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LISHEEN

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CHAPTER XXI

AT BRANDON HALL

Like many another poor mortal, Ned Galwey, trusting too much to his little learning, and refusing to be taught by experience, fell and fell sadly. The conviction forced itself on his imagination until it became a monomania, that gold was here, here in their own townland, where they were born and reared, and where now this black stranger coolly comes in and, by aid of superior knowledge, which was uncanny and criminal, was piling up an enormous fortune secretly and covertly from the world. The thought was maddening. Ned had read all about Nevada and the mines of Kimberley, and the rivers rolling down their golden sand in far India. And here, clearly and unmistakably, was this prospector, luckily for himself, digging and mining and pocketing the precious metal that had lain so long within a few feet of their own labours.

The nights were cold; Ned Galwey heeded it not, but established a kind of detective system of his own, by which, sooner or later, he sought to catch Hamberton, as the wise men of the old caught the Leprechaun and compelled him to surrender his ill-gotten wealth. Night after night he wandered around the lonely hills that frowned down on the marble quarries, expecting to see the glint of the lantern that would mark the Englishman at work; but he saw nothing, except, now and again, a hare that he might start from her form, or some wild thing creeping in the darkness from covert to covert. The good wife came to the conclusion that Ned's head was "turned"; and she communicated her fears to others; until at length the report reached Hamberton of Ned's nocturnal vigils, and he swore he would teach the fellow a lesson, and then dismiss him back to his farm and his fishing.

In one of the limestone caves in his quarries he had a tall figure dressed completely in white, the head covered except to reveal a grinning skull. He placed a lantern to hang as it were from the hands of the dead, and secreted two confidential men in the cave on a certain very dark night in January. Then, when his whole household were stilled in sleep, he came out at midnight, and slowly and cautiously entered the rough path to his quarries. As he went along, he threw the powerful light of an acetylene lamp before him; and he often paused and looked down, and picked up worthless pebbles and threw them away. He was quite conscious that his every movement was watched from above, and he strove by every gesture and pause to increase Ned Galwey's suspicions. At last he put out the light and entered the cave, and instantly Ned descended and followed him.

"I have him at lasht," said Ned. "An' he's the divil is he escapes me now. Here he has his gold heaped up in bags or boxes, I suppose. I wondher will I be able for him!"

Ned's idea was to come behind Hamberton, when the latter was counting his treasures, and seize him and them, using only the violence that might be necessary to carry out his project. He calculated that Hamberton might not know him in the darkness; or that, if he were detected, it would be Hamberton's interest, as well as his own, to keep the matter secret. For he had some dim idea that Hamberton's supposed mining was not strickly legal; and that the government or the landlord had claims on mines and minerals.

He stumbled over broken limestone and marble, as he descended from his post of observation; and, once or twice, when he caused some larger boulder to tumble down the declivity, with a noise as he imagined like thunder, his guilty conscience made him pause in terror. As he proceeded further, his terror became greater, until the bark of a sleepless dog, or even the wash of the sea, made him tremble. He would have turned back, but that the demon of cupidity was to strong within him, and the glint of the imaginary gold blinded his eyes to guilt and danger.

At length, after many pauses, he reached the opening of the cave. There was the dim reflection of some light cast from behind a mighty shelf of rock that screened the entrance of the cavern, and Ned thought: "He's now at his work, the divil; and won't he be surprised?"

Cautiously he crept forward, and then, after a moment's pause, he flew swiftly around the boulder, and came face to face, not with Hamberton, but with the awful sheeted, silent figure, with the skull grinning from beneath the white head. A lantern hung down before the ghost and lit the walls of the cave.

For an instant Ned Galwey was paralyzed with terror, and could only stare. There was a sudden bending forward of the awful figure, and then the unhappy fellow, with an awful shriek, turned to flee. As he did the figure fell on him and threw him to the earth. The lantern was extinguished, and in the darkness and dread and cold terror, as of death, his consciousness staggered and fled.

In the gray dawn of the morning, when the men assembled for work in the quarries, they thought they heard stifled moans proceeding from a certain cave, where sometimes they left their picks and hammers after the day's work. After some hesitation, for the Irish is peasant rather fearful of "finding somethin'" that would implicate him with the law, they entered the cave and saw but a white sheet, from beneath which the moans came, sad and fitful enough, a broken lantern, and a skull. They raised the sheet and discovered the prostrate figure of Ned Galwey, more dead than alive. To every query, there was but one feeble answer:

"Oh! the ghosht! the ghosht"

"What the divil brought you here, Ned, man alive?"

"Oh! the ghosht! the ghosht!"

"How long are you here?"

"Oh! the ghosht! the ghosht!"

"Rouse up, man alive, and tell us what happened."

"Oh! the ghosht! the ghosht!"

"Thunder and turf, man! What ghosht? What did you see?"

"Oh! the ghosht! the ghosht!"

"This bangs Banagher. This must be the banshee that we hard last night late. But what brought Ned Galwey here in the middle of the night?"

"Oh! the ghosht! the ghosht!"

They took him home and told his wife the circumstances. Even to her queries he had but one answer: "The ghosht! the ghosht!" And for many years after, whenever Ned was coming home from a fair or market, and was "unco fu'," it was a usual sight to behold him swaying to and fro within the prison of his crate and cart, and to hear him cry with outstretched hands: "Oh! the ghosht! the ghosht!" At last he became known all around the countryside as "The Haunted Man."

Hamberton, however, was not disposed to let him off so easily. He had a good deal of contempt for such a character; and he needed an example to prove that the popular fancy about hidden treasure was ill-founded, and also to show the discontented moiety of his laborers that he was not a man to be trifled with.

When time and thought brought back something like reason to Ned Galwey, Hamberton calmly but firmly demanded an authentic account of the event that was now the talk of two parishes. The one point that he desired particularly to clear up was, what brought Ned to the cave that winter night. He knew right well what it was; but he demanded the admission from Ned's own lips. This was no easy task. Ned had several theories about his presence in the cave, and these varied as their probabilities. He said he was bewitched; that he was a somnambulist; that he had dreamt three times running that there was a "crook of goold" hidden in the cave, and that it was whilst dreaming he sought is. Finally, he declared that it was "thim moonlighters, who wor agin the government an' every dacent, hard-working man, and who would think no more of shooting an Englishman than of shooting a rabbit, who took him by force out of his warm bed by night, and thransported him to the cave, where they held their nocturnal and rebellious meetings."

Hamberton took each story as it came from Ned's lips, and told it to the men; and each new invention was a source of intense amusement day by day; whilst Hamberton saw that every additional falsehood was wearing softly away every trace of discontent and every lingering idea that he was secretly amassing wealth. Then, one day, he determined to call them together and talk to them of their infidelity and perfidy. But he abandoned the idea under the influence of some cynical humor.

"Tis all the same," he argued, "and will be so to the end of time. All men are liars. I must tolerate them until I can leave them forever."

This was the idea—not passion, nor fear, nor monomania—but the calm, well-formed idea that was haunting the mind of this singular man. The idea of getting out of life, when he had accomplished certain things, as softly and as voluptuously as possible. The old Roman mode of life, sybaritic, cynical, philosophical, appealed strongly to him. And the Roman method of leaving life appealed to him still more strongly. He had no idea of drifting on to old age, a prey to every wretched infirmity, until he became an object of contempt even to those few who loved him. He had seen old age and shuddered at it—its imbecility, its multiform diseases, its impotence; and he determined that when certain things had been done he would leave of his own free will this most disastrous world. Once or twice he had hinted this to Father Cosgrove in their occasional conferences on the immortality of the soul and the future life. Then, he had broadly stated his intention to the horrified priest to leave this wretched life as soon as he had placed Claire Moulton under the protection of some man, in whose honor he could confide. And he added, in mitigation of the horror he had raised in the mind of the simple priest:

"You see it is a far-off event, Father. I think the condition is hardly realizable at all; or at least, only so after the lapse of many years. But when you meet that Sir Galahad, you will tell me, will you not?"

"You must allow Miss Moulton some choice," the priest answered. "From the little I know of them, young ladies' fancies cannot be forced, cannot be forced."

"Quite so. Quite so. I shall allow Claire the most absolute freedom. But this puts my design further back. Because, you know, like all girls, she is sure to marry a knave or a fool."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the priest. "But I pray it may be so; or that God will change your heart. And he will; he will. I am but a poor prophet; but I foresee the day when Miss Moulton will be the happy mistress of Brandon Hall, and you her honored and respected friend and father."

"Oh, man of mighty faith, how little dost thou know! How little dost thou know!" said Hamberton.

CHAPTER XXII

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY

The discovery that was now to throw dread and consternation, at least amongst some of the family at Lisheen, was made by Pierry, and communicated with great caution to Debbie alone. Maxwell's action and demeanour in the field before the hunt began, and afterwards at Reynard's death, gave, as we have seen, some food for reflection to Pierry NcAuliffe. No peasant, no matter how brave and independent, would act as Maxwell had done; and surely no deserter, hiding from the police, would tempt Providence in that way. Pierry, loth enough to act the spy, was yet so disquieted about their visitor, that he determined to set a watch on his movements; and, although these were manifest and unconcealed, he thought he should catch Maxwell in some moment when he was off his guard, and in which he might reveal something that would betray his identity.

Strange to say, the thought of the agent, Netterville, of his anger at the insult offered him by Pierry before the entire hunt, and of the possible revenge he might take, did not occupy the mind of the young peasant these winter days so much as the question: Who was their unknown guest, whence had he come, and what was his object in selecting Lisheen, above all other places, for a retreat?

He questioned his father closely about the chance of their having rich relatives to England or America, some far-out cousins, who might, after the lapse of many years, be anxious to resume the rights of family relations, and perhaps bring back some little resources to help their meagre means. The good father shook his head. There were, of course, relatives in America; but all were doing for themselves, and not likely to be troubled with home emergencies. There were none, so far as he knew, in England. He bade Pierry abandon all hope of succor from abroad. He thought that this was Pierry's idea. The latter then cast about for some other solution of the problem, but in vain. He consulted Debbie more than once. She persisted in maintaining that Maxwell was a gentleman; and she instanced his demeanour towards Miss Moulton when they had visited Lisheen. She spoke rather scornfully of "that thing," as she called Miss Moulton, and in great laudation of Maxwell's attitude towards people who should have minded their own business.

Clearly, then, Maxwell was a gentleman—but in disguise, and hiding away in this remote place for some obscure and suspicious cause. He cast up every possible cause in his mind—domestic trouble, reduced means, ganbling, even Debbie's attractions; but rejected them all. The revelation then burst unexpectedly upon him.

Every soft moonlight, night in the early spring he noticed that Maxwell, after supper used to throw on a heavy frieze coat and, under pretence of having a quiet smoke, was in the habit of going to a lonely plantation or screen of firs higher up on the hill, but not very far from the cottage. One night, when a heavy fog rose up from the valleys beneath and almost hid everything, Pierry, under its friendly cover, followed Maxwell up along the hill, and hid in ambush under a wet and dripping hawthorn hedge, on which a few withered leaves and a few red berries were still lingering. The plantation, composed of heavy timber with light young fir-trees springing up between, looked ghostly enough in the pale moonlight, that was now struggling with the heavy fog; and through a path cut between the tender young saplings, on which the beads of vapour were glistening, Maxwell was walking to and fro, apparently burled in deep thought. Suddenly, and with a kind of stifled cry, he stopped; and, turning around, he appeared to be engaged in angry altercation with some unseen person. His voice at first was pleading and pitiful, then it rose shrill and piercing, as if arguing against the suggestion of some terrible deed. Then it seemed to die away, as if remonstrance were unavailing, and Pierry heard him mutter: "When we have marked with blood these sleepy two," as Maxwell turned away into the recesses of the plantation again.

The boy was badly frightened; but he had nerve enough to wait and see what further developments would take place.

After a pause Maxwell emerged from the shadow of the firs, and stood in the open moonlit space again.

Suddenly he turned, as if taken red-handed in his guilt, and shouted:

"Who's there? What ho!"

Pierry, now believing that he was discovered by this madman or murderer, was about to run, when Maxwell, after a pause, cried:

"What hands are here? ha! they pluck out my eyes."

And then, as he rubbed his hands violently together, Pierry heard him ask if all the waters in the ocean could wash the filthy blood from his hands.

He needed no more; but crept along the hawthorn hedge and, once again wrapped in the fog, sped down with throbbing heart and bursting eyes towards home. But as it would never do to reveal prematurely all things before they were ripe, and as Pierry, consummate actor as he was, was now determined to see other and more tangible proofs of this man's guilt, he went into the cowhouse, and remained there until he saw Maxwell, half an hour later, lift the latch of the cottage door and go in. Then Pierry, with a half-lighted pipe in his hand, also entered, and sat down as calm as he could by the smouldering fire.

"A cowld night outside?" said the old man.

"'Tis cold," said Maxwell, so calmly that Pierry was shocked by the contrast of the man's demeanour with what he had witnessed an hour ago. "There is a thick fog and a heavy dew is falling."

"I fear the ground is too wet to turn up a-yet?" said the old man interrogatively.

"Yes," said Maxwell. "It would be heavy under the plow just now."

"I suppose we musht wait, though the spring is running on," said the old man.

And Maxwell pursued the conversation as calmly as if nothing was on his mind more terrible than the fencing of a ditch or the planting of a ridge of potatoes.

"He's the divil's own play-acthor intirely," Pierry thought, as he beckoned Debbie to follow him.

Not till they had gone around the house, and were safely ensconced in the cow-byre did Pierry open his mind to the wondering sister.

"I've found out all," he whispered at first.

"All what?" said Debbie.

"All about the bouchal inside," said Pierry.

Then Debbie's curiosity, and more than curiosity, was aroused.

"No wondher he was hidin'," said Pierry. "If I had what he has on my mind I'd drowned meself in the say."

"Wha—what is it?" said Debbie, now thoroughly terrified, as she looked out into the square of moonlight before the door.

"You'd never guess," said Pierry.

"No; what in the Name of God is it?" said Debbie. "Is it anything very bad intirely?"

"Couldn't be worse," said Pierry. "He has blood on his sowl, as sure as we're talkin' here to-night. He has done away wid somebody."

"Great God in heaven to-night!" almost shrieked the girl, "what did we do to punish us in this way? To think of having a murderer in the house, an' undher our roof! But are you sure, Pierry?' she asked, as the gleam of an old affection shone up under such a dark cloud of gloom. "How do you know? How did you find it out?"

"Aisy enough," said Pierry. "I had it from his own lips; an' if you can hould yer tongue for wan twenty-four hours, you can hear it, too, or I'm mistaken." Then he told her all.

They then decided to hold a deep, unbroken silence about the matter, until Debbie could verify her brother's suspicions. And then they would consult further on the matter.

The next night was equally favourable for observation; and when Maxwell, again donning the heavy frieze coat, strolled out into the moonlight, Pierry soon followed. But he immediately returned, and said aloud:

"I'm thinkin', Debbie, that some wan is paying a polite visit to your fowl. At laste, they're makin' the h—— of a row outside."

"Wisha, bad luck to that fox!" said Debbie, hustling around and assuming a heavy shawl. "There's the second visit this year; and not a pinny compinsation from thim huntsmin."

Brother and sister separated in the yard; and made their way by different routes, towards the plantation, the theatre of Maxwell's appalling confessions. But they met and crouched beneath the hawthorn where Pierry was ambushed the night before. The night was cold and the grass was wet; but they heeded not these things under the spell of the night's adventures.

"Now, Debbie," whispered Pierry, "for your sowl's sake, don't let a screech out o' you, nor wan worrd, no matther what you see, or you'll spile all."

"I'll try," said Debbie with chattering teeth and shivering all over, rather from fright than cold.

Again they had not long to wait. For again Maxwell, his figure looming up larger in the mist, emerged from the plantation where the trees were thickest, and stood in the glade, where the young saplings could not conceal him. After pausing some time, and making some wild gesticulations, he struck his forehead violently with his right hand and strode back into the shadows.

"Did you see that?" whispered Pierry.

"I did," chattered Debbie. "God help us! he has something weighty on his sowl."

"Weighty enough," answered Pierry. "Wondher we never shuspected anything. Whisht! here he comes again!"

Again with slow and solemn tread, Maxwell strode out into the moonlight; and after a pause, and looking around solemnly at the heavens, he suddenly gave a violent start, as if he had seen an apparition, and shouted at it to depart: "Avaunt! and quit my sight! Thou canst not say I did it; never shake thy gory locks at me!"

These were the appalling cries that came to the frightened watchers.

"He sees something," whispered Debbie, half dead with terror. "Can you see anything, Pierry?"

"I do," said Pierry. "There's somethin' white between the trees."

"Is it a man or a women?" said Debbie.

"'Tis nayther. 'Tis a sperrit," whispered Pierry. "Tis the thing he kilt."

"God save us!" said Debbie, making the sign of the cross. "Could we get home without his seein' us?"

"No, no," said Pierry. "Listen he's at it agin!"

Maxwell was still apparently arguing with the ghost, when suddenly the latter must have dissappeared; for he turned around, and pulled up his coat-collar and muttered:

"Why, so; being gone, I am a man again."

And muttering: "I will have blood; they say, blood will have blood," he went back into the shades again.

"Come home, in God's Name!" said Debbie to her brother.

"No," said Pierry. "We must see it out now. We won't get a chance agin!"

"But maybe he's gone home," said Debbie.

"No," said Pierry. "You'll see him lightin' his pipe first."

"He's the cool divil out an' out," said Debbie. "To think of shmokin' after what he's seen! But I wondher who was it? Was it a man or a 'uman?"

"Wait and maybe he'll let on!" said Pierry.

This time the interval was longer; but at last Maxwell came out into the glade again. After a few minutes, he began an imaginary dialogue with some person or persons, but in a low determined tone. Then he walked backwards and forwards as if waiting. Again he addressed his victim, who appeared to be pleading with him for mercy. He answered sharply and walked to and fro again. The only words they could catch were:

"Well, quick, be brief; I would not kill thy soul."

The dialogue now became more impassioned, Maxwell uttering quick, jerky expressions, as of one impatient and not going to be trifled with. At last he stopped short, and, stooping down, made as if he would kneel on his victim's breast to suffocate or destroy him. He was apparently interrupted in his murderous effort, for he stood up suddenly, and, looking around, shouted:

"What noise is that? Who's there?"

"He's found us out," said Debbie. "What'll we do?"

"No," said Pierry. "'Tis the divil's conscience that's troubling him. Whist!"

But they heard no more. For Maxwell, after one long, lingering look at the dead body, passed into the shrubbery again.

In a few seconds he came back, and stood over the dead body, his hands clasped and hanging down before him. Then broke into an awful lamentation, swinging his hands wildly, like women that are keening over a corpse; and, in a voice broken by his tears and moans, they could hear him saying:

"Cold, cold, my girl! Whip me, ye devils! Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur! Wash me steep-down gulphs of liquid fire! Oh! dead, dead, dead! Oh! Oh!! oh!!!"

These last words he almost screamed his arms held wildly over his head; and his whole frame contorted in agony. The lonely hour, the otherwise silent scene, the ghostly moonlight, the heavy drapery of mist and fog, and this man alone with his terrible remorse, made a picture of horror and desolation that would have paralyzed any soul with dread. The girl nearly fainted, while her tears fell fast; and it needed every effort of her brother to keep her from shrieking out with the horror that confronted her. At last Maxwell went away; and Debbie was free to speak amid her tears.

"Oh, Mother of heaven to-night!" she cried, whilst her brother held her in his strong arms, "what are we to do, at all, at all? To think of our having a murderer in our house for over six months, and we thratin' him like a gintleman. Sure I knew there was somethin, quare about him along; but we couldn't sind him away. An' it was a girl! Sure I ought to know it. What's that he said: 'Cowld, cowld, me girl!' Oh! the ruffian! To desthroy some poor, innicent crachure, that never did nobody harrum—"

"Well, he seems sorry enough for what he done!" said Pierry. Did ye hear him callin on all the divils in hell to blow and blast him? An' sure, bad as he is, it made me a'most cry to hear him say: 'Oh! oh! oh!' in the ind!"

"What good is all that, if he done the deed?" said Debbie, who was jealous that another had preceded her in Maxwell's affections. "Will all that moanin' and groanin' bring the poor thing back to life? Well, I suppose he'll have to swing high for it now. Sure, he can't escape much longer!"

"But what in God's Holy Name are we to do?" she continued. "Sure, we can't give him up to the pelice. We'd be called thraitors and informers forever!"

"We'll lave it alone till to-morrow, however," said Pierry, "and maybe I'll run over and tell the priesht!"

"The very thing," said Debbie, trying to dry her eyes. "But how am I to meet him again, or set at the table with him or make his bed?"

"Well do your besht," said Pierry. "It will never do to let on that we know anything. Why, he might murdher us all in our beds!"

"May God and his Blessed Mother save us!" said Debbie. "What a pickle we got ourselves into by too much good nature. 'Twill be a lesson to us, I warrant you." They passed down the hillside together, and then separated in the yard, Pierry going into the cabin first. After a long time Debbie entered; but kept turning her face away from the place where Maxwell was calmly smoking and chatting with the old people.

"Come over and take a hate of the fire," said her mother; and when Debbie demurred, the mother looked at her keenly and saw she had been crying.

"Why, surely, 'tisn't cryin' about a a couple of chickens you are?" she said.

"'Tis enough to make any girl mad," interposed Pierry, "to see wan fine fowl afther another desthroyed by that rogue of a fox."

"Yerro, no matther," said the mother, "there's as good to be got where thim kem from."

This commenced a pretty little debate, after Maxwell had inquired what were the rules regulating compensation to farmers and labourers for the destruction of poultry by the foxes kept for the gentry's amusement. He was very indignant at the revelations — the refusal in nine cases out of ten to repay anything, the incredulity of the gentleman who was Grand Almoner, the proofs that were required of the peasantry, the pittance that was reluctantly given. He expressed himself freely about the iniquitous custom. It was another sidelight on Irish history. But no matter how indignant and sympathetic he was, especially with Debbie, she kept her face averted from him. She only heard:

"Cold, cold, my girl! Oh, dead, dead, dead! Oh! oh!! oh!!!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

MISS SCHUYLER'S DECISION

The two pale, sweet-faced little nuns, with their rusty black habits and cotton umbrella, looked strangely out of place amid the splendor of Miss Schuyler's drawing-room. As they waited for her to come down-stairs, they sat ill at ease on the edge of their chairs, exchanging a few words now and then, but silent for the most part. The elder of the two, whom her companion called "Mother," seemed to be greatly troubled about something. Her hands lay folded quietly in her lap; but her face was anxious, and her lips moved in prayer except when she was interrupted by some question or obvious remark from her more talkative and less burdened companion.

Miss Schuyler dressed with more haste than care, tucked a five dollar bill under her belt, and hurried downstairs and into the drawing room. She welcomed the Sisters most graciously; and apologized for having kept them waiting, as amiably as if they had not called at an unreasonable hour and just as she was about to rest after a fatiguing morning.

The three were hardly seated before the timid little superior broached the subject that lay heavy on her heart.

"We have a special reason for calling to-day, Miss Schuyler. We—we are in great need, great trouble." Her voice trembled a little, and her blue, almost childlike eyes were very appealing as she raised them to Miss Schuyler's face.

"We have had to make some improvements in our building this spring. The dormitory in which the little children sleep was ill-ventilated and crowded. The doctor insisted on our having more windows cut. Then—then—" Again she faltered; but, after a slight pause, went on bravely: "We have fallen behind with the grocer's bill and the baker's. Children are so hungry, especially the little boys; and we have nearly two hundred to care for now. It doesn't take much for us, but they—" and she stopped short, throwing up her hands with an expressive gesture that was very French.

The two nuns fixed their eyes on Miss Schuyler, trying to read her answer in her face. It was not reassuring. The truth was that at the moment she herself was pressed for money. Only a few weeks before she had paid for extensive repairs in a number of houses which belonged to her—repairs which consumed several months' rent; and four or five of her storerooms had long been vacant. During the uncomfortable silence which followed the Sister's appeal, Miss Schuyler's frown deepened.

Both nuns looked crestfallen; and the one who had spoken before added timidly, with a suspicious moisture gathering in her eyes:

"You have always been so good to us, Miss Schuyler. We don't know any one else to go to."

"What do you owe, Mother?" Miss Schuyler asked by way of answer. She was resolved to be as kind and generous as she could without seriously inconveniencing herself.

"Thirteen hundred dollars," the nun faltered almost inaudibly.

"Thirteen hundred dollars!" repeated Miss Schuyler in dismay. She had imagined that the Mother would say about a third of that sum; for she knew of how great a little money was in the eyes of the poor Sisters. She said no more for at least half a minute; and again the nuns watched her anxiously, the Mother once more praying earnestly.

Miss Schuyler was battling with herself. She had arranged to go away with a party of intimate friends, and had laid aside fifteen hundred dollars for the expenses of the trip. She was looking forward to it with great eagerness and pleasure. It would be a treat indeed for one of her lonely, if luxurious, life to be closely associated with her most congenial friends for weeks at a time. But she could not afford to go away that summer, if she helped materially in raising the debt which weighed so heavily on those overburdened religious.

She hardened her heart deliberately. "What business is it of mine if these foolish, shortsighted nuns have run into debt?" she said to herself, conscious that she was being unjust. She raised her eyes and looked over at the Mother, intending to say that she could help her very little; for she, too, was pushed for money.

She caught the pleading, almost tearful glance of the meek little superior, She could see, too, just above her head, a portrait of her only brother painted when he was a charming, sunny-faced boy of twelve. "I'll offer the sacrifice for him," she thought, changing her mind with lightning-like rapidity. Then she said aloud:

"I am going to give you fifteen hundred dollars, Mother. It will pay your debts and leave a little over to start you afresh."

"O Miss Schuyler!" The Mother fairly sobbed, the sudden relief and joy proving too much for her. "God will surely bless you. Our little ones shall pray to Our Lady for you every day. It is the only thank-offering in our power to make."

Six weeks passed, and spring had blossomed into summer. The first of June came—the day on which Miss Schuyler's friends were to start, leaving her behind to face a long, dreary summer in the heat of the city.

All day Miss Schuyler felt irritable, disgruntled—an unusual thing for her, who was ordinarily most placid. She was glad, even thankful, that she had given the money to the needy Sisters; she would do it again, she told herself. Nevertheless she could not stifle her natural regret as she saw her friends set forth in great glee with the prospect of a delightful holiday ahead of them.

That evening she sat, alone and lonely in the corner of the street porch that almost encircled the old house. She was appalled at the thought of the months which stretched out uninvitingly before her, forgetting that she would have to face but one day at a time—or, rather, one hour at a time. She sighed heavily, then gave herself a little admonitory shake, and looked toward the street with forced interest. She was surprised to see that a man was leaning over the low stone wall which inclosed her grounds. He seemed to be looking intently at the house, which was in utter darkness as far as could be seen from the front, the only lights being in the kitchen and the servants' sitting-room in the rear. Miss Schuyler herself was in the deep shadow, and she knew that he could not see her in her black dress.

The minutes lagged by, and still the man stood there; and still he scanned the house from attic to cellar until Miss Schuyler became nervous. Even in the dim light of the summer twilight she saw that he was shabby, almost ragged in his dress, and very, very thin. She took him to be a tramp. Then observing him more closely, she noticed that he leaned heavily against the wall, as if he were weak or ill and in need of support.

As time passed and the man did not move on, but continued to lean on the wall, she concluded that he was indeed ill and in need of assistance and that her fear of him was ridiculous. "He could not hurt me if he wished to" she thought. "People are passing up and down continually — there is a carriage now!—and it is early—hardly eight o'clock." She rose and hurried down the walk leading to the gate near which he stood.

The man had shifted his position, and was bent over the wall with his head buried in his hands. He could not see her approach, neither did he hear the soft rustle of her silken skirts.

"I am afraid that you are ill. Can I do anything for—" She never finished her sentence.

The man started violently at the first sound of her low voice, and raised a face deathlike in its pallor.

"Arthur!" she exclaimed.

He drew himself up proudly, but swayed weakly, and had to cling to the wall for support.

"You need not be afraid, Ellen, that I'm going to annoy you in any way. I came to the city yesterday, bound for the hospital. I am going there to-morrow morning; but I thought that I must get one glimpse of home—before I die. I have always loved the dear old place because father and mother built it and were so proud of it. I suppose—in fact, I know—that it was my own fault that I was driven away; but it can do no good to go over that matter. Good-by, Ellen! I would not have hung about here to-night had I guessed you were at home. I took it for granted that you would be away and the house closed."

He straightened his old hat, which was sadly awry, and turned to leave her.

"Oh, Arthur, don't, don't go! Won't you stay with me?" she pleaded. "I'm all alone and so lonely! I have watched for you for years. And you're weak and suffering!"

"Surely, Ellen, you don't mean that you want me," he said incredulously, afraid to believe that he heard aright.

"Yes, yes, Arthur! Why, father and mother wanted you long before they died. They felt that they had been too hard on you. You were young. Their last words were loving messages for you."

It was too much joy for the almost dying man. He tried to say something, but the words refused to come, and he covered his face with his trembling hands and sobbed uncontrollably. And those tears washed away the bitterness which had corroded his soul for years.

A week passed. The doctors had been in constant attendance at Arthur's bedside since the night when his sister had supported him into the house: but from the first they had said that they could not save him. Miss Schuyler hung over his pillow, lavishing on him every possible token of her deep sisterly affection, which had been starved during fifteen years.

One day he lay for a long time looking at an exquisitely carved ivory crucifix which hung near her bed. At last he turned his tired eyes toward his sister.

"Ellen, are you a Catholic?"

"Yes, Arthur, thank God!" And she added, though she feared the news might agitate him: "Father and mother were both received into the Church shortly after I was, and several years before father died."

She longed to urge him to follow in their footsteps—longed to try to explain to him a little; but she hesitated, afraid that she might unsettle what faith he had, when he was too weak and suffering to find his way to the Truth.

He lay silent for some time before he motioned her to come close to him; and when she bent over him he whispered haltingly:

"I think, Ellen, that I would like to see one of your priests before I die. For a year or two I've had a yearning to be a Catholic. I know pretty well what you believe—" He paused, panting for breath; but after a few seconds went on again, in a voice so faint that his sister caught the words with difficulty: "I've been so miserably ill, and so bitter against all the world, that I didn't — couldn't — think much about such things. But now you have made me so comfortable and so happy and peaceful, Ellen dear, that—that I can see things more plainly than I ever did before. Do you think the priest would come to-day this morning?"

And Miss Schuyler nodded. Her heart was too full for words.

Three days later Arthur Schuyler died most peacefully, slipping away to God with the faith and confidence of a little child who goes to meet a loving and merciful father. And to this day his sister shudders when she thinks of what would have happened had she kept for her own pleasure the money that won the orphans' prayers of gratitude before Our Lady's altar.—Florence Gilmore in The Ave Maria.

Why the Church is Persecuted

"Men wonder," says the Monitor, Newar, N. J., "why the Catholic Church is always opposed; even those who are not ill-disposed to the Church wonder at it. They say: 'The other churches seem to get along quietly. Why is it that the Catholic Church is always contending? Why is it that the governments of the world are fighting the Catholic Church?' We can give no other answer than that it is because the Catholic Church is the true Church. She can not be false to her divine mission; she must preach the truth at all hazards; she must uphold the Gospel and the principles which rest upon it. There-she must be opposed to the world and the spirit of the world and those who are actuated by that spirit. The other churches, man-made, may compromise: the Catholic Church may not compromise. Persecutions will come; governments will seek to injure her or even to destroy her; but regardless of consequences, the Church of God must keep on her way and perform her divinely constituted mission."

Better to work and fail, than sleep one's life away.—J. K. Jerome.

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