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THE SNOW DRIFT; OR, HOW IT HAPPENED.

I have been looking out for your honor. You have only got in time. It is going to be an awful night; and sure you would be likely to lose yourself intirely in one of our Ballybrake storms.

I am afraid that it is going to be a bad night, Pat; I replied; 'and I would rather be inside the 'Blue Boar' for the next twenty-four hours, than out of it.' I gave myself a shake as I spoke, and scattered a miniature shower of snow-flakes right and left.

I am afraid that you are very wet, sir. Will you let me take your coat for you, and dry it? said Pat Doolan's wife, holding out her hand for the coat as she came forward from the brightest and neatest of kitchens.

Well, it is a nice look out for me, Pat.— Here am I likely to be kept for days in doors by the weather, and not much to do either, said I, in a dismal tone, as I followed Pat and his wife into the warm kitchen.

Not much to do, is it? asked Pat, as he touched my portfolio, which I had kept all the time in my hand. 'Sure, your honor, you can make your pictures while the snow lasts!'

How can I, when I cannot get out to draw any? I took one scene to-day, though—such a pretty one; and it will do for a couple of days to work at; after that I do not know what I shall do to occupy the time. This is the view I have taken; can you tell me the name of it, Pat? said I, untying my portfolio, and taking out a sketch, which I showed to him.

Bedad! could I tell you the name of it, cried Pat, as he caught up the drawing, while a delighted expression spread over his jovial, good-tempered features. 'Indade but I could. And if that is not Mainowen itself, my name is not Pat Doolan.'

Mainowen? I repeated; 'well, I do not know it by any name, but I am glad to know that it has one. It is that large manor on the highroad between Ballybrake and Leenside station, the prettiest and largest estate in the neighborhood, I should say.'

It's that same, your honor. Sure I know it as well as I know the nose on my face. Wasn't it myself that lived there, boy and man, for twenty years and more? and would I not be living there now if Mary had not stepped in between me and the ould place? Bedad, but they were mighty fine times at the Hall then; sure it was a pleasure to get a glimpse through the windows of the gay doings that went on in Mrs. Morgan's life. She was made for enjoyment, and she made the most of what fell to her share. Ah, it is a lonely ould place now, by all accounts.'

Why? I asked; 'does no one live there?' 'They do, your honor, but sure the blind don't see the sunshine, do they?' asked Pat, with a knowing look, and his head on one side.

Certainly not, said I; 'but you make me curious, Pat. I should like to hear the history of Mainowen Hall if there is one to tell; I am very fond of stories.'

'Sure it's not much of a story,' he replied; 'it is only about a snow-drift, your honor.'

To my utter amazement Pat's face quivered all over with uncontrollable mirth, and he burst into a hearty ringing laugh, which he kept up until the tears filled his eyes, and in which his wife as heartily joined.

Oh, your honor, I laugh whenever I think of it. Sure I'll tell you myself how it was, and then you'll know all about it, said Pat, as he passed his coat-sleeve over his eyes.

Well, said I, 'I will tell you what I will do. If Mrs. Doolan will be good enough to take me up some tea now, I will go up and get it, and later in the evening I will come down and take that jolly arm-chair in the little bar parlor, and smoke my cigar with you, and you can satisfy my curiosity, Pat.'

'Bedad, that will be fine,' said he. 'Do you mind that, Mary; and will you see to a roaring fire, for the night is cold enough to freeze music.'

Leaving Pat Doolan to give his orders, I went

out of the cheery, bright kitchen, and up the old-fashioned staircase—which was broad enough for a coach to drive up—into my room at the top. The fire was burning brightly, and laying aside my portfolio, I lighted a cigar and sat down to ruminate.

I felt very dismal, very lonely in my self-isolation. Here was I, Sir Archibald Verelst, of Castle Roydon, snowed up at a small Irish wayside inn. I had been wandering about, sketching, through some of the wildest parts of the Emerald Isle, until at last I had fallen in with Pat Doolan's snug little home, and taken up my quarters there, until—like all else in life—I wearied of it, and commenced my wanderings again.

What an unsatisfactory life I had been leading for the last fifteen years! One month in sunny Spain, backing beneath the blue sky or sheltered orange groves; the next perhaps would find me chasing the tiger through the jungles of Bengal, or driving furiously to the music of silver bells in snow-bound Russia.

My friends called me 'unsettled.' I knew that I was restless; but I knew to what to attribute my infirmity of purpose.

When I was twenty I was engaged to marry my cousin, Maud Muriel. From the earliest childhood Maud had been the idol of my young life, and we were to have been married when I attained my majority, and took my father's place amongst the baronets of England. But (alas for human anticipations!) the night before my birthday Maud ran away with my best friend, and so ended my life's short romance. Directly afterwards I commenced my wanderings; and now, at five-and-thirty, I feel as little inclined to settle down at Castle Roydon to a quiet country life, as I did when I passed over its threshold for the last time fifteen years ago. It was not the remembrance of my early dream, so rudely broken up, that lingered and prevented my habits from becoming those of a country squire, but I have a restless nature, and fortunately I have not yet found a motive sufficiently strong to chain me to one spot.

Long years have passed since the green turf in the quiet churchyard at Roydon closed over the remains of my mother—and I never remember my father; so if any one suffered from my lengthened absence, it would only be my tenants; and I had taken care that they should not miss me.

Somehow, on this evening, I felt more lonely and dismal than usual. I think the snow-flakes which made the air thick and dense, must have had a depressing influence upon my spirits, for I had never felt before so unsatisfied with the world generally, and myself particularly. Perhaps it came to me then for the first time, as the snow fell noiselessly and quietly upon the earth, like the benediction after prayer, that we were made for a higher and holier end and aim than the careless frittering away of the golden years in self gratification and self-employment.

I think that I had almost made up my mind to start for England as soon as the roads became passible again, and spend my Christmas season at Castle Roydon amongst my tenants, when my reflections were broken up by the round, joyous voice of Pat Doolan, which beamed in at the door.

'Sure and I thought it sleeping that your honor was. Mike has just come with the letters from Ballybrake, and bedad it's myself that is puzzled intirely. Here's lots of letters with the queerest address upon them; maybe your honor would be kind enough to explain it to me. I can read writing easily enough; it's not that which troubles me; it's not knowing what to do with them now I have got them. Mike says that it's all right, but I say the fellow has not come yet. They are for 'Sir Archibald Verelst,' and indeed I do not know him, your honor,' said Pat, his face looking hopelessly puzzled as he came forward, and I held out my hand for the letters.

'It is all right, Pat,' said I. 'Mike was quiet right; they are for me.'

'For you, your honor! Sure you are not a 'sir,' now, are you? And there's myself has talked to you so freely, I feel quite ashamed to

think of it; and sure why did you not tell me of that same before.'

'It is all right, Pat, as I said before. I do not like people to be frightened to speak to me because I have a title to my name. I told the people at the post office to send me all my letters here, and they have done so. And now, Pat, tell Mrs. Doolan to send up tea, and when I have finished it, I mean to make you keep your promise, and tell me the story of May Owen; for I intend to come down and listen to it, as I said I would, by the side of the little bar parlor fire.'

'Will you really, your worship? Sure I'll go and tell Mary directly,' said Pat, as he glided out of the room, with his eyes fixed upon me, as if he thought a living baronet was as great a curiosity as a white elephant. Honest Pat Doolan evidently had his own ideas of respect and reverence, for no consideration could induce him to call me anything but 'your worship' for the remainder of my short stay at Ballybrake.

'Now, Pat,' said I, some little time afterwards, as I seated myself in the cosiest of arm-chairs placed in the most comfortable of corners, 'we will have that story of yours.' Mrs. Doolan, I cannot let you go away, I said, as I saw that she was gathering up her work preparatory to leaving us. 'I am not going to drive you out of your own domain; and if you do not sit down again I shall go back to my own room.'

Affairs being finally arranged, I lighted my cigar, and settled comfortably to listen to Pat, while outside the moaning wind and beating snow made us all the more contented with our present warm and cosy quarters.

'Well, your worship,' commenced Pat, 'I will begin at the beginning. You must know that the Morgans have had Mainowen, frther and son, for the last sixty generations, and real fine the lot of them were. Not that I ever saw but two of them, but sure I've seen the pictures in the ould place, and it's all the same thing, anyway.'

'When I was a short sipp of a boy I went to Mainowen myself as a sort of general servant, your worship; that is, I used to do everything in the house, and out of it. The ould justice was always a proud, stern sort of man, and he would never take much notice of any of us; but Mrs. Morgan, sure it was herself that was the kind lady to her servants. She would always have a word for us, and there was not one among us who would have objected to go through fire and water to serve her. But the darling of the house was Miss Lena, she was the only child, and more like a sunbeam than anything. Sure, it was like a dream to see her bright, happy, young face among the flowers on the summer mornings; she would come and stand by me talking her pretty child's language until—bedad! I used to think it was a fairy.'

'Well, time went on until Miss Lena grew up and got old enough to go to the quality balls at Ballybrake and Leenside, when the head of her seemed quite turned by all the grand folks she saw. The first ball she went to I remember just like I know the things of yesterday, it all seems so distinct like. You see I was head groom then, your worship, and I had my lady and Miss Lena to drive to all these places.— Sure the justice never went; he used to stay at home, but no matter the time, he would not stir a foot towards bed until they came cack. Well, this first ball of Miss Lena's was a real grand thing to catch a glimpse of; and while I was standing at the door, waiting, with a thing all fur, which the justice sent for Miss Lena, didn't I see the lords and ladies walking about quite common like! And the music! och, your worship, it was fine enough to go to sleep to.'

'While I was standink waiting, with my eyes wide open, to miss nothing, Miss Lena came walking slowly towards the carriage with as fine and grand a gentleman as I ever saw. I noticed him particularly, you see, for I thought that maybe he was a prince, until I heard Miss Lena call him 'Captain Laurence,' and then I knew that he was not. To see the way the captain handed my ladies into the carriage was just a picture. Bedad, and it's the quality who know properly how to do elegant things.'

'Then I shall see you to-morrow?' says the captain, leaning his hand in through the window to say good night.

'You mean to-day, Captain Laurence,' says she, smiling, as we drove off. I knew that she smiled, although I could not see her face as she passed under the lamps.

'The justice came forward to help my lady and Miss Lena out as the carriage stopped at the hall door.'

'Have you enjoyed yourself, pet?' he asked, tenderly, for he was mortal proud of Miss Lena's beauty and grace.

'The happiest evening of my life, papa,' she answered; and there was a ringing music in her voice, and a sparkle in her eye, prettier than anything your worship ever saw.

'Well, the afternoon brought Captain Laurence. He came riding over from Leenside, where he was stationed, and looking in the daylight not a bit less grand than the night before, and more like a prince than ever. He stayed a long time that first visit, but the visits afterwards were longer and longer, until at last I thought, 'Bedad, my boy, it's a pity you do not stay altogether.'

'I knew the meaning of it all. It was easy guessing the road these two young things were making for; and I think my lady encouraged them, for I know that she left them often together. As for the justice, why he would never see anything; so it was not to be expected that he could see that Captain Laurence and Miss Lena were falling in love with each other.'

'The first time that I really knew there was anything between them was an evening when it was getting towards autumn, and the nights were cold and chilly. It was my custom, your worship, to take the round of the greenhouses just at dusk, and shut down the lights. In the conservatory, which went into the drawing-room, I heard voices. You see they had opened the door between the two, just to improve the drawing-room with a scent of the flowers, as they often did, and I heard talking. I went on with my work, and they never minded me—nobody never did. 'Sure I'm just the same as yourself,' I would say sometimes to encourage them like.'

'I do not like it, Lena,' I heard the captain say. 'I do not like it; and I must tell the justice before I go back to-night. Why do you fear, darling?'

'I do not know,' Ernest,' she says to him, in a sad kind of way like. 'I have a sort of presentiment of evil for us. Papa has lately so often laid his hand upon my head and talked about wealth and titles, as if he contemplated something. He never talks like that for nothing,' says she.

'The captain sighed, and said, 'I have neither wealth nor title, dear one. I wish I had for your sake.'

'You have both, Ernest,' says she, bending down and kissing him—'for you see, your worship, I heard it. 'You have both, for you are a captain, and you have a wealth of love for me. What more do I want?'

'And then, your worship, I knew for sure that Captain Laurence had been making love to my young lady; and I could see nothing but misery before them if the justice refused to let them marry.'

'I suppose the captain must have asked him that very night for Miss Lena, for I heard tell in the kitchen of an awful row having taken place between them. All I knew about it was, that Captain Laurence came round himself to the stables to fetch his horse, and his face was white as a banshee as he waited for me to put the saddle on.'

'Indade, but your honor is going early,' said I between whites.

'And enough to make me go,' says he. Then he turned sharp round and came close to me, and said, 'Mind, Pat, if ever you meet me in the park or elsewhere, never to mention that it might get to Justice Morgan's ears. Remember that you are helping Miss Lena.' And he tried to make me take some money.

'Is it paying me you are,' says I, indignant, 'for doing a service for Miss Lena? Put it away, your honor, for I can never touch it.—

Sure, there's not one of us who would not fight to the death for her; but it's affection, and not gold, we would do it for.' So I just promised the captain that I would never speak if I saw him about the place. No more I never did, and, bedad, I saw him about often enough.

'Well, so things went on till nearly Christmas time, when one day the justice walks in very pompous and proud-like, with an elderly, white-headed gentleman, and an earl—Lord Mount-Stuart. Bedad, leave an Irishman alone for second sight. I saw it all in an instant, and you could have knocked me down with a horse-hair as soon as my eyes were opened. The earl kept coming and coming, and at last it was whispered all through the servants' hall that Miss Lena was to be the Countess Mount-Stuart. Sure, the justice was as proud about it as a dog with two tails, and held his head higher than ever. It was no use for Miss Lena and my lady to cry and beg of him not to sacrifice her fair young life to a man ould enough to be the grandfather of her; the justice said she should marry the earl, and there weren't any going against that verdict.'

'At last, preparations for the marriage began, and poor Miss Lena began to grow wither and thinner day by day. The wedding was fixed for the end of February, and all the time the captain used to meet her in the grounds on the short afternoons whenever he could. At last, just a few days before the wedding, Captain Laurence came to me while I was working in one of the greenhouses. 'Pat,' says he, 'there's a good fellow, come to the tool-house at eight o'clock to-night, while dinner goes on indoors; and he was gone like a shot.'

'At eight I unfasted the tool-house and went in, and sure I had not long to wait before the captain came, his handsome face looking sad and white, and so thin, it made my heart bleed to see the sorrow the ould justice's taste for pomp and wealth was causing to the two.'

'Pat,' says he, grasping my hand in a grip like a young vice—'Pat, I know we can trust you.' Bedad, if I did not look round for the other of them, but I could see nobody. Says the captain 'Miss Lena is to marry Lord Mount-Stuart in four days.'

'True for you, captain,' says I, 'and sorry am I in my heart of it, for her heart is breaking.'

'Would you make her happy, Pat?' says he. 'Would I? I shouted catching up a spade and holding it before him. 'Look you here, captain, if it would make Miss Lena happier I would just walk into the dining-room this minute and give the ould earl a tap on the head with my spade.'

'You need not do that, my boy,' says the captain, 'but you can help her more than any one if you will.'

'Bedad, won't I?' says I; 'only say how, your honor.'

'To-morrow night, when they are all in bed, Miss Lena will open the hall-door and come out,' says he; 'you must be waiting there, and must bring her to me. I will wait some little distance off—by the Hollow Pond—with my sleigh.'

'Your what, your honor?' I asked.

'A sleigh, Pat—a carriage,' says he; 'you shall see it when you bring her; and when the justice misses her, do all that you can to prevent him from telegraphing down the line from Leenside, or stopping in any way the progress of the midnight train. Do you hear me, Pat?'

'Captain Laurence,' says I, 'sure and you never mean to walk off with Justice Morgan's daughter?'

'I mean to drive off with her, Pat,' says he; 'so mind you take care of her through the snow until you give her into my hands. And you will have to give us chase!—so mind and delay the justice.'

'Shall I upset him, your honor?' says I. 'No, do him no harm,' says he; 'for Miss Lena's sake, we must not have him hurt.'

'Sure I'd do it gently, your honor. I would not injure him at all.'

'No, Pat,—no upsets. You must think of something else. Remember he is an old man.' And with a few more directions. Captain Laurence went off.