

PRETTY MISS NEVILLE

BY B. M. CROKER

CHAPTER III

"TIT FOR TAT"

"It would be a good idea for a week, laughter for a month, and a good job for ever."—Henry IV.

Shortly before Maurice left, we had the satisfaction of seeing him in a towering passion.

The river slate ran through a part of Gallow, between two mills. At times it was very high, at others quite low, according as the mills were working and carried off the water. When the upper mill was in full play there was a kind of current, or mill-race, very strong, rapid, and dangerous. We three "imps," as Maurice usually called us, owned a large, flat-bottomed boat, which we kept in a kind of harbor, fastened by a lock and chain. We were quite expert in rowing about the river, but our operations were confined to the space between the mills, about a mile in length.

Here the slate was very pretty, bounded on one side by the woods of Gallow, and on the other by large fields, edged with alders and birches. One evening we had just landed, and were locking up the boat, when whom should we descry approaching but Miss Fluker and Maurice, the former with a handkerchief tied over her head, the skirt of her dress gracefully elevated, stepping high through the grass.

"How much I should like a row this lovely evening!" she remarked, looking pensively at her companion, with her hand on one side. "I'm afraid to trust myself with these children," she added, frankly. "I wish you would take me out, Mr. Beresford; it would be such a treat," rolling her eyes rapturously.

"All right," he replied promptly, proceeding to unlock the boat and hand her in. In she stepped, simpering and smiling, and making a great fuss about her petticoats—she was exceedingly vain of her feet and ankles. Having sufficiently displayed them, she took a seat.

"Now then, shove off," cried Maurice, as he opened the gate of the boat-house and pushed her out by leaning his hands against either gatepost. "Shove off," he repeated. We shoved with a will, all three, and sent them, with united might and main, out into mid-current, without any oars. At first Maurice could hardly realize his position; but when he had grasped it, he shouted to us to "float them off after him."

"A likely thing! What fun it was! What a state Fluke was in! We enjoyed the whole scene with unaffected delight, as we ran along the bank, and kept with them, capering very quickly for quite half a mile, and there the two sat in the boat, impotent and powerless.

Maurice's face alone was a study that would have richly repaid a two-mile walk; and Fluke's little screams and squeals were quite too awfully funny.

At length they were borne in close to the bank, and Maurice, by grasping a branch, managed to stop the boat somehow, till he and Miss Fluker were both on terra firma. They were dripping when we met them, and very angry. Miss Fluker's indignation was of the high and haughty kind which scorned words. But Maurice was furious; he spoke his mind for once; he gave us his candid opinion of us there and then—no delicate intonations, no beating about the bush.

"The next time I catch you playing off any of your pretty little tricks I will pay you out for certain." He discoursed to us from this text for nearly five minutes, and then escorted Miss Fluker home in search of dry garments; but the warmth of their indignation was of itself amply sufficient to have superseded any fire.

A few days after this "outrage," as Fluke called it, we were caught red-handed in the very act of putting eggs in the pocket of Maurice's light overcoat, which in an unguarded moment he had left hanging in the hall.

Seizing my wrist, and eying me for a moment in speechless disgust, he said, "Very well, very nice indeed," removing the eggs. "You are three delightful young people, and I am exceedingly fond of you. Wait, my little dears. One good turn deserves another, and I think I will be able to show you a trick worth two of yours." So saying, he strode away with his coat over his arm, leaving us grinning foolishly at each other, and feeling checkmated for once. He was quite as good, if not better, than his word; he kept his promise nobly, as you shall hear.

A week later was the half-yearly fair in Kilcool, the village nearest to Gallow, a day of the greatest importance in our estimation. We had always a whole holiday on the occasion, and all our pocket-money was hoarded up for at least two months previously, to be laid out in fairings. After much discussion we had made up our minds to invest in a joint-stock pig, to be fed and fattened (at grandfather's expense), and sold for our mutual benefit.

Between us, we mustered twenty-one shillings and five pence half-penny, fifteen of which we intended to lay out on the pig, the remainder on gingerbread, squibs, and fishing-tackle.

The morning came at last, bringing Deb and Rody to Gallow almost at break of day.

We counted over our hoard once more, and made detailed arrangements for spending a long and happy

holiday. Swallowing our breakfast hastily, we hurried down to the yard, where the donkey and twig were awaiting us.

Maurice was standing at the back-door, looking rather knowing, and whistling as usual. We had been on excellent terms for the last few days.

"What a hurry you are in, young people!" he said, with an air of cheerful remonstrance. "If you have a moment to spare, you will see something in the long loft that will surprise you more than anything you'll see at the fair."

"What is it?" we asked, eagerly; "is it pups?"

"Go and see for yourselves," he replied, turning away nonchalantly. "It won't take a second," I exclaimed, my curiosity aroused, nimble springing out of the twig, and flying up the long ladder like a lamp-lighter, closely followed by Rody and Deb.

We entered the great loft, which ran the whole length of the stables and coach house, scoured around it at full speed, looked into all the familiar nooks and corners—and saw nothing.

We returned rapidly to the open doorway, and found Maurice standing below, with one hand on the ladder and a smile on his face.

"Well!" he exclaimed, opening his eyes very wide.

"We saw nothing," we returned angrily; "you have made a fool of us. There is nothing to see, much less to surprise us."

"Does not this surprise you?" he rejoined, calmly removing the ladder.

"Oh, nonsense! Come, put it back at once. We shall be late for the fair as it is!" cried Rody, imperatively.

"I think it more than likely," said Maurice, composedly, pushing the ladder still further and further as he spoke.

"You don't mean to say you are going to keep us up here?" I screamed furiously.

A smiling nod was my only reply. "Here, Dan! Dan!" I shrieked, "bring back the ladder! let us down at once; do you hear me, Dan!"

But Dan, who had been critically surveying us, as he stood in the middle of the yard polishing a bit, now bolted into the harness-room, from which region his vulgar loud guffaws ascended to our indignant ears.

Meanwhile Maurice had sent away the twig, and seating himself on a wheelbarrow, with his arms crossed, and his hat on the back of his head, surveyed us with an expression of the liveliest satisfaction.

It was in vain we threatened, coaxed, raged, or pleaded. He maintained an exasperating, smiling silence, and seemed thoroughly to enjoy his hideous revenge.

Having made us the laughing stock of the entire premises, he rose to get the ladder, we fondly imagined, no such thing, but to take his leave, and to heap insult upon injury. With hat in hand, and an elaborately deferential air, he accosted us:

"Could he do anything for us in Kilcool? He would be most happy to undertake any commissions. Considering the short time he had been in Ireland, he was not a bad judge of pigs"—with a meaning glance at us.

"Would we put ourselves in his hands? Would we like a white pig, or a black pig, or a spotted specimen? And how about the gingerbread and peppermint? Or would we let the pig stand over till some future occasion?"

These empty civilities were responded to by frightful grimaces on our side. Having worked us up into a delirium of passion, he left the yard, with many bows and wreathed smiles and backward looks; we followed him, with all the names and execrations our vocabulary could command, till his figure was lost to sight round a turn in the avenue.

Every one had gone to the fair, apparently, excepting ourselves. The yard was empty, save for Sweetlips, who passed through more than once, for the evident purpose of jeering at us, and enjoying our discomfiture. The three of us sat down disconsolately in the loft doorway, with our legs limply dangling down, the very picture of impotent rage and misery, was a sight that undoubtedly pleased him not a little.

"Dear Sweetlips, let us down," we begged to say, "and we will give you half a crown."

"I'd rather see yez up there than twenty half-crowns!" rejoined the old savage, grimly.

In vain we raised our offer to five shillings, to seven-and-sixpence—he was deaf to every bribe; and compliments of the most fulsome nature, on his personal appearance, equally failed to soften him. He vouchsafed no reply, merely observing, each time he passed us, "it serves ye right! It serves ye right!" accompanying the remark with a malevolent grin.

Time crawled on—twelve o'clock came—one o'clock! We had breakfasted hastily, as I before remarked, and the pangs of hunger began to assail us. Half-past one—two! Unable to sustain the combined affliction of famine and disappointment, Deb and I dissolved in tears. We wept till three o'clock was striking, and then, though half-blinded with crying, we descried Maurice leisurely returning by the back entrance, whistling "Willie, we have missed you." He approached us and addressed us as follows:

"My beloved young friends, I am now going to release you on one condition."

"What is that?" we asked in a breath.

"That you will give me your solemn word of honor to give up playing practical jokes."

"We will," returned Deb and I, hysterically.

"On your honor, Deborah and Nora?"

"Honor bright," we answered meekly.

"But I won't promise anything of the sort," put in Rody defiantly, squaring himself in the doorway. "You are a mean, miserable sneak, and I hate you, and I only wish I was big enough to thrash you."

"I am sorry to hear you have such a bad opinion of me," returned Maurice, blandly, and I have no doubt that a slight irritation of the cuticle, to put it in polite language, would do you a world of good."

Addressing himself to Deb and me, he proceeded:

"I deeply regret that I am unable to release any of you till you have all given me the same promise."

As he concluded this remark he turned away.

"Don't go! oh, don't go!" shrieked Deb and I simultaneously, goaded to desperation by the prospect of his departure, and the stimulating effects of hunger.

"All right, I'll wait five minutes," he replied, once more taking a seat on the wheelbarrow, opening a cigar-case, and surveying us with an air of triumphant content.

Deb and I meanwhile seized this short respite with avidity, and flung ourselves metaphorically at Rody's feet, and implored and besought him to yield. Partly moved by our agonized entreaties, but chiefly by the pangs of raging hunger, he relented, and three minutes later saw us ravaging in the larder, where a certain amount of cold meat and potatoes, and the best part of a bogberry tart, had been put aside for us by Maurice's orders.

Half an hour afterward we were in Kilcool; but the best of the day, the cream of the fair, was over—skipped.

Many were the inquiries as to "Where we had been, and what had detained us?" accompanied by various significant, knowing looks, that told too plainly that Maurice's outrageous "joke" was known far and wide. It turned out that he had deliberately plotted and planned the whole scheme, and we, thanks to our curiosity, had fallen an easy prey to his vengeance. He had grandfather's full sympathy and entire permission to do with us as he pleased, for he agreed with his nephew in thinking that it was quite time to read us a lesson out of our own book.

Two days later Maurice left Gallow; our intercourse with him during those two days we marked by a sense of our high displeasure—putting him in "Coventry," as far as our entertaining conversation and delightful society extended. We did not deign to bid him farewell, nor did he ascend to make his adieu; but as our schoolroom overlooked the hall-door we were enabled personally to superintend his departure. We took the deepest interest in the matter, leaning half our bodies out of the window; we saw him take a very cordial leave of grandfather and Miss Fluker, and step into the dog-cart. Ere he was whirled away, his eye caught sight of us, with our necks craned forth, and our faces radiant with malicious elation. Lifting his hat with a courtesy that was ironical in its humble deference, and lightly kissing his hand to Deb and me, he was bowled away down the avenue, and soon lost to sight. Need I say that we witnessed his departure without any poignant regret? I drew my head back into the school-room with a deep sigh of relief, and warmly agreed with Deb and Rody in thinking that "Maurice's room was far better than his company." We abused him roundly, till Miss Fluker's entrance closed the conversation, and we returned to our lessons with a horrible, but unspoken, conviction that the late guest of Gallow had been more than a match for us, and had beaten us with our own weapon.

We discovered that Maurice had made himself quite a favorite with the rest of the household. Grandfather, Miss Fluker, and Mr. French each sounded his praises in their own way; we, meanwhile, secretly exchanging signs and nudges and glances of contemptuous derision. It turned out that he was popular abroad as well as at home, for he and Carlo, the setter, used to take long walks in the neighborhood and over the bog which lay behind Gallow; and he had made himself known and liked within a much wider radius than we had ever suspected. The country people, taken by his appearance, his affability, and his agility in leaping bog-drains, voted Mr. Beresford "a splendid young gentleman;" and even Sweetlips who never had anything good to say of him, with the notable exception of grandfather's dog Snapper—an ill-favored, irritable terrier, whom he declared to be "equal, if not superior, to a Christian"—even Sweetlips allowed that Mr. Maurice Beresford "was a dacent, quiet boy."

CHAPTER IV

GALLOW

"So sleeps the pride of former days, So glory's thrill is o'er."—Moore.

Gallow was a large, shapeless, old, red brick mansion, sufficiently imposing in its way, and known by the name of "The House" within a very considerable radius; it stood in the middle of a large demesne, and had little or no view beyond its

own undulating grounds, and—enlivening prospect—the family burying-place, which was within a moat or rath half-way up the avenue, surrounding a ruined chapel, and formed the only picturesque feature in the landscape.

Judging from the tombstones, we had a very respectable show of ancestors—ancestors of whom grandfather, despite his shabby old clothes, cynicism, and distaste for society, was not a little proud. Tradition handed down many stirring tales of their exploits; it even led us to believe that they had fought at the siege of Acre, and under the walls of Ascalon; and it is almost needless to mention that they came over with the Conqueror—by the way, his followers must have been like the sands of the sea in multitude. Personally, I did not care two straws for pedigree, and infinitely preferred a flourishing and fertile gooseberry bush, to the fine, wide-spreading genealogical tree that made grandfather's heart glow with family pride every time he lifted his eyes above the library chimney-piece.

We had long ceased to keep up state of any kind at Gallow—no hounds were in the kennels, no hunters in the stalls, no dashing coach-and-four swept round from the great yard; our glory had departed. "Ichabod" might be written on every rusty, set-aside entrance gate. The estate was partly let and partly farmed. The farming element predominated, and grandfather made large sums of money by the sale of stall-fed cattle and promising young horses. The retinue indoors was but small. "Big" and "Little" Mary were respectively cook and housemaid, and a venerable servant-man chief seneschal and butler. Never very smart at the best of times, he looked on our duced him to a state of mind bordering on imbecility. Thanks to us, he had a lively distrust of every dish-cover, plate or decanter he took into his hands; as he never knew where or how a lurking explosive might be concealed!

I think I have mentioned all the inmates of Gallow, with the exception of Miss Fluker, my governess. She was a thin, upright, angular lady (whose age baffled all speculation), with an opaque complexion, pale, furtive, greenish eyes, and quantities of dull-looking sandy hair; a reverse nose, and large white teeth, resembling the keys of a piano, were her strong points. Very thin lips and an exceedingly retreating forehead detracted considerably from her appearance, which, however, was passable, not to say "genteel." According to the servants, she had two faces; and two distinct characters from our point of view. Upstairs, alone with us, she was exacting, stern, and hard; downstairs, with the anxious, hard-working, most tenderly solicitous about grandfather's health and appetite, hanging on his words, however gruff, and flattering him in a manner that was palpable even to our not very sensitive perception.

She was a past-mistress in the art, and knew his little weaknesses and foibles. He considered him the best judge of a horse in the province of Munster, and the most weatherwise man in the kingdom! To his family pride she also administered delicate and judicious doses of the same specific, but here she only spoke in a wide and general way. He allowed no profane finger to meddle with his all but sacred pedigree. The Beresfords were a people afraid; a race in themselves; and not to be confounded with common humanity. I am not sure that he did not entertain the idea that they had a boat of their own at the time of the Flood.

Upstairs, our governess was at no pains to conceal her ungovernable temper, nor her all-consuming laziness and incapacity. Her own talent was music. She played splendidly in a hard, cold, showy style; and, thanks to hours of practice and a lively fear of Miss Fluker's ruler, I was an excellent pianist for my years. But our French was far from our sums. With great difficulty I advanced as far as the rule of three in arithmetic, and there I stuck fast, for the very good reason that my governess did the same. At 2 o'clock we were set free, let loose; and the remainder of the day was our own. Miss Fluker would spend hours on the sofa, deeply absorbed in a novel, and according to the time of the year, and as her delicate appetite suggested, we would place beside her a plate of apples, roasted chestnuts, strawberries, or plums, so that she was enabled to feed body and mind at one and the same time; or, sometimes arrayed in a scarlet cloak and coquettish little black hat, she would walk down to Kilcool and visit her friends in that direction, and enliven them with the latest news from the "big" house.

Mr. French, our rector, was the only outsider admitted to grandfather's confidence, and Gallow. He was a wiry, elderly gentleman, with a sharp nose, ruddy complexion, mild, benign blue eyes, and gray mutton-chop whiskers. In moments of intellectual embarrassment he had an odd habit of convulsively clutching one of these ornaments, and endeavoring to draw it into his mouth. He preached extempore sermons, of length varying from fifty to seventy-five minutes, to a large and appreciative congregation of staunch Protestants, descended from Huguenot settlers, and when suddenly stranded for a word, the above-men-

tioned maneuver invariably gave him instant relief.

Sweetlips was his clerk, and answered the responses in a loud, aggressive brogue, keeping his eye steadily upon us between whiles. I am sure he thought this just as much a part of his duty as handing round the poor-box, an article resembling a large brass warning-pun, into the depths of which each penny sank with a loud, resounding clang. Even Mr. French himself was not exempt from contribution. When all had given their mite, the long-handled receptacle was held up expectantly to the pulpit, and Mr. French's four-penny bit tinkled gently down among the coppers.

Then Sweetlips, his task fulfilled, would shut himself into his desk (along with the collection), and the service commenced. He gave his ears to the discourse above him—to French's rounded periods, his stentorian questions, his occasional shouts, and his frequent cushion-thumping—but his eyes were entirely at our service.

The long, doctrinal discourse was trying pastime to Rody, Deb, and me. Even the eye of our pastor himself was at times insufficient to restrain us, and from our deep, square peep hysteric snorts, and strangled, choking laughter, have more than once been heard—aye, even in the pulpit itself. On these occasions Mr. French would pause, and paralyze us with a look, and then resume his discourse, leaving us in a comatose condition. Not that we feared him. Grandfather was our *bête noir*. He assured that, when he was present, our conduct was unexceptional.

Within half a mile of Gallow, was the village of Kilcool. It boasted a church, chapel, post-office, and weekly market. There were several shops, where you could suit yourself with frieze, calico, corduroy, bacon, red herrings, and tallow candles.

On Monday—market-day—the one long street was thronged with carts of turf, asses' carts, farmers riding wild, shaggy-looking, long-tailed colts, and tribes of country women in their dark blue cloaks, driving hard bargains for eggs and butter and fowls. The various gentry of the neighborhood—few and far between—might also be seen doing their weekly marketing, and exchanging morsels of local gossip.

On other days Kilcool was empty. "The Deserted Village" might have been its name. A passing jaunting-car was an event that brought every eye to their doors and windows. Outside the police barrack a solitary policeman basked in the sun; he would have the street to himself for hours. Even a horse going to the forge, or the Gallow postboy, was an object of general interest.

This being the case, you can easily imagine the sensation that Rody created by walking down the village one sleepy afternoon, got up in the full costume of a first-class Chinese mandarin.

He really looked magnificent. The red satin petticoat added greatly to his height, as did also the round black cap, to which his pigtail was attached. His gorgeously embroidered wide-sleeved coat shone with a perfect blaze of splendor in the bright glare of the afternoon sun. A carefully gummed black mustache, and an enormous white umbrella, completed his personation.

As he went slowly and solemnly down the street, muttering some gibberish intended to represent Chinese, it is not too much to say that his own father did not know him.

Mr. French had been reading to a sick parishioner in Kilcool, and was in the act of leaving the house when his eye was caught by a vision of the Celestial, pacing sedately down the street, followed by an immense crowd, that had sprung up as if by magic. Market-day was nothing to that Sunday afternoon. He was too stupefied with amazement to move for some seconds.

Then, suddenly accosting the Chinese, who was leisurely stalking past he said:

"Who are you, my good man?"

Great gesticulation and dumb-show on the part of the foreigner.

"We allow no play-actors on Sundays; what are you doing here?" reiterated Mr. French authoritatively, speaking from the steps, with his Bible under one arm and his umbrella under the other.

"Chee-Chee-a hi ga. How much a hi ga?" returned the Celestial, with unabashed mien.

"Rody!" thundered his father, pointing on him, "alas, alas, Rody, the brogue has betrayed you!"

Over the conclusion of this scene I draw a veil.

Deb and I, who had followed in the crowd, fled home, and feigned perfect ignorance of the whole affair. But we did not escape unpunished. It was discovered that I had lent the costume to Rody. I routed it out from among a quantity of old family brocades and dresses that were stowed away in a large wardrobe in one of the spare rooms. It had been given to one of the Beresfords by a friend in the diplomatic service, and was said to be worth at least one hundred pounds; this was its first and last appearance in Kilcool. The wardrobe and its contents were securely locked up for the future. The penalty I paid for my share in the transaction was a severe one: I was cruelly deprived of sugar in my tea, and butter on my bread, for the space of one week.

The country round Gallow was very quiet in every way. We had

few neighbors, and even from those few grandfather held aloof. He never mixed in society since my mother, Nora Beresford, made a runaway match with the curate of Kilcool. It was said that grandfather idolized her, and would hardly have thought a duke above her merits. He indulged her in every way, and gratified her slightest whim; but when she announced her intention of marrying Mr. O'Neill, the curate, for once he was firm, and said, "If she married O'Neill, he would never see her again; she must choose between them."

She carried her point all the same.

One morning she was missing, and the inevitable letter was found on her perch, informing grandfather that she had elected to become Mrs. O'Neill, and hoped he would forgive her—a vain hope.

My father found an incumbency near Liverpool; I have heard that he was clever and eloquent and greatly liked wherever he went. Within two years he fell a victim to a virulent fever, caught among the stifling alleys and back courts of his parish. My mother shortly followed him, carried off by the same epidemic, and I was left an orphan ere I was a year old.

Grandfather sent for me and adopted me, and thus Gallow had become the only home I had ever known.

So much for my history; now, to relate Maurice's as briefly as possible.

He was the only child of grandfather's step-brother, a commander in the navy, and years younger than himself. He had married a pretty governess, to the unspeakable indignation of the whole Beresford connection. He was drowned by the sudden capsizing of a boat in a squall somewhere off the Mauritius, leaving his widow and son to the benevolence of his relations and to the enjoyment of a small prison.

The benevolence of his relatives was represented by grandfather's allowance of three hundred pounds a year, paid quarterly and in advance; otherwise, he steadily ignored the existence of his brother's widow. "That woman," as he called her, lived a very quiet, inoffensive life, in the neighborhood of a small seaport, and devoted herself entirely to the care (not to say worship) of her only child, Cousin Maurice.

CHAPTER V

MAURICE PAYS A SECOND VISIT TO GALLOW

"Moments make the year, and trifles life."—Young

Two years had passed since "Mandarin Sunday," as we called that Sabbath on which Rody was unmasked and disgraced before the entire population of Kilcool, and during those two years there had been some changes even at Gallow, where one day was the exact reflection of another. Time had told more upon the inmates than on the place itself, though there was a greater quantity of rust on the massive front gates, and moss on the avenue, than of yore. The library carpet and curtains were perceptibly dimmer and more faded-looking, and the great, long corridors and empty, shuttered rooms seemed drearier and gloomier than ever. Grandfather had aged a good deal; he was more silent, and lived, if it were possible, more to himself than formerly. Public rumor (which was occasionally wafted in our direction) declared that he was saving quantities of money, and public rumor for once may have been accurate. He spent most of his time over his old brass-bound bureau, adding up figures, making entries in account books, studying share lists, and writing letters, and he had become what the servants called very "near." I was changed too; I was now nearly fourteen, though very young for my age, as gawky and long-legged as ever, it is true, but my frocks now reached down to the tops of my boots, and my copper-colored locks were confined in one thick plait like Rody's pigtail. Sometimes I viewed myself anxiously in the old spotted mirror that stood between the windows of the almost empty drawing-room.

"Was I so very ugly?" I asked myself over and over again. I wished I knew. Deb and Rody entertained no doubt whatever on the subject, and they made me heartily welcome to their candid opinion. As a rule I agreed with them, after a critical inventory of my sharpened features, tawny locks, and sunburnt skin; and I would wander away with a heavy sigh and wish I were like my mother, whose half-length portrait in oils hung above the mantelpiece. She must have been lovely, judging by her picture—a slender, elegant-looking girl in a white diaphanous dress, with arch dark eyes, and a profusion of curly hair. "If I were only as pretty as Deb, I would be satisfied," I would mutter to myself. She was as well favored as of yore, and quite the young lady now, in her neat winter dress, fur coat, and felt hat. I was never well dressed, but always looked a romp and a hoyden, in my battered blue serge, miles too short in the sleeves, and too tight in the skirt. Occasionally Miss Fluker would hint at the scantiness of my wardrobe, and wring a few pounds from grandfather, in spite of angry expostulations that "it was sheer waste of money. I would do very well as I was. What did I want with dress?" and that "she was only putting extravagant ideas into my head." Nevertheless, Miss Fluker generally carried her point, and bore away a check for a small amount, to be spent on my adornment. Grandfather never seemed to feel parting

with a check as acutely as hard, visible coin of the realm; that to him was almost unendurable; and Saturday afternoon, when he paid the men, was by no means one of his happiest hours.

Deb was much improved in every way; various visits to her grandmother in Dublin had worked a distinctly perceptible change in her mind and manners. She now acted as a curb instead of spur to me, and people could no longer say with regard to our pranks that "Miss Deb made the bullets and Miss Nora fired them." Rody was as ugly, as active, and as mischievous as ever; a clever but idle boy at school, and the professional fool of the establishment. Maurice's battery was quartered in Dublin; he had become a real live artillery officer, and had more than once been invited down to Gallow, but as yet he had not made his appearance. I fancy that his recollections of his last visit were still too fresh in his memory, and that he had no consuming desire to renew his acquaintance with us. I had long soared above donkeys, and now possessed a steed of my own, one of the young horses bred on the place, who turned out to be too small for a hunter, and was presented to me by grandfather in a parcel, sent to Gallow, but as yet he had not made his appearance. I always had what the country people called "an element" for riding, and I now spent three or four hours in the saddle every day, to the great satisfaction of myself, if not of Freney; but I am sure he preferred careering about the fields, with a light weight on his back, to spending his time in a dark stable, like grandfather's fat cob.

Escorted by Dan, I went all the household messages. To Kilcool, to the post, to the railway station for parcels, to the canal-boat stores, to the lime kiln, etc.

During my peregrinations I rarely ever met a single creature, but that did not trouble me much—the mere fact of being on horseback was ample pleasure for me. I tested Freney's powers to the utmost, being extremely fond of jumping and schooling. There was scarcely a hurdle, bank, or gripe about the place that we had not been over dozens of times. Dan did not shine in the saddle; he was by no means partial to "leppin," as he called it, and was frequently pounded by me, coming home from Kilcool by the short cut.

I would say, "Come along, Dan; give Kate her head, she'll jump it beautifully. Follow me."

And he would have no shame whatever in replying, "Bedad, miss, I'd be afraid if ye don't mind, I'll just trot round," and, "trot round" he did.

When Rody was at home for his holidays I had an escort more of my own partial to "leppin," as he called it, and was frequently pounded by me, coming home from Kilcool by the short cut.

I can honestly say that, within a radius of five miles, we knew every field in the country, and most fences. The farmers vowed "that it was mainly alarming" to see the way we rode.

"Faix, they'll break their necks, and no loss if they do," I heard Sweetlips mutter, as he watched us amusing ourselves over a low white gate that led into the haggard. His amiable prophecy was never fulfilled; but I shudder now when I think of the awful places that in those days we used to go over just merely for fun!

It was a common thing for Rody to say, "Come along Nora, let us take a turn at Kelly's ditch before we go home." Kelly's ditch was an enormous boundary drain, the terror of the Darfield Hunt, viz., a tall, awkward, crumbling bank, with a vast yawner on either side.

Indisputably it was a place, to quote Dan, "that the more you looked at it the worse you liked it." Fortunately, Rody and I were light weights, and never came to any signal grief. We had a few mishaps, but nothing serious. Once I staked Freney, jumping into a plantation, but not badly; and once or twice he came down, owing to a bad taking off, or landing. Rody's falls were too numerous to mention; I have seen him get three in the same afternoon; but he was never a bit the worse, nor his horse either.

There is a great deal of truth in the good old Irish motto, "Where there's no fear, there's no danger;" and certainly we never dreamed of either one or the other. Sometimes we would take what we called a "bee line" across country, and pretend to be hunting, racing each other for some particular goal, and taking everything before us with dauntless courage and grim determination.

How I do enjoy tearing through the fields in the thin, chill autumn air