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LISHEEN

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CHAPTER XIX

A LETTER FROM IRELAND

Dublin, December 12, 18—.

Dearest Edith: I have been in the green-room, and have seen it all, just as you describe; but I have not seen the awful banalties you imagine. And I have been on the stage—a little—and I think, but I must not be too sure as yet, until I have heard the critics, that I performed my little part fairly well. The audience was vulgar enough, loudly-dressed and vacantly staring. My six bridesmaids were under sixteen—this I insisted upon; four were under twelve. They haven't bitten the apple of the Tree of Life as yet, and are still in their primeval innocence. But Maud Beresford kissed me, which is a good sign; and others, some not in my hearing, but all things return, nodded and whispered: "An' if she knew;" and, "Was that a wedding-bell or a passing-bell?" And one said: "Pride goeth before a fall;" from all which you will conjecture, dearest, that my debut on the stage of married life was a fair success. At least I like it. The prompter's call has no terrors for me; and I think my complexion stands well the footlights. No; I have not the slightest desire to go back to those lonely and stupid boxes again. I have gone beyond the caramels and sugared lemons; and I was tired of mere staring and wondering. "Give me action, action," was the cry of my heart; and my cry has been heard; and it shall go ill with me if I do not perform my part so well as to excite the admiration of my friends, the spleen of my enemies; and what more can human female heart desire?

But to drop metaphor—you led me into the detestable habit—why did you write me such a doleful, lugubrious letter? If it were written from foggy London—where we have just been, the fog yellow as the Tiber and thick as the darkness of Egypt—I could understand it. Everything is thick and heavy there; and the atmosphere clogs the ink in the pen, and the thoughts in the brain; and Puck could not be merry. But to get such a letter as yours from "India's coral strand," from the land of shining pagodas and skies of eternal blue—it was a profanation. Rainy reasons and steaming grasses and tropical heats won't explain it. What is it, dearest Edith? There is a note of sadness, even of despair, running through it all. Surely your life is not unhappy. I cannot think it. You—who were so jolly, so careless, so light-hearted—to send me, and on such an occasion so terrible a forecast! Write again, dearest Edith, and say you retract it all that it was all a horrible blunder, brought on by the heat depression. Or else I shall never allow Ralph to return to India. But I haven't told you about Ralph. Don't start at the name. The boy you mentioned—he was but a boy, compared with Ralph—took a mild attack of insanity, a strange wierd delusion, from excessive reading and poring over nonsensical books; and has gone down to the south of Ireland on some Quixotic expedition, from which it is expected he cannot return alive. I did him no injustice, I assure you. I warned him again and again to beware of ideas that, however nice they may seem in books, are never adopted in life, except within the walls of an asylum. It was no use. He would see for himself. He calmly dropped me, without a word of explanation, and went his way. When people marry an idea, they cannot wed a wife. Otherwise there would be incompatibility of temper, etc., which we read of in the courts.

Now, Ralph Outram—that's my dear husband's name—Ralph Outram, C. B., late of the Indian Service, has no ideas; and he is an archangel. He has mounted up, step by step, in the official and social ladder, until he has very nearly reached the top; and thence he has stooped down and drawn up little me! The height is dizzy; but I keep my head. We had a delightful few weeks in London, where he seemed to know every one, even the proletariat, for some queer people called at our hotel to see him, but he drew the line sharply at these. We had quite a round of parties, theatres, and then we ran down to a quiet seaside place called Littlehampton, away from the big, noisy world, and this was delectable. Not that I dislike the big, noisy world; oh, no; it is all right, especially when one can look the thing steadily in the face. But for one, just—well, on the stage, a little retirement away from the glare is sometimes welcome. But Ralph is an angel. Ever so considerate and kind and gentle; he has a strong side, too, to his character. He says all old Indians have. They must have from their intercourse with natives. One little instance gave me a shock, but filled me with admiration for such a great, strong protector. One of the proletariat (Ralph always calls them thus) presumed too much, and became offensive. Ralph was infinitely tolerant. Then he took the fellow, as if he were a child, in his arms, and dropped him into the area of the hotel. It was the evening we left London for Littlehampton.

And now one word about my little presents: They were many—I send you the Irish Times by this mail, as I cannot recount them in a letter—and beautiful. Very beautiful and very costly. One species was absent, and I thanked heaven. The vile, the detestably vulgar, cheque. It is one of the most dread signs of modern decadence. Ralph cannot see it. But men look at these things so differently; and I shall educate him. but how shall I thank you, dearest Edith, for your Indian present? I assure you its beauty took away my breath. The intense polish of the porphyry vase—it is porphyry, is it not? the perfect outline and finish, and the sudden contrast with the little green, coiled cobra at the bottom, gave me a start a surprise, which soon yielded to pleasure. One vulgar woman declared she saw a fac-simile, but on a much larger scale, at Chatsworth; but this was a little feminine boasting. No there's nothing like in the world. So every one says. One or two affected creatures pretended, while admiring the exquisite vase, to have received a sudden shock when they saw the beautiful reptile. But this was an affectation. And some tried to make it a sign of something—a hint, an indication! But this, of course, is absurd. There it remains, until I shall create for it a special place in my new drawing-room. Your lovely card that was in it Ralph picked up and kept as a talisman, he said, because you wrote in his beloved Sanskrit. He won't tell me what it is except good wishes and all forms of Oriental and fanciful felicitations. Some day, dearest, when you have returned home, we shall talk the whole thing over, and you will translate the beautiful poetry for me.

One little drawback I must mention. Poor father, in his failing health, was depressed about it all. He couldn't come to church, his feet are so swollen; but he has been extremely kind. Somehow—there! I must tell you everything, the golds and the grays mix themselves up so much in life—I fear he set his heart too much on my marriage with Bob Maxwell—the young fanatic, who, who has lost his head about Socialistic theories, etc.—and I know he was hoping up to the last moment to have heard tidings of him. Not that it would matter much. I had long ago made up my mind that I would follow my star; and that no girlish or parental caprice should deter me. I knew I had a destiny, and that I must fulfil it. But poor Pap had set his heart on Bob—his father was an old military comrade—and sometimes he looks depressed and sad, and murmurs: "Poor Bob! Poor Bob!" Ralph is highly amused; and repeats: "Poor Bob! Poor Bob!" until I have to laugh. "Bob must gang his own gait," he says; "I only wish I had my ring back." This was a talismanic ring, given Ralph by a Brahmin, or a Buddha, or something, out there in India; and Ralph parted with it to Mr. Maxwell, as a kind of pledge or security that the latter would do his part in the mad undertaking. The ring is valuable, I believe, and Ralph says he must have it back. It was all a madcap business transacted in a Dublin club; but no one took Mr. Maxwell seriously until he asked for the ring; and then Ralph couldn't refuse it. But father is gloomy over the matter. Ralph says it is only the depression of gout, which will wear away.

There, now, I think I have told you everything. Oh! I was near forgetting. 'Tis only a trifle; but you are so good as to be interested in every little thing that concerns me. The poor organist at the cathedral did grind out the Wedding March from Lohengrin; but he broke down suddenly. Something went wrong with the hydraulic engine, or something else; but we had gone! Otherwise, I—not I, but some of my dear friends—would say it was an evil omen. I hope I am above such things; but some people are are so superstitious. Anything more? No, except that I love you dearly, dearest Edith, and dream and dream of the day which shall reunite us. Do you know, I sadly need a friend; and I have not one. With which sad confession, I remain, as ever,

Yours, etc.,
Mabel Outram

P. S.—Ralph tells me that he is some relative to a great Outram, who distinguished himself in India, far back in the eighteenth century, or seventeenth, I quite forget which. N'importe! Isn't Ralph, too, great, or shall be? M. O.

When the little woman to whom the above letter was addressed, received it on a dull December morning, as the old year closed sorrowfully, she uttered some ejaculations that were quite unintelligible to her Hindoo maid. And all day she went around sorrowful and mute, so that her husband asked her anxiously at dinner.

"Is't a mutiny at Delhi, or an approaching earthquake, Edith? I never saw you look so glum!"

To which she only vouchsafed the dumb answer of putting her finger on her lips, and waving a certain letter in the air.

Once or twice he heard her murmuring: "Porphyry vase! Cobra coiled at the bottom! Sanskrit!" But he was too wise to asked further questions.

CHAPTER XXX

POOR REYNAD

Much as he struggled against it, Maxwell became every day, after Hamberton's visit, sunk in profound melancholy. They had brought with them that atmosphere of refinement and wealth to which he had been now for months a perfect stranger; and this had awakened reminiscences of the past life of gracious ease and pleasure, which was his natural environment. Nay; it must be confessed that, after this visit, Lisheen took on an aspect of sordid poverty which it had not wore before; and—shall it be said?—Debbie, his nurse, his handmaid, whom he had come to regard with a kind of brotherly affection, and whose rustic health and comeliness he had often wondered at, suddenly shrank into a mere country girl, rough, strong, healthy, but sadly wanting in the nameless graces that surround her city-bred sisters. The whole revolution in his feelings was horrible to his conscience and his honour; and he struggled manfully against it. But it would come back. That visit had shed a light on the floor of the humble cottage, in which the old, familiar aspects of things could never be seen again.

And then, as he brooded over this sudden change in his feelings, the conviction would force itself upon his judgment that his mission had failed. He had done nothing. These people were—where he had found them some months ago. He was so far from having lifted up the entire population, that he had not even helped on a single family. All that he had dreamed of in his sunniest moments had been dissipated. He had gained but one thing the grace of illumination, the deep, close insight into a condition of things that seemed to him desperate. Whatever he had read or heard of the sordid and humble condition of peasant life in Ireland paled into shadows before the reality; and "Good God!" he cried, "imagine some quarter of a million of people living under these conditions. The very stones should cry out."

In marked and violent contrast with his own failure was the reported success of this Englishman, Hamberton. He had made many cautious inquiries of Pierry and of the priest as to the success of Hamberton's work. Yes; there was no denying it. Hamberton had swept away a foul village of rotten cabins, and replaced it with a comfortable and picturesque little hamlet of neat, red-tiled cottages; Hamberton had burned some rotting coracles and placed a little fleet of safe and shapely vessels in the harbour. Hamberton had put up a little fishing-pier; and Hamberton had torn open the bosom of a hill that had sheltered its treasures with ignoble secrecy since the creation of things, and with the appliances of science had established an industry that was repaying him and yielding a decent livelihood to his workmen.

"What wages does he give?" asked Maxwell.

"Fifteen shillings to boys; twenty-and twenty-five shillings to men," said Pierry, as if he were relating something legendary and fabulous.

Father Cosgrove confirmed the legend, adding that he never allowed the men to work more than nine hours a day—seven to nine; ten to one p. m.; two to six p. m.

"And they have never struck?"

"No; they have murmured, but no more."

"We need the hand of the Saxon over us as yet," said Maxwell, in confession of his own impotence.

But the sense of failure galled him. How could he ever go back to Dublin, and face his own class again? The time was running on; and, so far, he could see no way out of the terrible difficulty wherein he had deliberately placed himself. If he could only see Hamberton, confess his identity and his failure, and seek for light and leading! But he had given his answer, curt and clear enough, and how now could he break with these people who had been so humane and kind? It was a horrible impasse, this to which his precipitancy had led him; and, apparently, there was no escape.

A few days before Christmas the long expected letter came from a daughter in Philadelphia. There were many excuses for the delay—sickness, hospital expenses eating away whatever little reserve had accumulated, etc., but it contained a postal order for £5; and there was great jubilation at Lisheen.

"I'll take it in to the agent," said Owen McAuliffe, "and get a clare resate from him. And thin we can bring down the cattle. I hope it will be a long time before we will have to clare the manes agin!"

"Av you take my advice," said Pierry, "you'll buy a shuit of clothes for yerself, and a dress for Debbie, and let us have one dacent Christmas dinner; and pitch that ruffian to the divil."

"Betther have an aisy mind an' our night's rest," said Owen. "Sure I have not wan dacent shleep since our cattle wos removed."

So the old man took in the £5 to Tralee, trudging the whole thirteen miles thither and back, and returning with a sad countenance.

"He wouldn't take thim," said he in explanation. "He demanded £2, twelve and sixpence more—costs, he said—which I hadn't to give him. I'm afeard he manes mischief."

"I'm dom'd glad he didn't," said Pierry. "Did you bring us anythin' from town for the holidays?"

"Not much," said the old man, dragging out of a frayed and broken bag a scraggy piece of raw beef and a bottle of whiskey. "'Twas hard to brake Mary's bit o' money; but I thought ye'd be expectin' somethin'."

"The ruffian does mane mischief," said Pierry. "But we'll be ready for him; believe you me, we'll be ready for him."

Christmas Eve came around—that blessed season when men seem to forget for a while that life is a warfare, and to remember that momentous saying: "A new commandment I give you—that you love one another, as I have loved you." Alas! It felt cold and bleak, and darkened by shadows of coming ills, on the little household at Lisheen.

One incident touched Maxwell deeply, revealing as it did awful depths of poverty and hardship. Right over the fireplace there hung two pigs' heads, so dry, so hard, so blackened by eternal smoke, that for a long time he had supposed them to be wooden ornaments or articles of an unknown use. That they could be used for human food never remotely entered his mind, until this momentous Christmas Eve, when it was suggested that, perhaps, they could make the sacrifice, and use one of these as a kind of condiment to the ragged beef which the old man had brought from Tralee. At first the idea was scouted, the old woman protesting that she would feel lonesomelike, if she missed it from its accustomed place; but probably it was Maxwell's presence that finally decided that the bacon should be used with the beef.

"Two kinds of mate," said the old man, jokingly. "Begor, we're gettin' on in the world."

And yet it was a lonesome Christmas—probably the most utterly miserable time Maxwell had yet spent.

St. Stephen's day dawned bright, crisp and cheerful; and the two young men, Pierry and Maxwell, started out for a long bright walk up the mountainside. It was about 11 o'clock, and they had mounted a declivity or two, when suddenly the music of a horn and the baying of fox hounds broke on their ears. It startled them both into feelings of swift and eager joy; for Maxwell was a keen sportsman, and one of his many sorrows at Lisheen was to see the pheasant and the partridge whirring over his head whilst his fingers twitched for the weapon that was not there; and Pierry, like every farmer's son in Ireland, was prepared to walk twenty miles to a race or a meet. They both wheeled around, and saw, deep down in the level, a gay assemblage of pink and black coats, hats shining in the sunlight, and the dappled coats of the hounds. They swiftly descended and came out on the road, and made their way down to the meet. The huntsman was consulting some farmers or laborers, who were pointing hither and thither as if to demonstrate the places where a fox was likely to be found. When the two young men mingled with the throng they just heard the name "Netterville" addressed by one of the gentlemen present to a horseman, who sat his horse without grace, and was otherwise distinguished by short stature, a furtive look, and a pair of bristling moustaches fiery red, and sharply cut at the ends.

In an instant, Pierce McAuliffe divined that this was the hated agent, who threatened ruin to their humble household, and while his passions flamed up, he swiftly decided that, no matter what the consequences might be, he would shame that fellow before the crowd.

"Here," said the huntsman, impatient at the delay, whilst the fierce dogs ran aimlessly between the horses' legs, "do you know which of the two covers, Lisheen or Ahacross, is likely to hold a fox to-day?"

He spoke to Pierry and Maxwell.

"I dunno," said Pierry, with a drawl; "but I can put ye on the track of as big and bould a fox as there is from here to Dingle this minit."

"Where? where?" was shouted, as the horsemen bunched together.

"There, jest behind ye," said Pierry, pointing to Netterville.

There was a titter; and to escape, Netterville, under pretence of exercising his animal, leaped a fence, which, roughly constructed of stones, gave way beneath the horse's hoofs; and cantered into a field, where the stubble of last harvest still lay. In an instant Pierce McAuliffe was after him.

"Get out, get out, d——d you," the boy cried, "get out of an honest man's lands, you thundering rogue."

The horseman wheeled round at the challenge and confronted the young man who was now in a dreadful fury.

"How dare you, you, sir, speak to a gentleman in that manner? I'd cut your hide well for you."

"Would you?" said Pierry, coming over. "You daren't lay a wet finger on me, you d——d coward, and you know it. Come, out o' this! None of your exterminators and evicthors will hunt over my lands to-day."

The whole group had now gathered at the fence to watch the singular episode. And Netterville, pale with rage and shame, gnawed his moustache, and made his horse caracole around.

"Come, come," said Pierry; "no nonsense. Out of this field, or by G——, I'll make you."

There were now cries of anger from the whole hunt, and many queries:

"Who's this fellow? Who's his landlord? We must make an example of him," etc., etc.

And one said it was the Maxwell estate—which made Bob Maxwell shudder and others said it was the Bernard property; and others that Netterville knew best, and would take a subtle revenge. He was still pulling his horse round and round, disliking to be conquered, and yet conscious that he was breaking the law, when Pierry, stung to madness by the remarks of the genteel crowd, struck the animal smartly on the haunches, and leaped aside just as the riding whip of Netterville swished in the air over his head. Again Pierry struck, and again Netterville strove to lash him with his whip; but the boy was too agile and lightly leaped back. At this juncture Maxweil, having shouted to the huntsman: "Call off the hounds if you don't want bloodshed!" leaped lightly over the fence, and approaching Netterville said, with the accent and manner of one gentleman addressing another:

"You must be aware, Mr. Netterville, that this young man has a strict legal right to stop hunting over his fields, and that you are putting yourself in the power of the law by assaulting him. Come, let me lead your horse!"

"Who the devil—?" Netterville was saying, when Maxwell quietly took his horse by the head, and as the bridle swung loose in the riders hands, cantered the animal gently across the stubble and led him through the gap on to the road. Then, looking up, he saw Hugh Hamberton and Miss Moulton watching with interest the whole proceeding. The former, his face set sternly and his lips tightly closed, was looking vacantly across the field. He was evidently studying this strange object-lesson in Irish life, and apparently his sympathies were with the boy who had merely asserted his legal rights. Claire Moulton, looking very trim and perfect in her riding habit, was slightly flushed, and that strange gleam came into her eyes as in every moment of excitement. Maxwell was turning away, when she nodded in a friendly manner towards him; and Hamberton, waking up, said gravely:

"You did that well, my young friend, very well indeed. Come, Claire!"

They galloped after the hounds; and then, for the first time, was Maxwell aware how shabbily he was dressed and how plebian a picture he must have presented to his new-found friends, in whom he had begun to feel a strange interest. He looked down at his mud-soiled boots, his blue trousers stained with earth and badly frayed at the extremities, his overcoat gray and wrinkled and greasy, his brown hat slightly indented and badly discolored, and he grew red with shame.

"I'd have killed him if you hadn't interferred," said a voice. It was Pierry's; and his white face and manner made it clear he meant it. "An' it was a chanst that will never come again. They couldn't hang me, for it was he broke the law."

The young men returned home, whilst the hunt moved away across the country towards Ahacross; and the short, bright winter day was darkening slowly towards evening, when again the deep baying of hounds, and the sound of the horn, drew them forth from the fireside.

This time, following the sounds, they went up towards the hills, Pierry armed with a thick bludgeon, and as determined as in the morning to allow not one of that hated band to cross a fence of his fields. When they had reached the heights, they saw the huntsmen labouring heavily across some fields beneath them, and looking further up they saw the hounds slowly and laboriously toiling up the fields, their tongues lolling out sideways and their dappled skins white and panting with exhaustion. A little in advance, and making his way apparently towards a farmer's cottage just outside the bounds of Lisheen, was poor Reynard, now making one last desperate struggle for life. He had given them a glorious run for many miles across the country from the cover at Ahacross; and now, as he stumbled wearily across the ploughed field, he could not be distinguished, except by practised eyes, from the brown earth, so discoloured was he with dirt and so slow and heavy his movements. The hounds were leaping the fences into this field, as he approached the farmyard; and they were now silent from fatigue, and the certainty that they had reached their quarry. One or two huntsmen, and one lady, were leading, when suddenly the fox dissappeared, as if the ground had swallowed him; and the hounds, rushing madly here and there, set up short yelps of dissappointment.

There was a large crowd of country people assembled to watch the hunt; and they were as deeply interested in the sudden and unexpected termination of the day's sport as the horsemen who had ridden across country, and who now came up, hot, querulous, and angry. No one could tell what had become of Reynard, until one old hound, whose experience atoned for his loss of scent, tracked the animal down to where a narrow channel, on the level of the field, seemed to lead through the ground across the road. It was so narrow and so blocked with brambles, that the hound could only put his nose into the aperture, whence he immediately withdrew with a deep howl of disappointment. In a short time, the whole hunt had assembled, horses and men panting and foam-flecked with the fierce exertion; but after a pause of a quarter of an hour or so, the huntsman decided that Reynard had escaped, and he drew off his hounds, and faced homewards. With the terrible instinct for destruction which still lingers in human hearts, the hunt, ladies and gentlemen alike, decided that it would be worth while to wait and unearth the fox; and they asked a few peasant lads present if there were no means of driving Reynard from his retreat. Maxwell, who with Pierry was standing by, could not help saying, as he forgot for the moment his assumed character:

"Let the brute alone! He has given you a good day's sport, and will give another. Don't you see the hounds are gone!"

There were some profane answers to this burst of indignation, some supercilious queries: "Who is this fellow?" etc., etc., which were interrupted when a young peasant lad put up a fox terrier in the channel at the other side, and the hounds and huntsmen were whistled after to return. In a few minutes the poor hunted brute emerged from the channel at the other side, and wearily crossed a potato patch near the farmer's outhouses. There was a shout of triumph from the horsemen, the huntsmen rode merrily up, the hounds gave tongue once more, and the hunted animal ran wearily backward and forron a ditch that bounded the farmer's haggart. When the hounds plunged down into the potato garden the fox, with one last effort for life, leaped up and struggled wildly to get a foothold on the thatch of the barn. He succeeded, and for the next few minutes he ran across the ridge of the barn, whilst the hounds came beneath, yelping at their victim and tossing their tails wildly. The whole hunt stood still, watching the end. Maxwell was furious. It was cold-blooded cruelty, without an atom of sport. He told the huntsman so; he told the horsemen so; he told the ladies so. They looked on and laughed. After about ten minutes' vain endeavor to tire out or allude his foes, it was clear the fox's strength was failing. There was nothing for it but to wait. Then one fierce dog leaped up and pursued the exhausted animal. Without a cry, or moan, the poor brute rolled down the thatch, and fell into the jaws of twenty hounds. In a few seconds he was torn limb from limb, and nothing remained but a few scraps of skin and bone. The huntsman deftly saved the brush, and cantering over to where Claire Moulton was holding in her horse, he gallantly offered it to her. But she put it aside with a gesture of disgust; and Maxwell, again forgetting himself, could not help saying:

"Quite right, Miss Moulton! It was the most brutal and unsportsmanlike act I ever saw!"

Which remark again excited the curiosity of the crowd, who could not reconcile Maxwell's manner with his dress and company. And many were the conjectures that were made, as the hunt broke up and the horsemen filed slowly homewards in the deepening twilight. And Pierry too lost in thought as he trudged slowly down the hill to Lisheen.

"Perhaps, after all," he whispered to himself, "Debbie may be right. No wan but one of theirsel's would spake up to thim that way. But what, then, can he be doin' here?"

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE HOMELIEST GIRL

Carroll, Senior, also meditated that night through many a cigar and his thoughts were not of such a nature as to contribute much to his peace of mind. The surprise of his niece upon finding that his wife and the family were not of her faith opened his mind to reflections to which he had been a stranger for many a year. Carroll in his young days had been as devout as the average Catholic youth, had served on the altar, and had even aspired at one time to the priesthood. Thrown upon the world, however, to make his own living, he had been obliged to sacrifice whatever ambitions he had entertained. He was a self-made man, and in that fact more than in his great wealth did he take unto himself glory. Money came fast, and with it admission into society. He had met the wealthy Miss Dyer and had fallen deeply in love with her. In the days of fervent Catholicity Carroll would have scrupled at marrying one outside the faith, but Henry Carroll had long since gone beyond the bounds of strict Catholicity. He had ceased to frequent the sacraments, appeared at Mass rarely, and it was suggested by some who were not overly friendly with him that the reason of his backsliding was his being mixed up in some dishonest deal. And so without any scruples of conscience Carroll had married the much besuitored Miss Dyer. Stubborn in business was Carroll, stubborn in exacting what he believed to be his rights; but a strange commentary upon his stubbornness, which makes one suspect that in the matter he was not so tenacious of his rights, his children were brought up strangers to the faith which had once been so ardently professed by their father. After Evelyn had been born he had timidly suggested the advisability of having her baptized in the Catholic Church. Mrs. Carroll had met the proposition with such an outburst of weeping and indignation that the matter was never reopened, and Carroll had accepted what appeared to him the inevitable and deprived his children of the inheritance for which he had stipulated when the Church had permitted his marriage with the Protestant Miss Dyer.

It was not to be expected, therefore, that the very non-Catholic Mrs. Carroll would accept into her house with much grace a relative tainted with practical Catholicity. It was that defect as much as the unprepossessing appearance of Mary Downey that raised in the majority of the household the spirit of rebellion against the orphan, intensified a hundred times on that Sunday when it was discovered that Mary had gone to Mass with Nora, the cook.

"It is intolerable, Henry," said Mrs. Carroll at the breakfast table. "The idea of your niece going to Mass, and that, too, with one of the servants. How can you allow it?"

"What, the going to Mass or the fact that she went with the cook?" asked Carroll, sarcastically.

"Both," she answered. "None of us are Catholics. Your children are not allowed to go there. Why should you allow your niece?"

"Why? Because she believes it to be the right thing to do, no doubt. If my own children do not go there, it is not that I have not wished them to go there."

"We will not discuss that matter," said the woman. "That was decided long ago."

And the rest of the meal was passed in silence.

"Come, Mary," said Carroll as the girl opened the door of her room to his knock, "it is a glorious day for our trip. You have had your breakfast?"

"Yes, uncle, very early. Nora and I had it together when we came from Mass."

"So you went to Mass," he said as he tucked the robe about her in the seat at his side, and they went spinning along over the frozen land.

"Yes, sir. And what a lovely church! They didn't have any like it in our town only just a plain brick one. Yours is all stone and has marble altars. It must be grand when it is all lighted up and when the big organ plays. My, but there must be thousands and thousands of pipes in it. It must be grand when it plays, isn't it?"

"I'm sure it must be, Mary," answered the man.

"And didn't you hear it?" she asked

"Not that one. But, of course, I have heard pipe organs. You see, Mary," he continued, as if in explanation of his defection, "I am so tired on Sunday morning after working all the week, that it is pretty hard to get up and go to Mass."

Big man as Carroll was, he chafed under the interrogation of the girl, but he could not find it in him to answer her other than kindly. There were too many in his household already giving her unkind words and looks. But unconsciously he reddened as he realized what a miserable excuse he had employed to cloak his irreligion.

"And your wife—I mean Aunt Carroll—doesn't like Catholics, does she?" said Mary when she perceived that the conversation was beginning to lag.

"You must not say that, Mary," said the man.

"But she told Nora this morning never, never to take me to Mass again. But you see, uncle, I had to go to church with some one, for I didn't know the way alone. I can find it myself now. You see, it's just like this, uncle. It's a mortal sin to miss Mass, and anyway, mother made me promise when she was dying that I would never stay away from Mass unless I was too sick to stand up. She said my religion was dearer than—than all your money—and she told me not to be led astray when I came to live with you!"

"So your mother told you we were dangerous people, eh?" said the man, breaking out into laughter.

"Not exactly that," said the girl. "She said that you were just the loveliest man, and that she knew I would be safe with you. And we used to pray for you every night—for you to come back, mother used to say."

"To come back?" repeated the man. "Come back where?"

"To her, I guess, because we were so poor."

The man sighed in spite of himself. He knew well that the intention of the mother's prayer was not any material welfare. His mind began to wander back to the days of innocent childhood when he and his sister Mary walked together over the mile of country road to the mission chapel. But his thoughts were again interrupted by the voice of the girl.

"And you did come back, didn't you?"

"Yes," he answered, but mechanically.

"And it was just because we said the prayers wasn't it? Mother said that if you prayed long enough and hard enough you would get anything."

"Do you believe that, dear?" asked the man suddenly, as if it were a new and strange doctrine,

"Why, everybody knows that," said the girl. "God said so."

"Then keep right on praying for me—for all of us, won't you?"

"Yes, sir, I've got a lot of prayers to say now—you see, it's so near to Christmas—but I'll keep a place for you. You were so good when no one else wanted me."

To Mary Downey, however, it seemed very strange that there was anything needed for the happiness of her Uncle Carroll. He was so wealthy and had such a grand home and servants and three automobiles, and such lots and lots of things. She could understand why people should ask for things and pray for them when they were poor and perhaps starving like her—and her mother, but when folks had so much money it did really seem as if there was nothing left to ask for that money could not buy.

"Nora," she said that night when she slipped into the kitchen, "what do you suppose my uncle wants me to pray for? He kind of jumped in the automobile when I told him that I could get anything I prayed for. I bet it's something for Christmas."

"Sure child, and what does the man want when he has barrels of money?" said Nora. "If it's money can buy it, he can have what he wants without asking you to pray for it. He's the good man, and it's a shame that that wife of his made him lose his faith."

"Do you suppose—"

But Mary suddenly stopped in the question that she was formulating. A new idea had flashed into her mind, and, as if she feared that Nora might be able to read it, she hurried from the kitchen and sought her room. Like a flash of light came to her mind the words of the priest at the morning Mass: "If a man lose his faith, he is the poorest of the poor." And Uncle Carroll, then, in spite of all his money must be the poorest of the poor, since he lost his faith. The words of Nora were but the confirmation of what she had been suspecting since that first long interview with her uncle.

It was a close argumentation followed by the little mind, and it brought her to the desired conclusion. Her uncle had been kind to her when all others had turned against her, and now he was in need of help. He did not go to Mass; he had lost her faith. It was not money that could bring it back but only the grace of God. Now did she understand what her mother had ever meant when they had prayed for him to come back. It was as if the task had been shifted entirely to her shoulders since the death of her mother. It was the time for the answer to the prayers of the long years of poverty, and so as verily as she believed in her own existence did she believe in her power to win her uncle back to the faith.

It was a hard campaign marked out for herself by the homeliest girl. It meant the shortening of prayers in other directions. And there was something which she had set her heart on in particular and was earnestly praying for since her arrival at the Carroll house. She was disliked by her aunt and by Evelyn and Henry because she was so homely. Was it not possible that God would answer her prayer and make her, if not as pretty as her cousin Evelyn, at least not so very dreadfully homely, as she knew herself to be? But even that soul-felt want became a secondly petition during those nine days before Christmas. She was at Mass every morning, stealing out early lest she might be found out and forbidden to go. It was a secret, and not even Uncle Carroll must guess it.

But Uncle Carroll almost guessed the secret. Each morning he heard the little feet stealing by his door. On the second morning he looked out and saw her turning the corner in the direction of the church. It was but one of the trifles of life, but trifles many a time change the destiny of souls even as the destiny of the empires. On the succeeding days he awoke as if listening for the departure of the child, and one morning as the little form had disappeared in a storm of snow about the corner he washed and dressed hurriedly and left the house to follow in the track of the homeliest girl.

That Christmas morning, as the homeliest girl was feasting her soul upon the beautiful gifts left by some unknown hand on the table near her bed, the man entered the room.

"Merry Christmas, Mary," he said. "Has Santa Claus come this way?"

"Oh, uncle, it was you who gave me all these things. I can see it in your eyes. It must have cost you more than five dollars."

Carroll laughed as he thought of the hundred dollars he had spent, extravagantly his wife had said, for one gift of furs for the girl.

"Pretty nearly as much as that," he said. "I'm glad your prayers were answered anyway. I hope you did not pray for any more or I will be bankrupt. It's hard to keep up with one who prays like you."

"And the funniest thing, uncle. I didn't pray for one of these things," said the girl.

"My," said the man, with a twinkle in his eye, "and what did you pray for? Not a diamond necklace, I hope."

The girl hesitated and blushed.

"I prayed for two things," she said, "but I didn't get them—that is, I didn't get them yet. I prayed for you to be

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