

a sardonic smile. "Yes, a chance of a rope against a certainty of disgrace, ruin, and—worse than death!"

Baring started again in dismay. He had often entertained the same thoughts and reasoned like this stranger. Often the unfortunate man half raised himself up to eject the intruder, but each time a force, he said himself, within him, mastered his movements.

"The thing seems so easy, too," the stranger went on. "Mr. D'Alton is so unpopular that agrarian assaults would account for twenty times as much! And then you would have a free foot and a tranquil mind."

Baring again looked at his visitor. Baring felt choking. "Who or what are you?" he struggled to say.

"I am the friend of people in your plight; but I see you want courage!"

"Courage!"

I should say so; but I must remember that you are going to face the jeers and mockery of enemies and the contempt of all your class! There is, certainly courage in that!"

Baring groaned. The stranger had again stricken home—and the jeers and contempt and the faces of assailants and accusers and foes were all mixed up together with a gallows and a hangman in the midst of them.

"You may not find this course a necessity," the stranger said, after a pause—"at least for six months—may be never. Cunneen would cash an acceptance of Mr. D'Alton for one thousand five hundred pounds, and hand you one thousand."

"An acceptance of my uncle?" And Baring laughed that laugh of woe and hate which only mocked despair knows how to laugh.

"Well, Mr. Baring you imitate Mr. D'Alton's writing well."

The unfortunate young man shook. "Six months may bring about changes, and relief for you might be among them," the stranger continued. "You must go on, you know. To stand still is irreparable ruin and dishonor. Then, we all know, that even should D'Alton of the Crag live six months to get notice from his banker, he will never blast the reputation of his heir and the respectability of his family!"

"But, Cunneen——"

"Cunneen knows very well how he is and he knows that if he refuse you now, he ruins himself as well as you. Again, I say, six months is a long time, and"—Baring felt the dark eyes burrowing into his soul—"and," the stranger added with a look of diabolical meaning, "you may not be driven to the 'agrarian outrage' at all."

Baring fell into a state which could not be called "thought." It was a state in which images moved rapidly and incoherently through the mind leaving the spirit weak and broken—as sickness or long labors sometimes leave it. He raised his head. The candle had been burnt into the socket. The first rays of the morning were stealing in, and Baring looked towards where the stranger sat. There was no one in the chair, nor in the room! Baring crossed himself the first time for many a month; and, going to the door, he tried the lock. The lock was all right, the door perfectly secured, and the *key was inside!*

"I have been dreaming," Baring murmured; yet the dream was dreadfully distinct, and dreadfully coherent."

Mr. Baring might have added that it was wonderfully instructive; and very like what an "old follower of a family" of a "certain kind" would have propounded.

The mind of Baring was in chaotic confusion. Yet the "six months' relief" and all that might arise in that time, perhaps the old man might die, or he might conquer the repugnance of his cousin—or—and then the "agrarian outrage" would present itself as the solution so horribly suggested and terrible in the consequences to be apprehended! Ever and anon, the words came back, the words of evil omen, "chance of death, or the certainty of something very much more horrible."

The comings and goings of Baring were very mysterious, as we have said; but much better known than he was aware. He aimed at money by intrigue. He aimed at money by dishonesty, and he aimed at money by *treachery*. One time he thought the last mode would have become a mine of gold and silver; but after pawning his honor and breaking his most sacred compact, he was informed that, until the results of his