of being married,” she said under her breath.

“How can you say that? What nonsense! What do you mean? Just because I’ve got tangled up; because things have gone wrong? You can’t play about—hanky-panky tricks—with marriage like that. You’re my wife, and you’ll have to—”

He broke off, baulked by her silence, her steady gaze; then began again: “Look here, Hal, we men have all sorts of business worries you don’t know anything about. It doesn’t touch us—you and me, what you are to me; you believe that, don’t you?”

There was something of the old panic in his voice.

He put out his hand, caught at her wrist and held it loosely in his palm, stroking her forearm gently with the fingers of his other hand; the memory of how he used to laugh at that slender wrist and small white hand, "ridiculous little pud," as he used to call it—and of what Lady Fair had said, somewhere back in the dark ages: "Henrietta, like a cool hand on your forehead"—came back to him. Hang it all, he couldn't do without her; he couldn't! There must be someone to come back to. He had been so bucked up by his dinner, the companionship of it: had felt it would, after all, be easy enough to fit everything in, pretty well all at once, after the old O'Hara fashion.

Now, quite suddenly, he was scared. He didn't want to let anything go, that was the fact of it. Anyhow, he could not do without his wife. During these last few months there had always been that at the back of his mind: if things went wrong he would find Henrietta waiting for him, seeing the best that was in him; understanding him as no one else did.

"Don't go back on me, Hal. I couldn't stand it—I simply couldn't stand it."

He had both her hands now and she let him hold them, looking gravely into his eyes.

"You know I won't go back on you, so long as you really need me. If only—only—you would try to be frank with me—"

"I am—look here, I am!" He drew her to him, slipped his hands up her arms and held her tight. "It's only just for a week or two; have a little pa-

tience, that's all. I do love you, Hal. I care frightfully; I swear it! But—one does get so infernally tangled up, you know.”

It was strange how his usual stream of words seemed to have failed him. Perhaps this, more than anything else, impressed Henrietta with the sense of some real crisis, with the feeling that if the gulf between them were ever to be bridged it must be now; impelling her to the greatest effort she had ever made, the reversion of her every instinct—something like the offering of herself—horribly difficult.

“Ronny, why don't you stay here now—to-night—and let me go back to Ireland with you to-morrow?”

“I can't!” He threw her away from him, almost violently. “Look here, I can't!”

“We could stay there a few days and then go abroad.” She put aside any further mention of that night with a sense of burning shame, of the most hopeless sort of failure that can come to any woman. “Dad wouldn't mind; we could go alone if you like—just you and I—or we could stay on in Ireland, or come back to London. Anything, anything you like.”

“I can't do it—I can't.” He seemed overcome by a sort of fear, not so much of her as of himself; it seemed as though he backed away from her. He took up his hat; his face was crimson. “Look here, Hal, I must go.”

“I ask you to stay,” she said desperately.

“I can’t stay now. I can’t. It’s out of the question. Look here, Hal, I want to do the decent thing—you must let me go now.” He moved away from her, as though he were scared. She had never seen him look so desperate, so appealing. It was amazing to think of Ronny wanting anything—anything on earth—and not taking it. Henrietta was completely out of her bearings; nothing in his manner seemed to fit in with anything she had ever known of him.

She had sunk back into her low chair as he pushed her aside, and sat staring up at him, trying to collect herself and speak quietly.

“Wait for the night boat, anyhow,” she said. “Let’s have time to think things over—come and see me to-morrow morning.”

“All right”; he had moved towards the door, and stood glancing back at her. “Look here, Hal, honestly I can’t help myself.”

“No, no!” She was filled with the extremest pity for him—it was so true that he could not help himself. “We’ll leave it now; only put off your crossing till late and come back and talk over things—will you do that, Ronny?”

“Yes.” He spoke hesitatingly, then quite suddenly moved towards her. Instinctively she rose to her feet and was clasped in his arms. For one moment they clung closely together, passionately, desperately, while it seemed as though something of the old love flowed between them, blending them in one.

“Hal, Hal, don’t forget, I do care most awfully. I’m not much good for anything—never was—but it’ll all come right. They’re things I can’t get out of—but in a week or two—”

“When you come back from Ireland—you won’t be as long as that?”

“No, no—no time at all; and then it will be all right. I swear it will. We’ll go back to the old days. Anyhow, it’s all right now—all right, eh?” He took her face between his hands and pressed it, gazing into her eyes. Henrietta could feel that he was trembling from head to foot.

“It’s all right,” she said. “I can trust you.” She said it and believed it; and yet at the same time there was, deep down in her, something which cried out against this, trying to make itself heard: “You can’t trust him, you know you can’t; you never could—for he can’t hurt himself he knows it, and you know it.”

“Yes, yes, old thing, for God’s sake trust me,” he said, and turned away, without even attempting to kiss her.

As he put his hand on the door she called after him: “There’s to-morrow.”

“Yes, yes, to-morrow.” He opened the door and was gone.

CHAPTER XXII

ALL next day Henrietta stayed in the hotel. She said very little to her father, but he made no move towards getting the tickets, wiring for rooms in Monte Carlo, completing all the hundred and one petty arrangements and small purchases that they had talked over on the journey: always with that sort of feeling of building up a bulwark of certainty with trifles.

It would have been impossible for Henrietta to say whether she really expected Shaen. She watched for him, at meals or in the public rooms; her eyes, her ears, every nerve, astrain. But, for all that, she knew that there was some foreboding, deep down in her, which would have made her surprised to see him. Every landmark in the day, each meal as it came round, brought that sort of relief which comes to the fatalist when the worst is known; and was yet, at the same time, a knell, marking the time—tolling the death of her hopes.

Curiously enough, neither she nor her father spoke of sending round to Shaen's hotel to inquire if he were still there. They were too alike for that: it would have seemed a sort of spying, utterly repugnant to people of their type.

Soon after seven Henrietta went up to her own room to dress for dinner. The dragging day, the

strain of doubt and anxiety, had told upon her so that she ached from head to foot, found it impossible to focus her mind upon anything. It seemed, indeed, as though she were continually forgetting what she was about to do—even in this simple matter of dressing for dinner—moving to and fro between her dressing-table and boxes, taking up first one thing and then another, opening and shutting drawers and cupboards.

She could not make up her mind what dress to wear. It did not matter in the very least, but something had to be decided upon. She was unaccountably troubled; worried and bewildered, in that vague way which comes to us in dreams when we are confusedly endeavouring to get dressed for a journey or a party; finding ourselves totally unable to come across anything which matches with anything else.

She had brought over a good deal of luggage, thinner clothes than were, as yet, needed in London. For this had been another way of pushing down that sense of finality, burying it at the back of her mind, beneath the mental picture—an airy castle in Spain—of what life would be like at Monte Carlo; impressing upon herself the fact that her father always seemed to be able to carry through anything upon which he had set his mind; beating up all her old childish faith in his infallibility, his knack of managing men; forgetful of how he had failed, once away from India, of how impossible it was for anyone to turn Shaen in any direction he did not wish to go. Sometimes he would resist and

bluster, more often just ooze away, running through your fingers—and this was the most difficult of all.

She got out a black dress but was unable to discover anything apart from light-coloured shoes and stockings; felt herself unreasonably baulked over this. Everything seemed scattered about in a fashion completely alien to her—exquisitely dainty as she always was. There was even a pair of stays hanging over the back of one chair—the last note of disorder in any woman's room. She moved over to them and rolled them up, meaning to put them by in a drawer; then forgot what she was doing, and, laying them down again, began to search for a handkerchief.

All this was on the top of her; a sense of worry and hurry and bewilderment, the outcome of that apparently endless day. Underneath it, in the very centre of her being was a dull weight; the sort of feeling which might come to a woman who carries a dead child beneath her heart, sapping her strength, her power of coherent thought.

She had taken off her wrist-watch and several small ornaments and was sitting down to change her shoes, when there was a knock at the door. Going to it she found a waiter with a visiting-card, which she took in her hand and stared at for some moments before she realized the name upon it. There was another pause, another distinct effort while she endeavoured to connect the name with the person to whom it belonged. It seemed, indeed, as though there were a thick curtain hung between

herself and any fresh impression: a curtain of which the warp and woof, knotted and unevenly twisted, was made up from the entangled threads of everyday life, with all its preoccupation and petty duties, the difficulty of co-ordinating one thing with another.

The waiter glanced at her curiously. "The lady wishes to know if she can come up and speak to you."

With a conscious effort, Henrietta fitted the name to its owner: the fair, evenly-waved hair, the blue eyes and pink and white skin of Nina Arbuthnot.

"If she will wait a minute, I will come down." She had half turned, when she realized that the man was still holding his ground.

"The lady wishes to speak to you alone," he said. "She very particularly asked me if she might come up to your own room."

For that moment something cleared in Henrietta's brain. Mrs. Arbuthnot would not have come to see her because she liked her. She had some reason for it, and in that case it was best that she should say what she wished to say in private.

"Ask her to come up," she said, and turning back into her room, leaving the door ajar, busied herself in the effort to produce some sort of order: whipped to it by the feeling that she could not bear to think of Nina Arbuthnot finding either herself or her belongings, her outward appearance, in disorder; as if it would leave some sort of chink in her armour, through which the other woman would

delight to poke her fingers—with their brightly-tinted, pointed nails. Having tidied the room, she smoothed her hair, refastened the brooch in the front of her dress, and was composed and tidy as ever when there came a light knock at the door.

Mrs. Arbuthnot was not tidy. To Henrietta's surprise—for she had never expected any such thing, would not have credited her with sufficient feeling to allow so much as a hair to be ruffled—she seemed to have gone altogether to pieces. At first she imagined this must be the effect of some overwhelming grief; but in another moment she realized that it was in the main, temper: a passion which overruled everything else, found a sort of perverted pleasure in letting itself go; the very angle at which her hat was placed upon her head was eloquent of this.

Henrietta offered her a chair, but she would not sit down, and the two women stood facing each other.

“That husband of yours,” began Mrs. Arbuthnot, with a gesture of angry contempt. “I suppose it was a put-up job between the two of you. I suppose you imagined that he was going alone; or didn't you mind—so long as he was out of my reach, eh? There's no knowing what a woman of your stamp minds or doesn't mind. But there it is. You set your heart upon getting him away from me, and now you have done it. Oh, well! I for one can't see what you've gained by it. Nonsense to talk of exchange being no robbery—pretty sort of

exchange!" She spoke with the same coarseness with which she had uttered that insult which Shaen, in his adolescent pride, never forgave her; for which, with youthful cruelty, he had determined to get even with her.

"I don't know what you mean."

"You got him out of Ireland to try and keep him away from me. Oh, I know that. Everybody knows that. Honora said: 'Oh, there *are* things Hal won't put up with'—but what beats me is how you think you are going to benefit by it. If there was ever a case of 'out of the frying-pan into the fire'—" She laughed loudly; then, quite suddenly her voice dropped: "Oh well, after all, it's much the same fire—come to that!"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, for both of us!"

"I still don't know what you mean."

"Oh well, I suppose you knew that he was going abroad. I suppose that was part of it."

"But he hasn't gone abroad. He has gone back to Ireland; there was some business—" began Henrietta; then broke off, overcome by that hopeless feeling of never being altogether certain of how much truth there was in anything which Shaen chose to tell her; always a little, of course—there could not fail to be this with any man who talked so incessantly—a certain amount of truth interwoven with a fabric of lies.

She sat down by the foot of the bed, feeling un-

able to stand any longer; that old sense of deadening bewilderment came back to her.

She had no desire to hear what Mrs. Arbuthnot had to say. She wished she would go away. Whatever she told her did not matter—when once you come to the end of a thing like love nothing really matters. She had realized this when she parted from Shaen—the instant he left the room, though she could not have said why, after his clinging to her as he had done at parting, with that old look of panic, of desperate pleading. And that was not all, either, she knew she was being deceived, however much stricken he might be at the thought of it; his conscience-stricken misery only made it all the more hopeless, as though weakness was in some way as inexorable as fate.

“He has gone to Monte Carlo,” cried Mrs. Arbuthnot, with shrill triumph in her voice. The thing itself was against her own interests, she was furious over it. If it had been possible to kill Shaen in some mysterious and safe way—kill him from a distance, mutilate his companion, she would have done so; it would have given her infinite satisfaction to see them suffer. All the same, in a lesser way, it pleased her to see his wife suffer, exasperated as she had always been by Henrietta’s youth. There was not a line in her own face, the faintest fold of loosened skin beneath her chin, for which she did not, in some perverted fashion, long to avenge herself upon this chit of a girl. “Off to

Monte Carlo with that woman. I can't say I admire his taste."

"What woman?" Quite coolly, at the back of herself, away from herself, Henrietta was thinking: "She has a Belfast accent; I never noticed that before."

"Upon my word! You don't say that you didn't know? Oh, well, if you don't you must be a greater fool than I took you for. Why, everybody has been talking about them—everybody! Before he went out to Ireland last time they were the talk of London—that's what amused me so—getting him away. . . . And now. . . . Oh well! Anyhow, he has thrown his cap over the windmill this time—as far as a man can do. Though I suppose you would have him back, forgive him. You are the sort of woman for that."

"He has gone to Ireland." Henrietta repeated the words almost stupidly. "He left early this morning. I know—I said good-bye to him last night."

"Oh well, you may have said good-bye to him, but, for all that, he must have been knocking about London all day, for I saw him at Victoria at six this evening—and the Cristal woman with him—a stack of luggage! I found out from Cook's people where they had booked for."

"Oh!"

"Oh! . . . Oh! . . . That's one for me for spying, I suppose! 'Oh, oh!'" Nina Arbuthnot stamped her foot, wild with impatience. "Look

here, what's the matter with you? There seems to be no life in you. To sit there tamely and keep on saying, 'Oh! . . . Oh!'—or, 'He's gone to Ireland . . . he's gone to Ireland!'—like a parrot—as if that would make him anywhere but where he is. Oughtn't I to know?" She gave a harsh laugh, the half-triumphant laugh of a coarse-minded woman, forgetful of appearances—of the veneer of good breeding. "I saw him go, I tell you!" She broke off, staring, then began again: "Don't you hear what I say, or are you really too stupid to understand? He's gone off to Monte Carlo with that woman, Fay Cristal—there, is that plain enough for you! He has taken us both in." She laughed again. "It's queer to think of—you and I in the same boat—but, after all, you're his wife. By God! If I were that I wouldn't sit there staring in front of me. Do you realize what it means? Do you realize it?"

She put one hand on the rail of the bed and shook it. If she had dared to touch Henrietta she would have shaken her too; but she was half frightened of her and her immobility, of the fact that she had no faintest idea of what was going on in the brain at the back of that quiet face.

"Anyhow, something's got to be done. Look here, I don't see why we shouldn't join forces. You are his wife, but after all I've got pretty well as good a claim—more, if it comes to that. Oh, by God, what a fool I've been! You've the laugh of me there—ach!" She placed one hand on the knob

of the bed and beat upon it with the other. “A boy like that! A boy whom I always imagined I could do anything with—to let myself be taken in by a boy! But we don’t know ourselves, that’s the fact of the matter. One says one could never do this or that—and then one goes and does it. . . . You know— Oh well, after all, we’re in the same box. You risked everything—I wonder what you knew, or thought. But anyhow you got him—something for your pains: position, title, all that—it’s I who am left with nothing—like a servant-girl—landed!”

She broke off and then began again wildly: “And what am I going to do now, I’d like to know? It seems such a rotten shame; it isn’t as though I were the sort of woman that was always carrying on with men, as lots of them do. . . . But I was always so careful, always drew the line, and now, to be let in like this!”

She seemed beside herself; not with regret or shame, but with sheer fury.

“Something ought to be done with him. Men ought not to be allowed to go about the world like that—beasts! But I don’t believe that he cares for anybody, or anything—he’s that sort; and now—well, after all, it *has* got to do with you. You’ll have to help me—the thing’s got to be hushed up somehow or other. I have always been so contemptuous of women who get into this sort of trouble; everybody knows that, and now it will make it all the worse for me—the laugh against me.”

“What do you mean? What sort of trouble?”

“Oh, haven’t I made it clear? Are you so dense? You must have known what was going on between us—what a fool I was! I believe that even then—right up to the very end—I looked on him as a sort of kid one could do anything with. And now—”

“What sort of trouble?” Henrietta repeated the words, her eyes steady on the other woman’s face. It seemed as though her mind were clearing, things coming back to her. She remembered the reproaches which she had heard from beneath the terrace at Cloncross the evening of the dance: that—“After all there’s been between us?”

“What do you mean—what sort of trouble?” She nailed her to it with cold persistence—though she did not seem to care much one way or another. But Mrs. Arbuthnot was that sort of woman who cannot bear to put anything altogether plainly into words; a little of her fury seemed to have ebbed out of her. Twisting round the knob of the bed in both hands, her head bent, she muttered something about: “The kind of trouble that does come to women who—who make fools of themselves.”

“You mean that you are going to have a child?”

“Well, it sounds like it, doesn’t it?” She laughed, taking refuge in a sort of rudeness—the common refuge of the underbred.

“By my husband?”

“Yes! That’s what makes me so mad, so wild with myself! If it had been a real man . . . but a boy like that—a boy I always laughed at! I was

married for years, and this was one of the things that I always stuck out against—even with my husband. I hated it—he used to say I was so cold. But I wouldn't have it—I wouldn't! . . . Why should women be put to all sorts of torture just to satisfy men's vanity? That's what it comes to. All this talk about parentage!—I wouldn't have it, I tell you—and now . . . My God! I only hope to goodness the wretched thing won't live.”

She broke off into a sudden passion of tears—angry, uncontrolled sobs.

“I don't see what I'm to do—things get out somehow or other—they always do. You'll have to help me.”

“I can't help you. No one can help anyone else.” Henrietta spoke as though she were in a dream, her voice far away to her own ears.

“That's nonsense; you'll have to—you'll have to. You're his wife, and in some way you are responsible—you should have looked after him. Anyhow, he has got to come back. Why should he be enjoying himself in Monte Carlo while I'm going through hell? I knew something was up; I knew he was trying to sneak away; but he was too quick for me. I set someone on to watch him—one of these people who advertise—but the fool was too late. I got to Victoria station just as the gates were shut. They were late, too, but not so late as I was. I know now what animals feel like—shut away behind iron bars—I know how I felt when that brute of a man slammed the gate in my face. But he's got to be

made to come back—why should he get out of it all? Look here, why can't we join forces?"

She leaned forward, almost ingratiatingly: "He's done you in the eye, too; we shall have to help each other—us two women. We'll make him come back and face it out, somehow or other, between us. After all, you don't care for him, and if you divorce him he'll be bound to marry me—I'll see to that; no man has ever made a fool of me yet, and no man ever will. . . . Oh, *this*—I suppose we all have our moments of weakness, but . . . Oh well, what's over and done with doesn't matter—but you'll help me now?"

"No one can help you."

"If you wanted to you could."

"I can't help myself."

Henrietta had been sitting absolutely immobile, her hands folded in her lap; she raised them now, with a little gesture of despair: dropped them again, palm uppermost.

"If you were married to him you could not hold him—nobody could. You could never be certain for one single moment."

"Well, what about the kid, then? Why should I suffer? I don't see why I should suffer. I never got in a mess like this before. To be caught like this—the first time. Oh, it makes me mad!"

"It wouldn't matter what you did. It wouldn't make any difference if you brought him back; if I did as you say—divorced him and made him marry you."

“Then you won’t do anything?”

Nina Arbuthnot’s voice was sullen. It seemed as though her rage was spent, had worn itself down to a dull, sulky resentment.

“All I can say is that it’s damned hard luck.”

Henrietta did not speak. The other woman stared at her for a moment, then picked up her gloves, which she had thrown rather than dropped on the floor. “Oh well, I suppose I can find people who will help me—doctors and people like that. Anyhow, I don’t mean to let myself be beaten by a boy like that—a fool of a boy.”

She moved towards the door, then hesitated a moment, standing looking back. “Oh well, I suppose it’s pretty rotten for you too—though he always said you didn’t care, would divorce him like a shot—were so cold.” She broke off with a short ugly laugh. “Oh well, I suppose that’s what all men say of their wives!” she added, and turned and went out, leaving the door wide open behind her.

CHAPTER XXIII

It is strange the way in which the human body will go on working, the outward routine continue, all the gestures of everyday life seeming to remain the same when the mainspring of the whole thing is broken or lost. It cannot be for long. Quite suddenly the body—realizing that the inward control is gone, moving more quickly for the moment, in a meaningless and amazed fashion—runs down, ceases to work, and remains flaccid; useless, and ludicrous as a marionette with the guiding wire broken; its limbs hanging, its mechanically-controlled chin dropped, its head lolled forward, its very clothes seeming to hang more loosely upon it.

Henrietta finished dressing for dinner quickly with that sort of decision which had been impossible to her half an hour earlier: a decision which was in itself a sign that her mind had ceased to work, so that she was no longer preoccupied—for God knows she had other things to think of, if she could think, than the business of clothing herself—that, for the time being, she felt nothing; her every action purely mechanical, following that sort of routine to which she had been for so long accustomed.

To outward appearance there was not the faintest change in her when she joined her father at dinner,

apologizing for her lateness: beautiful and serene, so completely finished that people glancing at her, admiring her, made sure of a sort of coldness.

“Someone came to see me and delayed me,” she said. She did not mention who it was, and Rorke wondered, scared by some change which he realized, not in the least from any reason that he could put his finger on and say, “It is this or that”; “She is paler, more disturbed, less at ease.” Indeed, there was no change of that sort, though the something there was throbbled through him like one of his own nerves, jagged and enflamed. She talked more than she had done for some time, more than she usually did; almost running on—for her, Henrietta, usually so silent—though it was noticeable that she never once mentioned her husband’s name, that there was no renewal of their plans for going abroad together.

All the same—“Something’s gone terribly wrong!” Rorke repeated it to himself, as a question which might bring its own answer, yet found none. He himself was involved in the catastrophe, for that the bond between them, which had been growing stronger and more articulate during the last few weeks, was now broken. Desperately, miserably, he searched back through his own mind for anything in his own behaviour which might have caused this change. There was that old unforgivable cowardliness, of letting her go her own way when she was far, far too young to bear the burden of responsibility which he laid upon her young shoulders; and yet it was not that, he knew

Henrietta too well to believe it, though this was the first idea which had swept over him. She was far too generous to hark back, to nurse a grudge—come to that, she had never, even in her most inmost thoughts, he was certain of that, acknowledged his failure.

No, no, it had nothing to do with him. And if it hadn't to do with him it had to do with Shaen—so small was her world; while he himself was dragged down for no fault of his own, but simply because with the cessation of feeling in one direction the whole thing went: he had a mental picture of a telegraphic system, with one wire tearing down another.

It was not until they were drinking their coffee, still seated at the table in one corner of the quiet little dining-room, that she so much as mentioned herself.

“Father, I'm thinking—if you don't mind awfully—” She hesitated for so long that it seemed as though she had changed her mind about speaking—her elbow on the table, her chin propped in the palm of one hand, her eyes far away as though she were projecting herself into some future where her father was unable to follow her; looking forward into something beyond his ken, something altogether out of sight and mind of anyone whose feelings, however desperate, still held that sense of responsibility or hope which keeps their attention on things normal and of this earth.

“If you wouldn't mind—if you didn't think it

unreasonable, upsetting all our plans—I feel I—I would like to go back to Ireland—just for a little.”

“Oh, why not!” Rorke was conscious of a sudden cessation of his fears. During the course of the day she had spoken of her husband going back to Ireland, and it seemed that here was a very simple explanation—he forced himself to take it at that—of the change in Henrietta. She was anxious to be with her husband, distressed by the appearance of throwing him, her father, over. He himself had just one pang at the thought of being dropped like the pilot, no longer wanted, but he put it behind him. Later on it was more dreadfully embittering than all else put together, to remember how he had done this deliberately—with a sort of mental patting on the back: to realise how futilely one can act when one goes against instinct, overcome by a smug desire to do what is right; obliterating oneself, presumptuous in the attitude of a spurious Christ.

“Oh, of course! Why not, my dear? The best thing you can do!” He was actually effusive for him. “You two go off together and don’t bother about me; I can find plenty to amuse myself in London. We can talk over the other plans when you come back.”

Henrietta turned her head and glanced at him with wide eyes, her lips parted. It seemed as though in some strange way he was smoothing out a path before her, relieving her of any sort of excuse or explanation.

“Oh, I don’t know. I’m not sure—” she began,

feeling that it was impossible that she should lie to him by mere passive acquiescence, then broke off, overcome, more than anything else, by a sense of immeasurable fatigue: a feeling as though she had no strength left for any sort of explanation even so simple as this: "Ronny's not gone to Ireland. He's gone somewhere else. It's only that I want to be back home—I want to be alone."

It seemed impossible to get this thought into words. She was appalled at the number which would be wanted: the mental picture of the sentences trailing out, fold upon fold, in front of her. And even that would not have been all. Once she started explaining there was something else which would have to follow—something still further on that she intended to do. Come to that, she would be blocked there, anyhow, for the simple reason that she did not know what it was. It was there. There was no doubt about that—no doubt whatever—something inevitable. Wave upon wave, a sense of the ordered drama of life swept through her mind like the sound of many men—so many that the beat of their feet was like the sound of the sea—marching to the tune of all those things which Mr. Fielden had said about her love and the inevitability of tragedy, along with her own realization of the shortness of time—drum and fife, shrill, insistent.

She was going to Ireland for some very special reason, though she did not know what. She was like a person under sealed orders, moving on a settled route to an unknown destination.

“What are you going to do? Is he calling here for you, or will you meet him at Euston?”

“Euston, I think.” She had risen from the table, and they stood for a moment facing each other across it.

“Would you rather I didn’t come to the station with you?” Rorke’s gaze held something of that old curious diffidence. Whatever the trouble was—trouble or reconciliation—it seemed to lie between Henrietta and her husband, and he was frightened of interfering, making some sort of wrong move. Looking back at it all afterwards he realized this: that tragic quality of mental cowardice which is so fearful of any sort of responsibility as far as other people are concerned. “I will come if you like; if I can be of any use to you.”

“No, no. I’ll be all right.” The words: “Shaen will meet me there,” were clear in her brain, but it was impossible to express them, tell him a direct lie in the face of his anxiety, his desperate fear of hampering her by any sort of personal demand.

“We’ll have breakfast together before you go?”

“If you don’t mind. I—it will make the day so long for you—”

“Oh, that’s all right.” They had turned and were moving, side by side, towards the lounge. “Of course you’ve got all sorts of things to think of.” She felt the disappointment, the sort of flatness in his voice, and yet for once she could not respond, make it easier for him; she could not, simply could not. She must be alone, that was all she

wanted; it was impossible to bear the thought of any renewal of these passive untruths, impossible to leave him under the freshened impression that Shaen was actually waiting for her. She put one hand on his arm.

“Father, it’s hateful of me to go off like this but—oh, I can’t help myself.” It was dreadfully true; she could no longer help herself; was overcome, deadened by that sort of feeling as though she were no longer herself, which comes to all of us in moments of intense mental strain or suffering. That stupefied amazement at the stranger who has invaded and taken command of our personality; speaking with our voice, moving with our limbs—and yet with ourselves looking on at it all from a great distance—outraged and yet totally unable to intervene.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE whole side of the Slieve Myshall was in shade; not the dark blue shades of midday, but a pale, smooth wash of grey like the look in the eyes of a newly-awakened child, blank and noncommittal. The world immediately beneath Henrietta was softly blotted in with different shades of the same colour—river and trees, bog-land and the smaller lakes: but further still, Lough Conn caught the first rays of the sun coming up over the shoulder of the mountain and flashed with a clear, white radiance, like an immense pear-shaped fragment of broken mirror; while the plains around and beyond, stretching to the further hills, low and blue on the horizon, showed up in brilliant patches of light where the young green lay gold beneath the sunshine.

Henrietta sat at the mouth of the cave, her knees drawn up to her chin, her arms folded around them. She was in her riding-dress, but she had left Grizel further down the mountainside, and walked up to that plateau which she and Shaen had once spoken of as their own—moving very slowly, for she had a strange feeling at the back of her mind as though she were dropping the world away from her as she mounted; leaving it without regret and yet with a deep sense of tenderness; unwilling to seem to hurt it—this beautiful world which had been in some

ways so good to her—by any display of eagerness to be done with it.

She had arrived at Castleford the night before, got out of the train with that sort of sensation which a ghost might have, revisiting its old haunts, wondering at itself as it had been; scarcely believing one half of all its memory tells it.

And yet there could not have well been anything less ghostlike than the little station bathed in the warm sunshine, looking precisely the same as it had done the very first time she and her father arrived there on coming home from India; she herself, a small, erect child, apparently so self-possessed, thin and pallid, bleached by the tropical heat, screwed up tremendously tight with an overwhelming excitement over this homecoming of which she had heard so much—eyes and ears, every nerve raw with the strain that was being put upon them, trying to take in everything at once. Here was the same porter, with the same look of self-conscious, business-like importance; the same monotonous cry, which had struck her so comically on her first arrival, though it was not until later on that she had realized the full, the delightful inanity of it: “Anyone there for here?—Anyone there for here?” A cry to which the young O’Haras were so accustomed that it had passed unnoticed until she spoke of it, when they caught it up as a tribal cry of their own: “Anyone there for here?” “Anyone there for here?”

She had not thought of letting anyone know that

she was coming, but there was a jarvey named Harrison O'Grady waiting outside on the chance of a fare—with a mere frame of a chestnut horse tied up with string to his disreputable jaunting-car—who waved his whip ecstatically at sight of her, beseeching her custom.

He talked to her the whole way to Greylands. What he said in his raucous sing-song voice grittled and flowed, like the waves on a shingle shore, in at one ear and out at the other; but, apart from this, Henrietta's every sense was almost preternaturally alert. She saw the countryside as though she had come to it for the first time: even O'Grady, with his long, fox-like face fringed with reddish whiskers, struck her as something dreamt of but never really seen.

Close to the gates of Greylands they overtook Mr. Fielden walking like a crow—things like this were wonderfully clear to Henrietta just now—with that same grotesque half-hopping motion of his long black legs, his coat flapping in the gusty spring wind. She had hoped to pass him, but he looked back at the car and recognized her, so that she was obliged to stop.

“Have you come back for good?” he asked her, and she answered “Yes,” with a sudden deep sense of peace, as though the whole jig-saw puzzle of life had suddenly slid together, was fitted bit to bit: finished and done with, all ready to put away.

O'Grady, realizing a pause between the two, went on with his own tale, stimulated by an enlarged

audience: the terrible price of what was left of last year's hay, the iniquitous charges of the farrier; the contrariness of the pig that had died on him; the hard times all round; flourishing off, quite suddenly, into a description of his daughter's wedding and the glories of it, vaunting the fact that she had married "a warm man," that there had never been such a wedding-feast in the whole of county Mayo—"Lashin's and laevin's, butther on bacon"—then pulling himself together suddenly, and harking back to his recital of the woeful poverty which overwhelmed him: "An' nothin' more than chopped straw fur the skin this week past an' more." He was so full of himself that he went on talking, heedless of what Fielden was saying, leaning against the footboard of the opposite side of the car and looking up at Henrietta.

"It's come—the trouble, eh?"

"I don't know." She spoke slowly, wonderingly, for indeed she did not know. It seemed as though that last shaft of Nina Arbuthnot's had numbed her so that she resembled a person who, with the actual sharp agony of some dreadful illness at an end, is conscious of nothing more than the relief and languor of on-coming death, like Sir Roland at his Dark Tower.

"No, I don't think I am unhappy." She hesitated for a moment, then went on more quickly with a sudden physical appeal: "I'm sorry—so stupid—but I'm most frightfully tired." She smiled a wan little smile which came back to him

afterwards, whenever he thought of her. “I feel as if I could sleep and sleep and sleep for ever.”

“Well, make haste and get home to bed, my child. You look as if a breath would blow you away. I’ll come up and see you to-morrow.”

She nodded and smiled again, with a word to O’Grady, who whipped up his sorry steed.

The March dust still thick on the roadway rose in clouds as they drove away, enveloping the car in a golden mist, wrapping it away from Fielden. They were bound in the same direction and yet she had not offered him a lift. That was not like Henrietta. She was alone, so Rorke must have stayed in London—and where was her husband? They had spoken of going abroad together, had seemed to regard it as a settled thing. Why, then, had she come back like this—looking like this? What had she come for, all alone—so lost-looking? He asked himself that question, but could find no answer to it save in the poignant memory of her face with that smile upon it: infinitely sad, and yet with a sort of high, excited courage at the back of it.

He was a fool not to have kept her, or claimed a seat in the car at her side. He had half a mind to walk on to Greylands, find out who was there and whether she was being properly looked after; but his queer, awkward shyness, his own love for her, transfixed him. What would she, a married woman, think of him dogging her about like that? Besides, she had made it evident that she wanted to rest, be alone. “I’ll go up early to-morrow,” he

thought, "directly after breakfast. She'll be all right till then. Likely enough there's nothing wrong; women have got a queer way of looking when they're tired: as if their bodies were being peeled away from them."

Curiously enough, though Henrietta's whole desire had been for sleep, she could not so much as shut her eyes all that night. Cooky had prepared a meal for her but she could scarcely touch it. She did not feel ill. It seemed, indeed, as though she felt nothing apart from this sense of absolute, overwhelming fatigue, drugged by it; like a person who, after an insufficient sleeping-draught, feels his heavy brain screwed up as if in a vice, from which it struggles dully, hopelessly, to escape.

She went up to bed before it was dark, having wandered listlessly from one room to another, sat down and got up again. The drawing-room was more ghostlike than ever, shrouded in sheets; everything more or less packed away, for they had expected to be absent for several months at least. The glances of the servants followed her, uneasy and curious, chafed her like a rough woollen garment too close against her skin. The house itself pressed tightly about her, hard and unyielding, like some torture devised in the form of a wooden suit.

The bedroom which she had occupied with Shaen, a vast bare apartment, was, fortunately enough, dismantled, and she was infinitely relieved to be able to take refuge in the little room which she had had as a child.

The magnolia was just opening and the great cup-like flowers breathed out exquisite gusts of perfume which floated in through her window. Lying in bed she could hear the horses moving in the stables; an owl hooted; from somewhere far away towards the mountains came the sharp, reiterated bark of a fox, the wildest of all sounds left to us.

She was so tired that it seemed as though she had not energy to turn, lay stretched flat on her back with her arms straight at her side. Soon after ten o'clock someone had knocked at her door—Cooky, or one of the other servants—opened it, peeped in, and then gone away again, fancying that she was asleep.

The night passed, neither quickly nor slowly. It seemed, indeed, as though there were no time left; as though she herself, lying there so straight in her bed, were completely detached from the usual order of life: hung in a space which excluded time; waiting for something and yet not in the very least concerned to know what it might be.

It came to her with the first hint of dawn: more inevitable than any spoken word, for the simple reason that it diffused the whole of her person, drenched her with the sense of something entirely inevitable, as natural to her as breath, ordained from the very moment of birth or, maybe, long before.

She got up and dressed, went downstairs, let herself out at the back door, and crossed the yard. The stables and harness-room were unlocked in the

usual Irish fashion, and, saddling Grizel, she mounted her and rode off into the chill dawn, with the morning mist as thick as a fog; gathering on her eyelashes so that they felt like wet curtains across her eyes; while Grizel stepped with that same tippitty motion which she had used so long ago when they rode out through the night. Henrietta could feel her shivering beneath her thin skin—small, exquisite shivers of pure excitement and delight. As they stopped to open a gate she put back her velvety muzzle and rubbed it against her mistress' stirrup foot. But Henrietta did not pat her, hardly spoke to her, though the poor beast asked for it with a soft whinny, a pettish movement of her head.

Henrietta left her at the Blakes' farm with no thought of regret, though she had loved her, knew that she would never see her again. She was leaving more than that, but it meant nothing to her, while that vague sense of tenderness and regret was all for Nature: the coming and going of the seasons, the blossoming of the flowers, the winds; the brilliance of young grass in between the shadow of tall trees, running out trying to hide it; the grey puffs of cloud-like pollen blown from the fir-trees in spring-time—odd how she should remember that, then.

She had no thought of people, not even of her father: was completely emptied of all human affections. She had been right when she told Fielden, months before, that there was nothing to her apart

from her love for Shaen. So long as this lasted other things held her: other interests ran along with it, entwined with it, strengthening and sweetening; all sorts of things—joys, and the hope of joys; her interest in, and consideration for, others; her love of nature, the quick sense of life which came to her with certain aspects of sunlight over a field of young wheat; the scent of bean flowers and eglantine; the sheets of bluebells under budding trees; buds themselves, black on the ash, ruby on the lime; young beech leaves with their fringe of pale down; osier beds in winter.

Now it had come to this, that there was nothing left. It was not her sense of the loss of Shaen's love which broke her—such as it was, it still remained, errant and diluted—but the realization that she herself was emptied of all feeling for him, empty as an oak ball hollowed out by some small, burrowing insect. The world itself, stretching away below her, meant nothing, held no sort of message so far as humanity was concerned. She could not go back over the past as most of us do in such moments—forever gathering them up sadly enough, arranging and re-arranging them as best we may; like a child with empty shells on the seashore—for there was nothing left of it.

She had formulated no sort of plan. If she had been dramatic enough to stand apart from herself, with any sort of belief—Christian or pagan—she might have thought, "I am being led," but she was too quiescent for this.

The sun was level with the top of the mountain before she rose to her feet and walked over to that tiny lake in which—or so Shaen had told her on the morning which followed that fateful night—it would be dangerous for her to bathe; the one point of life—the only liberty of choice—left showing itself in her avoidance, and even that was involuntary, of the cave itself.

The fine young grass was a clear green round the water's edge; with a few pale harebells struggling to life in the chill spring air; while the high-hunched shoulder of the mountain—a Fielden-like shoulder—bent above it, shutting away the sunshine, the smallest rippling breath of air; so that it lay there dark and glossy and unstirred as black ice—shining like onyx.

“Deep as blazes” was what Shaen had said. And did not that, in itself, show how little he caught at the true meaning of things; to use the word “blazes,” and the picture it invoked—flames high and flashing, wild with life—in connection with this, so still and secret, secret as the grave?

It was strange how that old horror of drowning had dropped away from Henrietta with everything else; so that this thing which had once seemed so cruel seemed now kind—most kind in its very indifference, its silence, its abstraction: offering something yet pressing nothing upon her: “Take it or leave it”—with none of those everlasting, emotional demands of humanity.

She stooped and touched the water with her hand.

She had half, in the deadened way which was all of feeling left to her, dreaded the cold. But it was not even this; or maybe her body was in some queer way in harmony with it, for it made no impression upon her skin. Even as she slipped down into it there was no sense of panic, no instinct for struggle: rather that sort of feeling of folded sheets round a tired body at the end of a hard day: the sliding down into them, the smooth, shining, lovely touch of the linen: and then sleep, with the water flattening itself out above her, smooth and dark and secret in its hollow.

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“Shaen!” Fay Cristal, in an elaborate morning wrapper, seated by the open window of her bedroom—which looked out upon the hotel gardens, ablaze with flowers; the mountains; the curve of the town-fringed bay; the deep lapis lazuli blue of the sea, dotted with small white and brown sails, like butterflies upon an unbroken field of blue flowers—glanced up from the three-days’ old *Times* which lay upon her knee, and across at Shaen, in another low chair, pouring out his morning coffee, bright eyed and absolutely free of care; still overflowing with elation at a lucky coup of the previous day.

“Hullo?”

“Oh, I wasn’t really speaking to you— My word how lazy you look! I never saw anyone so completely fitted to this sort of life—you must always wear blue and white pyjamas if you want to look your best in your interludes, my dear— Oh, but it’s

here—the name . . . Wait a minute—hang it all, where has it got to?” She followed the obituary column with her finger. “There—‘Shaen’—it seemed so queer to come across your name jumping out at me like that! . . . O-oh! . . . No, no, my mistake!”

She crumpled up the paper and thrust it down among the cushions at her side—her second thought: “What’s the good of letting any of his mouldy old relations spoil our good time for us?”

“What is it? Here, give me that paper.”

“No, no—nothing! Look here, if we don’t start dressing we shall have no time for anything before lunch—and such a gorgeous day—does one ever have such weather anywhere, except at old Monte?”

“Give me that paper.” Shaen was standing over her, the colour wiped out of his fresh brown face. A sudden awful premonition had swept over him. After all, there was only one other Shaen so far as he knew. “It’s—it’s—look here—damn it all, there isn’t anyone apart from—”

His jaw dropped and he stared at her. It seemed as though something had taken hold of him, was shaking him to and fro like a rat. For one long minute his glance ran round the room as though in search of some sort of relief—or was it chance of escape, like a wild animal taking stock of its cage?—curiously conscious of everything in it; the litter of costly knick-knacks on the dressing-table, the wide bed with the clothes turned back

from it; Fay's own clothes everywhere, flung over the chairs, filling the half-open wardrobe, hanging over the edges of the half-closed drawers—everything pink and white, frothy with lace—the immense bouquet of pink roses on the table at the foot of the bed, all overblown, with the petals fallen on to the polished surface reflected in it.

He dragged his gaze back to his companion's face, overblown as the roses. After all, it was not the room that he wanted to break away from, but something that she was going to tell him—something on the leash straining to spring, something far more than Fay herself could have anything to do with.

“Good God! It can't be—”

He broke off; then realizing that his mouth was hanging open, closed it, running his tongue round the dry lips, his bright blue eyes fixed on her, furiously incredulous as a child's.

“It can't be! I couldn't stand it—I couldn't stand it! Hal—Hal! Damn it all—! But . . . my wife!” His voice was high with amazement, rising shrilly on the old familiar phrase—“I couldn't stand it!” It was as though someone had offered him some almost unbearable insult.

Fay Cristal looked at him not altogether without sympathy. In her own way she was a philosopher. Men could go stark staring mad about her, risk everything for her: and yet at the same time love their wives. She had a way of testing them over this—whether they minded speaking of

their lawful partners, or whether they didn't: talked of them themselves disparagingly to her—to anyone. Once, once only, she had dared to lay her tongue on Henrietta. But never again, for no lie of Mrs. Arbuthnot's many lies had been so cruel, so unfounded as that one in which she declared that Shaen had spoken of getting a divorce from his wife.

“Give me that paper.” Shaen's voice sounded as though he had been shouting until it had cracked. She took the paper from its hiding-place and smoothed it out on her knee. So that was who it was, was it? It would spoil their time together, and really he was such fun, such good company. But all the same, he would have to know. “Poor kid! Poor kid!” she said to herself with something of that same mothering sense which had formed so large a part of Henrietta's love for her husband. “He did care then,” and again, “Rotten luck!” for there was no trace of malice in her. She had no thought of getting hold of Shaen “for keeps,” as she herself would have said: there was no pretence of love—just having a good time together, and what a good time it had been! All the same, she remembered that girl whom she had seen in the opposite box at the music-hall. Such a child, too! Lord! what a tangle people get themselves into! “Drowned—accidentally drowned—” there was something queer about that “accidental,” so unnecessary if it were true.

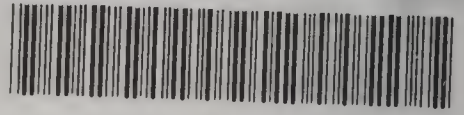
“Look here, Shaen—I'm afraid, old thing, that

there's no mistake about it. I suppose no one knew your address, and that's why—" She broke off; then began again, reading from the paper: "Henrietta Millicent, wife of—"

She was interrupted by Shaen's cry: "What's that? Drowned—drowned!" he broke off, and began again violently, as though in a rage. "But that's rot; I taught her to swim in the West Indies—I taught her—taught her myself! Why, look here—" He stopped, stared for a moment as though he saw something of which he was altogether incredulous, then flung himself on his knees at his companion's side. "Look here, Fay, it's too awful—too awful! It can't be true! How can it be true? God couldn't be so cruel! I couldn't stand it! Hal—Hal—why, she's only a kid, just nineteen!—God couldn't—" The tears were streaming down his face as he buried it in her lap. She could feel them scalding hot through her thin skirt, as she bent over him, smoothing his hair with gentle fingers. "Poor kid! Poor kid!"

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