

Cackling and nodding, she beats a retreat, and Doris, with a sigh of relief, hears the door close behind her. Yet the sound of the wheels did not emanate from Lord Dundeady's chariot; and Doris, having ascertained this fact from a window that overlooks the avenue, turns once again to the contemplation of his present.

She slips it round her neck, and, standing with folded hands before a mirror, sways her body gently to and fro, to make the gems catch the light, and is delighted with the effect, and indeed with herself too.

Then she wonders, when the old nobleman comes, in what fitting words will she thank him, and makes up the dearest little speech in the world for his edification, which she totally forgets an hour afterward, when the necessity for it arises. She adds up, too, indifferently, the chances for and against Clontarf being in time to see his father, and then she yawns a little, and, going out again to the balcony, sinks into a low chair and falls into a musing trance once more.

This evening Vera, the little sister she has not seen for four long years, will be with her. A sense of joy at the approaching reunion fills her heart. Then Vera was fourteen, now she must be very nearly eighteen. Why, quite a woman!

Lady Clontarf smiles as she pictures a grown-up Vera. Such a little baby of a thing as she was when last they were together, all soft yellow curls, and rosy lips, and eyes so blue and innocent that they suggested heaven and its sky. A strange idea that she is old enough to be Vera's mother has taken possession of her. Yet in reality there are but two short years between them.

Kit Beresford and Vera must be about the same age. Doris hopes earnestly they may be friends. But even Kit will be older in most ways than her Bebe, as she generally calls Vera. She will never be very old, dear Bebe, she is so childish, so laughter-loving, so gay! Why, her letters even now are vague enough to drive any solemn person out of their wits. Yes, Kit will teach her to be sensible, dear little innocent tender Vera.

So thinking, Doris lets her eyes wander thoughtfully over the glowing landscape before her, past the swelling lawns and stately trees to where in the far distance Coole lies basking in the sunshine, with the high hills of Carrigfaddha on its left, and the sun rushing in soft streams across the valleys on its right. The river, too, running at its feet, and flowing past Moyne House, looks like a gleaming band of silver in the glowing light.

At Coole live Mr. and Mrs. Desmond, with their uncle, The Desmond. As a rule, Kit Beresford too is always to be found there, though her home is commonly supposed to be with her aunts, Miss Priscilla and Miss Penelope Blake, at Moyne, a pretty old house about half a mile further away.

Just now, not only Kit but two or three other people are staying at Coole.—Dick Browne for the shooting, Neil Brabazon and Mr. Mannering for Kit,—the latter openly, the former surreptitiously, his suit being by no means so favorably received by Kit's sister Mrs. Desmond as that of his richer rival Mr. Mannering. How Kit means to give it is a more important matter still, and one as yet hedged round by doubt, though perhaps there have been certain rare moments when—when—

Miss Beresford is roaming through the gardens of Coole at this moment, with a rather discontented expression upon her mignonette face; she is alone, all the men having been carried off shooting, *don't you know*, by Brian Desmond. Yet it cannot be said she is altogether left to her own devices, being closely, though furtively, pursued at every step by the under-gardener, who regards her with mingled feelings of admiration and distrust.

"She has the prettiest face an' the softest tongue in the country, an' a touch of the 'com-ether' every way," says Mr. Doyle when questioned about Kit. "But she plays the very devil wid me flowers."

His feelings reach positive agony now, as she stoops before a bed of late carnations, and, carefully picking one of the beloved flowers, puts it with indifferent appreciation to her nose. Though apparently disparaging the virtues of the thing she has plucked, she yet stoops as if to possess herself of its brother. This is one too much for Doyle.

"Miss Kit, miss, I beg yer pardon," he says in a tone that trembles with agitation, "but I think the mistress wants them flowers."

ers for the dinner-table to-night or to-morrow."

"Carnations for the *epergne*!" says Kit, with widened eyes; "and to take the flowers from the garden! Why, she always has them from the conservatories," regarding him with manifest distrust.

"Generally, miss, it must be said. But only yesterday she laid her eyes on that there bed, an' said as how she fancied them. If ye would condescend now, miss, to take a posy from any other bed, why—"

"Oh, certainly," says Kit, with a view to giving him the advantage of a most impartial judgment. "Strict justice he shall have," says Kit to herself, "but nothing more." She smiles grimly, and instantly pounces upon a bed of rare geraniums and calls it a choicest treasure.

"Oh, not that, miss," cries Doyle, almost in tears. "The *maisther* likes them. He wants to show them to the marks when he comes over. Ye wouldn't be the like o' them anywhere, miss, at this time o' year. 'Tis a pity, I will always say, that ye haven't studied the thing. There, now I only look at the size o' the flower in yer hand! why, 'twould have been twice that size to-morrow, an' the sun beavin' as it is for the last week! If ye'd just kindly turn to another bed, miss, an'—"

"This one?" says Kit, directing her thieving attentions to an exquisite *Gloire de Dijon* rose-tree that stands in a bed devoted entirely to himself. He deserves it; he is indeed a king among flowers.

"What a beauty at this time of year!" she says genially; and bending forward, she deliberately prepares to snip off one of the three last roses of summer that adorn it. Doyle springs forward.

"Oh, Miss Kit!" cries he. "Be the powers, 'twas well I stopp'd ye in time. The baby, *Maisther* Brian inside is that fond o' them. May blessings light upon him! fair, 'tis he himself, when Mrs. Maloney brings him this way, that stops just here, an'—"

"Baby!" says Kit, turning upon him sternly. "How can you quote him, Doyle, when you know he couldn't see the difference between a rose and a cabbage? I'm ashamed of you! Why don't you say at once that no one is to touch a flower in this garden, and be done with it. But such a subterfuge as that—! Do you suppose an infant of four months knows anything about roses? Now, do you, Doyle? Answer me that, if you can."

"I do declare to you, Miss Kit, that the cleverness o' that child passes belief. I wouldn't think it, now, to look at him, would ye? An' yet I think, but for the spakin' part of it, he's as knowin' as yerself."

"He is not," says Kit, indignantly; "and it is just to save your flowers you say all that. You are so mean about them that some day I am sure a blight will fall upon them and wither them all up."

This terrible prognostication, sounding to the superstitious Doyle like a curse, so cowed and terrifies him that at once he resigns all hope of saving his heart's children, and involuntarily crossing himself to avert evil, moves backward and beats an ignominious retreat.

"Routed with great slaughter," says Kit to herself, with a malicious smile, and for the next half-hour plays pretty havoc with the flowers, unmolested.

But time drags with her, and is a grievance rather than a joy. What a long morning it has been!—and what an unclouded sky, all one tiresome blue! Not so much as a wink in it. Good gracious, if Italy is always like that, how she would hate Italy!

Some people, no doubt, would like the exquisite monotony of it; but then some people would like anything. Shooting, for example! The idea of spending a whole day in a murderous assault upon defenceless little birds! How cruel, how senseless!—sport, indeed! Now, it isn't one bit that she misses anybody (with a vehement shake of her head), or is lonely, or wants any one back again, that has given rise to these withering comments, but, really and truly, only an honest surprise that people should care to pass hours after hours trudging through broken fields with so utterly paltry an object in view.

By-the-bye, when did Monica say the men would be home from their "slaughter of the innocents?" She wishes she could say when would "the man" be home? but that tiresome Mr. Mannering seems determined to stay on at Coole, though she is positive he can't shoot anything. In fact, Dicky Browne

told her so. Strangely enough, in spite of her scornful reflections of a moment since, this doesn't seem to add any lustre to the mental picture she has drawn of Mr. Mannering.

"Why doesn't he go back to his beloved England?" she says pettishly, apostrophizing a yellow rose. "I don't encourage him to neglect it as he is doing."

"Kit," calls Monica, thrusting her head out of the dining-room window, "come to luncheon, do! the servants are tired of looking for you, and the cutlets are fast resolving themselves into leather."

Certainly—whether for that reason or for any other—the cutlets don't seem to do Kit much good. She is silent and *distracted* all through luncheon.

"You've been quarreling with somebody," says Monica, glancing at her keenly, when she has seen her favorite cream go away untasted. Mrs. Desmond is not so long a wife that she has forgotten all about it.

"No, I haven't," says Kit, so curtly that Monica knows she has guessed aright, and is much discomposed by the knowledge. That there has been a skirmish of wits between Kit and some one unknown is as clear to her as the day; and that Kit is now angrily and half repentantly going over and over that skirmish again, with her inner self as judge and jury to excuse her or condemn, is equally apparent. There is indignation in her pretty eyes, and a little—a very little—grief; evidently her inner self is being very lenient to her. Was it between her and Mr. Brabazon that that secret disturbance arose? Of this Monica, though with an unpleasantly strong suspicion of the truth upon her mind, cannot be quite sure.

To feel a quarrel, one must either love or hate the one quarreled with. That Kit does not hate Neil Brabazon is only too well known to her married sister, who would indeed fain have had it otherwise. If she should insist upon loving him, it would be a terrible pity, and one that ought to be prevented at all risks. Why should her pretty Kit be wedded to a hopelessly briefless barrister, when here was Mr. Mannering, with as many thousands a year as the other had hundreds, only waiting for a look, a word, from her to cast it all at her willful feet?

That Mr. Brabazon has openly declared to Kit his affection for her is known to Monica; what Kit's answer was is, however, unknown to her. That it was hardly as satisfactory as an ardent lover could desire she has guessed from certain signs and tokens. Evidently Kit had hesitated. Much might come of this hesitation. Procreation is a thief; it might steal from Brabazon even those faint sweet friendly sentiments that Kit half coquettishly acknowledged she entertained for him. "There is always hope," says Monica to herself, even whilst gazing at her sister's downcast countenance.

The day closes in, and evening descends apace,—a warm and sultry evening, with not a suspicion about it of cold or damp. A breath from the departed summer has come to it:

"The falling day
Gilds every mountain with a ruddy ray;
In gentle sighs the softly whispering breeze
Salutes the flowers, and waves the trembling trees."

Monica, who has been haunting Kit all day with an evident desire to say something to her from which her heart revolts, now, plucking up courage, follows her into the orchard, where, as a rule, Miss Beresford is to be found all day long, guarding(?) the plums.

"Kit," she says, taking the plunge with a shiver, "I want to ask you about Mr. Brabazon."

"You used to call him Neil before his uncle married," says Kit, in a rather impossible tone.

"Used I? Well, never mind that. He has proposed to you, I know. Have you accepted him?"

"No," coldly—perhaps a little defiantly. "I think you have shown great good sense," says Mrs. Desmond, with a sigh of relief, though conscious that the relief stands on a very frail foundation.

"I wonder if you would have said that a month ago, before Sir Michael got married," says Kit, with abominable persistence. "However," maliciously, "not accepting one man doesn't make one accept another."

"Certainly not; but—"

"I suppose I should have shown even greater good sense if I could have brought myself to accept Mr. Mannering?" says Kit, with a little scornful laugh.

"I think if you could do so—"

"Well, I couldn't," says Kit, decisively.

"Not now, perhaps, but—"

"Neither now, nor at any other time. I wouldn't," says Miss Beresford, slowly, "as mercenary as you, Monica, for all I possess."

"That is so very little, darling," says Mrs. Desmond, with tears in her eyes. It is horrible to her to be called mercenary, but how can she let this girl who loves so dearly make herself uncomfortable for life? "So very little that I cannot bear to see you contemplating a marriage with a man who has literally nothing."

"I am not contemplating anything. I don't believe—so far as that goes—that I shall ever marry anybody, and certainly not a man who hasn't a feature in his face or an idea in his head. Why, just look at his nose!"

"I don't see anything wrong with Mr. Brabazon's nose," says Monica, determined to be just even to her foe, "and I believe he has as much brains as most young men."

"Mr. Brabazon!" cries Kit, flushing crimson. "Who is talking about him! And who has a nose except Mr. Mannering?"

Monica, discovering her error, and finding herself in the wrong, is very justly incensed.

"I have," she says, with great dignity. But Kit treats the dignity with contempt and scorn.

"The idea," she says, "of pretending you thought I was alluding to Neil. One of your jokes, I suppose; but a sorry one, let me tell you."

"You mentioned no name," says Monica. "Well, I shall now. I was speaking of Mr. Mannering."

"I don't think any one but you would say he was totally devoid of brains."

"He isn't raving mad, if you mean that, or even, strictly speaking, an imbecile, but he is as near the latter as decency will permit."

"I think you should not speak so of a man whose only fault is—"

"Loving me too well," quotes Kit, with an irrepressible if rather angry laugh.

"It isn't kind," persists Monica, gravely. "And is it kind of you," demands Kit, vehemently, "to flout and sneer at the man I like ten times better than any other man know, even though I am not sure that I love him? Ah! when you were worried about Brian, before your marriage, it wasn't in such a fashion as this I treated you?"

This is a terrible reproach. Mrs. Desmond's own love-affair, having been a very genuine one, had run anything but smoothly. There had been serious complications, and divers difficulties, in all of which she had been supported by Kit's unbounded sympathy. There had, too, been certain situations that had owed their triumphant terminations to Kit's assiduity. Monica's heart melts within her as all these memories rise.

"Oh, Kitty, I am not ungrateful or forgetful," she says, miserably; "but if you really think that—"

There is no knowing to what extent she might have committed herself but for the appearance of two young men, who, entering the orchard at this moment from the eastern side of the yew hedge, advance rapidly toward her, and so check the words that are lingering on her lips. One is Neil Brabazon, the other Dicky Browne.

"Ah! they have returned from the shooting," says Mrs. Desmond, quickly.

"So I can see," returns her sister, coldly. Mr. Browne is all smiles. Mr. Brabazon is all the reverse. There is a sense of injury about him not to be mistaken. There is, too, a determination not to look at Miss Beresford that is perfectly clear to everybody except Miss Beresford herself, who being equally bent upon ignoring him, loses sight of this fact.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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