

He seized the blacksmith's hand, and a tear fell upon it.

"Mat," he said, in a broken whisper, "if anything happens me—it can't be much for the worse, God knows—but if it *do* happen, you won't forget poor Kitty an' the childher?"

The tear in the blacksmith's eye glittered threateningly, as though it would fall perforce.

"'Tis a bad business, my boy," he said, "'an' they sez 'twill be my turn nixt to be routed out o' the old forge; but as long as I live.—There, Tade, I can't say another word—'twould choke me."

And the tear fell triumphantly at last.

"God bless you!—God bless ye all!" The new-fangled murderer was gone.

The blacksmith stood in the forge's gloom for a few minutes, thinking—for under the iron cap there was a thought-apparatus, how clogged soever.

"The boy manes murder!" he muttered, reflectively. "Well? 'Tis only death here or there. What matter?"

And the blacksmith betook himself to his cheerless crib behind the bellows with the iron wrinkles hammered once more into decorous rigidity: ashamed of his unusual emotion. But the apparatus under the iron cap never ceased working in its own dull chambers all that night.

It was a weary night for the hunted outlaw in the mountain wood, when the birds were at rest and the leaves—all but the owl hooting from the ivy of the old Castle, all but the owl and his own breathing heart—weary when the morning broke in holy purity—weary and more weary as the sun mounted by slow seconds to the meridian, and beamed over the ripe corn-fields, and gladdened the happy birds—as if there was no grief under the sun. He had seen Sir Albin Arslade go to Clonmel in the morning, accompanied by Murphy, the baliff: both armed to the teeth—but as arms were in those days among the equipments of those who were privileged to carry them, he saw no ground of suspicion on that score. That his design could have been anticipated, the more especially as his wife was the only one actually acquainted with it.

There was on the old road between Clonmel and Kilsheelan, some two miles outside the former place, a deep and lonely gorge known as the Pass of Cah. Here the road took a bend immediately under the brow of the mountain, and passed for about two hundred yards between a steep acclivity on one side, and on the

other the mountain wood reaching down to the very border of the road, and back in the dense covert of pines and underwood to the recesses of the mountains. It was a place made for murder—gloomy, isolated, and to the murderer offering ample shelter and easy escape. Here Tade Ryan awaited his victim: behind a thicket on the roadside, about a hundred yards up the Pass, whence he commanded a clear view of the road from its entrance, and in a few bounds could conceal himself in the depths of the wood.

Wearily the lagged hours toiled along. Every sound of life startled the watcher. Every one that passed the road seemed to be conscious of his presence and shuddered. Every horse's hoof-beat made his heart jump into his throat. The sun began to decline, and still no sign of the victim.

Tade Ryan began to almost wish he would not come at all. Terrible is the agony of the deliberate murderer. Like minute guns amid a roaring sea, the conscience voice shriek betimes, and then are swallowed in the clash of star-striking billows and hurricanes of passion, making the poor heart quiver and heave with the *Æolia* bursting within its bounds. And the minute-guns come again like spasms of agony; for all the stormy rage that seeks to drown them; and will not be drowned.

But when it is despair that reasons, where will be found the cannons? Tade Ryan thought of his wife and starving children, of his hunted self, of his wrecked home, of his lost cause, and of the pitiless stranger who would flourish in their ruin: and he was a demon again. The haggard look in his face denied parley to prudence—life for life was his terrible game. He looked once more to the priming of the blunderbus, and patted it with savage glee. Then resumed his anxious watch down the road. A lunatic in a powder magazine with lighted match!

In the meantime, Sir Albin Arslade had set out from Clonmel, little suspecting the dreadful fate that was preparing for him. In the excitement of a heavy day's business in town, he had almost forgotten his daughter's silly fears, and was riding along leisurely with thoughts that were nearly all pleasurable. He was after receiving a large consignment of gold, transmitted to him by the agent who still carried on his money-lending business in London; and the gold was stowed away in a bulky, leathern sack attached to his saddle; close by the pair of loaded pistols stuck in the holsters. He had made the few arrangements necessary;