

Dermot dared not smile.

"To be sure there is," he said, good-humouredly. "But I solemnly swear ——"

"Don't," said the Duke, who had heard many such asseverations on other subjects from the same lips, and was no longer impressed. "I only spoke out like this, Dermot," he said simply, "because it appears to me it would be foolish to throw away my own happiness, and perhaps—who knows—in a lower tone) *hers*, for want of a word between you and me, who have always more or less understood each other."

"It would be simply tommy-rot," said Dermot, translating the Duke's measured words into the emphatic language best understood of himself; and he helped himself with emotion to his third whisky and soda since dinner.

"I don't think you're the fellow to let a few days idle—I hate the word—flirtation come between you and me; it wouldn't be worth it," said the Duke. "But she's very young, or at least she's very inexperienced, which comes to the same thing, and—and—but mind, Dermot, I'm not asking any kind of sacrifice from you,—if—if it's with you as it is with me. In that case we'll shake hands over it, and let the best man win."

"But my dear old chap, it isn't," almost shouted Dermot, "I give you my word, such an idea never even entered my head. I'll leave the house to-morrow morning if you wish, with the greatest pleasure in life."

"No, no ——"

"Well—anyway here's luck to your wooing," said Dermot, with the enthusiasm born of whisky. "Have you thought what our parent will say when she gets wind of it?"

"I don't mean her to get wind of it, until it's settled—one way or the other."

"But she will—trust her for nosing it out." ("The more especially if you give yourself away as you have done to-night," thought Dermot, but this to himself.)