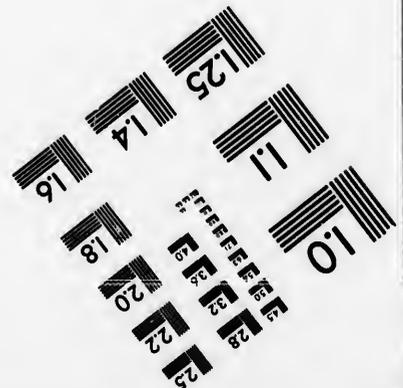
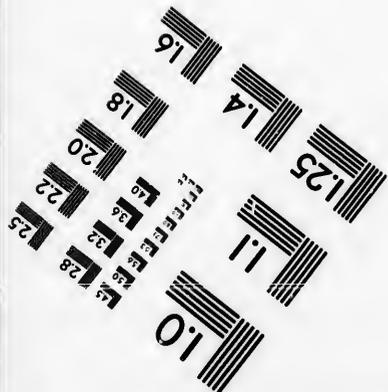
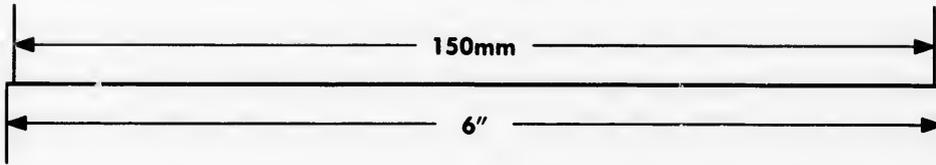
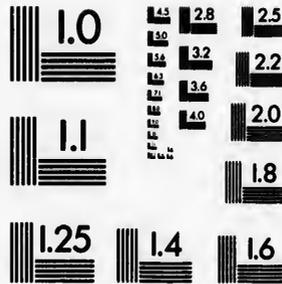
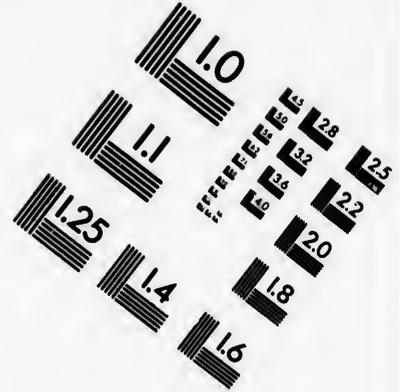
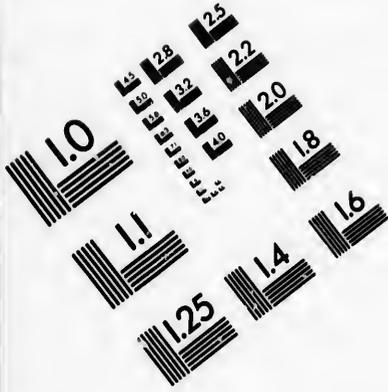


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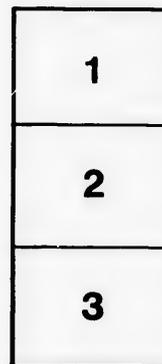
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A SON OF ERIN

P.

Miss M. Cowan
Craigie Lea



"YOU MUST LEAVE ON MONDAY, AND GO TO GLASGOW."

Frontispiece.

[Page 175.]

A SON OF ERIN

BY
MIRIE E. LEAN

(With an Introduction by the Author)

NEW YORK: THE CENTURY CO. PUBLISHERS, 1900.

THE CENTURY CO. PUBLISHERS

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1900



AUT

A SON OF ERIN

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN

(Mrs. Burnett-Smith)

AUTHOR OF "A BITTER DEBT," "A STORMY VOYAGER," "WYNDHAM'S DAUGHTER,"
"A VICTORY WON," "NE'ER-DO-WHEEL," ETC.

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A SON OF ERIN

CHAPTER I

"A BLAST O' JANUAR' WIN'"



THROUGHOUT the length and breadth of Scotland, and in many a remote town and village far across the sea, wherever, indeed, Scotchmen were to be found with hearts beating warm and true to the land that bore them, the birthday of Robert Burns was being commemorated with song and story, and all the traditions which have helped to make it the great national festival of the year. In Edinburgh a great gathering was being held, marked by the usual enthusiasm and hilarity. It was a typical gathering, representing all that was best and most patriotic in the Scottish nature.

Among the many delegates and secretaries of Burns' Societies from different parts of Scotland, there was none more welcome or more in accord with the spirit of the occasion than John Fletcher of Spitalhaugh, a

man of humble birth and position, being only a foreman in one of the great woollen mills, but a man of fine mind, and possessing poetical gifts of no mean order; and, moreover, a gentle, almost a Christlike soul, beloved by all who came within touch of his benign influence. For many fitting reasons he had been chosen above those of high birth and standing to propose "The Immortal Memory of Burns." He had done so in words which would be long remembered by those privileged to hear them. It seemed to the most discriminating among those present that never had so just and accurate an estimate of the poet's character been given, or one more humanly sympathetic. The errors and faults of his life, so largely a matter of temperament, were not glossed over, but weighed and judged by a delicate perception, an exquisite clearness, and rugged tenderness which made a powerful impression on all present. They felt inclined to make much of him, and to pour unstinted praise on his achievement; but honest John Fletcher was a modest man, possessing in a very high degree the reticence of his nationality, and when his task was done he slipped away before the proceedings were half over, anxious to hear the verdict which was of more account to him than the praise of lords and judges and others in high places of the earth.

The little woman who had seen him rise, and, accepting the signal, had herself slipped out to meet him at the door, clasped her two hands proudly on his arm, and looked up with adoring eyes into his face.

"Hoo did I dae, Mary?" he asked with a furtive touch of anxiety. "I was terrible nervous: the words were like to choke me."

"Oh, my man, it was grand! I was like to greet.

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I did greet. An' to see you standin' up there among a' the gentry, an' them hingin' on your very words! I couldna believe my ain e'en. Will ye be pleased wi' me yet, John, an' the quiet life at Spitalhaugh; for, oh, I think ye are a Burns yoursel'?"

He drew the hand she had slipped through his arm closer to his side, and, as they turned along the street, looked down into the sweet face with a very real tenderness. Moments of emotion were rare between that undemonstrative pair, but they understood each other, and were happy as few are in this weary world. For they were content with such things as they had, and were untroubled by any soaring ambition or vague unrest. They had within their own hearts and minds perpetual wells of refreshment, and the God of their fathers was their guide and comforter by day and night. It is such souls that have made Scotland honoured and beloved, and given her her place among the nations. When that type of God-fearing, hard-working, self-respecting men and women shall be no more reproduced within her borders, then she may write Ichabod upon her gates, for her glory will indeed have departed for evermore.

As they turned away from the pillared doorway of the Music Hall a great gust of icy wind blown up from the storm-tossed Forth caught them, and almost swept them off their feet. The snow lay thick on the ground, and stray flakes of what country-folk call "a feeding storm" were driving in the wind.

"Bless me, Mary, that's awfu'," said John, as he pressed his wife's slight figure closer to his side. "But it's fit, very fit. It was just sic

" 'A blast o' Januar' win'
Blew han'sel in on Robin.' "

A Son of Erin

She smiled at the apt quotation, and they struggled on arm-in-arm, not attempting to speak much until they came to the unpretentious street where they were to spend the night with Mary's mother, a widow who had reared ten sons and daughters, but was now left entirely alone. By this time the snow was coming down in earnest, and swirling before the wind, giving promise of drifted streets before morning.

"This is Sir Walter's 'onding,' Mary," said John Fletcher, dreamily, for his mind was with the great souls of the past, and memories of them crowded thick and fast on him. "It was just sic a day as this he wad row Pet Marjorie in his plaid, an' rin wi' her to his study. Eh, wumman, if they only walked Edinburgh streets yet, they wad be paved wi' better than gold for some o's."

"Ay, man, maybe somebody'll say that aboot John Fletcher yet," she said, looking up into his face with a certain archness which gave a bewitching look to her round, fresh face.

"Wheesh't, wumman, I'm but a learner at their feet," he said, reprovingly, but the look of pride only deepened on her face.

"What I'm thinkin' is, hoo we're to get hame the morn, John," she said presently, recalled to the more practical side of things by a blast of more than usual severity. "What if we hae to bide in the toon for some days?"

"Oh, it'll no be so bad as that, lass," said John Fletcher, hopefully. "Well, here we are, number twenty-seven. But what's this?"

A gas lamp just opposite the house shed its full light on the doorstep, where lay a small bundle rolled in a plaid of shepherd's tartan. Mary pressed forward,

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"GOD BE GUID TO US, JOHN, IT'S A LITTLE BAIRN!"

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and as her husband gently lifted the bundle she gave a low cry.

"God be guid to us, John, it's a little bairn!"

"Ay, is it?" said John, and putting back the shawl from its head peered into its face, Mary raising herself on tiptoe so that she also might see. "A bonnie wee bairn; an' wha wi' a mither's heart in her could leave it oot on sic a nicht?"

His voice took a sterner tone, and he glanced sharply round as if expecting to see the woman, to whom he would not have been slow to administer a stern re'duke.

"D'ye see a policeman, Mary? They're never here when they're wantit. Tak' you the bairn or I tak' a step east and west to see if I can get a gliff o' its hizzy o' a mother."

Mary stretched out her arms and clasped the sleeping infant to her breast. As she did so her husband was struck with the expression of her face, and his own heart was somewhat sore as he turned away, for he knew now, though she had never spoken it, that it was a heart-sorrow to Mary that she had no child. Hearing them at the door, Jean Middlemas, who had not expected them home so early, came out to meet them.

"Look here, mother," said Mary, excitedly. "Look what we have found on the step! John has just gane up the street to look for a polieman."

"What is't?" asked Mrs. Middlemas, holding the candle high in her hand as Mary stepped briskly across the threshold.

"It's a bairn," said Mary, with a little tender note in her voice. "A bonnie wee lamb that some hard-hearted wretch has left on your doorstep."

"A bairn!" repeated Mrs. Middlemas, sharply. "I

A Son of Erin

dinna think you should hae brocht it in, Mary, lass; maybe you'll find yourself saddled wi' it a'thegither."

"Weel, I'm sure I'm no carin'," said Mary. And by this time she had entered the cosy little kitchen, and sitting down on a chair close to the fire, she unwound the shawl from the child, Mrs. Middlemas standing curiously by, regarding her with a mixture of surprise and disapproval.

"It's a fine bairn," she said, critically, feeling because she had brought up ten that she was competent to give a conclusive opinion. "A laddie, nearly twa year auld I should say, and weel dressed. Noo, I wonder what is the meanin' o't?"

At that moment the child opened his eyes, and seeing the bright light, and perhaps the kind, tender face bent above him, smiled, and uttered one of those mysterious sounds which were his only way of expressing his satisfaction.

"Bless him!" said Mary Fletcher, tenderly. "I dinna ken how any woman, mother to sic a bairn, could leave him as she has done."

"It takes a' sorts to make a world, my woman," observed Mrs. Middlemas, wisely. "Suppose we try him wi' a drink o' milk. Now, I wonder if John will find the police, or get any clue to the woman that left him."

At that moment they heard the outer door open, and his feet on the little passage, where he paused to knock the snow from his boots and remove his wet overcoat. Mrs. Middlemas threw open the kitchen door so that the light fell across the passage.

"I suppose ye didna see anybody?" she asked, eagerly.

"Not a livin' soul, mother," answered John Fletcher.

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"There's nothing we can do but keep the bairn here till the morn. I daresay Mary and you between you will be able to take care o' it."

"She's makin' no a bad set at it," said Mrs. Middlemas with a humorous smile, as she pointed to Mary sitting close to the cheerful fire holding the baby on her lap as if to the manner born. His gaze was very tender as it fell on the picture, and presently she looked up with a smile.

"Come and see the bairn, John. Isn't he a beauty? He's nae common bairn either; look at his claes, mother; they are the finest money can buy."

"I canna understand for the life of me why it should have been left at my door," said Mrs. Middlemas. "I'm sure I've had my share o' them in my time."

"It's my belief she just saw John and me comin' along, and thought that we might notice the bairn and pick him up," said Mary. "We'll hae to keep him anyway until the morn. Maybe we'll hear something about her then."

A severe cold had prevented Mrs. Middlemas from going to the Music Hall to hear her somewhat distinguished son-in-law make his speech, but she was none the less proud of him, and eager to know how he had acquitted himself.

"Come now," she said, "the bairn's a'richt; how did you get on, John? I've been little use all this nicht except to sit and think about you. Did ye make a good speech?"

"Oh, mother, if you had only heard him!" cried Mary, looking up with adoring pride into her husband's face. "I couldna believe it was our John. He held them a' that quiet ye could hae heard a pin drop when he was talking."

"Wheesht, wheesht, lassie," said John. "I spoke but the truth, mother, according to my light; I think that whiles there is too much said in praise o' Burns, and sometimes too much o' blame. The right thing is to strike the middle course."

"Well, we'll get it a' in the papers the morn," said Mrs. Middlemas in tones of lively satisfaction. "That consoled me for no being able to get. It's a terrible nicht; ye'll never get hame the morn, the railway'll be a' drifted up."

"Oh, I think not," answered John; "the wind has changed. Weel, I'm tired; it's the excitement, I suppose. What's to be done with this bairn, then?"

"Oh, I'll take care o't till the morning," said Mrs. Middlemas. "Look at Mary, John; she would fain keep it. Maybe the Lord has sent the bairn to you to take care o'."

John smiled, and for the first time came close to his wife's side, and looked down into the child's smiling face.

"It's a bonnie bairn," he repeated. "We might do waur than keep it—eh, Mary? And seein' what nicht it is, we might ca' him Robbie Burns."



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CHAPTER II

ROBERT BURNS FLETCHER



NEXT morning the storm had somewhat abated. There was no need for the Fletchers to go home until the afternoon, so immediately after breakfast, John, after having carefully read the report of his own speech in the morning paper, went forth to make some inquiries concerning the little foundling who had so strangely come into their keeping. He had slept well all night in the comfortable bed near the warm kitchen fire, and awakened as bright as a bee, still more to entwine himself about Mary's heart.

"Oh, mother," she said, as she watched her stalwart husband striding up the street, "it may be wrang, but I hope John'll hear naething, and that he'll let me keep the bairn. Do you think he will?"

"I shouldna wonder, lassie. John would gie ye the heid off his shoulders if ye but asked it," she said with a slow smile. "But ye had better think well first. If ye tak' the bairn hame to Spitalhaugh, ye hae a heavy responsibility, and, mind you, it's no yer ain bairn, and ye dinna ken what kind o' a fire-

brand he might turn out to be. Besides, ye might hae some o' yer ain yet."

"That would make no difference," said Mary, as she glanced across to the bed where the child was taking his peaceful morning sleep. "I'll certainly keep him if John will let me. Oh, mother, if you had but heard him last night. He spoke better than any o' them, and there was a something—I canna tell what, but other folks felt it, too—something just gaed to your heart. I am sometimes feared when I think how clever he is, and how little I ken."

"Dinna bother your heid aboot that, lassie," said Mrs. Middlemas, cheerily. "John is your ain man, and he thinks there never was a wife like you. You tak' my advice—dinna set him up on a pedestal and worship him. You ken wha has said—'Thou shalt have none other gods but Me.'"

Thus rebuked Mary held her peace, and they waited with some considerable impatience until John should return from making his inquiries at the police station. As was to be expected, he had learned nothing that could give the slightest clue; the woman who had deserted her child with such apparent heartlessness had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed her, and, unless the kind people who had found the child were willing to keep it, there was no refuge open to him except the poorhouse.

"And I never will let him go there, John," said Mary, as she stood by the bed with her hand clasping the tender rose-leaf fingers lying outside the coverlet. "I'm sure that God has sent the bairn to us. Dinna say you won't let me keep him!"

"Oh, I won't say that," said John, good-naturedly. "I have been thinking myself that I would like to

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keep him ; maybe he'll be a second Burns, and, anyway, we'll never miss his bite and sup. If ye like to take the bother o' him, ye can."

So the matter was settled, and that afternoon John and Mary Fletcher returned to their home on Spital Water a good deal richer than when they had left it not forty-eight hours before.

John Fletcher was quite a person of note in the little Border town where his family had lived for many generations. They belonged originally to Haddington, but there had always been Fletchers in the employment of the Bremners of Halliwell Mills, and it is not too much to say that the interests of Halliwell had always been as dear to the Fletchers as to the Bremners.

Some well-meaning and disinterested persons who had read the collected poems of John Fletcher, and who appeared to see something incongruous between the bent of his mind and his occupation, had busied themselves in trying to find him some more congenial work ; but John, while thanking them kindly, had declined to leave the town of his birth, and the pretty little rose-covered cottage on the banks of the Spital Water where he had been born. He had no fault to find with his occupation, indeed, he loved the great mills, and the rush and roar of their machinery was as music in his ears, inspiring some of his finest lines. He did pretty much as seemed right in his own eyes at Halliwell, for he was so highly respected and absolutely trusted by his employers that they did not treat him altogether like a servant. It was a trust which was never abused ; for though John Fletcher was a poet he was a workman first, and never neglected his daily duties to follow the vagaries of his mind.

The morning after his return from Edinburgh, when Mr. Bremner came down from Halliwell House to the mill, he sent for John to go to his private room. Mr. Walter Bremner was a fine-looking man in his early prime, a man of no mean gifts, and who knew how to turn them to the best possible advantage. Although he had inherited a considerable fortune from his father, and a thoroughly established and lucrative business, he did not fold his hands and allow things to drift. He was constant in his attendance at the mill, believing rightly that a flourishing concern cannot afford altogether to dispense with its head. His relaxation was politics, and he had half promised that one day he might be induced to represent his own burghs in Parliament. He was married to a charming wife, and had some little children who made the sunshine of the fine old house standing high on the wooded slope above the town. Altogether, fortune seemed to have bestowed her highest favours on Walter Bremner, and it would have been hard to find in the whole breadth of Scotland a more prosperous or happier man.

John Fletcher entered his master's room nothing loth. Between them there existed the most perfect understanding, a feeling of good-fellowship and community of interest which was almost brotherly, so that there was nothing incongruous in Mr. Bremner rising from his chair and shaking his employee warmly by the hand.

"Well, John, have you got back from your great jaunt?" he asked with a twinkle in his pleasant grey eye; "and do you find it quite easy to step from your pedestal down to the level of commonplace things?"

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"Oh, ay, sir," said John, entering into his master's humour, "yon's all very well once in a lifetime or so, but nae oftener."

"Why, man, you acquitted yourself grandly," said his master. "Mrs. Bremner and I felt quite a thrill of pride when we read your eloquent words, and she said we could not possibly expect to keep you at Halliwell after it."

"Tell Mrs. Bremner, with my best respects," said John, quietly, "that I never came back to Halliwell with a better heart than this morning."

"She'll be glad to hear that, I can assure you," said Bremner; "but really you had a fine gathering, and everybody in Spitalhaugh from end to end could speak about nothing yesterday but your speech. I am sure Mrs. Fletcher must be very proud of you."

A somewhat comical look crossed John Fletcher's face.

"She's got something else to take up her heid wi' yesterday and the day, sir," he answered. "We brocht a bairn back with us from Edinburgh."

"A bairn!" echoed Mr. Bremner, in surprise. "Where did you get it?"

"We found it on the doorstep o' my guid-mother's house," answered John. "It's a foundling, and the bonniest wee chap you ever saw."

"And are you going to keep it?" asked the mill-owner, much interested.

"Mary says so," answered John.

"Well, the bairn may congratulate itself," said Mr. Bremner. "It has fallen on its feet. Mrs. Bremner will be greatly interested to hear this; I shouldn't wonder if she came down at once to see it."

"I hope she will," said John. "Can I tell Mary that she may expect her?"

"Well, I think you may. You know how fond my wife is of little bairns, and of course there's something specially interesting about this one."

"Yes, there is," admitted John, "and the way we found him on Burns's nicht. We've ca'd him Robert Burns."

"Have you?" asked Mr. Bremner. "That was a good idea. Well, John, I hope that he'll grow up to be a comfort to you, and that he will exhibit all the poet's virtues and none of his faults."

"That would be expecting owre much, sir," said John; "but we'll see."

When it leaked out that the Fletchers had brought home a foundling with them from Edinburgh, and that they had given it such an interesting name, it made a great talk in the place, and during the next week or two Mary received more visitors in her quiet little home than in the whole course of her married life. Everybody wanted to see the bairn, and very proud she was to show him. I don't believe she could have taken more interest in him had he been her very own; he seemed to nestle into her heart, and to fill up the only blank there which she had ever felt during all the happy years of her union with honest John Fletcher.

John was much amused at the whole affair. At first he did not pay much attention to the child, and rather wondered at Mary's passionate adoration for him; but bit by bit the little lamb wound itself about his heart too, and gave a new and more tender note even to the songs he wove as he listened to the great shuttles moving to and fro in the mill. That

loud and, to unaccustomed ears, discordant din was the music to which John Fletcher attuned his song. It represented to him the web of life, and awakened in him many deep-lying thoughts concerning the things of this life and that which is to come.

In that quiet and happy home, surrounded only by benign and holy influences, the child Robert Burns Fletcher, or Rob, as he was familiarly and tenderly called, grew and throve body and soul, giving promise even in his childhood of a fine manhood graced by gifts above the common. For some time Mary was haunted by the terror lest his mother should one day turn up and wrest her treasure from her; but as the years went by this fear, of course, became less haunting and real to her. Other anxieties, however, took its place. While the child had much that was lovable and sweet in his disposition, he at times revealed a terrible and passionate temper, and a vindictive disposition which occasioned them both the greatest concern. They loved him too dearly to spoil him altogether, and the wholesome discipline insisted on by John, who had himself learned at the hands of a somewhat stern father the priceless lessons of self-control, did much to counteract the natural bent of the child's nature.



CHAPTER III

A GENTLE HEART



FAMILY party was gathered in the drawing-room of Halliwell House after dinner on a lovely evening in May near to the open window, which commanded a magnificent prospect of hill and dale, with rich masses of woodland clothed with the thousand tender and living greens of early summer, reaching to the twin Eildons, beloved of Sir Walter, where they lost themselves in the soft, cool shadows of the gathering night. It was warm for May, which is ever a treacherous month in northern latitudes. The fire had been allowed to smoulder in the grate, but the lofty and handsome room was warm and comfortable, and Mrs. Bremner found her window-seat most desirable. She looked a young woman still to be the mother of two daughters and three sons, all of them approaching manhood and womanhood. Emily Bremner had enjoyed a life of ease and luxury into which no sorrow or care had entered until within the last few years. She was proving now, as many another mother has proved, that the time of least anxiety for her children is when she can put them to bed and close the nursery

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door on them, knowing them to be safe till morning. Of late much anxiety had been hers on account of her eldest son, who ought to have been his father's right hand and comfort now that he was weighed down by heavy Parliamentary duties which were a drain on all his energies as well as his means. Walter Bremner had lived to see all his political ambitions fulfilled, and, while he took the keen joy of a born politician and a good fighter in his Parliamentary life, there were times when he doubted whether it was, after all, worth the many sacrifices it entailed. His wife's health had not of late permitted her to stand the strain of London life, and he had been for three months alone in a London Club—which to a home-loving man is a sacrifice of no mean kind.

He was at home now for Easter, but was dining at the house of a neighbouring magnate; the young men of the house were in the billiard-room, and Mrs. Bremner was with her daughters, Adair and Jessie. The elder had been baptised Florence Adair, but had never been called anything but Adair, sometimes Addie. The former name suited her well. She was tall and stately, with a certain reserve of manner and suggestion of hidden power which made her interesting to those skilled in the reading of character. Of all his children she was the most interesting, perhaps the dearest, in her father's eyes. The love between them was a wonderful thing, of a depth and intensity which they hardly realised.

His son Laurence, upon whom he had built his early hopes, had bitterly disappointed him. His abilities were mediocre, and he had a lazy, sometimes his father feared a vicious, strain in him. He was a cad at heart. In his case public school training

A Son of Erin

had been a fatal mistake, fostering in him all that was puny and despicable in his nature. After four years at Harrow he returned to Halliwell despising trade and openly avowing his contempt for the mill which had provided the wherewithal to make him a gentleman.

Walter Bremner was the most sensible of men. No sooner did he observe these unmistakable signs in his son than he set himself to curb, and if possible to destroy, them. He had always destined him for the business; to this end he now caused him to enter it upon the lowest rung. He told him that he must learn it in all its practical details, and that from his decision there could be no appeal. Laurence exhibited sulkiness, but obeyed. How he loathed it no one knew. Perhaps it was a mistake, but Walter Bremner did it for the best. He was devoid of that most despicable form of pride himself, and the knowledge of it in his boy galled him inexpressibly. It had been his hope that Laurence would grow up to be a comfort to him, to take the responsibility off his shoulders, so that one day he would be able to retire, perhaps, to a little Mayfair house in the season, and some yet-to-be discovered retreat in winter; but, alas! all these hopes had been dashed to the ground. It seemed to him that from the time Laurence entered Halliwell Mills trouble began.

It was very soon evident that Laurence Bremner would not be so successful in his relations with the men as his father had been. He lacked the fine, open, frank manner which won their confidence and liking, as well as that indescribable dignity which commanded their respect. A man who earned his bread by the sweat of his brow was in the eyes of

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Laurence only a necessary part of the complex machinery required to carry on a large organisation ; the idea that he could have any individual rights or refinement of nature he scouted when it occurred to him at all. These views, common to smaller minds before they have been wholesomely cleansed by the fire of experience, tinged his manner with a certain superciliousness which was at once felt and resented. The nineteenth-century workman resents nothing more keenly than supercilious patronage ; he knows his own power and place, and requires that others shall know it too.

The only thing Walter Bremner could do was to keep his son in a subordinate position as long as possible, until, indeed, the sense of years should come to him ; to give him power prematurely he foresaw would only make trouble for himself and all concerned. But the time came when it was necessary that he should raise him to some more responsible position, and the prospect was full of anxiety for Bremner, and added not inconsiderably to his worry and cares. He was discussing that very point with the neighbour at whose table he was dining, a man who had reared a large family, and had his full share of trouble and anxiety with them.

Laurence, however, all unconscious of the care he was to his father, played his game of billiards with his customary skill, taking great pleasure in beating his younger brother, who was too fond of his books ever to give the necessary practice to the game.

"Mother," said Adair, suddenly, after she had played some pieces of music with a quiet and artistic touch which her mother greatly enjoyed, "I forgot to tell you that I heard to-day that poor Mrs. Fletcher is very

A Son of Erin

ill down at Rose Cottage. Don't you think, as the evening is so fine, I might walk down and inquire for her?"

"Why, yes, if you like, dear," answered Mrs. Bremner, readily. "I am very sorry to hear that; but I was only noticing in church last Sunday that she looked rather frail. Corrie will be delighted to walk down with you."

"Oh, I don't want Corrie, mother; besides, he's enjoying his game with Laurence. Don't you hear them? I shall not be gone more than half an hour or so. I can just put a big cloak over my dress."

She wore a gown of some soft pink material with short sleeves, and sufficiently low at the neck to show the full contour of her stately throat. Adair always dressed well and becomingly, although she did not bestow a great deal of thought or time upon it. She had the artistic eye and the nice sense of fitness which are essential to the well-dressed woman.

"I don't suppose you will meet anybody, dear," said Mrs. Bremner, "and after you leave our woods there are only a few yards of the path by the river; but put on some thick shoes in case you catch cold."

"Oh yes, I shall do that. May I take the grapes which were left on the sideboard?"

"Certainly, dear; and anything else you would like."

In a very few minutes Adair was dressed for her walk. A long cloak of dark cashmere covered her evening dress, and with a small basket on her arm she took her way across the park, and plunged into the gathering shadows of the wooded hill which sloped very steeply to the edge of the water. Adair was thinking chiefly of her father as she walked. She

knew that he was very much worried about Laurence, and her young heart was filled with indignation against its cause. If only she had been the eldest son there would have been no trouble in Halliwell Mills, nor any anxiety in her father's heart.

There were several small houses standing near to each other on the banks of the little stream which watered the base of the hills, but among them Rose Cottage seemed to stand out in beauty, well-deserving of its name. The garden, which had ever been one of John Fletcher's hobbies, was still a blaze of late spring flowers, and the roses to which it owed its name gave promise of an abundant harvest. Adair was somewhat relieved to see John himself standing at the door enjoying an evening pipe in a leisurely fashion, which did not suggest much anxiety of mind. When he saw her at the side gate he came quickly to meet her, lifting his cap with the fine courtesy never lacking.

"Good evening, Miss Adair," he said. "It is not often we have a visit from you so late."

"Well, I heard from Mrs. Anderson this afternoon that dear Mrs. Fletcher was not well, and I thought I'd better come and see," she said, in the most pleasant tones of a singularly sweet and pleasant voice; "but as I don't see any terrible anxiety in your face, John, I hope that the report was exaggerated."

"She's no very well, Miss Adair," said John, and his face shadowed slightly. "She doesn't know what it is, but there is something. Mrs. Anderson was for her going to Edinburgh to see one of the big doctors. I doubt it will have to come to that."

"Oh, well, I hope that it is nothing very serious. Isn't this a lovely evening? It is just a joy to be alive."

"Indeed it is, Miss Adair," answered John, as he lifted his face to the exquisite sky, where the blending of colour was such as no painter need essay to reproduce. "It's a bonnie world. Do ye ken what I was thinking at the door just afore I saw ye come in?"

"No; tell me, John," said Adair, interestedly. She and John Fletcher were very close friends, and had many long talks together on subjects which interested them both.

"Well, I was just thinking what I daresay many another has thocht before me—that everything the Creator has made, and everything He touches, is good; and that it is only marred by the selfishness and the sin of the human beings that have wandered so far from the way in which He set them."

"'Every prospect pleases, and only man is vile,' eh, John?" quoted Adair, with a slight smile. "It is certain that there is a lot of needless pain and misery in the world that human beings could avert if they would only try."

"If there were mair like you, Miss Adair, it would be a bonnier and a happier world," said John. "But now, will you come in? Mary will not thank me for haudin' ye speaking oot here. She's not in her bed; but I just wonder whether she shouldna be. Whatever it be that ails her, she's no the woman she was."

He held open the cottage door for her, and she stepped into the wide, pleasant, low-ceiled kitchen where she had spent many a happy hour. When Mrs. Fletcher saw her she rose quickly from the depths of the big grandfather chair where she found rest passing sweet after the long hours of the day, for whose toil she was not now able.

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"Eh, Miss Adair, I was just thinkin' o' ye a minit syne. How kind of you to come doon. Tak' off your cloak. My, what a braw gown! Look, John, do ye ken what she minds me of?"

Adair laughed, and, only faintly embarrassed by their adoring and admiring glances, threw aside her cloak and hat, and, taking Mary by the arms, pushed her back into her chair.

"Sit you down now, Mary, and don't talk any more nonsense. What is this Mrs. Anderson has been telling me about you? You can't be ill. We won't allow you to be ill, you are too necessary to everybody. Just think what would become of John and Robin if you were laid up."

"Oh, I'll not be laid up if I can help it, Miss Adair," said Mary. "I'm tellin' John there's not much the matter wi' me, but I'm just tired, aye tired. I suppose it must be that I'm gettin' auld."

"Nonsense, Mary, you are not fifty yet. By-and-by you will get quite strong again. Mother is something like you just now; she's always complaining of being tired. I tell you what you must do; you must get a big strong girl to do the hard work for you in the morning. Do you hear, John?"

"Ay, I hear, my dear," said John, as he sat down on the little table which stood between the two windows white as the driven snow. "I have been telling her that; but what do you think she says?—that if I want to pit her in her grave without delay I can just get her a servant lass."

Mary laughed softly, but did not demur.

"I am no needin' a servant lass, Miss Adair; I have two grown servants here in my man and Robin. When I came ben this morning at the back o' six

Robin had the whole kitchen cleaned like a new pin, and my breakfast on the table! Could I get a servant lass to do better than that? I wonder to hear ye!"

Adair opened her basket, and, taking out the bunch of luscious grapes, fed her old friend with them as if she had been a baby, kneeling on her knees by the homely hearth, careless of her dainty frock, perhaps knowing that there was nothing to hurt it on that spotless floor.

"You just be quiet, Mary. Mr. Fletcher and mother and I will go into council on your account, and all we will ask you to do will be to obey. Now, John, tell me how you thought father was looking when you saw him to-day?"

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CHAPTER IV

IN SUDDEN PERIL



As she asked this sudden question she rose to her feet again.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Miss Adair," said John, "I dinna think him looking so very weel. But there, what can you expect from anybody that has to live in London? It's too much for him, Miss Adair. There's no man can carry on twa things almost at the very ends of the earth, as it were. I made bold to tell him that this morning."

"I quite agree with you, John. I wish that he could give up the mill; he has been long enough at it. Now tell me honestly, do you think that my brother will ever be able to take his place?"

A curious look crossed John Fletcher's honest face.

"If I was to say he would, I would be tellin' a lee, Miss Adair," he answered. "What I do think is that he will get sense by-and-by, and that maybe he will be able to acquit himself like a man yet."

"But you don't see any sign of it, is that what you would say, John?" asked Adair, quick as a needle.

"Maybe my thoct was something like it, Miss Adair; but I have seen it before—the arrogance and

impatience o' youth. Mary and me have had our own to do with Robin. Indeed, there are times when we dinna ken what will be the next move."

Adair looked much interested. She knew very little about Robin Fletcher, although she had spoken with him several times in his father's house. He had always struck her, however, as being a young man of very strong character, and one with whom it would perhaps be somewhat difficult to get on; but one thing she had always admired in him—his perfect devotion to the woman who had stood so sweetly in the place of a mother to him, and also the marked and untiring respect he showed to John Fletcher himself. She had come to the correct conclusion that in the nature which displayed these two fine characteristics there could not be much amiss.

"There's something in the lad, Miss Adair, that I canna fathom," he said, thoughtfully; "a terrible determination. What he has in his mind we dinna ken, but we can partly guess, and it is as certain as I am sitting here now that he'll no bide long in Halliwell."

"You think he has great gifts, then?" asked Adair, more and more interested. "I have often looked at his face in church, and thought that it indicated something beyond the common; but I have never heard anything to justify it. Father says he is only a middling workman."

"That's quite true," said John; "but there are minds that take a long time to mature. Robin himself hardly knows what he would be after yet; the only thing he does ken is that there's something stronger than himself struggling within him. Mary and me have many an anxious thocht about him, Miss

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Adair. It's natures like his that either make or mar themselves. There will be no middling course for Robin—either he'll come to something great and be a world's wonder, or he'll sink lower than the low."

"He must not be allowed to sink, then, John," said Adair, quickly. "What you tell me interests me inexpressibly. Tell me one thing—do you think he feels that he has not had sufficient education?"

John smiled a slow smile.

"It depends upon what you mean by education, Miss Adair. Of book lare he has maybe had but a small share in his youth, but he has made up for it since. Maybe you'll no believe me that he can speak three languages besides his own. Every penny of his earnings except what he pays to his mother for his keep is spent on books and on lessons, and every spare moment is gi'en up to that alone. A man that can dae that will make his mark."

"You astonish me," said Adair, and, indeed, she looked much impressed. "Then, what makes you say that you fear he might sink low? A man who is so devoted to intellectual pursuits would never debase himself in any way."

John shook his head.

"Ah, but there's a queer strain in him, Miss Adair. He belongs to no common folk; if only I could get a clue to his birth I would maybe ken better how to deal with him."

"Then you think he will not long stay here?" said Adair.

"I am sure of it. He is not putting all that knowledge into his mind to put it out again on wool spinning," said John, with a dry smile. "But them that lives longest 'll see maist."

"Well, I must be going home now," said Adair, as she picked up her cloak. "Mother sent her love to you, dear Mrs. Fletcher, and she will come and see you to-morrow. And you are to do as you are bid, do you hear?"

Mary's smile was very sweet as she rose to bid her dear young friend good-bye.

"You'll spoil me, and make me lazy among you," she said, and a bright tear started in her eye.

"No fear, only you are precious to us, and we always take care of precious things, don't we? Good-night. No, you must not come with me, John. It's only a step, and I am not in the least afraid. I shall be inside our gate in a few minutes."

John put on his cap, and walked only as far as the gate of his own garden. He loved Adair Bremner as if she had been his own child. She had come about the cottage since the days when she was a little vision in a white sun-bonnet, toddling at her nurse's side, and during all these years the love between the fair daughter of Halliwell and the little rose-covered cottage of the poet had never faltered or grown cold.

"Mrs. Fletcher wants taking great care of, John," she said, as she paused at the gate, "and we shall have to insist on getting our own way about the little maid. I know of a girl in my Sunday class who would just suit her. But I'll send my mother down to-morrow to talk to her about it."

"Ay, but ye mak' sunshine wherever ye go, Miss Adair," said John, simply, "and the man that gets ye a king might envy."

"You spoil me, John," said Adair, and left him with a smile.

The sun had now set, and the sweet spring dusk

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was quickly shading into darkness as Adair sped quickly along the picturesque park by the water's side. No thought of nervousness or fear troubled her, her mind being entirely occupied with the affairs of the kindly people she had just left. Although the path was lonely, she had been familiar with it all her days; indeed, there was no road or by-way in and around the town in which Adair Bremner would not have believed herself safe. As she came near to the little green wicket-gate which stood embowered among the graceful larch trees of her father's own woods she saw the figure of a man emerge from the shadow, and stand there exactly as if waiting for her approach. She did not recognise him as any one belonging to the Haugh Cottages, and for the first time in her life an odd feeling of nervous dread stole over her, which deepened as she came nearer and saw that the man quite evidently belonged to the tramp or nomad class who infest the roadways of every town and village. For a moment she felt tempted to turn about and flee back to the friendly shelter she had just left; she certainly wished with all her heart that she had accepted John Fletcher's offered escort. But she was naturally brave, and summoning all her courage she advanced boldly, trying to reassure herself with the thought that probably the man meant no harm, and might only be resting for a moment by the stile.

She was not reassured, however, by his appearance and expression as she came within a yard or two of the stile. He was very poorly dressed, and had that famished, wolfish look only seen on the faces of the outcasts of society. An untrimmed beard and unshaven face seemed to add to his ferocious appearance, and it seemed to Adair, now thoroughly

frightened, that the eyes looking out from under the greasy old felt hat glared upon her with unpromising ferocity. Involuntarily she stood still in the path ; to leave its light and comparative safety, and to plunge into the dark shadow of the woods with such a creature behind, even although she was but a few hundred yards from her father's door, seemed impossible. She felt inclined to cry out, but her better judgment told her that it would be a needless proceeding, since no sound she could utter could possibly reach either Halliwell or the cottages farther up the bank. She hesitated only a moment, and then, bidding the man a civil good-evening, took a step forward. He glanced round, evidently to make sure that no one was in sight, and then stood on the path straight in front of her, and in a low thick voice demanded money.

"I have no money," she answered, and though she was terribly afraid her voice scarcely faltered. "I have only been calling on a sick friend. I have nothing I can give you. You had better move on and allow me to pass."

"Perhaps you've got something that will do as well as money," said the man. "Anything in these hard times will do. Just show me what you've got on your pretty fingers, and you'd better give 'em to me quietly if you don't want to get a fright."

Adair hesitated a moment, looking round almost in agony, wondering if God would not send some one to her succour. She was totally at the mercy of the brute, who was so near her that she could almost feel his vile breath on her cheek. She had several valuable rings on her hands, gifts she had received at various times from her father, and which were there-

fore precious to her. A something came over her, a swift determination that she would not be thus shamelessly robbed; so as the man laid hold of her wrist she lifted her other hand and dealt him a blow directly in the face. Looking back upon it afterwards Adair never could remember how she had presence of mind to do it. She remembered thinking that probably this would so enrage the man that he might kill her on the spot, but just at that moment she heard a hasty foot on the path, and the next moment some one had the cowardly assailant by the back of the neck in a grip of iron, and she was free. A blinding mist seemed to swim before her eyes, and she remembered no more. When she came to herself she was in her own room, and her mother's anxious face was bending over her.

"Oh, mother, where am I?" she cried, tremblingly.

"Oh, I remember, it was Robert Fletcher who came up. Is he here?"

"He has been, dear," said her mother, soothingly.

"He brought you home, and he has also succeeded in delivering into custody the man who gave you such a terrible fright. I shall never be able to forgive myself for allowing you to go down there alone."

"It was terrible," said Adair, with a shudder. "I shall never forget how I felt; but you must not trouble about it, mother; just think how many hundreds of times I have done the same thing. John Fletcher wanted to bring me home, and I would not allow him. Oh, I shall never be able to thank his son. I wish he had not gone away. I should like to have seen him."

"It will be an easy matter to see him when you are able for it," said Mrs. Bremner, tenderly. "I don't know what your father will say when he comes home.

He will certainly blame me for allowing you to go out so late without one of the boys."

"Oh no, he won't. It's all right now. I am so ashamed of myself for having fainted. Did poor Robert Fletcher have to carry me all the way up here? I feel quite sorry for him."

"He did not appear to find you very heavy, my dear," said Mrs. Bremner, allowing herself to smile. "Fortunately, some one else came along who could relieve him of the scoundrel who gave you such a fright, and who is by this time no doubt safely locked up."

"It is quite an adventure, mother; but not one I should care to repeat. I never shall forget how I felt; but I know I was determined he should not have my rings without a struggle. Now I must get up. It is quite too late, I suppose, to see Robert Fletcher to-night; but I shall never rest until I have thanked him myself for what he has done."

"Your father is not likely to forget it, my dear," said Mrs. Bremner. "I don't think you should get up, except to make ready for bed. You are quite white; it will be a little time before you get over this terrible fright."

"I am so thankful that I am safe, mother," said Adair, and there was a distinct tremor in her voice. "Now I know what a dreadful thing it is to be really afraid."

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CHAPTER V

AN INTERESTING INTERVIEW



DIRECTLY he went down to the mill next morning Walter Bremner sent for Robert Fletcher to come to his private room. He had been much upset by what had happened, but had said so very little about it that even his wife scarcely realised how it had affected him. Adair was the very apple of his eye, and the thought of the insult and danger to which she had been subjected within a stone's throw of the house was intolerable to him. As the door opened and young Fletcher entered, the millowner rose to his feet, and surveyed him with an intensity of interest which surprised himself. He had shown him a good deal of consideration and kindness for his father's sake, but had never hitherto been personally drawn to him, and for that reason had not sought in any way to cultivate a closer acquaintance with him; but now he looked at him keenly. The man who had saved his daughter's life must henceforth occupy a different position in his eyes.

Robert Fletcher was now in his twenty-second

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year, but looked older. He was not handsome, but the well-proportioned head, with its broad, square brow and features clearly defined, the large, earnest, grey eyes, which had a slightly melancholy expression, combined to make a striking personality, of which Walter Bremner now became conscious for the first time. He wondered that he had never before noticed the young man's interesting and striking face. He had obeyed the summons to the master's room because there was no escape from it, but the knowledge that he had been called in order to receive thanks which he did not desire gave a certain hardness to his expression which Mr. Bremner was quick enough to observe, although he scarcely understood it.

"I daresay you know why I have sent for you, Robert?" he said, kindly, at the same time extending his hand. "I wish to tender my own and my wife's heartfelt thanks to you for the unspeakable service you rendered to us last night, a service of which I can scarcely trust myself to speak."

"It was nothing, sir," said Fletcher, not confusedly, yet with a certain stiffness which seemed to indicate that the subject was not welcome. "I only did what any other man would have done in my place. I hope that Miss Bremner is none the worse this morning?"

"She feels a bit shaken, of course," said Bremner, at the same time continuing his close study of the young man's face. Walter Bremner was no fool, and he moreover possessed a fine perceptive gift which enabled him to form a prompt and usually correct judgment of character. He had found this quality most valuable to him throughout his business life, and now that he had entered the political arena he had found it scarcely less serviceable. He was amazed

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that he had not before observed in young Fletcher the signs of exceptional ability which he now read as easily as an open book.

"You may make light of it, Fletcher," he said, quietly; "that is your modesty. But you know as well as I do that you have rendered us an incomparable service, one which we can never forget nor repay. My daughter will thank you herself when she has opportunity; meanwhile, I have sent for you to-day to ask if there is any way in which I can be useful to you. Believe me, there is nothing you could ask which I would not at least try to give to mark my gratitude, which is so deep, and will be so lasting that I do not care to speak about it." Bremner uttered these words with emotion, which in some subtle manner communicated itself to the young man to whom they were addressed. His face softened, and became almost winning in its look. The attitude of defiance which had been quite marked when he entered the room quickly disappeared, and the better self, the real man, which none saw except the two who loved him, and whom he loved because of all they had done for him, was permitted to assert itself.

"Sir, you make too much of it," he said with a smile which Bremner long remembered, "and I have nothing to ask. I don't wish payment for having done my duty."

"That's all very well, my man," said Bremner; "but there are some duties which resolve themselves into debts, which have to be acknowledged, and if possible repaid. I will find some means of serving you. It is just possible that when you talk with my daughter she may be able to help me. One thing I should like to ask before you go—are you satisfied with

your position in the mill? It is possible I may be able to give you some promotion; but what I think more possible still is that perhaps you would like another sphere altogether."

Fletcher started, and looked keenly into his employer's face. He had never so far as he was aware breathed in mortal ear the vague unrest, the consuming discontent, the vaulting ambitions of which his turbulent soul was full.

"What makes you think that, sir?" he asked, suddenly.

"Well, I couldn't exactly say," answered Bremner, "only I have never thought that your heart was much in your work. Tell me what it is you would like to do; there can be no harm in that, at least, and you may surely believe, Robert, that I would respect any confidence you might place in me."

"Oh, I am sure of that, sir," said the young man, quickly; "but it would be hard for me to put into words what it is I want, only I know that I'll not stop here long, although I hardly know what it is I would be after."

"Perhaps you would rather work with your head than your hands? Your father has told me of all the studies you have so constantly pursued; a man who will work so hard after his day's toil is over will make his mark, Robert. If I had some idea of your mind, it is more than probable that I could help you. Now, what would you like to be?"

A slow smile dawned on the young man's face.

"I am afraid you'll laugh at me, Mr. Bremner; but if I could only get into Parliament some day I should be a happy man."

"Do you think so?" asked the millowner, slightly

amused, and yet struck by the words. "Well, much stranger things have happened, and in these days when we have Labour Members and all sorts, a man has only to display unusual power and he is sure to obtain recognition from his party. But, come now, tell me what makes you want to go into Parliament? It's a harassing life, although I will not deny that it has its compensations. At any rate when a man has once had a taste of Parliamentary life he does not care to relinquish it. In your case it would mean serving a long apprenticeship; you would need to go to London and get some post which would, at least, bring you in touch with politicians."

As he spoke these words he observed the young man's eye kindle, and knew that he had touched upon his most cherished ambition. He looked at him with increased interest, not altogether untouched by compassion, because he knew that it is such keen, ambitious souls who suffer most; they are never satisfied, but always striving after something beyond them.

"I'll see what I can do," he said, kindly. "Meantime I should like to have a little further talk with you. Can you come up this evening about eight o'clock? My daughter would like to see you, and her mother as well. Then we can have some further talk about this grand ambition of yours."

"Very well, sir, thank you," said the young man, and his face resumed its ordinary somewhat dull expression.

Mr. Bremner found some difficulty in dismissing him from his mind. Something in his deep-set eyes seemed to haunt him, and he found himself constantly thinking about his future, and wondering how

he could best help him. As he was leaving the office to go home for lunch he met John Fletcher just without the gates on his way back to work after the dinner hour.

"Well, John, how's the world using you?" he said, cheerily. "I am sorry to hear that Mrs. Fletcher has not been so well. You heard, I suppose, of the service Rob did us last night?"

"Yes, sir, I did, and I'll never forgive myself for letting Miss Adair go that lonely bit o' road hersel'; but she had no fear she said, and I was concerned about Mary at the time, and did not insist."

"Oh, it all happened very easily and naturally, it was no one's fault; but it will be a lesson to her in the future. I have been talking to Rob this morning, John, and there's a lot more in him than any of us have thought. Halliwell will not hold him long."

"I have never thought it would, sir," said John. "It's long since I said to you that I thought he wouldna bide here."

"Well, we must do something to help him, that is all. What do you think his ambition is? Have you any idea?"

"No much," said John, with intense interest. "He has never spoken very freely to me. I think his mother understands him better."

"He aims at nothing less than a seat in Parliament, John," said the millowner with a smile, "and I have told him that stranger things have happened. There's power and ability yonder, John, more perhaps than we are aware of. I will help him if I can."

"I whiles say to Mary, Mr. Bremner, that if we kent his folk we would be better able to deal wi' him. He has several times spoken to Mary about gaun to

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London to seek his fortune ; but unless he had something to go to I would set my face against it."

"I quite agree with you there, John ; but it will be an easy matter to find him something to do if he continues of the same mind. I'll see what I can make of him to-night. It's a pity I am not a Cabinet Minister, John, employing two or three private secretaries, that's just what would suit him ; but I'll see what can be done."

These remarks gave John Fletcher plenty of food for thought at his work that afternoon. His neighbours found him even less talkative than usual, though he was not a man of many words at any time.

Punctually at eight o'clock that night Robert Fletcher presented himself at Halliwell House, and was shown into the library. The Bremners were people of cultivated taste, and possessed a finer library than is usually found in such houses. It was a long wide room of lofty proportions, and the walls were lined with books from ceiling to floor. The moment the door closed upon him, and he was left alone, Robert Fletcher approached the shelves. He had never in his life seen so many books gathered together in one place, and his eyes had an eager, almost a hungry look as he ran them quickly along the shelves, noting the authors' names, many of whom he had long held in reverence. Never had the contrast between capital and labour—a subject to which, as may be understood, he had given much thought—seemed so marked. He saw that not only had the man of wealth every luxury within his reach, but also what was of far more importance in his eyes—the power to surround himself with the great thoughts of all ages. He had in his hand an exquisite copy of

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Ruskin's "Seven Lamps of Architecture," upon which he was gazing with the reverent eye of the book lover, when he heard the library door gently opened, and turned quickly round, almost as if he had been caught in some offence. It was Adair who entered, and it seemed to the young man's exaggerated fancy that in her white evening gown, her face paler than its wont after the excitement of the previous night, she looked like a being from another sphere.



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CHAPTER VI

A MIND OF HIS OWN



“GOOD evening, Mr. Fletcher, father will be down presently ; but I thought I must come and thank you for what you did for me last night. I can never forget it as long as I live.”

“Oh, it was nothing,” he answered, stiffly, more embarrassed than when he had received her father’s thanks. “I said to the master that anybody would have done the same.”

“It’s very kind of you to put it like that ; but the service remains just as important,” she said, as she laid her hand in his and looked into his face with a very sweet serious expression on her own. “I am only ashamed that I should have been so cowardly, and given you so much trouble.”

“It’s nothing at all,” he answered, almost harshly. “I wish you would say no more about it.”

“Well, I won’t,” she said, with a smile ; “but it was the least I could do to speak a word of personal thanks. You were looking at the books when I came in. I have heard from dear Mrs. Fletcher how fond you are of books.”

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"Yes, I am," he said, and there was a hint of painful longing in the glance he cast round the well-lined shelves. "If I could only be allowed to spend all my leisure time in a place like this I should make some use of it."

"I am sure you would, and there's no reason why you shouldn't spend as much time as you like here," she said, quickly. "I am fond of books, too; but, of course, only in a girl's fashion. I sometimes think that our education is such a mistake."

"All education is," he answered, with astonishing readiness. "I mean to say," he hastened to add, observing her surprise, "that no education is conducted on the proper lines in the schools. Of course, it is impossible to take account of individual minds; all are treated in the same way, and afterwards a good deal has to be undone."

"That is quite an indictment of our School Board system," she said, brightly; "but I am sure you would find my father agree with you. You have read a great many books, have you not? Is there any here you would like?"

"Oh, don't ask me," he said quickly. "I could take them all. Some day, if I live, I shall have a library like this."

"I am sure you will," she answered, more and more impressed, as her father had been in the morning, with the same hidden personal power which she could not have explained. She saw in him a mind above the common, a spirit perhaps somewhat out of tune with its surroundings, and a determination which must sooner or later ensure success. An interesting man beyond a doubt, and to those who knew him best eminently lovable. Adair Bremner was a thinker and

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a reader herself, and it interested her inexpressibly to have speech with this young man of whom she had heard much which had already claimed her attention. While she was listening to his quietly-expressed words she did not forget, woman-like, to take some note of his personal appearance. She saw that the badly-cut, homespun suit could not altogether hide the ease and manly grace of his figure, nor did she fail to observe that his hands and feet were more gracefully fashioned than those usually found in his own walk of life. Then his manner, though quiet and unassuming, had little of awkwardness in it. In noting this, however, Adair forgot to take into account her own singular gift of putting those with whom she talked completely at ease.

"Do you read German?" she asked presently. "Mr. Fletcher told me that you could talk several languages. I can lend you German books. You know I was three years at school in Weimar, and I have quite a little German library in my own room. I am reading Hegel."

"You read Hegel," he exclaimed, in surprise. "He does not write women's books."

"Perhaps not; but you see the lady with whom I lived in Weimar was very exceptional; she had quite a philosophical—what you would call a man's mind," she added, with a smile; "and, fortunately for me, she took a great interest in me, and introduced me to the very best literature of her country."

"I have often wished I could get some German books. They are so scarce and so dear," he said, simply; "I have never felt that I should be justified in spending so much money on them."

"I understand. Well, if you will come up another

day, perhaps some Saturday afternoon," said Adair, without taking time to think what a very unconventional proposal she was making, "I'll show you my treasure-house. I have a dear little room of my own up in the tower; you ought to see the view from it. I can see the Eildons in their full beauty, so I am never allowed to forget Sir Walter. I have a whole first edition of his books; papa gave me it on my last birthday. I am so proud of it. And I have a letter, too, which he wrote with his own hand to Mrs. Riddell of Redheugh. You know she was my mother's aunt, and on intimate terms at Abbotsford."

Robert Fletcher, leaning on his elbow on the library steps, looked into her face, his own eyes burning with eager interest, as if almost fearing to lose a single word.

"I am sometimes sorry I did not live in those days," said Adair. "Just think to have known Sir Walter as my aunt knew him, to see him in his own home, to listen to his voice in intimate talk. Oh, I do think life was worth living then."

"But I hope you do not say that it is not worth living now?" said Fletcher, quietly. "I have no patience with that cry."

"Oh, no," said Adair, quickly. "I think life is very much worth living; indeed, I should be an ungrateful and wicked girl were I to say anything else. But here comes father. We have just been discussing the question whether life is worth living or not."

Bremner smiled as he came into the room and bade the young man a pleasant good-evening.

"It is a matter of temperament, or perhaps digestion," he said, lightly. "You see, Miss Bremner doesn't look the worse for her fright. I have seen the fellow who attacked her. He is one of those pests of

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society who are an unspeakable danger to the community. Of course, he will be punished ; but after his term of punishment ends we have no guarantee that he will not return to the same bad habits."

"Did you inquire into the causes which have brought him to this?" asked Fletcher, quietly. Struck by the words, Mr. Bremner looked keenly into the young man's face.

"No, I have not. You think, perhaps, that he may have been the victim of circumstances."

"He might be," said Fletcher. "I can hardly conceive it possible that any man would adopt such a career through sheer love of it."

"I do not know that," said the millowner, thoughtfully. "There is no doubt that we have among us a number of criminally-disposed persons who are the natural enemies of law and order, and always enemies to the community."

"I grant that, sir ; but I still hold that there are many causes—some removable—which have made him what he is. Take our prison system, for instance. Suppose that man gets three or four months' hard labour, as he most likely will, he will not come out of confinement imbued with any more kindly feelings towards the well-doing portion of his countrymen. Nay, I could almost predict that he comes out a worse man than he goes in."

The young man spoke with a considerable passion which strongly impressed those who listened.

"I think you had better go upstairs, Adair," he said, turning to his daughter. "Mr. Fletcher and I have several things to discuss affecting his future. Tell your mother we shall come up and see her in half an hour or so."

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Adair felt somewhat reluctant to leave the room. She would have liked to hear the discussion on the prison system, but her father's tone was slightly peremptory, and she did not dream of disobeying.

"I see that you have given a great deal of thought to several questions which are likely to become burning ones by-and-by," said Bremner, when the door closed. "We spoke of politics this morning. Supposing that the field was ever open to you, I gather that you would be in the advance guard of the Radicals."

"I should be wherever reforms were needed and likely to be accomplished," said Fletcher, with kindling eye. "I have thought a great deal on many subjects, and I think there is a great deal waiting to be done; the mystery is that our legislators do not seem to see it."

Bremner smiled a somewhat dry smile. His experience of political life had already taught him that it is to many only a game to be played with skill, and sometimes merely for the advancement of personal ends, also that there were only a very few on both sides actuated by the highest motives; but he did not choose to say so at that particular moment to one of his own workmen.

"I quite agree with what you said a minute ago about our prison system," he said; "and though I think the fellow who so seriously frightened my daughter last night richly deserves any punishment he may receive, I shall make a point of seeing him before it expires, and try to find out what you term the causes of his degradation."

"It might repay you, sir, and it would certainly interest you," said Fletcher, quietly.

"Well, well, suppose we come now to the purpose of this interview. I have been thinking a good deal

about you to-day, and I think it more than probable that I can find you something to do in London. You are a lover of books; even a librarian's post at first would be better than nothing."

"A librarian's post!" repeated Fletcher. "You could not give me anything which I would appreciate more. I have yet so much to learn."

"Ah, well, book knowledge is all very well and valuable in its place; but I don't know that it is of the highest value to the politician. A mere bookworm would never achieve success in the House—he wants to be made of sterner stuff. Well, we can say nothing very definite about it, of course, until I return to town. I shall be back again at Whitsuntide; but in the meantime, if I hear of nothing at all likely to suit you, you may believe I shall not forget your existence."

"I am very grateful, sir; but I would not wish you to trouble yourself about me. I am not afraid for the future. I think I could fight my own battle."

"Very well said," observed the millowner. "I don't dislike your independence; there's too little of it in these degenerate days. At the same time, unless you take advantage of all the stepping-stones available, your progress towards the goal of your ambition is likely to be slow. Miracles sometimes happen, but not often; it is a very long step from the spinning-wheel to the woolsack." Both smiled at the simile, and after a moment Mr. Bremner descended to more practical details.

"I should like you to write me a letter at your leisure, setting forth your qualifications, and, as far as may be, your desires. I may never show it; but it might be of value all the same."

"Thank you, sir, I can do that at once."

"Very well, and meantime I need hardly remind you that the man who does the duty which lies nearest to him is the one who is worthy to achieve the highest. Now, shall we go upstairs to Mrs. Bremner?"

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CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNING

MANY months elapsed before Robert Fletcher heard any more about a situation in London. Sometimes he thought his employer had forgotten him in the stress of other matters claiming his attention. These were stirring times in the political world, the early days of the Irish agitation, which was engaging the earnest attention of all in authority. Robert Fletcher, among his many studies, found time to make himself completely master of the situation, and his intimate knowledge of the whole Irish question would have shamed many a member of the House. Sometimes John Fletcher was surprised at the keen, intense sympathy he exhibited towards Ireland—it amounted almost to a passion. John himself was not without feeling for the romantic, lovable people who had within their own nature all the elements of unrest and turbulence, but it was rather the dreamy, bookish interest of the poet than of one actively interested in the struggle.

“Man, Rob, ye are clean carried awa!” he said one evening to his adopted son when he had listened with patience to a more than usually bitter tirade

against those who obstinately refused to give justice to Ireland. "Hae ye never heard that there's aye something to be said on baith sides? We here in Scotland micht mak' a din if we liked, an' wi' as muckle reason. When do Scotch affairs get attention in the Parliament, tell me that? It's a disgrace the way we're shoved aside, but we dinna mak' sic a song about it."

"There's truth in what you say. Still, we are not so shamefully treated as the Irish are. It makes the blood of every fair-minded man boil, and nothing less."

"I whiles think ye must hae some Irish bluid in ye, Rob," said the old man, with a twinkle in his kindly eye. "That wad be a farce, after we've named ye Robert Burns."

Young Rob slightly smiled, entering for the moment into the old man's kindly humour. It was impossible to harbour any bitter or harsh thoughts in that gentle atmosphere. He was a born fighter, and his blood was hot to a fault. But he was never able to get away from the restraining memories of the poet's cottage at Spitalhaugh; in his moments of passion and excitement an unseen hand seemed to touch him, and the voices he loved bade him be still.

"I shouldn't wonder. There was not the slightest clue, I suppose," he said, with a touch of wistfulness on his rugged face. This was the first time the question of his birth had ever been spoken between them, though many strange thoughts had from time to time passed through the young man's mind.

"There was naething that could be ca'd a clue, I think. But your mother kept a' the claes ye wore that nicht we picked ye up—puir, forlorn atom of humanity—on the doorstep o' your granny's house at Stockbrig. She'll let ye see them, I dinna doot, if you ask her.

But tell me, are ye that anxious to prove that ye are not sib to us, Rob?"

"No, oh no—how can you say that? It was a passing curiosity. No, a thousand times no! I only wish I were your flesh and blood, father. I would be a better man."

"We have nae fault to ye, my man," answered John Fletcher, quietly. "Ye have ever been a dutiful son to your mother an' me, an' ye are the very apple o' her e'e. But if it be that ye leave us sune there are some things I would wairn ye against—this terrible excitement ye get yersel' wrocht up to. Believe me, Rob, there's few things in this world worth takin' so much oot o' yersel' for."

"It is only enthusiasts who win great causes," answered Rob. "There is too much lukewarmness. That's why so many wrongs are unrighted, why injustice walks unchallenged every day."

"It may be," said the old man, with a sigh, for he discerned in his adopted son a passionate intensity of nature which it would be hard to curb. "They are best aff that keep themselves to themselves, my man, daein' their day's darg as the Lord appoints it to them; so they are happiest, and serve Him best."

"Yet David was a man after His own heart," said Rob, shrewdly. "And there must be fighters so that peaceable folk may have the peace they crave for."

"Weel, weel, I winna argue," said John, good-humouredly. "Look, see—read my lines! I made them this mornin' as I watched an April shower creeping owre Minnigrey. They dinna please me; they havna the ring they used to hae. Poetry, like mony o' the best things o' life, lad, belongs to youth, an' no to auld age."

This talk took place in the little summer-house in the garden at Rose Cottage on a lovely evening in April, when all nature was awakening to the touch of a hastening summer. Rob took the slip of paper in his hand, and bent his eyes upon it with a tenderness which brought out all that was best in his face. It was a touching picture—the old man leaning somewhat on the shoulder of the younger, an eager, wistful look on his face, on which advancing age had set its mark. His hair was white and thin about the temples, and he could no longer read without his horn glasses, which had belonged to his father before him. Whether Rob had ever written anything himself he did not know, but he had again and again proved his fine critical gift, which seldom erred. Therefore he hung upon his verdict now almost breathlessly.

"Tell me, Rob, what is the maitter wi' it?" he said, quickly, thinking his son long of speaking. "There's something wrang wi' the rhythm; it hasna the lilt it should hae. What could I dae wi' it?"

"Nothing," said Rob, and there was a strange restraint in his voice as he folded the paper in his strong hand tenderly. "Will you give me this, father, to keep as a talisman, something which no eye has seen but yours and mine? I may need it yet."

"What do you mean, lad? It's but a pair thing. I'll try my hand at something better if it's a keepsake ye are wantin'?"

"It's this I want, and I will have it as it is. It is perfect; and it was meant for me. Was I not in your thoughts when you set down this line—

"'The eager spirit, victim of its own unrest'?"

"Maybe, lad, maybe; I winna say."

"Then it is mine, and I will keep it till the day of my death. There is a sad note in it I don't like. What is it that troubles you—now that mother's health is restored? You should not be writing such sad stuff."

"It's the shadow o' pairtin', my man, an' here's the maister come to gie ye yer marching orders. I see it in his face."

Both rose as Mr. Bremner came through the gate and up the narrow path between the roses. It was Easter week, and they knew he was expected at Halliwell, though they had not heard of his actual arrival. He bade them good-evening pleasantly, and, standing a moment by the summer-house door, remarked on the picturesque house and the promising appearance of the garden.

"You ought to take nothing but happy and ennobling thoughts with you from this place, Robert," he said, with a keen, straight look at the young man's face. "I have heard of something which might suit you. Though it has some disadvantages, still, it is certain to be a stepping-stone."

"I said ye had come to gie him his marching orders, sir," said John Fletcher, and his face was sad.

"Well, Halliwell will not keep him, John," said the master, good-humouredly. "So it behoves us to do what we can for him. Well, Robert, I suppose you have heard of Captain Byrne, late member for South Meath?"

"Yes, sir, and I saw him here last autumn when he was visiting you at Halliwell," answered Rob, and his face glowed with eager expectancy.

"He's coming again presently, to-morrow; in fact, he has resigned his seat, and is retiring from

Parliamentary life. I fancy he has grown tired of the hopeless struggle. He is going back to his Irish home to devote himself to literary work. I believe he has in contemplation a history of his own times, with special reference to Ireland under the Victorian rule. I daresay you can guess the rest?"

"Is it possible he would wish me to help him in any capacity?" asked Robert, eagerly.

The millowner nodded.

"That's just it. I have interested him in you, and one of the objects of his visit is to see you. One of the disadvantages of such a secretaryship would be enforced residence in Ireland for some time at least."

"That would be no disadvantage to me, sir," said Rob, eagerly. "I have always wanted to go to Ireland."

"He has that, sir. I tell him Irish bluid must run hot an' strong in his veins. He's faur owre hasty an' rash to be a canny Scot," put in John, quickly, whereat Mr. Bremner smiled, much amused.

"Well, it looks as if the thing had been made for you, Robert. I have spoken of you very highly to Captain Byrne, and I shall look to you not to belie my recommendation. You will find him a kind master, though exacting wherever duty is concerned. He has never spared himself; he will not spare others. It is his high sense of duty, I believe, that has caused him to come to the decision he has."

"He is no an auld man, sir?" said John, inquiringly. "Last year he looked as if he had ten guid years' work in him yet."

"So he has, John, so he has. It is not incapacity that has made him resign; but he is weary of the party and its methods. That's the real truth; and he

prefers to quit political life altogether rather than be perpetually at loggerheads with his own party."

"He's a wise man," said John, thoughtfully. "It's internal strife that eats the vitals o' mony a great cause."

"It is," said the millowner, with a sigh. "Things, I confess, are looking black for Ireland. I shouldn't wonder if August saw a general election in the heat of it. One thing, Robert, I could not satisfy Captain Byrne about. Are you a shorthand writer?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see you have equipped yourself thoroughly, and it will repay you. What Captain Byrne wants is a modest, unassuming fellow, who will not be above doing as he is bid. He could get many in England; but he has his own ideas and peculiarities, and has a contempt for the ordinary college-bred youth. He was interested at once when I told him about you, and I see no reason why you shouldn't suit each other admirably, and be of great mutual benefit."

"I will do my best, sir," said Rob, quietly, but with a good deal of earnestness. "I don't know how to thank you. I shall try to be worthy of your recommendation."

"We may all live to be proud of you yet, who knows?" said the millowner, genially. "Well, John, I was delighted to hear from Mrs. Bremner such good accounts of your wife. I haven't time to pay my respects to her to-night. I am afraid she won't thank me for enticing her son away. Tell her I'll come and make my peace with her one of these days. Good evening, Robert. I'll send a message from Halliwell when Captain Byrne comes, appointing a time for you to come up to Halliwell and see him."

"Thank you, sir," said Robert, and his face wore a

A Son of Erin

strange, uplifted look as he turned away alone, while John accompanied his master to the garden gate where his well-trained horse was tethered.

The desire of his heart—if it had not actually come to him—was within his grasp. Some strange prevision of the stormy years in store—years destined to prove him to the uttermost, to test his strength and manhood, to teach him many things—came to him as he stood in the sweet-scented garden that April night under the shadow of Halliwell Hill.

"Well, lad, it's queer how things come about, is it no?" his father said, and his voice also was quiet and restrained, as if he felt the stress of the moment.

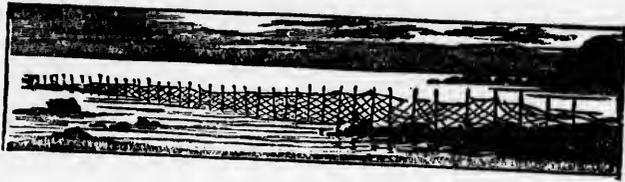
"I can hardly believe it—to go to Ireland, father! It's the very hand of Fate."

"Of Fate! There is no fate," said John Fletcher, sharply. "It's Providence that shapes our ends though we rough hew them sair enough. Mind this, Robin, if ye follow sic blind leadin' you'll come to grief, an' that only they have perfect peace that have their hearts stayed on their Maker."

Rob Fletcher long remembered the look in the good old man's face as he uttered these words. When he thought of his blameless life, of his pure heart, which harboured nothing but gentle thoughts, of the songs he had given to his country, songs that would live after more meretricious contributions were forgotten, he felt what an inestimable privilege had been his to live in intimate relation with him, and to have called him father.



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CHAPTER VIII

A NEW FRIEND

T seemed to John and Mary Fletcher that from that night Rob was a changed man. The dull, thoughtful look, the manner, quiet to moroseness, seemed to fall away from him like a garment for which he had no further use. He became alert, eager, joyous, like one who had everything before him, who anticipated a future which would satisfy him completely. They did not say much to each other about it, though the same thought was in the minds of both, that soon the boy they had loved and reared as their own would be cut off from them, and though he might retain them in loving memory, which indeed they did not doubt, his life would henceforth be one they could not share. This is the lot of many, nay, of most parents, but I do not believe that any ever felt it more keenly than these two simple souls who, never having had any child of their own, had done a parents' part to an unknown waif.

They did not grudge him the good fortune likely to befall him, nay, they saw that it was what he

needed and deserved. His growth had been slow, and though he had made no moan over the common toil allotted to him, they saw that he was above it, that it was by mental gifts he would rise, and not by the labour of his hands. On the evening of the second day after the interview with Mr. Bremner a message came from Halliwell asking Rob to go up at once. No sooner had the messenger gone, however, and Rob was preparing to follow him, than a second knock came to the cottage door. Mary opened it. She was surprised to behold on the threshold Mr. Bremner and a strange gentleman, elderly and of benevolent aspect, though under his shaggy white brows there gleamed a pair of very keen and penetrating dark blue eyes.

"Good evening, Mrs. Fletcher," said Bremner. "We have followed hard upon the messenger. I suppose he has been here. Captain Byrne suddenly thought he would like to make your acquaintance as well as Robert's, so now I have the honour to present you to him."

Mary's face, sweet and comely as it had been twenty years ago, expressed genuine pleasure as she bade them come in. She was one of those rare and natural souls it was impossible to catch unawares or at any disadvantage.

"Robin is just getting ready, sir, to go up to Halliwell," she said. "Please to walk in. We hae but a sma' biggin', sir," she added to the stranger; "but ye are kindly welcome to it."

She opened the door of her little sitting-room, which smelied sweet of lavender and thyme, drew up the white blind to let the glow of the setting sun come in and bade them be seated. All the time she was

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quietly making her own keen observations of the man who wanted to take her boy away.

He had a somewhat stern look, and an abrupt manner of speech, which, however, were only the sheath of a truly kind heart. His eye softened as it took in the whole aspect of the room; its sweet wholesomeness and simplicity seemed to reflect the entire character of the folk who dwelt in it.

"There cannot be much wrong with a man reared in this environment, Bremner," he observed, as Mary slipped out of the room to find her husband and bid Robin make haste.

"I thought it would please you. They are the salt of the earth here—the old folk, I mean. Don't forget the young man is only an adopted son, that their blood does not run in his veins."

"Still, he has known no other influences or surroundings, and they should tell," observed the captain; and no further speech was rendered possible by the opening of the door. It was Robert who entered, and the captain, before he spoke a word, eyed him keenly. Rob bore the scrutiny well, though Mr. Bremner observed him grow a little pale.

"I had better leave you to discuss the matter privately, Captain," he said, rising. "I daresay I shall find Mrs. Fletcher in the kitchen. Pray, take your time. There is no hurry, and we shall have a fine moon to walk back by."

So saying, he went out and closed the door.

"So it seems you have ambitions, young man," said the captain, gruffly. "Come over here, and sit down. Do you know anything about the Irish character, sir? There is nothing Scotch about it—nothing steady or slow or sure, d'ye hear?"

"I have studied Irish history, sir," answered Rob, not in the least discomfited by the peremptory tones of the old gentleman's voice. "And it reveals, of course, a good deal of the national character."

"I daresay. How do your sympathies go? I don't ask your political views, for you are not expected to have any, d'ye hear?"

"Yes, sir. I have always sympathised with Ireland. She has not got justice.

"So; well, I go as far as that, and she's in a deplorable state at present; but her affairs will never be mended so long as the present Government is at the helm. That's why I'm quitting public life. I'm sick of it—sick and ashamed. I'm going back to the country to do my duty by my tenants, and that's a pretty tough job in these times, I tell you, with this organisation and the other goading them on to madness. And I'm going to write a book—a history of my country as she is—fair and square and above board, setting down nothing in malice. It'll open the eyes of the Englishmen. I'm a good fighter, but not much of a scribe, and I want help. What my friend, Mr. Bremner, has told me of you has interested me. I like the look of you, so if you care for the job you can have it."

In these extraordinary and blunt terms did Captain Byrne lay bare his views to Robert Fletcher, and then waited for his reply.

"My first duty would be to write to your dictation, sir?"

"Yes, and to hold your tongue. I had a young chap in London, an Oxford graduate, a cousin's son, wanted a job, but he thought he knew more about the subject than I did—by Gad he did!—so I told him to

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go home and write a book himself. Can you hold your tongue? You look as if you could."

"Yes, sir, I think I can."

"You'll be willing to make yourself generally useful, I suppose? I don't mean by that that you would clean the windows or mow the grass. I'll treat you like a gentleman so long as you behave like one."

"I'll do my best, sir," said Rob, and he looked his best at the moment—honest, manly and sincere. The captain thought more of him as every moment passed.

"You're uncommonly like some one I have seen," he said, presently. "But I can't place the resemblance, a chance one, of course. Do you know that in your training and environment here you have something which money could never buy? It will be invaluable to you. That's what's the matter with half the upstarts of the present day—they haven't been properly brought up. I hope you will never be ashamed of this place, my lad, nor of your days as a working man."

"I hope not, sir. That would be a despicable shame," said Rob, and the colour flushed his face, while his strong lip quivered. These signs did not escape the captain's observation, nor did he fail to read them aright.

"Well, we haven't said anything about salary," he observed, bluntly. "What would you expect?"

"I shall be glad to leave it to you, sir. Perhaps it would be as well to wait and see what my services are worth."

"That isn't Scotch," said the captain, grimly. "It's more like an Irish bargain. I'm a poor man, but not a hard one. At least I can promise you will not get less than you have been earning. It's in

Wicklow I live. Rathdrum is my station, and Kilkilane my house. It will be September before I want you. Is the bargain struck, then?"

Robert assented, and the captain, old-fashioned in some of his ways, insisted on shaking hands upon it. Robert Fletcher's career had begun.

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"ROBERT FLETCHER'S CAREER HAD BEGUN."

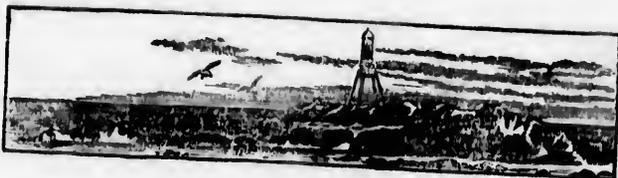
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CHAPTER IX

GOOD-BYE



THE final settlement of affairs created a still more marked change in Robert Fletcher. The man who sees a career before him has a grip on life which brings out all the latent qualities of his nature. During the weeks which intervened between his interview with Captain Byrne and the time of his departure from Scotland he devoted himself still more assiduously to his books, and to all the means of culture within his reach.

It was in the first week of September that Captain Byrne wrote to say that the post was now open, and that he would be glad to see him at Killane without delay. It was a Saturday evening when this summons arrived, and the little family were sitting round the table at their evening meal. Rob read the letter and then passed it silently across the table to his mother. Beyond a slight flushing of the face he betrayed no sign of excitement. Mary only read a few lines on the first page, and then laid the letter down on the table with a visibly trembling hand.

"He is for off, Mary," her husband said, looking at her with a kindly and sympathetic eye, for he knew

that go when he might Rob's final departure from home would be sore upon Mary, perhaps sorer than any of them could guess.

"On Monday he wants me to go," said Robert. "I'll need to go up to Halliwell and tell the master."

"That's very hurried, isn't it?" asked John, still keeping his tender eye on Mary, who had never spoken a word, but left her supper untouched on the plate.

"Hurried at the last," answered Rob; "but he said it would be the first week in September, probably."

"Weel, your things are a' ready, my man," said Mary, and, controlling herself by an effort, she nodded brightly across the table to him, "and I dinna care wha sees them; no a gentleman among them ever gaed oot wi' a better stock. I'se warrant when ye come back they'il no be as weel worth looking at—that is to say, if ye ever come back."

Rob pushed back his chair and rose hastily to his feet. Perhaps for the first time he actually realised that it was a home he was leaving, a home whose love and precious associations he had perhaps prized too lightly.

"Oh, mother! don't make it any harder for me," he said, abruptly, and strode out by the door to the garden upon which the harvest moon lay in a white flood. He was not ashamed of his honest emotion; but they had taught him that to make too much display of the inner feelings is weak and unmanly.

Mary wiped her eye with the corner of her apron, and looked across the table at her husband with a somewhat wan smile.

"I dinna think he is glad to go, John," she said. "He winna forget us a'thegither."

"No, and why should he, Mary?" asked John, with

a sharpness merely assumed to hide a deeper feeling. "We have fathered him and mothered him, and that's something he canna aye get in this world, even for siller, Mary."

"I dinna ken how it is, John," said Mary, as she folded her hands on her knee, while her face wore a strange, far-away look, "but I think there is something great in store for Robin, and that though he may no forget us a'thegither, yet he never will be to us the lad he has been."

"We cannot expect it, Mary," said John, with a sigh; "but whatever Rob may become in the future we have been the makin' of him, and he cannot get past that. If we hadna ta'en pity on him that Burns' night in Edinburgh, where would he have been noo?"

"Oh, somebody else might hae picket him up, my man," said Mary, with a quizzical smile.

"That may be; but the chances are that but for us he would have aye been a puirhouse bairn, and no wha he is the day. I have a queer feeling about him gaun to Ireland, Mary. I may be wrang, but I think that the Lord is leading him to his ain country, it may be to his ain folk; but we'll see."

"I hae the very same feeling, John," answered Mary, "and whatever happens, naething would surprise me."

I will not linger over the last hours spent by Robert Fletcher in the poet's cottage. They were distinguished by a quiet intensity of feeling which, though it did not find actual voice, was deeply felt by them all. It seemed as if in these hours they drew more closely together in heart than they had yet done, and when the actual moment of parting came it was full of the keenest pain. Rob tried to tell them something of what was passing in his heart, to give voice

to his gratitude, and to assure them that whatever the future might hold for him they would remain enshrined in his heart, and that their goodness would never be forgotten.

"We want no thanks, my man," said John, as he clapped him on the back at the door; "what we want, and what will make us happy, is to hear that you do your duty wherever you may be, and that ye never forget your Maker; and mind that the door here is aye open to ye, nicht or day, whenever ye like to set your foot on its threshold."

Rob could not speak, but John—a self-contained, undemonstrative man himself—did not misunderstand his silence. So they parted—the young man to go out into the great world, his heart throbbing with ambition and hope, the old to go back to his quiet fireside and pray that he might be kept in the right way and saved from temptation and sin.

The actual parting over, although it left a deep shadow on his heart, Fletcher began naturally to anticipate the future, which, if not actually roseate with promise, had still sufficient of possibility in it to give him the liveliest satisfaction. Then it had the unique charm of novelty. Hitherto his short journeyings from home had never taken him further than Edinburgh on the one side and Newcastle-on-Tyne on the other, where one of Mary's brothers had a large engineering business; he had never even seen London. His journey on this occasion did not take him so far south. Acting on Captain Byrne's instructions he went to Holyhead, where he took the mail boat for Dublin. He spent the hours of passage on deck. In his present mood sleep was far from his eyes, and he grudged to lose even a passing glimpse of the new

world which he now saw for the first time. The sea even was a revelation to him. It was a fine star-lit night, the harvest moon, which he had long known, and loved to watch ride in full glory above Border hill and dale, made a wondrous pathway on the water, and filled the young man's ardent soul with a thousand vague longings which he scarcely understood. By and by it melted into the soft dawn of the autumn morning, and just as they came within sight of the green shores of Ireland the sun shone out gloriously, making the picturesque Kingstown Harbour a scene of beauty which Rob never forgot. It was his lot during the coming years to cross many a time that restless strip of sea, but he never forgot the newness and the freshness of his sensations that September morning. They belonged to the things of youth which never come again.

He remained a few hours in Dublin, astonished at its size and prosperous look. He had long thought of Ireland as an oppressed and downtrodden country, in which he scarcely expected to find any signs of prosperity; but so far as a cursory view served him, the capital city compared favourably with any he had seen.

Early in the afternoon he took train for the little Wicklow town which was the nearest to his new home. At each stage of the journey the beauty of the country seemed to strike a deeper note into his soul. The train sped along a coast line incomparable for majesty and beauty, while inland the fertile landscape undulated softly to the base of the Wicklow Hills, which, in all the glory of their purple heather, seemed more beautiful than a poet's dream. Although Rob was well aware that it was in the South that poverty

and depression chiefly reigned, he was again agreeably surprised by the rich and prosperous appearance of the country. It was only a cursory view, however, and when he alighted at the little railway station nestling in a basin of the hills watered by the romantic Avonmore he saw some signs of decay and desolation which filled him with a strange feeling of depression. The few cars awaiting the arrival of the train were poor, shabby conveyances, drawn by sorry steeds and attended by very disreputable Jehus, who presently began to wrestle with each other for the privilege of his hire. When at last he made his choice and started on his way he saw that the enchanting loveliness of the scenery deluded his eye, and created a false impression of riches and prosperity. The little town through which they passed was dirty and ill-kept; the houses untidy and in many cases in a tumble-down state; the few shops scarcely worthy of the name. He found his driver either morose or ignorant, since his questions elicited no reply but a grunt. This was disappointing, but only caused Rob to use his own eyes with greater vigilance. The roads were hilly, and his experienced eye quickly told him that the soil was poor and badly cultivated. No rich yellow breadths of harvest fields gladdened the vision; here and there a few odd acres were dotted with sparse sheaves, while the potato patches gave off a somewhat dank odour suggestive of disease. The sheep and cattle looked lean and ill-fed, and the donkeys about the roadsides nibbled the short grass as if it was their only luxury. But the enchanting loveliness of the scene remained, imprinting itself indelibly on the young man's mind. As they jolted down one hill and up another a new panorama opened out before his astonished eyes—giant

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hills, heather-clad and pine-crowned, the early tints of autumn already making a wonderful diversity of colour ; while far below a brawling river filling the air with the music of a Highland glen. Fletcher did not know then that he beheld one of the fairest and most famed of Irish pictures, the sweet Vale of Avoca which witnesses the "Meeting of the Waters," which Moore has made immortal.

The gruff and reticent driver gave him no information, nor did he after a few preliminary attempts make any effort to obtain it. It was sufficient to him to drink in the incomparable beauty of the scene, and to feel his heart throbbing with a strange sense of nearness and kinship, something more exquisite and yet more painful than anything he had yet experienced. His acquaintance with the luxurious and well-kept residences of the Scottish Borders had prepared him to find in Killane a country seat somewhat similar. As they drove on, however, though they passed many large houses, they bore the evidences of lack of prosperity. Few attained to the distinction of an entrance lodge, and in many cases the gateways, if not actually broken, were weather-beaten and poor, and the avenue which they were supposed to guard overgrown with moss and weeds. And in many a noble park the cut timber lay in loads on the ground, sure sign of the fallen fortunes of the occupier.

By-and-by the driver, rattling down the hill at break-neck speed, took a sharp turn and dashed through a wooden gateway which was wide open, though a small ivy-covered lodge stood beside it. It was, however, untenanted, and Rob observed as they passed by that the windows were boarded up, and that the moss-eaten gate was off the hinges at one

side, and propped up by an iron beam driven into the ground.

"Is this Killane?" he asked, in surprise, which had a tinge of disappointment in it.

"Yes, sor, this be Killane," answered the Jehu, shortly. "That's the house among the trees."

He saw its white gleam, and immediately they came within full view of it. It was built in the common style of the district, a large, square, unpicturesque building with flat windows and a pillared door. Some ivy and a yellow-rose tree still rich in bloom lent a touch of kindness to the bare walls, and the exterior of the house was carefully kept, the lawn smooth and green, the gravel sweep free from weeds. Some one took a pride in it, but the means were lacking. The story of the family fortunes was mutely proclaimed by these outward signs which did not escape Fletcher's vision. By the time he had leaped from the car the door was thrown open, and a middle-aged man-servant appeared. Rob eyed him keenly a moment, and even with a touch of anxiety. His position in the house might be more or less determined by the servants of whose ways he was totally ignorant of; but the broad smile and the entirely respectful manner of Denis Doolan, who had been Captain Byrne's body-servant in the far-off days of his active service, and was now the trusted family factotum, entirely reassured him.

"Mr. Fletcher, sor? Captain Byrne told me to make his apologies as he had to go to Wexford on county business. Miss Aileen, sor, is in the house, and will see you at once."

"All right," said Rob, but his mind was hardly relieved. Captain Byrne's daughter was certainly a more formidable person than his servant.



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CHAPTER X

NEW SURROUNDINGS



FLETCHER stepped across the threshold into a square hall, from the centre of which a stair ascended to a small gallery which ran round three sides of the hall, and gave it a singularly quaint look. All the woodwork was of old oak, of that singularly rich grain only obtained in the growth of peaty soil; no stain or varnish had desecrated it, but it shone as if it had come fresh from the polisher's hand. The handrail was low and plain; indeed there was no carving anywhere, though some of the mouldings were exquisitely fashioned. Fletcher, of course, had no idea of the artistic beauty and value of the surroundings to which he was now introduced, but he was quite conscious of a sense of harmony and fitness, which remained with him all the time he was sheltered by the roof-tree of Killane. It was an old family house, rich in little now save pathos and memories, but in its decay dear beyond expression to those who called it home. He stood a moment while Denis Doolan paid the driver of the car, and swung the modest luggage from its precarious position

on one side, then a light foot made a faint sound on the bare boards of the gallery, and looking up Robert beheld the figure of a young lady wearing a very English dress,—a skirt of homespun and a cambric shirt, also a sailor hat with a black ribbon and a quill. A great bunch of mysterious silver ornaments, such as Rob had never before seen, jingled from her belt, and he even noted as she came swiftly down the broad, shallow steps that her foot was small and her ankle exquisitely turned. Her proximity disconcerted him, and he awaited her coming awkwardly. Yet in a moment, by some mystic touch known only to herself, she set him at his ease.

“Mr. Fletcher, of course,” she said, extending a frank hand and showing two dazzling rows of teeth in a perfectly friendly smile. “We did not know quite when to expect you, or papa would have sent to meet you. He has gone to Wexford this afternoon, but will be home at six. When Denis has shown you to your room you can join me in the drawing-room, where I am having tea all by myself.”

She did not appear to notice his extreme nervousness, which assisted him mightily, but all the time he was making a hasty toilet the fear of the impending interview haunted him. In all his anticipations of the new life upon which he now entered such a person as Miss Aileen Byrne had never entered. But she was a very real personage, one from whom he could not escape, and who would doubtless expect him to talk, perhaps to amuse her. Often Rob looked back upon that first hour. His natural courtesy and consideration forbade him to keep his master's daughter waiting. In less than ten minutes Denis, waiting patiently with imperturbable good-humour at the

drawing-room door, ushered him in. The room was large and low-roofed, the floor of dark polished wood, with a few warm rugs here and there. A small wood fire made a pleasant glow and also a musical crackling at the further end, where the tea-table was spread near a corner window which commanded the whole matchless Vale of Avoca. Miss Byrne was behind the tea-tray, and had laid her hat on the couch beside her. She was very pretty, with the fresh, healthful beauty of one who lived a wholesome outdoor life, and was free from many of the weaknesses of her sex. She had the rich, clear colour, and the half sad, half merry grey eye of her country. Rob may be forgiven if he thought her at that moment the fairest vision his eyes had ever beheld.

"Come and sit down," she said, smiling again, and beckoning him to a seat near her. "Papa has told me a great deal about you. Of course, I was naturally interested to know what the new member of the household was like. You see, we are few now, and dependent on each other. I hope whatever you do you will try and study my father about his book. He has been dreadfully worried over it. I hope you are interested in Ireland."

"I think I am," answered Fletcher, when she looked at him directly waiting for his answer. "I cannot explain what I mean exactly, but I feel as if I had come home to-day after a long exile."

Aileen looked at him attentively. His manner was so very simple and sincere, and his words themselves arrested her.

"Yet you are Scotch, are you not? Papa told me you were."

"I suppose I am, but no one knows. Ireland is a

beautiful country, Miss Byrne; it is a pity she is torn and racked by internal strife."

She gave him a lightning glance, as if seeking to know what right he had to pass his verdict, and whether anything lay behind it.

"Don't let us speak about Ireland yet," she said, quickly. "Wait till you have been here six months, then it will be time enough. Have you been educated at an English public school?"

At this unexpected question, which showed Rob that Captain Byrne had told his daughter little or nothing regarding his new secretary's antecedents, he forgot himself so far as to stare at her helplessly.

"No," he stammered at length. "I was educated in Scotland, at an ordinary Board school and—*and* privately."

"I am glad to hear it. The specimens of English school and University youths I have seen have not imbued me with respect for the system. My father had one of my cousins as his secretary last season in London, and it was nearly the death of him."

Her eye twinkled as she dropped the sugar in the cups.

"He knew everything. I used to ask him whether he had a commission to run the universe. Papa ought never to have taken him. I hope you don't know everything?"

Her glance was arch as she shot this dart at him, and her eyes danced again.

"No; I know nothing," he answered as quick as thought.

"If I took you literally I should say papa had made mistake number two; but I don't think he has. What he really wants," she added, and here her face

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became grave and even anxious, "is some one who will be interested in his work and keep him at it. That is what papa lacks—application, I mean. It is a family—I had almost said a national—failing. But anything, anything to keep him out of politics. It is too much for him. I saw him being killed by inches. You see he lays things to heart. You will understand me better when you have been here a little while."

"I quite understand you now," answered Fletcher, and the intelligent sympathy expressed on his face brought a sense of assurance and hope to the heart of Aileen Byrne. She was passionately attached to her father, whose close companion she had been since she had left school. The exciting and perilous times through which his country was passing had indeed laid hold of Captain Byrne's warm, impulsive nature. Year by year of his Parliamentary life Aileen watched him gradually wearing out; the late hours and unwholesome atmosphere, but perhaps above all the perpetual anguish of soul and shame because so many who professed to love Ireland were really traitors to her best interests, slowly undermined the constitution of the good old man. It was a relief of no ordinary kind to Aileen when he at length yielded to her earnest entreaties and decided to quit Parliamentary life, for which indeed he was in every way unfitted. Her anxiety, therefore, concerning the man who was to help to fill up the leisure time, which at first would probably hang somewhat heavily on his hands, was a perfectly natural feeling. She knew well that much would depend on the secretary, with whom her father would spend the greater part of his time. So far she was more than pleased with Fletcher's appearance and manner. He was not only modest and unassuming,

but seemed to be quick of comprehension, and would probably be able to adapt himself readily to the circumstances. She had not been ten minutes in the room with him before she came to the conclusion that whatever his antecedents he had not been accustomed to cultivated society. There was a bluntness in his manner, he sat awkwardly upon his chair, and handled his tea-cup as if unaccustomed to it; but these things were of small account in the eyes of Aileen Byrne so long as the more important qualities were not lacking.

"We are very proud of our country, Mr. Fletcher," she said, changing the subject to one of less personal moment. "I daresay you noticed its beauty as you came along."

"Yes, I did. I have been reading a good deal about Wicklow, of course, since I knew I was coming; but I had no idea that the scenery was so fine. I am sure the view from these windows could not be surpassed."

"That is my opinion exactly," she answered, brightly. "I am always glad to come back to Killane. I love every stick and stone upon it; but, like many others, the Byrnes have fallen on evil days. I am glad even for economical reasons that my father has given up Parliamentary life; we really could not afford to live in London even as unpretentiously as we did. We shall have an opportunity of retrenching this winter. Papa told me that you were recommended to him by Mr. Bremner, the Member for Spitalhaugh," she said presently when Rob made no answer. "I like him so much. I think he is a good man, and one to whom politics is something more than a mere game. I was to have visited them with my father at Easter, but I had to go to my cousin's in Oxfordshire. You know

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Miss Bremner? I think she is charming. We met in London two years ago. I am hoping that she will pay me a visit here."

To all this Rob listened without confusion, but in silence, not knowing what he was expected to say. It was quite evident, however, that she knew nothing about his relations to the Bremners. The idea of talking to her under false pretences was intolerable to Rob, and, without taking into account the fact that perhaps Captain Byrne had reasons of his own for keeping his counsel concerning his new secretary, he bluntly told her the whole truth.

"I know Miss Bremner, of course, though in a different way from what you imagine. She was my master's daughter."

"Oh," said Aileen, uplifting her straight brows in some slight surprise, "I did not know Mr. Bremner kept a secretary; I thought he was only an ordinary useful member—a business man first, and a politician after."

"I was not his secretary," said Rob, bluntly. "I was employed in his mill as a common working man."

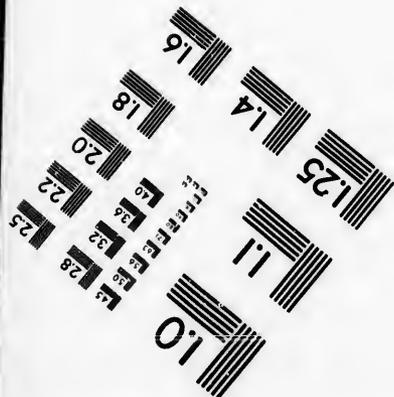
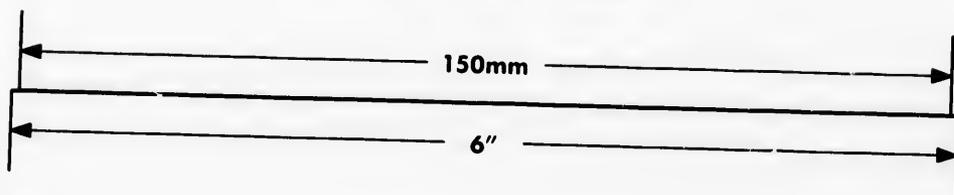
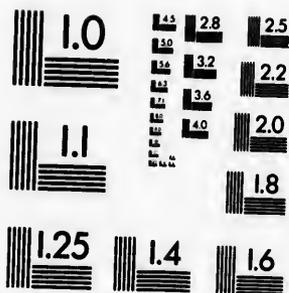
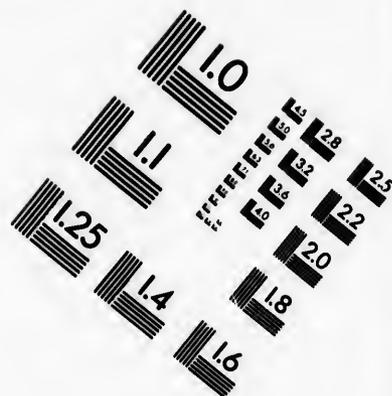
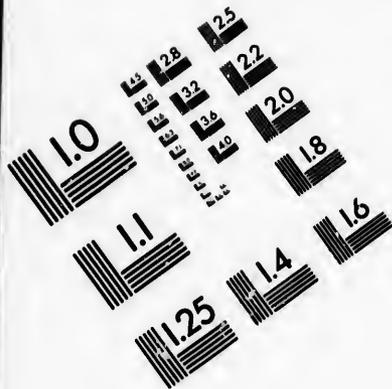
"Papa did not tell me that," said Aileen. "But after all what does it matter? It makes no difference to me whether you worked in Mr. Bremner's study or in his mill. It is refreshing to meet with somebody who can work and is not ashamed of it. I assure you it will make no difference to me."

"I must apologise for troubling you with the matter at all," said Fletcher, quietly; "but I did not like the idea of being here under false pretences."

"I understand perfectly. Pray let us say no more about it," said Aileen, with a bright, frank smile. "I rather think I hear wheels on the gravel. Here comes papa."



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CHAPTER XI

SETTLING DOWN



HE door opened, and Captain Byrne entered the room, relieving by his hearty presence the undoubted restraint of the moment. He wore a shabby old shooting suit, in which, however, he held his fine figure erect, and looked every inch a gentleman.

"Well, so you have arrived, young man?" he said, as he shook Fletcher cordially by the hand. "I thought you would come to-day. You have made the acquaintance of my daughter already, I see. She is always very kind to strangers. Well, my dear, have you any tea for me?"

"Yes, father. Did you get all your business satisfactorily accomplished?"

"In one trip, Aileen! No such luck in this or any other country, I fear," he said, with a grimace. "My chief indictment against my fellow-creatures is that they shilly-shally, and won't get through with business. By Gad, sir, to-day you would have thought that we had an eternity before us instead of a week or two to decide a most important matter. It's just the same in Parliamentary life. That's why I couldn't

stand it any longer ; it was getting the better of me, it was indeed. Perhaps it is that I am getting old and have less patience than I once had ; but I have never been a patient man even on active service. Denis Doolan is the man that can tell you that." The old man gave a hearty laugh as he mentioned the name of his old servant, who had been with him through so many campaigns both in war and peace times. There was something sunny and winning about the old captain, and he also possessed his daughter's rare gift of putting all who came within his reach entirely at their ease ; but though Fletcher felt more at home in the drawing-room of Killane than he could have believed possible, he had not a flow of small talk at his disposal, and could think of nothing to say. The captain, however, did not misunderstand or dislike his silence, perhaps because he had so much to say on all topics himself. He did not like too much talk from others, especially from the young and inexperienced. While Fletcher was inwardly calling himself stupid for his lack of speech, the old man was heartily approving him for that very quality.

"Well, and how did you leave our friends at Halliwell ? Perhaps we shall have a visit from them by-and-by. And how are those fine folk, your father and mother ? I repeat what I said to you the last time we met—you can never be too thankful that you belong to such a stock ; everything depends on the accident of a man's birth, although it is sometimes possible to rise superior to it."

"I left them all well, sir," answered Rob. Then he added, bluntly, "I only wish I did belong to that stock, or, at least, that I knew something about my origin."

"Perhaps it will be just as well not to inquire too closely into it," said the old man, shrewdly. "Did I tell you that Mr. Fletcher had quite a romantic history, Aileen—that he was a foundling, and does not know anything about his ancestors? A good thing for some of us," he added, comically, "if we knew less. Well, shall we go to the study now? Since I took it into my head to become a literary man," he added, facetiously, "I have fitted up a den at the top of the house where you and I can work undisturbed. Perhaps you'd like to see it?"

"Yes, I should," said Fletcher, with alacrity, glad to be released, he could not tell why, from the keen, bright glance of Aileen's eyes. He wished with all his heart as he followed the old captain upstairs that there had been no daughter of the house. He had a natural shyness of women. Mary Fletcher had often been amused at the shy way he would steal out of the house when she had any feminine visitors. The prospect of seeing Miss Byrne every day, and having to reply to her quick, bright speech, rather appalled him. With the old captain he felt there would be no difficulty whatever. He was genial and lovable, and only required a little study to make him the pleasantest and most indulgent of masters. Robert was accustomed to elderly people, and it came easy to him to be considerate with them, and he had no doubt in his own mind as he followed him into the pleasant study, which the captain with a great deal of pride and fun had set in order for the great work to be done there, that there his happiest hours would be spent. In this conclusion he only proved his ignorance and inexperience—a shy young man of three-and-twenty has everything to learn. The room was sparsely fur-

nished, and, though called by courtesy a study, was marked by the absence of books, although some rough shelves had been hastily run up against the wall.

"There's a library downstairs, Fletcher," said the captain, in explanation. "I thought perhaps you and I might amuse ourselves in our off-times by bringing the books up. My daughter wouldn't mind having the library for a little snugger of her own; but if we haven't much to look at inside, we can always take our fill from the windows. Look there!"

From the front windows could be seen the same view which enchanted the eye from the drawing-room below; from the back it was scarcely less beautiful—the Wicklow Hills in the blue distance, with the mysterious glory of the sunset upon them, made a picture never to be forgotten.

"I had no idea that the scenery of Ireland was so fine," Fletcher observed.

"Had you not? Ay, my lad, there's nothing the matter with the country; it's the people that are in it that will never rest until they destroy it." His face became shadowed, and the red flush of indignation, which never failed to rise to his cheek when his country's wrongs were under discussion, warned Rob that they were touching upon a dangerous theme. "You would, no doubt, observe as you came by that our country seats do not look quite so prosperous as they do in Scotland," said the old man, with a touch of bitterness. "Some of them are starting to the timber; but, please God, the old trees of Killane will stand all my time. I'd rather go without many a meal than see one of them felled to the ground. I have only one child to provide for, and she is of the same mind with me."

"Have you a large estate here?" asked Fletcher, with interest.

"About two thousand acres. I had another place in Connemara—nothing but a bog and some hungry hills. I sold it when I entered Parliament because I wanted the money, but in selling that I did no wrong to anybody, because it was not family ground, but was left to me by a distant connection."

"And is Killane cut up into small holdings?" asked Fletcher, still further encouraged by the frank replies to his questions.

"Yes; I believe I have between twenty and thirty tenants. It's a poor business, I can assure you, but I try to make the best of it. But there, we needn't go into these particulars now; you will have plenty of time yet to get acquainted with the whole past and present history of Killane."

The kindly welcome given to the young man that day was but the earnest of his future position in the house. It astonished no one more than himself that he became so quickly at ease and at home amid surroundings so very different from anything to which he had been accustomed. While this was no doubt chiefly due to the delightful manners of the inmates of the house, his own singular adaptiveness did the rest. He was very quiet and unobtrusive, not only doing his utmost to help the captain in his study, but also seeking to make himself helpful and serviceable in a great number of unobtrusive ways. He was the captain's constant companion indoors and out. Aileen watched the gradual growth of affection between them with somewhat mixed feelings. While her clear eyes were quick to discern that certainly Robert Fletcher was the right man in the right place

there was a slight feeling of jealousy because she was no longer so necessary to her father ; perhaps also there was just a slight, scarcely-acknowledged inclination to hold aloof from one whose social position was so much below her own. She fought against this, and was indeed rather surprised to find that she was to some extent imbued with the social prejudice which she had always affected to despise. This attitude made her quick to observe and criticise certain little breaches of good-breeding which in the very nature of things Fletcher was bound to commit. A man who has been reared by a cottage fireside, and been a unit among toiling hundreds in a great industrial concern, cannot be expected to have all the usages of polite society at his fingers' ends. Of his mistakes, however, Fletcher was entirely unconscious. He was a strong man in that respect, and his mind was too much engrossed by graver and more important matters to bestow much thought on the trifling amenities of everyday life. Then, though never failing in his respectful manner towards the daughter of his employer, he betrayed not the smallest interest in her, nor did he ever voluntarily seek her presence or speak to her except when she addressed him. This was no part of a settled plan, but rather the natural outcome of a shy and retiring disposition, which, moreover, had a singular lack of interest in the opposite sex. After the first feeling of awkwardness, which indeed had not been untouched by dismay over her proximity, Fletcher virtually dismissed his master's daughter from his mind, and scarcely thought of her unless when her presence compelled it.

Now Aileen, a singularly handsome and attractive girl, who had never suffered through any lack of

admirers, secretly resented this attitude on the part of her father's secretary, although it is certain that she would have resented yet more fiercely any presumption on his part. She was a very sensible girl, yet by no means above the natural vanities usually attributed to her sex. Fletcher would have been profoundly astonished had he known what an object of interest he was to Miss Byrne ; and that she watched him keenly, yet so unobtrusively that he had no idea of it. She noted that as the days went by the habit and tone of his former life gradually disappeared as he responded to the altered conditions under which he now dwelt.

Remembering the appeal Miss Byrne had made to him during their first interview, the frank confidence of which, however, was never repeated, Fletcher did his best to make the captain observe some regular mode of life, especially as regards the book for whose production he held himself in a manner responsible. Every morning after breakfast they retired to the study, and on most days Rob managed to keep him there until lunch time, the afternoons being spent out of doors.

Fletcher found that the old man had an enormous and unwieldy mass of material at his command, much of it interesting and of considerable value, yet requiring a discriminating hand in its arrangement. He quickly saw that this would depend entirely upon him, since the captain had no more idea of it than a child. But it was a work such as Fletcher loved ; his close study of many hundreds of books had given him a fair idea as to their construction, and he was very happy in his work during the first few peaceful weeks of his life at Killane, until the beginning of the troublous times which were to agitate them all.

One afternoon, as he and the captain came across

the park from paying a visit to one of the outlying portions of the estate, they saw two saddle-horses standing at the door under the supervision of Denis Doolan.

"Hello! Visitors," said the captain. "I recognise that filly as belonging to Tom Lyndon of Ballymore. I haven't seen Tom for ever so long, but I hear that he's been rather busy." The speaker's face clouded slightly, and Fletcher observed that his mouth took a somewhat grim curve. "You haven't been to Glendalough yet," said the captain, as they approached the doorway. "Ballymore is one of the finest places up there. I think it beats Killane for beauty, and that's saying a good deal, my lad. The Lyndons of Ballymore are a very old family, and used to be wealthy and influential before they fell on evil times like the rest of us. You'd better come up to the drawing-room and see the young men. Tom is the elder, but Terry's my favourite; evidently they're both here."



CHAPTER XII

A NOTE OF DISCORD

FLETCHER hesitated a moment—it was his nature to shrink from strangers, and he seldom entered the drawing-room when visitors were present ; but on this occasion some impulse for which he could not account prompted him to accept the captain's invitation. When they entered the drawing-room they found Aileen entertaining her guests, and that they were very happy was evidenced by the merry laughter which rang through the room. She was seated at the tea-table precisely as Fletcher had seen her on the first night of his arrival at Killane. A young man of fine and graceful figure and undeniably handsome face stood close by her, evidently saying something which pleased her, for her eyes were sparkling, her cheeks flushed, and her whole appearance betraying interest and animation. The younger man, who was in fact only a lad of seventeen, sat on the corner of the couch, his bright, happy face wearing a merry smile while he listened to the gay badinage between his brother and Miss Byrne.

“Hello, you young renegades,” called out the cap-

tain, gaily, "where have you been all these weeks? I was only saying to Aileen yesterday that we had lost you entirely. What's come over you?"

"Didn't you hear that we'd all been to Scotland for a month and more paying our respects to our maternal aunt in Ross-shire? Rather a slow time we had, but a good big shoot atoned for much," replied young Lyndon as he advanced and held out his hand cordially to the captain, while Terry followed suit.

"Yes, I think I did hear something of the sort, now you speak of it. How is Lady Lyndon? I hope very well."

"Yes; she intended to come with us to-day, but was prevented at the last moment by a caller, no less a person than your neighbour at Avondale," said young Lyndon, significantly. "I suppose you have seen him since his return from America?"

"No, indeed I have not," said the captain with a puzzled look. "Do you mean to say that he has come back, and that he has been to Glendalough and never looked at us?"

"That must be so," said Lyndon, "because I saw him with my own eyes, and spoke with him, too, before we left Ballymore."

An expression of surprise deepened into one of annoyance on the captain's face, but suddenly his daughter's look reminded him that he had not introduced his secretary.

"I beg your pardon, Fletcher," he said, quick to make amends. "This is the gentleman who is kindly assisting me with my book, Tom," he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "Mr. Robert Fletcher—Mr. Lyndon, Mr. Terence Lyndon."

Fletcher made a distinct and rather awkward bow,

which Lyndon merely acknowledged by a somewhat careless nod. At that moment a strange antagonism towards each other seemed to find birth in the hearts of these two young men, an antagonism which never faltered, but gained strength as their acquaintance deepened and the tragedy of their lives unfolded.

Tom Lyndon had the reputation of being a very free-handed, happy-go-lucky youth; but with him pride of birth was carried to an almost inconceivable height. His look and manner conveyed the distinct impression that he regarded Fletcher merely as a servant in the house of Killane, and even resented his appearance in the drawing-room. Now, though the same thought in a mitigated form had more than once passed through Aileen Byrne's own mind, her innate courtesy and womanliness made her quick to see the studied rudeness of Lyndon's manner, and her face flushed in quick resentment. She turned, therefore, to Fletcher with a smile such as she had not bestowed on him for many a day—

"I hope you had a pleasant walk to Slieve Beg; and how did you find the Wheelans? They have never been out of hot water within the memory of man."

"They certainly seemed in considerable distress to-day, Miss Byrne," answered Fletcher, relieved to be able to turn away from the proud and insolent Master of Ballymore. Then his eye fell upon the good-natured face of Terry, who had resumed his seat on the couch. He was struck by its expression, which was at once quizzical and yet full of perplexed thought.

"I tell you what I think, Aileen," he said, confidentially as Lyndon and the captain withdrew to the

further window, probably to discuss the unlooked-for arrival of the Squire of Avondale. "It's my firm opinion that we're all going to the dogs, and the sooner the better. I wanted to come over and see you dreadfully; there's going to be awful happenings at Ballymore."

"What, Terry?" asked Aileen, bending her bonnie head towards him with an expression of real sisterly affection on her face. She had no brothers of her own, and certainly felt towards Terry Lyndon as if he had been one. Of her feelings towards Tom we shall learn something later on.

Terry glanced up rather doubtfully at Fletcher, who, observing the look and feeling himself *de trop*, turned rather hastily to leave the room, but Aileen detained him.

"You needn't go, Mr. Fletcher. Terry, I assure you, you will have a sympathetic listener in Mr. Fletcher, and he is entirely at one with us. What's going to happen at Ballymore now?"

"Oh, well, you know how frightfully hard up we are. I heard mother and Tom talking this morning, and I really believe they've got their minds made up that some of the people have got to leave. They haven't paid any rent for ever so long, and we've got nothing to live on. There's something to be said from Tom's point of view, of course; but—but there, I can't bear it. I can't indeed."

Here the lad's suppressed feeling almost burst its bonds, his face coloured, and his eyes became suspiciously moist. Aileen stretched out her hand and touched his softly, and there was an indescribable expression of tenderness on her face.

"Never mind, Terry. Don't worry about it, it'll

all come right. I don't believe for a minute that Lady Lyndon or Tom either will ever evict anybody from Ballymore. Why, there never has been such a thing in Glendalough, or in the whole of Wicklow. The times are hard with us, we know, but we'll never let them come to that pass."

Terry shook his head, scarcely reassured.

"I suppose the people have been for a long time on the estate?" said Fletcher inquiringly, and his expression was one of such deep and sympathetic interest that Terry turned to him almost with relief. Aileen was sweetly sympathetic always, but then, she was only a woman, and could not enter into all his feelings, nor perhaps understand how he chafed against a condition of things which, as the younger brother totally dependent on the elder, he had no means of bettering.

"Yes, they've been always there, never anywhere else; they've more right there than we have to Ballymore. The Rooneys, Aileen, they've been in Arraghvanna for hundreds of years. I know Tom has them in his eye. He doesn't like Ted Rooney; he's too independent, Tom says, and he's going to give him his marching orders."

"But he has a bedridden mother, Terry," said Aileen, in a shocked voice. "Lady Lyndon will never permit it."

As she spoke she glanced apprehensively at Tom Lyndon, who was discussing something animatedly with her father. From the expression on the latter's face she easily gathered that he was far from being pleased.

"Mother will do anything to please Tom, Aileen. Besides, she wants to go to Dublin for the season."

The inference was obvious. Aileen sighed. At that moment the two at the further window came

forward into the room. Lyndon's face wore a somewhat sour, determined look, and his cheek was flushed, indicating some strong feeling.

"Take my advice, Tom, and don't do it," said the old man, emphatically. "Listen, Aileen, you wouldn't like to see the black eviction work begun so near as Ballymore."

"No, father," answered Aileen, clearly. "And very sure I am we shall never see it."

"I hope it won't come to evictions, Aileen," said Lyndon, and his haughty eye softened as it rested on Aileen's attractive face. "But I'm determined to be rid of the Rooneys. They're a bad lot. Ted belongs to heaven knows how many Secret Societies. He's a dangerous man to have about the place, the worst I believe, in Glendalough."

"Perhaps circumstances have made him what he is," said Fletcher, involuntarily, and immediately saw that he had made a mistake. Lyndon turned a supercilious eye on him, which said as plainly as words could have done that his remark was uncalled for and impertinent. Captain Byrne saw the insolent, flashing look, and with a natural chivalry hastened to support Fletcher.

"By Gad! he is right, Tom. I remember when Ted Rooney was as fine a lad as stepped. The heart's crushed out of him by the hopeless conditions of his life."

"But I am not to blame for that, Captain Byrne. Did I make the bad seasons or send the potato disease?" asked Lyndon, sullenly.

"No; but you exact your due to the uttermost when they can't pay it," answered the Captain, promptly. "It's our duty to share the bad times with our people, Tom, and I've always tried to do it. How long is it

since I've had any rent from the Muldoon or the Wheelans or the M'Arthys, Aileen?"

"A long time, father," answered Aileen; "but people can't pay when they have no money in their pockets."

"D'ye hear that, Tom? and Aileen hasn't had a new frock for twelve months and more. We can't go to London, because we've no money. That's how we share the bad times with our own folk."

"And what do you get for it?" asked Lyndon, with a sneer. "I could bet my hat they deny themselves nothing. All I know is, that Ted Rooney has always money to go to Dublin to attend those meetings and demonstrations which are the ruin of the country, and ought to have been put a stop to long ago by the police. He spends most of his time at home in Micky Malone's, airing his imaginary wrongs, and putting more of Micky's execrable whisky into him than he can afford to pay for."

"I am sorry to hear that," said the captain. "Now, I always thought that the Rooneys were a very sober, well-doing family. You know, Tom, continuous misfortunes take the heart clean out of a man. Any of us can stand an occasional blow, and brace ourselves for it, as it were, but continual dropping wears away stone."

"I quite agree with you," said Lyndon, quick to apply the truism to his own particular point of view, "and Rooney has worn out my patience. I am determined to get rid of him and of a few like-minded with him without delay."

"And what do you expect to gain by it?" asked the captain, quickly. "No tenants will hardly pay you any better than bad ones."

"Ah, but I don't propose to have the places empty," answered Lyndon, quickly. "My idea, which I have never ceased to din into old Moran's ears since ever I was of age to understand things, is that these small holdings are the curse of Ireland, just as the crofter system is of the Highlands of Scotland. If we conducted our estates and farmed after the English plan we'd be a sight better off, and hear less of disaffection and distress."

"But there's the people to be considered," said the captain, hotly. "You can't turn them all out without means of subsistence?"

"Oh, let them emigrate," said Lyndon, gruffly. "If they had a spark of enterprise or real independence in their whole composition the half of them would have emigrated long ago."

"You might as well say that we ought to emigrate, Tom!" exclaimed Terry, hotly, who all this time had held his tongue only by putting a great deal of restraint upon himself. "I think it's wicked and horrible the way you talk. The people have just as much right to Ballymore as we have. The captain is right, and I am sure that if you carry out what you are talking about a judgment will fall upon you, I am sure I hope it will."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Terry," observed Lyndon, coolly. "All the Lyndon soft-heartedness is centred in you, and when you come to the ignominious end I predict for you, men will say of you—'He was nobody's enemy but his own.'"

"Better that than to have my name held up to execration as yours will be if you carry out evictions at Ballymore," said Terry quickly, in no way disconcerted by his brother's scathing remarks.

"Well, well, it seems I have pulled a hornet's nest about my ears," said Lyndon, good-humouredly, "so we will change the subject, if you please. I had almost forgotten my mother's message, Aileen, which was to ask when you were coming over to Ballymore. Can you fix a day now, so that she may have the pleasure of expecting you?"

"I can come any day," answered Aileen, "but I shall take no pleasure in the thought if I am to hear any more talk like what we have had to-day."

"Come over," whispered Lyndon, as he bent over her hand at parting, "and I shall perhaps be able to convince you that I am not such an unreasonable and unrighteous tyrant as you think. You know that there is nothing in the world I am more anxious about than to stand well in your esteem."

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CHAPTER XIII

THEIR HERO



SCARCELY had the young men disappeared between the spreading trees of the avenue when another figure approached from the opposite side of the park, having come across the fields from the direction of Rathdrum—a tall, lithe, slender figure wearing a suit of rough homespun, and a slouch hat drawn well over his brows. There was nothing in his dress to betray his origin or position, yet there was a certain air of distinction in his carriage, and a mysterious charm in his pale, clear-cut, melancholy face, which was instinctively felt by all who came in contact with him, even those who gave least thought to such characteristics.

He was in time to observe the two horsemen disappear among the trees, and, recognising them, a faint smile curved for a moment his grave, mobile mouth. He paused just a moment in the friendly shadow of a giant oak tree, evidently anxious that they should get out of sight without observing him. There was no reason why he should seek to avoid them, since he had already spoken with them in the grounds of their own property; but a certain secrecy of motive

and action was habitual to him, and was exercised even in the most trivial affairs of life. This habit had invested him with a certain mystery which made perhaps the secret and indescribable fascination of his personality. The man who babbles his thoughts and intentions to the whole world will never command the respect and interest bestowed on one who firmly keeps his counsel. For we are all curious by nature, and the man or woman who provokes our curiosity without satisfying it must always figure as an important personage in our imagination.

The little party had not broken up in the drawing-room, but were still discussing the affairs of Ballymore when the new visitor was announced. Fletcher gave an involuntary start as the familiar name, announced in Denis Doolan's most important voice, fell upon his ears.

"Ah, how are you, Mr. Parnell?" said the captain, bustling forward in evident excitement. "We have just heard of you a few minutes ago from the Lyndon boys, who assured me that they had left you at Ballymore, otherwise I could not have believed it possible that you had returned."

"Yes; I came back yesterday," answered Mr. Parnell, with his slow, inscrutable smile, which deepened into one of genuine pleasure as he greeted Aileen with a touch of almost brotherly affection. "I need not ask how you are," he said, as he warmly pressed her hand. "The troublous winds of adversity make no impression on these fair cheeks. I must apologise for showing myself at Ballymore first," he said then, turning with an easy grace to the captain; "but the truth was I had a message from a kinswoman of Lady Lyndon whom I had the pleasure of meeting in

Boston, and I thought I had better deliver it at once before other matters engrossed my attention. Well, and what do you mean by playing such a trick on me in my absence?" he asked, looking straight at the captain with assumed asperity.

"It was my only chance," said the captain, laughing heartily; "but you needn't say a word to me. There sits the culprit," he said, pointing to Aileen. "She has never liked London, and she was pleased to say that the late hours were killing me. The real truth is that we were both homesick for Killane; but there, let me introduce my secretary, Mr. Robert Fletcher, who has kindly consented to bury himself in the Wicklow wilds to help me to finish the work of the century."

Parnell turned round and faced Fletcher, giving him at the same time a keen, incisive glance from his mysterious, inscrutable eyes, then, with a winning grace of manner and charm of expression, he extended his hand and expressed his pleasure at the meeting. The difference between this greeting and the one accorded to him by the young Squire of Ballymore was so marked that it was in the minds of all present.

"You have taken a heavy responsibility, Mr. Fletcher," he said, with a somewhat quizzical glance at the captain; "but I am so much disappointed and concerned over his retirement from the active duties of the House of Commons that I am afraid I cannot take the interest I ought in the 'work of the century.'"

"Now, Mr. Parnell," said Aileen, in her most sprightly manner, "that is too bad of you, after the trouble I took to concoct that long and eloquent letter to you, in which I set forth all our reasons for quitting public life."

"Our reasons," repeated the captain, with a slight laugh; "observe that it was a company concern. Faith, and I believe you might do worse than get a few lady members like Aileen."

"Oh, it's coming, I don't doubt," said Parnell, entering for the moment into the jest. "We are within approachable distance of the twentieth century, in which our women folk, they say, are to have their full innings; but I shall not live to see it. The next decade will be the end of a good many of us."

"But surely things are looking brighter," said Aileen, eagerly, "and your mission to America has been crowned with success?"

"So far as money is concerned, yes, we have done well," he answered, readily; "but it's a weary business, and I have often longed for the solitude of Avondale. Nothing on earth will move me without its gates for the next two months at least."

"I hardly think you will be allowed such a long respite," said the captain, drily. "You have been too much missed for that. Did Lady Lyndon say anything to you about Tom's intention to evict at Ballymore?"

"No, she did not," said Parnell, in surprise. "What's the matter there? I always thought they were fairly comfortable."

"They might be if they had not such big ideas," said the captain, quickly. "Lady Lyndon will have her season in Dublin, and in London, too, and Tom is not a whit behind her in extravagance. These times will not permit it, as you know; but they do not feel inclined to share the hard times with their people, which, I maintain, is every Irish landlord's duty at present."

"If all were of your mind, captain, the Irish question would be solved," said Parnell. "Can I speak to you elsewhere for a few minutes?"

"Certainly, certainly," and they left the room together.

"What do you think of Mr. Parnell?" asked Aileen, the moment the door was closed, and turning with all her old cordial frankness to her father's secretary. She was still smarting under the insult he had suffered at Lyndon's hands. She was very sensitive where the feelings of others were concerned, and too thoroughly a gentlewoman ever to hurt them willingly."

"I have hardly yet recovered from my surprise at meeting him face to face," answered Fletcher, almost confusedly, for truth to tell the meeting had made a great impression on him.

"But surely my father must have told you that we knew him very well, Avondale being so near."

"Yes, he has mentioned it. But I suppose I did not realise it until to-day. He is a man of immense power."

"That is your opinion, is it?" asked Aileen, with interest. "You are quite right; but he is also one of the most winning and lovable of men. That, I think, is hardly so well understood."

"No; I have always heard him spoken of as quite unapproachable," said Fletcher; "but I confess that he did not seem so to-day. I can never forget the kindness of his greeting to me."

"Coming, as it did, after the other greeting," she said, with a quick flush. "But you must not think any more about that, Mr. Fletcher. Mr. Lyndon has had an English education, which I cannot help thinking

is a frightful mistake. English prejudice and misunderstanding are what we have to contend against in our own country ; that is what makes it so difficult for us to get justice. When you have seen a little more of Mr. Parnell, as you are certain to do here—because he is so much at home with us—you will quickly discover that one of his outstanding characteristics is his intense, deep-rooted, and dominant hatred of the English."

"Perhaps not without cause," observed Fletcher, his mind reverting to the horrors of the rebellion, of which he had so often read.

"The traditions of his house have done everything to foster that hatred. Of course you know that Wicklow was the scene of some of the worst atrocities of 1798, and some of the old servants who were alive in Mr. Parnell's boyhood have told him some of the dreadful stories of that time. He has never forgotten them, and I am sure they have coloured all his public as well as his private life."

"But he is held in respect by all parties in London. I have heard Mr. Bremner say so," said Fletcher, with the most intense interest.

"Yes ; because he is a gentleman, and a born leader of men. We have many good men and true among our own members ; but perhaps they do not always command respect."

Fletcher smiled slightly, thinking of some of the scenes he had read of in the daily press ; but in a moment the smile passed to a graver look. "They are desperate men, I verily believe. Will you tell me, Miss Byrne, how far it is from here to Glendalough."

"To Glendalough ? Why, of course, it is seven miles. I feel quite guilty to think you have been

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already six weeks here and have not yet visited the shrine of St. Kevin. We must arrange to drive over at an early day."

She rose as she spoke, and said she must inquire whether their guest would not remain to dinner. Fletcher, strangely impressed, and unable to banish the pale, sphinx-like face of the great statesman from his mind, went out of the house, and strolled across the park to the edge of the fields, from which he could just catch a glimpse of Avondale. It was a house similar in appearance to Killane, although built upon a smaller scale. It had, however, a neglected look; shabby blinds adorned the windows, and there were no curtains or other evidences of a woman's presence and care. He had often seen the house before, but now it seemed invested by a peculiar interest, and as he pictured the solitary man dwelling alone in the sombre, melancholy house, it almost seemed as if he obtained a clue to his nature. He leaned his arm on the loosely-built, stone dyke, which was the only boundary between the two estates, and he was so engrossed by his thoughts that he was quite unconscious of an approaching footstep, which, however, gave forth no sound on the soft, green turf. At length, however, he became inwardly conscious of the proximity of a human being, and, turning quickly, he saw the object of his thoughts within a few yards of him. His face slightly reddened, and, raising his hat respectfully, he was about to pass on, when Mr. Parnell stopped directly in front of him, holding him by that strange, intense, inscrutable gaze which was one of the sources of his power over men.

"So you have come to assist my old friend in his literary venture," he said, with an odd smile. "Well,

you might very well be less pleasantly employed. May I ask where you hail from?"

"I came from Scotland, sir," answered Fletcher, without a moment's hesitation, yielding to the personal influence which this strange man never failed to exercise over those with whom he spoke face to face.

"You are happy in your birthright," he observed, shortly. "I daresay you have been long enough here to feel cause for gratitude that you are not Irish born."

Fletcher hesitated a moment, moved by a strange impulse to offer a full confidence, and yet not certain how it would be received.

"You look as if you were capable of some independent thought," observed Parnell, still keeping his eyes keenly on the young man's changing face. "I will give you a piece of advice. Whatever your sympathies or inclinations, keep them well in hand. For the time being this is your adopted country, in which you ought to take some interest. Do you belong to a political family?"

"No, sir; I was reared a working man among working men. Since you are good enough to express a kindly interest in me, I may tell you that I do not know in which country my actual birthright is to be found. So far as sympathy—I had almost said love—is concerned, I think I might very well be Irish born."

Parnell leaned his arm on the stone wall, and regarded him with a singularly earnest and impressive look.

"You are young, and unless youth has some enthusiasm, where is it to be found? You remind me of some one I have seen. I spoke of it to Captain Byrne, but he could not help me. He is much pleased

with you in every way, and considers himself fortunate in having secured your services. You look like one who would consider it no hardship to take duty for a watchword."

"It is all I have to depend upon, sir," answered Fletcher, without a moment's hesitation. "If I rise at all, it must be by my own exertions."

The great statesman elevated his straight brows in some slight amusement.

"To rise! Then, you are ambitious? It seems long since the word lost its charm for me. But, tell me now, in what particular direction does your ambition soar?"

"I can hardly put it into words," Fletcher answered. "Only I feel strange promptings within me I shall not always be poor and obscure; some day I shall taste the sweets of power."

"Sweeter in anticipation than in possession," said Parnell, as he raised himself from his leaning posture. "It is pleasant to hear you, to be assured once more that ambition, hope, possibility are still youth's words to conjure with. Well, I wish you well. If I can help you at any time I shall be glad to do so. We are on the eve of a general election that will offer many an unlooked-for opportunity. Whatever the future may hold for you, you will lose nothing by such conscientious performance of duty as now marks your conduct. Perhaps we shall meet again. Good evening."

So saying he leaped the low wall and crossed the green fields of his own domain, walking slowly, and with his eyes bent thoughtfully on the ground. Fletcher stood still by the wall, and watched him out of sight, then slowly retraced his steps to Killane.



CHAPTER XIV

THE HEART OF THINGS



THE following week Captain Byrne and his daughter went for a brief visit to Dublin, and Fletcher was left, not without some work it is true, but still with considerable leisure on his hands. One fine October afternoon, immediately after his early dinner, he set out on foot to Glendalough. During the days that had passed since the visit of the Lyndons to Killane, Fletcher had found himself dwelling much in thought upon the affairs of Ballymore, and the desire to behold the place grew upon him until it would no longer be set aside. He was a very good pedestrian, and accomplished the distance in the shortest possible time. A more delightful walk could scarcely be imagined; the day was one of the loveliest of the late autumn, the glory of the heather was not altogether dimmed, and the trees of that richly-wooded county wore all their gorgeous October dress, the dogberries blazed rich and red on every wayside bank, the blackberries hung in purple richness in every hedgerow, and there was that indescribable and exquisite stillness in the air peculiar to the Indian summer, when it

seems as if nature were waiting, breathless, for the first blast of the coming winter.

The longer Fletcher remained in Ireland the more his heart seemed knit to it. It was not the mere sympathetic interest of one susceptible to inspiring natural scenery and to the welfare of a sister country, but rather the inward and passionate devotion of a patriot. There was now no doubt in Fletcher's mind but that he was Irish born. Often he gazed at the little amulet which his adopted mother had given him the night before he left Spitalhaugh. The sight of the green shamrock enamelled upon its golden surface seemed to place the matter beyond a doubt. Such a trinket he had never seen in Scotland, and one day he had observed, with much inward tumult, a little heart of precisely the same shape and design attached to a bracelet worn by Miss Byrne on her left arm; but he never breathed his own imaginings to a living soul—they belonged to the secret and inner recesses of his being, to be revealed, perhaps, when fulness of time should justify it.

He met very few pedestrians on the way, because after making sure of his direction he cut into a by-path across the fields, and so reduced the distance by more than a mile. He had often heard of the beauty of Glendalough, yet it came upon him with something of surprise, the gleaming waters of the lake nestling in the basin of the hills reflecting the clear, vivid blue of the sky, surrounded by its seven mysterious churches sacred to the shrine of the saint. He had no idea in which direction to turn for Ballymore, but held on his way to the hamlet, where, doubtless, they could give him every information. In these earlier days the hotel accommodation of Glenda-

lough was not on so pretentious a scale as now. Fletcher entered a modest, old-fashioned hostelry at the mouth of the glen, and, finding a very pleasant-spoken girl at the bar, asked the way to Ballymore. She came courteously to the door, and pointed him in a direction which would lead him out of the glen.

"That is Ballymore, sor," she said, fixing her bright eyes keenly on his face. "It'll be my Lady Lyndon, or perhaps the young squoire, ye are seeking?"

"No; I merely wish to have a look at the place," he answered, not hesitating to satisfy her curiosity.

"It's a purty place enough, sor; but toimes is bad at Ballymore, as they are wid us all, and loikely to be worse, they say. Since the young squoire came into his own he's loike to become wan o' thim hard-hearted landlords that will have their rint at any price; but maybe you're a friend of Mr. Lyndon's, begging your pardon, sor?"

"Oh no, I am no friend of his. I am merely interested a little in the history or the place. I suppose the tenants are very poor? Do you happen to know anything of a family called Rooney?"

"Why, yes, sor, I know Ted and his mother—pore craitur, she's been bed-rid these five years and more!—and Kitty Rooney; his sister. We were at school together in Glendalough; she was here seeing me last night. May I make bould to ask whether it's a friend of the Rooneys ye are?"

Fletcher smiled at her insatiable curiosity, for which, however, her winning black eyes seemed to mutely ask pardon.

"No; I never set eyes on a Rooney among them," he answered. "Only I heard that they were likely

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to get into trouble over their rent. I was interested in the case, that was all."

"There has been talk about evictions in Ballymore, sor," said the girl, her smiling eyes becoming suddenly clouded. "It will be the first that's been in Glendalough, and some say it will be the last," she added, significantly. "It's a great disappointment, sor, that the young squire should have come back from England with such a hard heart; but, ach me, shure it's England that is the ruin av us all, asking your pardon, sir, if it be that you are an English gentleman; but there, you don't have the look av it."

"No, I am not English," Fletcher answered, reassuringly, as he slipped a coin into her hand. "Good-day to you; straight across the hill to Ballymore, isn't it?"

"Straight as the crow flies, sor. The smoke from the castle will guide you. Maybe you'll give us a call again as ye go by."

She folded her hands above her snowy apron and dropped him a little coquettish curtsey, nor did she fail to watch him as he made his way manfully up the steep side of the hill which was crowned by the castle of the Lyndons. As he approached it he observed that it was more pretentious in size and architecture than any of the family houses he had yet seen in Ireland. It was built in the baronial style, and its turret windows commanded a magnificent prospect of the whole valley of Glendalough. He only approached the house near enough to obtain a clear view of it, and then, taking a detour, he skirted the outside of the park, and presently came to an open plateau from which the country stretched in undulating reaches, descending gradually to the

neighbouring valley. At that particular season of the year the landscape presented rather a desolate appearance, the sparse harvest was already ingathered, and the potatoes (almost a complete failure, the few which had come up being almost without exception destroyed by disease) made dark and ugly patches on an otherwise rich and beautiful scene. Standing on a ridge at the edge of the plateau, Fletcher took in the whole sweep of the Ballymore estate, and observed that it was evidently apportioned out in very small holdings. It seemed as if upon every few acres there was a little thatched homestead, with its surrounding cluster of tumble-down outbuildings. Not far from him an old man was slowly and laboriously digging at his potato furrows, and Rob observed that as he shook each plant he also shook his head. He watched him for some little time, and then, thinking doubtless he could obtain the information he desired from him, he leaped the boundary wall and walked up the furrow to his side.

"Good-day to you," he said, cheerily, and at the unaccustomed sound the old man gave a great start.

"Ach, shure, it's a fright ye'll be afther givin' me, sor, axin' yer pardin; but we're not accustomed to the loikes av you. Good-day to yez all the same."

"I only want to know if you can direct me to Mrs. Rooney's house?"

"Shure, an' that I can. There it be, sor, roight afore yer face. Ye can't miss it. D'ye see where the black donkey is? That's the beginning av his fields. Ye'll know the house by its tasty windows that Kitty is always after keepin' swate an' clean. Might I make bould to ax whether ye are any kin to Widder Rooney, dacent sowl that she is, an' sorely tried?"

"No ; I am no kin. I suppose times are pretty hard with you here as well as in other parts ?"

The old man leaned upon his spade, and drew his hand across his wrinkled brow.

"Yes, sor, the toimes is cruel hard for poor ould Ireland, and, so far as I can see, they're loikely to be harder still. I think, sor, ye have not an Irish tongue in your head."

"No, I am not Irish," answered Fletcher. "At least, not that I am aware of. Well, I must not keep you from your work, but will step on to Widow Rooney's."

When he set out on his walk Fletcher had not entertained the slightest intention of entering the house of the Rooneys, or of making any inquiries concerning the state of the Ballymore tenants. He had simply yielded to a curiosity to behold with his own eyes the place in which, for some unexplained reason, he took a keen interest. It did not take him many minutes to accomplish the short distance to the Rooney homestead, about which there appeared to be no sign of life, except a faint curl of blue smoke from one end of the cottage, and a somewhat weatherbeaten old black donkey peacefully browsing at the edge of one of the fields. Although the buildings were all in a ruinous condition, even the thatch of the cottage itself scarcely weatherproof, the place was marked by many evidences of careful tenancy. There were no unsightly heaps of manure or other untidiness to be seen, the little courtyard round which the farm buildings formed a square was cleanly swept, while the cottage itself bore out the testimony of the old peasant, the tiny window panes being polished till they shone again, and the

neat muslin curtains as white as the driven snow. The door was shut, and after a moment's hesitation Fletcher gave a slight knock. Immediately a feeble voice bade him enter, which he did. The light was comparatively dim in the little low-ceiled kitchen, and it was just a moment before the young man's eyes grew sufficiently accustomed to the gloom to discern the solitary occupant. An old, old woman with white hair, her thin face worn by long suffering, sat in an enormous highbacked chair close to the hearth. She was not able to rise, but leaned forward, and betrayed the liveliest interest at the sight of the stranger.

"Good-day, sor," said she, fixing him with her keen black eyes, whose brilliancy years of suffering had scarcely dimmed. "It'll be Ted you're after; but he's gone to Wicklow this afternoon, though why he has gone I'm shure I couldn't tell you. Kitty isn't at home either. She's gone to take some needlework to the ladies at Castle Beg, and she'll not be home afore six."

"That's all right," said Fletcher, cheerily, wondering much at his own presumption in intruding without any real justification upon this humble home. "May I sit down and rest? I've walked a long distance, and your hills are by no means to be despised."

"I didn't think much av them, sor, when I was your age," she answered, with a slight smile, "and what would I not give to set fut on the heather agin. May I make bould to ax how far ye have come?"

"Yes; I have come from Killane, the other side of Rathdrum. I suppose you know the place?"

"Fine do I know it, sor," she answered. "If ever

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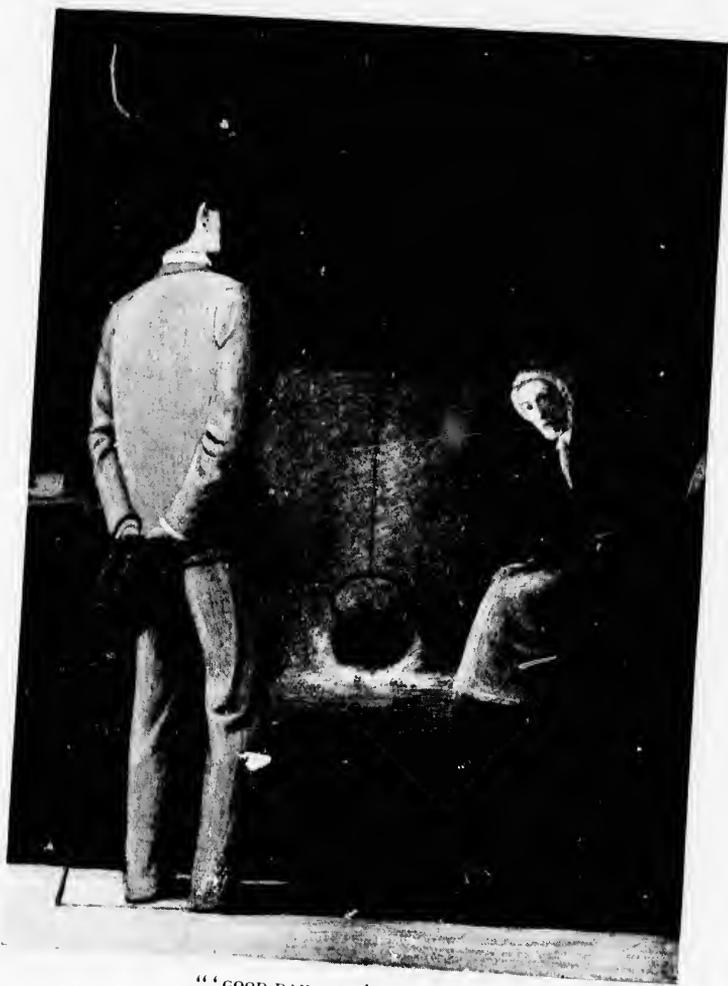
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there was an angel upon this earth it was the Lady of Killane—God rest her sowl—and Miss Aileen doesn't fa' far short. She never comes to Ballymore but she looks in to speak a kind word to poor Bidy Rooney. I hope she is well?"

"Yes; she is quite well. She is in Dublin this week with the captain."

"Ach, well, there is not much pleasure in the country just now, sor, and they're best off that can lave it; but the tenants on Killane dwell at their own firesides in peace—not like the poor folk here, who never know what's going to happen to them next. We have even been threatened with eviction here; but they'll never take me alive out of this house, where I've lived all my married days, and where all the childer have been born. I don't moind tellin' you, for you look kind and will not betray us, it's about this very matter that Ted has gone to Wicklow, to consult a very dacent man o' business that will advise him for the best. The rint day is next wake, and they do say that a' thim as doesn't pay up, arrears and all, are to be put out of their homes. If there be in any truth in that we'll see what we shall see on Ballymore."



CHAPTER XV

LADY LYNDON



LETCHER remained talking some time to Widow Rooney, and when he left two facts were impressed upon his mind—that the lot of the Ballymore tenants was harder than most, because the side of the hill upon which all the small holdings were situated was bleak and barren, exposed to the bitter north wind, which sometimes nipped the tender shoots in their infancy; even all the generous accompaniments of good farming could not make it a lucrative business; as it was, hard times and generations of poor tillage had reduced the hungry acres to their feeblest capacity. The other fact borne in upon him was the extraordinary bitterness evidently cherished by the whole tenantry against the present Squire of Ballymore. He did not know why the matter interested him so keenly. It was not the first time he had heard of distressed tenants and hard-hearted landlords; it was indeed the one theme which seemed to loom large before everybody's vision; yet the affairs of Ballymore and their probable issue haunted him strangely, and he retraced his steps across the fields to the side of the home park, his mind

entirely occupied. He was suddenly arrested by the sharp report of a gun, and the next moment a youth, whom he had no difficulty in recognising as the younger son of Ballymore, appeared out of the thicket with the weapon over his shoulder.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Terry Lyndon called out, recognising him in a moment. "There might have been an accident. I assure you I never saw you, and I was only taking a stray shot at a bird on the wing."

"It's all right," said Fletcher, but at the same time he felt somewhat embarrassed, knowing it would be difficult to satisfactorily explain his trespass on the lands of Ballymore; but there was nothing suspicious in the happy-go-lucky nature of Terry Lyndon, and he leaned over the fence, his bright face wearing quite an interested look.

"Had you any message from the captain, or were you going to call?" he asked, lightly. "My mother is at home. I am sure she would be pleased to see you."

"Oh no; I had no such intention. I was merely taking a walk over in this direction, having heard so much of the beauties of Glendalough; I ought to apologise for trespassing here."

"Oh, pray don't," said Terry; "there's no apology needed that I know of. It's a free country—or at least it ought to be," he added, with a momentary shade of bitterness. "If you've walked all the way from Killane you'll be glad of a cup of tea, and it's just tea-time. There's nobody at home but my mother. My brother is in Dublin to-day. I suppose the captain and Miss Byrne have not come back yet?"

"No; I believe they are expected to-morrow."

"I thought so. Well, are you coming? You may

as well have a look at the old place. I think it's the show place of the whole glen, the house, I mean. The Lord knows there's little enough else we can be proud of."

Fletcher hesitated only a moment. It was not his nature to intrude himself anywhere, but his strange interest in the family and affairs of the Lyndons seemed too strong to be set aside.

"You are very kind," he said. "I should like to see the outside of the house at least. I have heard what a fine place it is."

"All right; come on," said the lad, cordially. "I suppose you've been looking at our holdings, a sorry spectacle, aren't they? Rent day falls next week. I expect we'll have lively times of it. Tom is determined that all who don't pay shall go. I think I'll put a bullet through myself before the day comes. It would be the easiest way out of the difficulty; anyhow, I've got nothing to look forward to. I have no profession, and the estate is burdened to that extent that I can't expect a penny from it. I can't think why I was ever born."

"But can't you strike out a path for yourself?" asked Fletcher, looking with a sudden warm interest into the lad's fine open face, which was scarcely marred by the expression of bitterness upon it.

"It's easy to say strike out a path; why, I haven't even had a university training—everything's been spent on Tom, and a nice mess he's making of it. I don't know what makes me speak out so frankly to you, but I liked you that day at Killane—somehow you seemed to understand things. What do you suppose I could do now? Look at it squarely in the face. I am nearly eighteen years of age. I have a

fair smattering of a good many things—I am a first-rate shot, and I can land a salmon the time another chap's thinking about it; but that'll not get me a living, even an Irish one," he said, with an odd twinkle in his eye. The merry strain in the boy would out, even in the moments of his keenest depression, and the natural bent of his mind was to make the best of things, and even to see their comical side first.

"Haven't you any relatives who can give you a leg up?" asked Fletcher.

"We haven't many relatives. I don't know whether to regard it in the light of a blessing or the reverse; and, unfortunately we're at loggerheads with the few we have. I have an uncle down in Donegal whom I sometimes think of writing to, but he has never been to Ballymore since my father married my mother."

"Was it a second marriage?" asked Fletcher, with consuming interest.

"Why, yes; I thought that the Byrnes would have told you the whole history long ago. The whole Lyndon connection turned their back on Ballymore from that day. I don't know why, but there it is. Isn't it a prime spot?" he broke off, suddenly, as they came within sight of the house. "The odd thing about it is that though I am always grumbling about my fate I do not honestly believe that I could exist away from Ballymore."

His face as he spoke was suffused with an indescribable tenderness which seemed to accentuate his words. Fletcher was silent a moment, thinking of the irony of fate which had made this fine, high-spirited, noble-natured boy the younger son, and given all the power into the hands of his unworthy elder brother.

There was no lack of luxury, no sign of hard times,

about the house of Ballymore. The contrast between it and the plain, simple dwelling of the Byrnes was very marked. As Fletcher followed his young guide (his own heart beating tumultuously) up the noble staircase to the drawing-room, he saw upon every hand evidences of that extravagant expenditure for which the Lyndons had long earned a reputation. There was nothing shabby, second-rate, or simple. It seemed nothing less but gorgeous to his unaccustomed eyes, and as he thought of the Widow Rooney sitting by her desolate hearth, consumed with anxiety and fear as to the coming events, a hot feeling of indignation, almost of shame, filled his soul. He seemed to realise for the first time how great is the power of human selfishness to add to the misery of the world. Terry, who in that brief interview in the Killane drawing-room had felt strangely drawn towards the new inmate of the captain's household, and who was himself too unsophisticated a child of nature to take into consideration any question of social degrees, ushered his new friend into his mother's drawing-room without the slightest misgiving, certain, at least, she would not shame the laws of hospitality, but would give him a courteous, if not kindly, welcome.

"Mother, this is Mr. Fletcher," he called out cheerily, the moment they were within the door of the lofty, imposing apartment where Lady Lyndon spent most of her time.

"Don't make such a noise over it, Terry," a languid voice answered. "And who, may I inquire, is Mr. Fletcher?"

"Why, Captain Byrne's secretary! You know we met him the other day, the last day we were at Killane," said Terry in rapid explanation.

Lady Lyndon rose from her sofa. She had heard some account of that call from her other son, who had laid great stress upon the cool, presumptuous assurance of the captain's private secretary. It was not to be expected that she would be pleased to see such an individual in the drawing-room of Ballymore. Terry, with his usual good-natured lack of thought, had made another of his numerous mistakes. Lady Lyndon would not, however, so far forget herself as to be rude to any one for whom Terry claimed her hospitality. She therefore greeted Fletcher with the very stiffest of bows, and bade him find a chair. She was not a handsome or attractive-looking person, although she had a commanding figure, and a certain imperiousness of manner which proclaimed her high birth. She was an earl's daughter, and never allowed those about her to forget it. Poor Tom Lyndon, her husband, ought to have died convinced of the fact that she had conferred upon him an inestimable favour in consenting to share his simple fortunes, although many a time he doubted it.

"To what are we indebted for the pleasure of this visit?" she asked, quite sweetly, and yet with a certain directness which left Fletcher no escape. He was totally unused to the ways of great ladies. The simple unpretentiousness of the life at Killane under the regime of Aileen Byrne had not prepared him for the cool and haughty insolence with such a woman as Lady Lyndon is capable of showing towards those whom she considers her inferiors.

"Oh, hang it, mother," said Terry, as he passed close to her sofa to ring for tea, "don't put on that air. Jump on me after if you like. It's all my fault. I only met him out on the hills, and asked him

to come in. He never would have come in on his own account."

In a moment, however, Fletcher's quick temper rose. He had not yet acquired any of the veneer with which polite society smooths its ruffled feelings. He felt that he was unwelcome, and his natural impulse was to get out of the house as quickly as possible. His strong, honest face was deeply flushed as he rose to his feet.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Lyndon. I have no right here. I ought not to have come. I have the honour to bid you good afternoon," he said, stiffly, and, in spite of Terry's dismayed exclamation, he walked straight out of the room. Lady Lyndon looked much annoyed. She was not accustomed to such cavalier treatment; and, in a person of Fletcher's standing, resented it most deeply. She turned sharply on Terry as the door closed.

"How dare you bring such a boor into my presence, Terry? When will you learn what is fitting and proper respect to pay to your mother——"

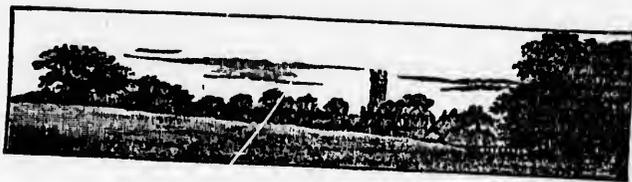
"Oh, mother, I thought I was doing no harm. I thought at least you'd be civil to the chap for hospitality's sake, though he is only Captain Byrne's secretary. I must go after him and apologise."

So saying Terry flung himself hotly and angrily out of the house. Lady Lyndon, angry still, walked to one of the windows, and watched them cross the park together. Fletcher's profile was towards her, and it seemed to haunt her with a vague irritating sense of familiarity. The very set of his figure, the square, broad shoulders, the long swinging gait, the well-balanced head, all struck her with a strange feeling.

"Now, where have I seen some one like him?" she

said, musingly. "And why does his very expression irritate me, I wonder?" she said, musingly, as she turned away from the window when the trees hid them from sight. As she did so her eye fell full on the portrait of her husband, painted in the early days of their marriage, when he had been gay, happy-go-lucky, well-beloved Tom Lyndon, Master of the Wicklow Hounds. She gave a little shiver then, and covered her face with her hands—

"I'm getting into my dotage—oh, yes, my dotage—the worries of my life are getting the better of me outright, and making me a feeble old woman before my time."



CHAPTER XVI

TERRY'S OPINION.



"**FELT** I must come after you," said Terry,¹ as he linked his arm through Fletcher's just outside the hall door. "I am sorry you took what my mother said so seriously. It's just her way. She doesn't mean anything by it. I hope you won't think any more about it."

It was impossible to resist the winning manner of the boy. The momentary gloom on Fletcher's face vanished under its influence like mist before the sun.

"Pray don't say any more about it," he said, quickly. "I ought not to have intruded on Lady Lyndon; but your invitation so frankly given tempted me."

"Oh, I know it was all my fault," said Terry, ruefully. "These are the sort of scrapes I am perpetually getting myself and other people into; but let's say no more about it. Are you going to walk back to Killane?"

"Yes; there's no other way of getting back, is there? Besides, I like the walk—it is a lovely evening."

"Yes, it is; but beginning to get dark already. I do hate the autumn so, it always has a depressing

effect on my spirits. I don't know what's the matter with me just now, but I feel as if things were going all wrong, as if we were on the brink of some calamity almost. Do you ever have imaginings like that?"

"Sometimes. I daresay you have been thinking too much about the probable evictions," suggested Fletcher.

"Well, I believe there's something in that. I can't believe that Tom will really carry his threats into execution. If he does, something dreadful will happen, as sure as I am talking to you now. Can the people be expected to submit calmly to being kicked out of their homes? It isn't likely. Would you or I do it? That's how we have got to look at it. I say, have you seen anything of Parnell yet?" he broke off suddenly.

"Only that day he came to Killane. He called immediately after you had left."

"Queer chap, isn't he?" said the boy, musingly.

"Nobody likes him, though most people are afraid of him, I think, because they don't understand him; he keeps his own counsel, and never gives himself away to anybody. If you can do that you get a kind of power over people, don't you think? It's a certain fact I'll never distinguish myself in that way. I am always giving myself away in the most guileless manner."

Fletcher laughed. There was something fresh and delightful about the boy which it was impossible to resist.

"I believe that the quality you speak of is certainly one of the secrets of his power over men. Do you think he will be the next leader of the Irish party?"

"Why, of course, the moment old Butt comes a cropper. Have you any doubt of it?"

"Not much, certainly," said Fletcher, rather astonished to find that Terry, in spite of his harum-scarum way, had some grasp of the situation.

"I only wish I had a chance of going into public life, that's what I'd like; and the first measure I'd go in for would be a Bill to compel Irish landlords to live on their own estates and take an interest in their people. It's all very well to put all the blame on the peasants, and call them lazy good-for-nothings, that's easily done; but let any of them that talk in that strain come and try for a year or two to get a living out of an Irish bog, he'll change his tune. That's what I am always telling Tom; but, although there's been such a lot of money spent on his education, he can't see an inch before him, or he won't—perhaps that's the more correct way to put it. It's horrid, I tell you, to stand by helpless and see so many wrongs requiring to be redressed. Now, these Rooneys—that's their place over there," he went on, pointing backward to the homestead with which Fletcher had already made acquaintance—"they've been in Arraghvanna over a hundred and fifty years (longer than we have been in Ballymore in a direct line), yet Tom speaks as calmly of turning them out as he would of putting a horse in a new stall. That can't be right, you know, Fletcher. Why, they've as much right to Arraghvanna as we have. Ted's a queer, rough diamond, but there isn't a lazy bone in his body. He toils there late and early; but he talks a good deal of course, and he has a hot temper. Perhaps he spends rather more of his time than he ought down in Mickey Malone's tavern, 'The Harp,' as you come into Glendalough. I don't believe he drinks much, though. I think it's Mickey's daughter, Nora,

that's the attraction. The thing is—he won't cringe to Tom, but holds his head as high as Tom himself, and says quite frankly he won't leave."

"I suppose he's in your brother's debt considerably," said Fletcher.

"Yes, there's a good deal of arrears. I only wish I had the money. I know what I'd do with it. But I know the Rooneys have sold every mortal thing they could do without out of their house, and Kitty—that's Ted's sister—sits up half the night doing lace and fine needlework to help. A fellow can't get away from these things, you know, and people like that ought not to be harried and badgered as they are."

"I quite agree with you," said Fletcher, understanding the matter more fully than he had yet done. "But I mustn't take you too far. I know my way, thank you, and can easily find it."

"Well, I won't come any farther. I shall have to go back and see my mother," said Terry, pausing as they came within sight of the lodge gates. "I hope we'll meet again soon. Tell Miss Byrne I am coming over to Killane on Sunday. I'm not very happy here any day of the week, but Sunday is more than flesh and blood can stand."

Again they shook hands warmly, and Fletcher, his ruffled feelings considerably soothed by the subtle influence of Terry's wholesome and winning personality, went on his way yet more keenly interested in the affairs of the family with whose destinies his own was to be so closely intertwined.

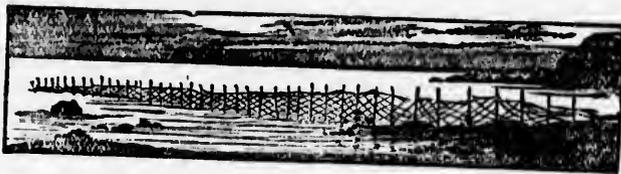
The gateway of Ballymore was one of the sights of Glendalough. Its imposing magnificence was now entirely out of keeping with the changed fortunes of the house. The gates were of the finest wrought iron,

of quaint and exquisite workmanship, and had been brought from Florence by the late squire's father, who was a man of fine taste and discernment. He had caused huge granite pillars to be hewn to support them, these were surmounted by the escutcheon of the house—a mailed hand with uplifted sword. A lodge guarded the entrance on either side, and the ivy which grows so luxuriantly in that kindly soil had clothed every available surface with its evergreen beauty, making a picture not easily surpassed. Fletcher paused in the roadway, and took a long, close survey of that imposing entrance; its artistic beauty was pleasing to the eye, and seemed to witness to the importance and standing of the Lyndons. Much food for thought had Fletcher received that day. He marvelled more and more at the hold which the very name of Lyndon had taken upon his imagination.

Dusk was now rapidly falling, and, bethinking himself suddenly that he had a long way before him, he walked rapidly on, and presently (having an eye for locality which seldom erred) he plunged into the dark recesses of a wood which he believed would cut a considerable distance off the road. Already the leaves lay thickly under foot, and the trees were becoming rapidly thinned. They stood before him on either side like ghostly sentinels, with their leafless arms stretched out almost appealingly to the autumnal sky. He followed the beaten path for some distance, until he suddenly emerged unexpectedly into a small green glade, so shut in by thick trees on either side that its existence often came as a surprise to those unfamiliar with the wood. The trunks of several fallen trees lay across the soft green turf in a sheltered

corner, and upon this natural seat Fletcher was startled to behold two persons sitting, one of whom he immediately recognised as the Squire of Ballymore. His companion was a girl, evidently one of the peasant class, since she wore no hat or bonnet, but only the red hood of her cloak, which, however, made an exquisitely becoming frame to one of the sweetest faces Fletcher had ever seen. He had little more than a glance at her, yet it was sufficient to imprint those delicate, clearly-cut features on his memory. The charm of her face was further deepened by the large, clear grey eyes, which had in their depths that strange mingling of pathos and arch merriment which is the characteristic of Irish eyes wherever found. Their attitude and bearing towards each other left no doubt on Fletcher's mind that they were lovers. The girl saw him first, and sprang affrighted to her feet. Then Lyndon, whose hands and face had been softened into undoubted tenderness as he urged something upon his companion, looked round in angry haste, and when he saw and recognised the intruder a deep scowl instantly brought out all that was worst in his face.

The path which Fletcher had been pursuing crossed the glade, and continued its way through the wood on the other side. He only glanced at them once, and then kept steadily on, and though he heard Lyndon address him by name he took no notice, but, quickening his steps, immediately disappeared within the shadow of the trees.



CHAPTER XVII

TEMPTED



SMALL, mean nature is always suspicious. Lyndon immediately jumped to the conclusion that Fletcher had been dogging his steps—though, if he had taken a moment to reflect, he would have seen the absurdity of such a thought. Why a man who had only seen him once should take sufficient interest in him to watch his movements was a question he did not trouble to ask himself. He had a very hot temper; and his face reddened as he shook his fist after the retreating figure—a proceeding which filled Kitty Rooney with amusement more than anything else.

“Why, whoiver is the gintleman, Misther Tom, and what has he done to you at all, at all?”

“He’s watching me, confound him! He has followed us here. What right has he on my land? I’ll speak to Captain Byrne to-morrow, and have it put a stop to.”

“What has the captain got to do with it?” asked Kitty, thinking her lover looked rather ridiculous in a passion for which there seemed to be but small foundation.

“That fellow’s his secretary—a common fellow, but

with all the cheek of his kind. Now, I wonder what he was doing here?"

"Afther takin' a walk, I should say, by the look av him," said Kitty, archly, and at the sight of her piquant look the anger died out of Lyndon's face. She was so very pretty and bewitching it was impossible to think of disagreeable things in her presence.

"You may be right, Kitty; but I doubt it. He has the making of a sneak and a traitor in him, and I'm convinced he was watching us. Now he'll go to Killane, and give an exaggerated report of what he has seen. Oh, confound him, I could wring his neck for him!"

Kitty was shrewd enough to read between the lines.

"It's Miss Aileen you're afraid av," she said, demurely. "I believe it wouldn't do for her to know about our bit av sweetheartin', for they say she's to be my Lady Lyndon."

"Oh, that's all nonsense, and you know it, Kitty," protested Lyndon, hotly. "But you know how such a story could be misrepresented. Then, they might speak of it to my mother."

"Sure an' they moight," said Kitty, innocently. "Nothing aisier in the world."

"You witch! Why do you tantalise me so? Won't you believe I care for nobody but you, and that for that very reason I would not let my mother suspect it for the world just yet? It would put an end to everything. You know how hard the times are, and how many worries we have. I must steer my course very warily till the worst has blown over."

"I suppose so," said Kitty, and an odd note of weariness stole into her voice. She was drawing a

comparison—thinking of the sad fireside where her mother sat alone, the last days of her suffering life embittered by a thousand fears ; of her brother Ted, high-souled, honest, hard-working, kept down by the sordid conditions of his life. Lyndon did not like that look. It betrayed emotions which would not speed his wooing ; and, though he had loved many a time during the last three years, somehow this appeared to be the most serious episode of them all. Yet he knew that, so far as any real or honourable issue was concerned, it was hopeless, since his mother expected and desired him to make a rich marriage, and that even Aileen Byrne would not be regarded as suitable from her particular point of view.

“What are you thinking, Kitty? Some harm against me, I could swear.”

“No ; I was only thinking av the hard toimes,” she answered, and her upper lip curled with a quite involuntary sarcasm.

“Well, you mustn't. Think rather of the good times that are coming, when we shall be all in all to each other,” he said, coaxingly, as he tried to draw her to his side. But she drew back, shaking her head, and her face wore quite a serious look.

“I didn't come out this evenin' to hear them sort av things, Misther Tom, but to ax what's to be done about the rint. Ted got his paper from Misther Moran—notice to quit at Martinmas. It came yesterday. He's gone to Wicklow to-day to see what Misther Gaffney, the lawyer, my father's cousin, has to say about it.”

Lyndon winced. He was not aware that his bailiff had already served the notices, or he would have before now felt the awkwardness of his position towards Kitty. There was certainly something incongruous in making

love to a girl whose family were under notice of eviction. Yet he had been in her company for half an hour, and she had never mentioned it until now. He could not but marvel at her restraint.

"Oh, well, you must know that it's a mere matter of form. Ted had to get his with the rest," he said, rather confusedly. "Of course, you know I wouldn't think of putting the screw on *your* people—that is, if you—if you care about it at all."

"Care about it!" she repeated, looking at him with a steady, slow wonder in her large, soft eyes. "Shure, an' isn't it a matter of loife or death? Put it to yourself. How would you like it if you didn't know whether you would be allowed to sleep another night in Ballymore? An' yet you ask if I care! I was down in Monaghan when the evictions began. I'll never forget it as long as I live."

"I shouldn't like it, of course," he answered, impatiently. "But there's something to be said on my side, too, Kitty. What am I to live on? And you know a lot of them are lazy spendthrifts, nothing less. But come, don't let's talk of such disagreeable things. We didn't meet for that purpose, did we now?"

She stepped behind the felled trunks, and leaning her elbows on the topmost one, looked across the barrier at him steadfastly.

"I don't know what you came here for," she said, simply. "I came to ax you for God's sake to spare the people a little longer, until another season at least. Perhaps we'll have a better time then, an' the disease won't come."

"But I haven't a cent to go on with, Kitty, unless I'm to shut up or sell Ballymore. I must have tenants that'll pay their rents——"

"Oh, it can't be as bad as that. Besides, you are only wan," said Kitty, shrewdly. "Look at Captain Byrne. There's no talk av evictions in Killane, an' he's not so rich as you——"

"I wouldn't be so sure of that, Kitty. The captain has pleaded poverty all his days, and it pays. Nobody has ever expected much of him. It's a different matter with me. I'm at my wits' end."

"Sell some of the horses, Misther Tom, an' send away half the servants," said Kitty, swiftly, and, though her presumption irritated him, he admired her courage.

"It's easy for you to talk, Kitty. You don't understand."

"Then you won't stop execution?" she said, and he saw the red pale from the softly rounded cheeks as she drew her hood about her head with a nervous hand.

"I don't see how I can, but I'll try if you like to persuade Moran to leave Arraghvanna alone; though, mind you, I don't think Ted deserves it. He has been most trying and insolent to me for months back. It's only for your sake I would spare him."

Kitty smiled a strange smile which had neither sweetness nor mirth in it.

"If he could see us now," she said, quietly, "he would spare naither av us; av that I'm dead shure."

"I daresay he'd be angry. What, you're not going like that, Kitty? I won't let you. I'd do anything in the world for you if only you'll let me see a sweet light and not an angry one in these pretty eyes!"

"I've tould ye what I want, Misther Tom—only a little mercy for us all, an' ye will not listen. So I will be biddin' ye good-evenin'; but I will not say God-speed."

She turned as if to hasten away, but Lyndon stood before her and took her by the arm.

"You won't leave me like that, Kitty, with such a cruel light in your eyes? There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, if only you'll give me something in return; but you always send me empty away."

"I've tould ye before, Mистер Tom; there can be naught but a jest between us. I've done wrong to meet you so often, and I've felt so guilty at confession, I've not dared to look Father O'Hagan in the face. But, God knows, I've had only wan thought in comin' out to meet you like this—that I might be able to soften your heart, and get the evictions stopped."

"Well, you have softened it," Lyndon cried, overcome by her beauty, which had never appeared so rare as then, softened by the pensive sadness of her soul. "I will do anything you ask me if only I can win your love."

"What is that in comparison with the gratitude and prayers of all the people of Ballymore?" she asked, quickly. "That is what ye will earn if ye will give them a little more time."

"Well, supposing I do what you say, and tell Moran to stay all proceedings, what then?" he asked, still holding her hand, while his eyes, full of passionate entreaty, were bent upon her face.

"Why, then, I'll be grateful, too, Mистер Tom, and remember you in my prayers," she said, softly.

"That's all very well as far as it goes," he answered, as he let her hand drop somewhat impatiently; "but it isn't enough. Listen to me, Kitty—you've got such a hold of me that I can't give you up. I am quite ready to make a bargain with you if you like. I'll promise to do everything you want for the people

of Ballymore if you give yourself to me. There, now ; nothing could be fairer than that."

The hot colour flushed her cheek, and she looked at him with a strange, deep-searching glance.

"I'm only a poor girl," she said, slowly, "but I belong to dacent folk who would rather see me dead than going wrong. I'd rather be dead myself. So if that's your terms, Mither Tom, I thank you kindly, and I'll be going. Ballymore and the evictions must just take their chance."

There was all the pride of a young queen in her gesture as she drew her skirts aside as if fearing to touch him. Lyndon had never seen her in this mood, which seemed to his disordered vision the most bewitching of them all.

"I don't mean any wrong to you, you foolish girl," he said, hastily. "Of course I mean an honourable love. I'll marry you, Kitty, by God I will, in spite of them all !"

She paused a moment against the leafless tree, once more arrested by his words, which presented a totally unexpected possibility to her mind.

"Marry me !" she exclaimed, mockingly, "after what ye have just said about Lady Lyndon finding out that we have met ? Ye are trying to decaive me, Mither Tom ; but my eyes are wide open, and I know that such a thing could never be."

"Yes, it could, Kitty !" he cried, quickly, becoming more eager as Kitty's opposition waxed stronger. "It's not the first time a gentleman has married one of his dependents."

"But I'm not your dependent, Mither Tom, as it happens," she said, with a proud uplifting of her head. "I am Kitty Rooney, of Arraghvanna, as good a

family as the Lyndons, though maybe not so rich."

"Why, Kitty, you have the pride of a princess, and I like to see it in you," he said, admiringly. "What a splendid Lady of Ballymore you would make! If only you had the dress, and all the accompaniments, you would put them all in the shade. Listen to me now, Kitty, seriously. Of course you must understand that if we were to seek to marry openly and in the ordinary way just now, when matters are so strained at home, and everything at sixes and sevens, nothing but disaster would ensue. My mother would move heaven and earth to prevent it; and, even if she did not succeed, she would make us all miserable, and we should never know a moment's peace. Now, on the other hand, if you would consent to a private marriage, I can easily arrange it so that nobody would be any the wiser. I would take you clean away from Glendalough, of course, and afterwards, when all this fuss about the rents and everything had died down, I should tell my mother quietly, and everything would be smooth sailing after that, because you know, after the thing was really done, she is sensible enough to feel that it would be no use saying a single word."

Kitty shook her head. The first faint beams of the rising moon falling on her face showed it white, sad, but very resolute.

"I couldn't do it, Mither Tom, and I won't—that's more. I've heard of poor, foolish girls being decaived like that; but it'll never be Kitty Rooney. If it's marriage you mane, fair and square—in the Church of St. Kevin an' Father O'Hagan to tie the knot—then I thank you kindly; but nothing of the other sort for me. My mother has always taught me that everything

about marriage should be open and above board, so I'll be bidding ye good-night."

"Well, then, Kitty, if that's your answer, you understand that next week you may have to clear out of Arraghvanna," he said, significantly. "I am quite willing to give you every proof of my sincerity you ask for except a public marriage just now. That would be to ruin us all."

Kitty winced as the picture of the possible eviction rose before her mind, accentuated by the memory of the scene she had witnessed on her uncle's farm at Monaghan. Lyndon, watching her changing face with hawk-like eyes, detected a momentary wavering, and was quick to take advantage of it.

"Now, listen, Kitty," he said, coaxingly. "It's quite a fair exchange. You become my wife, and for your dear sake I forego my immediate claims, not on Arraghvanna alone, but on all the people of Ballymore. It's a mighty sacrifice, although you don't appreciate it, and the Lord only knows how I am going to struggle through. All the sacrifice I ask from you is to go into obscurity for a little while, and to say nothing to anybody until the whole trouble blows by; then you will be the Mistress of Ballymore."

Now, Kitty Rooney, although a sensible and right-minded girl, was not devoid of feminine vanity or ambition, and the picture somewhat dazzled her. To be Lady of Ballymore, and to have such a fine young gentleman for a husband, would be a triumph indeed, although the prudent part of her nature whispered to her that the risks of the undertaking as they were represented by Lyndon were very great.

"I don't like the secrecy," she said. "I think we'd better part, Mither Tom, and say no more about it.

It isn't safe. I daresay if we have to quit Arraghvanna we'll find shelter elsewhere' although I know it will kill my mother."

"Well, if all that happens, Kitty, remember that you have only yourself to blame, and that you could have prevented it if you'd liked. I'll tell you what, you can take two days to think it over if you like, and meet me here at the same time on Saturday evening."

"It doesn't want any thinking over; but I'll meet you if you like on Saturday night," said Kitty. "Good-evening." And without waiting to hear another word she darted from him, and was quickly lost in the shadow of the trees. As she reached the road she heard the heavy tread of an approaching foot, and before she could get out of the way she came face to face with Father O'Hagan, the much-beloved parish priest of Glendalough. He was an elderly man of stout figure, with a pleasant, kindly face, and a heart big enough to hold all the woes of his widely-scattered parish.

"Good-evening, my daughter; you are late afoot," he said cheerily, but without suspicion, because he regarded Kitty Rooney as one of the pearls of his flock; a devoted daughter whom he often held up as an example to others.

"Yes, I have been to Castle Beg with some needlework, father," she said, quietly, "and I am just hurrying home. Good-evening to you."

"Good-evening. Tell your mother I hoped to have seen her to-day, but I had so many sick at the north end of the glen I could not manage it. To-morrow I will come without fail."

"Very well, father, thank you. Good-evening,"

she repeated, and she hurried on, glad to be released without further questioning. A few yards further along the road Father O'Hagan met the Squire of Ballymore, and stopped to speak with him for a few minutes. It was not until after he had parted from him that the coincidence struck him with a vague sense of uneasiness.

"Now, I hope the young rascal is not playing fast and loose with Kitty Rooney. He's just the living image of 'is grandfather, who made more trouble of that kind in the parish than any other man within its bounds."



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CHAPTER XVIII

FROM OUT THE PAST



It was about seven o'clock before Fletcher reached Killane, and he was then considerably surprised to learn that the captain and Miss Byrne had returned from Dublin. He supposed that they had come unexpectedly, since he had had no intimation of it from any of the servants. He looked into the study, and finding no one there he sat down to wait, and began to overlook the work he had done in the morning; but he found it difficult to concentrate his thoughts, although the chapter he had written dealing with some of the most stirring scenes of the rebellion had interested him beyond measure in the morning. The events of the afternoon, however, had turned his thoughts into a different groove, and he was specially troubled by what he had seen in the woods of Ballymore. He felt more and more certain that Lyndon was a scoundrel at heart, and the desire to warn Kitty Rooney, and to get her if possible withdrawn from his influence, pursued him with a persistency which amazed himself. He had been in the study for about an hour when Denis Doolan knocked at the door.

"If you please, sor, Miss Byrne would be glad if you would join her at supper. She is waiting now."

"Oh, I beg her pardon, Denis. Hasn't the captain come back, too?"

"Yes, sor; but he has gone over to Avondale, and I don't think he will be back till late," answered Doolan. "He asked for you when he came in; but I don't think it was anything particular."

"All right, Denis," said Fletcher, and hastily locking up the desk he proceeded to the dining-room. It was only three days since Aileen had left Killane, and it seemed to Fletcher as he entered that the whole room was filled with her presence. He did not pause to analyse or understand the quiet glow of pleasure which took possession of him as he saw her once more in her accustomed place. Although he had not admitted it to himself, the place had seemed empty without her, yet not a hint of these inner feelings was betrayed on his impassive face as he bade her good-evening, and hoped she had had a pleasant visit.

"Oh yes, thank you; not perhaps quite so pleasant as usual. There are too many rumours of war in the air," she said, with a slight smile, not untouched by sadness. "Papa has gone over to see Mr. Parnell, I think, on rather important business. He told us not to wait, so will you please take his place?"

Fletcher seated himself at the bottom of the table without a word, and proceeded to carve the bird which Doolan set before him. In these few weeks Fletcher, apparently without effort, had made marvellous strides in deportment (if I may use that now almost obsolete word); that is to say, he could bear himself without awkwardness in a lady's presence, and even attend to all the little courtesies of the tab' without

making any flagrant mistakes. A quiet, unobtrusive person has always the advantage over one inclined to make a noise in the world, and, though ignorant, does not draw attention to his shortcomings.

Aileen felt pleased to see him again. She thought as she poured out the coffee that his face was a singularly pleasant one—the face of a man to be trusted. She felt towards him as one might feel towards a tried friend.

"I think Dublin is in a state of great unrest," she said, casually. "We were at the castle more than once, and even there I think there is a vague uneasiness felt. I could not help thinking, as I have often thought before, what a mistake that little mockery of a court is. It does not win anybody's respect. The only persons who really take any interest in it are those struggling for social recognition. I felt out of tune with the whole life and the place."

Fletcher was much struck by the shrewd observation betrayed by her remarks.

"I quite agree with you," he said, readily. "I have often thought myself that, unless there could be a real court, presided over by a Prince of the blood, there ought to be none at all. It is an insult to the Irish people. I can't imagine such a state of affairs to exist in Edinburgh, for instance. I am sure the Scottish people would never stand it, and in Ireland it is a mistake."

"Everything seems to be calculated to gall and irritate us," said Aileen, with an indescribable touch of bitterness, for indeed the shadows too evidently closing in upon her unhappy country lay heavily upon her sensitive soul. "I don't know what will be the

end of it, but fear the worst. Denis told us you had gone to Glendalough. I hope you enjoyed the walk."

"I did. It is a most enchanting spot."

"I think so, one of the most beautiful I have ever seen," she answered, readily. "Did you go as far as Ballymore?"

"Yes, I was in the house itself."

"Indeed," she said, with a quick glance of surprise, "So you called? You would not see Mr. Lyndon, because he was in Dublin this morning."

"I did not see him in the house, but I met him out of doors," said Fletcher. "I had a long talk with Mr. Terence. He is a fine boy!"

"Ah, yes. It would be a happy thing for Ballymore if Terry had been born the elder brother. But there, we have no control over these things. Have you much to do this evening? I brought some new songs from Dublin, and I can let you hear them if you like."

Fletcher flushed with pleasure, and was for the moment at a loss what to say in reply. He did not always understand the moods of Aileen Byrne—one day she would speak so little that she seemed scarcely cognisant of his existence, while another she would be the frank, cordial, delightful woman she had been in the first hour of their acquaintance.

"Did you see Lady Lyndon at Ballymore?" asked Aileen when they had been in the drawing-room some time, and Fletcher had listened to the new songs. At the question his face lost for a moment its pleasant and peaceful look

"Yes, I saw her, Miss Byrne; but I thought that she resented my appearance, so I left immediately."

"But tell me how you happened to be in the house at all?" said Aileen, interestedly. "Did you call of your own accord?"

"No; I should not have dreamed of doing such a thing. I met young Mr. Lyndon in the grounds, and he invited me."

"You were, of course, very near to the house. It is a beautiful place, is it not?"

"Most beautiful. Yes, I was trespassing. I had been to the cottage of the Rooneys."

"Had you indeed?" asked Aileen, with interest. "Did you see poor Widow Rooney? She is such a favourite of mine I never go to Glendalough without calling to see her."

"She told me so, and spoke with the greatest affection of you."

"And Kitty, too. Is she not a sweet creature? I really think she's the prettiest girl I have ever seen."

"She was not at home," answered Fletcher, deeming it prudent not to mention as yet at least what he had seen in the woods of Ballymore. Sometimes he had fancied that Miss Byrne was somewhat personally interested in the young Squire of Ballymore, and until he was assured on that point it would be better not to make any trouble. "I came away thinking that if the Rooneys were really turned out it would be a very hard and unjust case."

"I quite agree with you, but I don't really for a moment believe that Mr. Lyndon is serious. If any thing of the sort really should happen I would blame Mr. Moran, his agent, much more than Mr. Lyndon himself. Did the widow seem to be at all apprehensive?"

"Very much so," answered Fletcher. "She told

me that her son had gone to Wicklow to consult a lawyer in his own interests."

"Well, I am glad to hear that, because Ted, as a rule, is a law to himself," said Aileen, with much satisfaction. "And now, come, tell me what Lady Lyndon said to you? You must not think me too curious; but I know that she can be very disagreeable when she likes, though why she should have been disagreeable to you I don't exactly see."

"She struck me as being a very proud and haughty woman," said Fletcher, "and, of course, in her eyes I should rank little above the position of a servant."

"Oh, not quite so bad as that," said Aileen deprecatingly. "Of course, she is very proud, you know; she is a daughter of Lord Bantry's. They have a great domain in the south, but are very poor. I don't suppose she would have married Sir Tom at all, only that she believed him to be much richer than he actually was. He was a most charming man, and his death was an irreparable loss to Glendalough. We shall never cease to mourn him. Had he been alive, or had it been his first wife who was left a widow, matters would have been very different in Ballymore. She was a very dear friend of my mother's. I have a photograph of her here I can let you see." She unlocked a bureau in the corner and took from it an old shabby leather portfolio which she seemed to handle with tenderness. "There are some of my mother's treasures here," she explained, "some of the things she prized beyond anything. They are just as she left them. The first Lady Lyndon was her dearest friend. They were girls at school together, and were unspeakably happy that the first years of their married life were spent so near each other. Poor Lady Lyndon

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had only three years' happiness, however, and she died when her child was born. There she is, is it not a sweet face?"

Fletcher took the old faded daguerreotype in his hand with an almost reverential touch. It represented a young, sweet, girlish face, with round, soft cheeks and gentle, lovely eyes. It was a happy face—a smile seemed to lurk about the corners of the mobile mouth. Fletcher felt fascinated by it, and could scarcely take his eyes off it. There was nothing familiar in the features, and yet it seemed to him as if he must have seen it in his dreams.

"She is not so handsome as the present Lady Lyndon, you will easily see that. She was a different type of woman," observed Aileen. "Although Sir Tom married in what was thought to be most indecent haste, he never forgot his first wife or ceased to mourn her. No one really ever knew how he came to marry again so quickly. It happened after a visit he made to Lord Bantry's in the autumn after his wife died; but he never was the same man after it."

"The child died, I suppose?" said Fletcher, still keeping his eyes fixed on the likeness in his hand.

"No, he didn't—that was the strange part of it. He disappeared, and his nurse with him, about six months after the present Lady Lyndon came to Ballymore. They disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them, and have never been heard of from that day to this. There are a good many who did not hold Lady Lyndon guiltless in that strange affair, though nothing could be proved. She asserted at the time, and has all along appeared to believe, that they were drowned in the lake at Glendalough; but it was dragged from end to end, and it is certain that

if they had been there they would have been recovered. It was whispered pretty freely that Lady Lyndon knew more about their disappearance than she owned, and that she was jealous over the interests of her own child, who was born a few months after."

"It is a strange story. It sounds like a romance from a book rather than a page from ordinary life," said Fletcher, musingly. "Was no machinery set on foot to try and discover the lost heir?"

"Oh yes; everything was done. Sir Tom was nearly distracted, for he was devoted to the child. Every one knew that Lady Lyndon was jealous of his love for him. Anyhow, that is the story. I wonder no one has told it to you before; but it happened so long ago that it has been forgotten in Wicklow, but poor Sir Tom never forgot it. It saddened his whole life, and it certainly did not add to his happiness with his wife. Do you know that Mr. Lyndon's real name is not Tom at all, but Brian, only his father never would call him Brian because it was the other son's name, and is one of the hereditary family names?"

"Then the name of the child that was lost was Brian Lyndon?" said Fletcher, in the same low, eager, interested tone.

"Yes; Brian Lyndon," she answered, and the harmoniously-sounding name fell with a regretful sweetness from her lips. "I have always thought it such a pity he did not live, for the son of so sweet and dear a woman as this," she said, touching the photograph with a tender hand "would have made a splendid Squire of Ballymore."

"And was no trace of him ever found? It seems extraordinary that such a thing could happen in modern days."

"No trace was ever found. I said they disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them, and indeed that best describes what happened. After a time people began to give credence to Lady Lyndon's theory that they had been drowned in the lake, and gradually, of course, the whole affair died a natural death, except in the heart of poor Sir Tom."



CHAPTER XIX

WITHOUT HOPE



WHEN Kitty Rooney got back to Arraghvanna she saw through the uncurtained window before she stepped across the threshold that Ted had returned from Wicklow, and was sitting at the table at his supper. Her mother was still seated in her high chair, and, noting the pale and wearied look on her face, Kitty keenly reproached herself for her delay; it was now more than an hour past her usual bed-time. She gathered from the gloom on Ted's face that things had not gone well with him in Wicklow. He was a fine, manly-looking fellow, with an honest, somewhat determined-looking face, which betrayed more strength of character than it was advisable to possess in those days under the stern rule of Ballymore. The cares and troubles of their lot seemed to close in upon Kitty like pitiless stone walls. As she put her hand upon the handle of the door a strange, dead feeling seemed to clutch at her heart, and something told her that there was no escape—that upon her the future must depend.

"I am very sorry to be so late, mother," she said as she stepped within the kitchen door. "The ladies

were out when I got to the castle, and I thought it would be as well to wait until they came in to save me another journey, so I had tea with Mrs. Malone in the housekeeper's room, and waited. I see you are very tired ; but I'll soon get you to bed."

"I was beginning to think that something had happened to yez, darlint," said the widow, with affectionate solicitude. Somehow it was a relief to her eyes to rest upon the face of Kitty, which, in spite of their many cares, never wore that look of settled gloom which was seldom absent from her brother's face.

"How did you get on at Wicklow, Ted?" asked Kitty, pausing a moment. "What did Uncle Hugh say?"

"Nothing, Kitty, that would do you any good to hear," he answered gruffly ; and, seeing that he was completely out of temper, Kitty left him to himself while she busied herself in getting her mother to bed. When that was accomplished she came back to clear the table without making a single remark.

"Gaffney says we're helpless, Kitty," repeated Ted at length, looking up from his gloomy contemplation of the fire. "Come and sit down and let's talk it over, although all the talking in the world will niver mend matters, so far as I can see."

"All right, Ted, just a moment till I put these things away, then we can talk in peace." Her quick hands soon cleared the remains of the supper from the little table, which she set in its place against the wall, and then took a chair opposite to her brother. She was very tired. It was a long walk to Castle Beg, and the excitement and strain of what she had gone through in the Ballymore woods was now bringing its inevitable reaction.

"Gaffney says we have no power," said Ted, suddenly throwing himself back in his chair and looking his sister full in the face. "He says the land is Lyndon's, and that if his tenants don't pay he's within his roights to evict them, and get somebody that will pay. Now, what's to be done?"

"What is to be done?" repeated Kitty, faintly, for she saw a most terrible determination in Ted's face, and knew too well what was passing in his mind.

"There are two things to be done, Kitty," he said, steadily. "First, we can clare out afore the sheriff comes; then second, we can bide in our houses and say we won't go out, and foight for our roights to the death."

"But of what use would it be at all, at all?" asked Kitty, mournfully. "You know how it was in Monaghan when I was there. The soldiers came: and what chance would a few farmers have against them? It was the hopelessness of the whole thing that made uncle go out quietly, because he did not want to see any bloodshed."

"Murder, you mane; call things be their roight names," said Ted, fiercely. "I have got my moind made up on wan point, that is, if the boys are agreed. If we do have to quit we'll give whoever comes to put us out a peppery welcome. We'll make it hot for them, and wan day, as certain shure as I am speaking to yez, as sure as there is a God above us, I'll have my revenge on Lyndon of Ballymore."

"Oh, hush Ted!" said Kitty, with a shudder. "Remember who has said—'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.'"

"He has forgotten us, Kitty," said Ted, sullenly. "I've tried to do my duty all these years. I've lived

a decent, self-respectin' life, and I've kept myself clear even av the drink, and what better am I this day than any wan av the boys that have taken their fill of enjoyment? Not a whit. I am tired of it. It's ten years an' more since I had a bit av heartenin', and a man can't go on for ever."

"I think things will improve," said Kitty, desperately. "Somehow I feel sure it won't come to the worst."

"You've got no grounds for your assurance, Kitty," he answered, promptly. "As shure as we're sittin' here now, if the rents are not paid up to the uttermost farden next wake, we'll be put out of house and home. It's the poor ould mother I'm thinkin' on, Kitty; it'll be her death."

"Oh, it will," cried Kitty, in a great burst of sorrow. "I see it in her face every day; she'll never recover it."

"It's these things that have sint the iron into me sowl," said Ted. "There's to be a meeting at 'The Harp' to-morrow evening to consider what's to be done, so there's no use saying much about it till then, though I could almost swear that there's hardly a boy among them will submit tamely to be turned out like brute beasts to the fields. If there's to be evictions on Ballymore they'll be lively evictions, Kitty Rooney; something that'll be a world's wonder."

"Oh, Ted, ye'll gain nothin' by that, but only the gaol, maybe. If we must leave Arraghvanna, then we must! We'd best go quietly. Down in Wicklow, or even in Dublin, you could get somethin' to do—drivin' a car, if nothin' else——"

"I'll niver droive a car in Dublin or Wicklow strates, Kitty Rooney. If I can't droive me own nag, I'll let thim alone," answered Ted, sullenly. "I saw Pat Finnigan as I came by 'The Harp,' an' he sez

that if only we put a bould front on it he thinks we moight bate the evicters back."

"They'd only come back again the next day with a lot more soldiers or police, Ted," said Kitty, shrewdly, "and we'd be worse off than before. I wonder you would pay any attention to what Pat Finnigan would say. Everybody knows he's a lazy, drunken good-for-nothing; and, to be honest with you, Ted, I don't think anybody could blame the squoire if he put Pat out of Rathlow. I am shure I'd have sent him about his business long ago."

"But though Pat Finnigan takes a drop, Kitty, that doesn't affect the question at all, at all. It's justice we're saiking, and justice we mane to have; and Pat ses we could get help from Wexford, and he knows some chaps that would come out from Dublin if we'd but say the word."

"Oh, I know," said Kitty, with a shiver. "I suppose he manes thim Invincibles that he's always talkin' about, a lot av cut-throats I call thim, an' nothing else."

"It doesn't matter what name they call themselves by, Kitty, as long as they are brave boys an' not afraid of a redcoat or a peeler's baton. Faith, an' I'd rather loike it meself. We could make a regular Siege of Derry up here, and it would give some of us that have a lot of old scores in our books a chance to settle them."

These things troubled Kitty greatly. She could not sleep that night. She knew that the very worst side of her brother's nature was roused, and she greatly deplored the influence Pat Finnigan had exercised over him. Now, while there were many decent, hard-working men such as Ted Rooney on the Ballymore

estate, there were others like Pat Finnigan—lazy, drunken malcontents—who did nothing but stir up strife, and try to incite their neighbours to rebellion. No man could have blamed any landlord who tried to rid his estate of such dangerous loafers. Kitty had long been accustomed to listen to the empty ravings of Pat and those like-minded with him. They were devoid of any sense of justice or right, and were really Anarchists of the worst type, to whom sedition and rebellion against all law and order were the very breath of life.

Next morning, instead of going to work as usual on the land, Ted dressed himself and went off immediately after breakfast, not saying what were his intentions. Kitty had no manner of doubt but that he had gone to organise the meeting to be held in the evening, and as she went about her household duties her heart was heavy within her with the sense of approaching evil. Her mother was very ill that day—too ill either to rise or to express much interest in the probable course of events. Kitty felt almost relieved that it was so, because she felt that it would be difficult to parry the old woman's questionings, and had she known what was in the wind she would have worked herself up into a dangerous state of excitement.

Ted did not come in for dinner, and after she had made everything straight and tidy for the afternoon, and saw that her mother had fallen into a sound sleep, she slipped out of the cottage, locking the door and putting the key in her pocket. She wished to pay a little visit on her own account, which would not take her away from Arraghvanna longer than half an hour.

Father O'Hagan lived alone with his old house-

keeper in a small unpretentious house within a stone's throw of the church in which he had ministered so long. Kitty knew the father dined at two o'clock, and as it was then only half-past the hour she hoped to find him at home. She was not disappointed.

"I houp your poor mother is no worse, Kitty," said the housekeeper as she admitted her.

"She is not much better, Bridget," answered Kitty, "but it's not that I want to see his riverence about. Just tell him, if ye plase, that I won't keep him a minute, and that it's important."

"That I will, darlint," said Bridget obligingly, and left Kitty standing in the little hall while she took the message to her master.

"Plase to walk in," she said when she came back, and Kitty entered the dining-room, already feeling a sense of relief at the thought that she would soon shift the responsibility to abler shoulders than her own. Father O'Hagan had just finished his frugal meal, and was sitting back in his high oak chair enjoying the half-hour's rest which was the only indulgence he permitted himself in his long and busy day.

"Well, my daughter, what can I do for you?" he said kindly. "I hope your mother does not require my services."

"Oh no, thank you, father, I left her asleep. It's something else I want to spake to ye about. Do ye really think that the squoire will carry out the evictions next wake?"

The kindly face of Father O'Hagan instantly became clouded. "I am afraid there can be no doubt about it. I have done my best, my child; but Mr. Lyndon will not listen to me, and her ladyship is still more inexorable. What have you to say about it?"



CHAPTER XX

IN COUNCIL



KITTY hesitated only a moment, scarcely knowing how to unburden her soul of the load which lay upon it.

"The boys are all in a terrible way, Father. Ted was at Wicklow yesterday seeing my uncle, Hugh Gaffney, about it."

"Yes, I heard that," answered Father O'Hagan, "and it pleased me to think that Ted had taken such a sensible course. All I have heard about Mr. Hugh Gaffney has convinced me that he would only advise Ted for his good. Well, what was the result?"

"Oh, Uncle Hugh said there was nothing Ted could do except go out quietly, if the squoire really carried out his threat. He knows that it is hard and unjust, but he said what is quite true, your riverence, that nothing is to be gained by going against the law. It would only end in Ted being thrown into goal perhaps, then we should be worse off than we are now, for we should have nobody to work for us."

"That's the whole matter in a nutshell, Kitty," said the priest, sadly. "These matters lie heavily on my soul, and I will go yet again to Ballymore and try if I

can touch their hearts to the distress of the people. I think myself it is a cruel shame that you, who have been in Arraghvanna so long, should even be threatened with such a thing. But there, these are hard and bitter times in which we live, and many things happen which we cannot understand."

"But I came to tell you something more, father," said Kitty, quickly. "Ted is in a terrible way, as I told you; but he is not so bad as some of them, and there's to be a meeting to-night in 'The Harp.' When I tell you that Pat Finnigan is at the bottom of it, and that he has been talking and talking—oh, you know how he talks, your riverence—he has even said that he could bring men from Wexford and from Dublin to help to fight the evicters. Oh, if only this meeting could be stopped I am shure it would be better for us all."

At this information Father O'Hagan betrayed the liveliest interest.

"I am very much obliged to you for coming and telling me this, Kitty. I was afraid of something of the sort. I saw Pat this morning drive off in his car just after breakfast, and I thought there was too much alertness and energy about him altogether. I said to myself that he was up to no good; but, though I have been about the glen all the morning, I have never heard a hint or a whisper of such a thing. Have you any idea what hour the meeting is to be held?"

"No; only I know it's to be to-night at 'The Harp,' unless they've changed their plans. Could you go, father? I am shure that if you were there you would keep Pat and those loike him from leading away dacent boys. As I said to Ted last night, he'll gain nothing by joining himself to Pat Finnigan and his lot."

"Faith, you are right there, Kitty," said Father O'Hagan, filled with admiration for her courage and good sense. "I had no idea you could take such a broad and sensible view of things. I shall certainly be there, and I am very much obliged to you for giving me the information."

"Thank your riverence kindly," said Kitty, "then I'll be going home. I left my mother asleep, and I'll feel aisier in my mind now that ye know what's in the wind."

"In the interval I shall go up to Ballymore, and see what can be done," said the priest, and, giving the anxious girl his blessing, allowed her to depart.

"The Harp of Erin," the little hostelry under the management of Michael Malone and his daughter Nora, was then the only place of entertainment in Glendalough. It stood snugly and invitingly at the bend of the road which gave entrance to the glen, and was the favourite stopping-place of the many travellers whom business or pleasure brought to that enchanting spot. Michael, or Mickey Malone, as he was familiarly called, had conducted "The Harp of Erin" with great shrewdness and circumspection for over forty years. Nora was his only child, and in these hard times would easily come out as the richest heiress in Glendalough. Whether she had any idea of the real amount of her father's bank account no one knew—certainly she did not give herself any airs, but was apparently content to stand in the bar of "The Harp of Erin" from morning to night dispensing her father's wares to the loungers or the thirsty travellers, to whom "The Harp" was a veritable shrine of rest and refreshment.

Nora was a great favourite, and, though she had a pleasant word or a smile for all, knew how to respect

herself, and never allowed a rude or light word to be spoken in her presence.

About eight o'clock, after the moon had gone down, any one watching with an object in view might have seen a good many men arriving singly, or in twos and threes, at "The Harp" and slinking through the wicket at the side make for the meeting-room in the garden. Father O'Hagan, who had had an evening engagement in a neighbouring parish, did not get back to Glendalough until nearly nine o'clock. It was his habit to walk everywhere, not even keeping a pony for his own use. Every penny of his modest stipend, except what was necessary to supply his simple needs, was spent upon the poor in his parish, and the number of the necessitous seemed to increase year by year. On this night, however, Father O'Hagan had borrowed a pony from his brother in the neighbouring parish, and rode with considerable speed back to Glendalough. Outside "The Harp" he alighted, and giving the pony in charge of one of the lads who were always to be found hanging about the door of the tavern he bade him take it up to the manse stable for the night; then he stepped into the bar where Nora, serene, smiling, unconscious as usual, was sitting industriously at her knitting.

"Oh, your riverence," she said, dropping him a little curtsey, "we don't often see you of an evening. Perhaps you have come a long way. Can I get you something?"

"No, nothing, thank you, Nora. I am come on a different errand. There's a meeting behind to-night, isn't there?" he asked, bluntly. Nora flushed guiltily, and for the moment scarcely knew how to answer, because she had strict injunctions from her father to

say nothing in the bar of what was going on in the room behind.

"I can't deny there is a meeting, your riverence," she replied, hesitatingly. "I didn't think any one knew av it."

"I got some information. I am going in, Nora. I suppose the door won't be locked."

"Oh, I don't think so, your riverence, because they haven't all turned up yet," she answered, seeing there was no use keeping back anything. "Father was here just this minute axing if Mr. M'Carthy from Wicklow had not arrived."

Father O'Hagan shook his head as he passed through the back shop into the garden behind. M'Carthy was a Wicklow man, one of the best known and most troublesome of the agitators. Wherever there was any revolt against law and order, or any shady work to be done, there M'Carthy was to be found.

The windows of the room were judiciously darkened, and the door was closely shut. Father O'Hagan, however, did not hesitate a moment, or even knock at the door. He opened it, however, with a soft hand, and finding himself in the little hall upon which the inner door was also shut, he paused just a moment as some one was talking in rather a loud voice. In a moment he recognised it as belonging to Pat Finnigan, and it interested him to listen for a moment to that worthy's presentation of the case. Pat had a very long tongue, which he seldom wagged in any good cause. His persuasive eloquence was indeed a weapon which Father O'Hagan had had to endure more than once.

"It just amounts to this, boys," he was saying. "Are we slaves, to be ground to powder under the

heel av Lyndon av Ballymore, or are we freemen, who have as good a roight to live as him? That's the quistion we have to settle to-night—at least wan av thim. Another is whether we're goin' to sit down calmly and let our homes be pulled about our ears, as they're doin' ivery day in Monaghan an' Kerry an' Connemara? By the Howly Virgin, 'No' say I!"

"No! no!" his audience cried in chorus, and there was a unanimous waving of stout blackthorn sticks in the air. Father O'Hagan lost the next few words, for that moment the outer door opened, and a man whom he recognised as Dan M'Carthy, from Wicklow, pushed his way in. The priest gave him a civil good-evening, noting at the same time the look of surprised chagrin on his face; then, pushing open the inner door, they entered together.

A cheer was raised at sight of M'Carthy, for whom they were anxiously waiting. They did not, however, look so well pleased to see Father O'Hagan, though they had too much respect for him to show it.

Pat Finnigan, who stood on the little platform, and was getting warmed to his subject, so that his shock of red hair was pushed in all directions, looked distinctly crestfallen at sight of the priest, and stopped short in his harangue.

"Go on, Patrick," said Father O'Hagan, good-naturedly. "When I heard of this meeting I thought it my duty to put in an appearance, though I have done so at great personal inconvenience. But the matters you have met to discuss affect the welfare of the whole glen, and I think you will admit that I am second to none in my solicitude for that."

"Yes, yes, yer riverence," they cried more cordially, for not a man among them could deny him that

interest in face of half a lifetime of unselfish labour in their midst. Father O'Hagan glanced over the score or so of men present, and at last descried Ted Rooney sitting on a bench in the background, with his arms folded across his chest, and his face wearing the look of gloom which had become almost habitual to it during the last year or two. Encouraged by the applause of his audience, and perhaps goaded on by a little bravado to show Father O'Hagan that he stood in no awe of him, Pat Finnigan continued his harangue.

"I will not be namin' no names, boys," he went on, "but ivirybody knows thim as has toiled early and late in their hungry places, how they've built the out-houses, an' put new roofs on thim, an' kept thim in repair, and put in manure, an' done ivirything the landlord should do—but won't. An ivirybody knows thim that has paid their rint honestly whin they had it; ay, often denying thimselves an' wife an' children mate and dhrink so that that debt should be paid. An' all what for? Only that the landlord may have more money in his pocket to spind, finer clothes to wear, an' a softer bed to lie on. All that's been goin' on for years, an' nobody here can deny a word av what I'm saying;" here he glanced rather defiantly at Father O'Hagan—"an' now, instead o' bein' grateful to thim as has done all this for land as is not their own, or tratin' them wi' common dacency, what's goin' to happen? Because some av us have come to the bottom av our pockets, an' have no more gold to hand over to thim horse-leeches, we're to be turned out like beasts to the field. Is that roight, or just, or Christian, your riverence? That's what we've met together to-night to discuss."

Pat glanced round triumphantly as he finished his peroration, as if challenging any one to contradict or deny what he had said. But nobody did.

"Mister M'Carthy has come all the way from Wicklow to sympathise wid us, boys," said Pat, who appeared to be the spokesman-in-chief of the assembly. "Will he come up now an' let us hear the welcome sound av his voice?"

M'Carthy glanced expressively at Father O'Hagan before mounting to the platform. He was bitterly disappointed at seeing him there. The priest of Glendalough was well-known throughout Wicklow for the moderation and catholicity of his views. Justice to all men was his motto, and though the larger share of his sympathies were undoubtedly with the poorer members of his flock, he would not join in the general condemnation of landlords simply because they happened to be landlords. Nay, he endeavoured to give every man his due.

"I see friend M'Carthy is not at all sure of me," he said, with a good-humoured smile. "But if he has reason and justice on his side he should not fear the face of man."

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CHAPTER XXI

SMOULDERING FIRES



M'CARTHY was a man of education, and had sat for some time as member for one of the smaller constituencies of the South. But the notorious immorality of his private life had led to his defeat, and he had never obtained another seat. It was a bitter disappointment to him, and he revenged himself by hatching as much trouble as possible behind the scenes. Towards Parnell he cherished a mortal hatred, and at the time of which we presently write was doing everything in his power to undermine his influence with the Irish party. Father O'Hagan knew him well by repute, but now met him for the first time. He knew something of his methods, and had often read reports of his fiery speeches made at the Land League meetings. He was therefore quite prepared for what he was to hear.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. M'Carthy, "I have much pleasure in coming here to-night to say a few words at a meeting which is not convened a minute too soon. The sane sort of meetings are being held all over our unhappy country—in Tyrone, in Mayo, in Galway—not a county has escaped the terrible devastating touch

of our tormentors and our tyrants. I am, as you know, a native of Wicklow, and am familiar with beautiful Glendalough, which was once the garden of Ireland, breathing nothing but peace and plenty and smiling contentment. That was in happier days, which we dare only recall now to contrast with the sordid and awful misery of present times. Gentlemen, I say we have been patient, resigned, oppressed too long; and, if I understand the object of this meeting at all, it is to make a protest against bygone apathy, and an earnest of more courageous and manly conduct in future. Gentlemen, the word slave is one calculated to stir the blood of every freeborn man and woman. It is associated with indignity and shame and degradation, yet I say here, as I have said elsewhere, ay, as you know, even on the floor of the English House of Common—so called by courtesy a chamber of justice, yet where justice and honour have long since hidden their diminished heads—I say here, that in this year of grace eighteen hundred and seventy-nine, the Irish nation are a nation of slaves, ground under the heel of the English oppressor, and of Irishmen who are English at heart, and therefore traitors to the land of their birth. Take the estate of Balymore, for instance, the tenantry on which are fully represented here. In old Sir Tom's time—I see, gentlemen, you remember Sir Tom kindly, and it will harm no one if we give a cheer for his memory."

Here he paused, and the cheer was heartily given. Father O'Hagan sat still, no longer wondering at the rugged power this dissolute orator exercised over those whom he addressed. He was without doubt a student of human nature, and had been quick to discern the relaxed faces and the softening eyes at mention of Sir

Tom Lyndon, so he played upon their feelings, and won more earnest attention to his next words.

"Had old Sir Tom Lyndon been alive now, I will concede that this meeting would never have been held, because he would have shown every consideration in his power to his people, and cheerfully suffered with them. His son, however, is of a different breed. You all know what his mother's family is, if you don't, go down into Clare and get the Bantry character first hand. Then he has been educated in England, and is English in every action of his life—I had almost said every fibre of his being. He has had a long minority, and he is richer, I have no doubt, than any landlord in the county of Wicklow. Yet he will show no consideration to those whom hard times and famine and potato disease have driven to desperate straits and robbed of their all. His agent and mouthpiece, Moran, makes no bones about his terms. 'Pay or quit' is his motto. I have been informed that during this week notices to quit have been served on no less than seven tenants on the Ballymore estate." Here he named them in turn from a small slip of paper in his hand. "I have not yet heard particulars of all these cases, gentlemen, but I am quite convinced that all are honest, hard-working people, who would pay a fair rent cheerfully if they had it. Of the case of Mr. Edward Rooney, of Arraghvanna, I do happen to know something, and I say that a more scandalous thing than this notice to quit has never been known in the whole annals of this country. The Rooneys have been a hundred and fifty years in Arraghvanna, and more thrifty, sober, hard-working people could not be found. Mr. Rooney has an aged and infirm mother, also a fatherless sister depending on him. What is to become of them when

they are turned out of the house which is theirs by every right of justice? Die by the roadside if they like—what cares my Lord of Lyndon, so long as he has good money in his pocket to pay for his pleasures. Gentlemen, I have also been informed that it is his intention, aided and abetted by that traitor, Timothy Moran, to apportion his estate after the English plan—in large holdings—perhaps, who knows, to Englishmen. Gentlemen, are you going to sit down quietly and let these things be?”

“No, no,” they cried, with a tremendous cheer, and the blackthorn sticks were brought into requisition again.

“The time has come for action. We are not lovers of war for its own sake; but there comes a time when peace is synonymous with shame. Gentlemen, I hold that the time has come for the oppressed sons of the land to rise against the English rule; and also against those of her own blood who are traitors to her, and who oppress her to the very dust. You don't need me to tell you that this conviction has been growing steadily all through Ireland, and that good men and true, driven mad by their wrongs, are steadily preparing themselves for conflict. If necessary, these men will come to the help of Wicklow and of Glendalough, so that a blow may be struck for liberty, and justice, and right. If these wicked and horrible evictions be carried out on Ballymore, we shall not sit quietly by without striking a blow in self-defence. I——”

At this moment Father O'Hagan rose hurriedly from his seat, and pushed his way through the excited throng. He was evidently labouring under strong excitement himself; he pushed M'Carthy aside with one sweep of his hand, and faced the meeting. He

was very pale ; but his eyes, which had so long beamed with goodwill upon Glendalough and its people, were blazing with righteous anger.

“ Don't listen to him, friends—sedition and poison drop from his tongue. I am an old man. I have gone in and out among you for over forty years, sharing in your joys and sympathising with your griefs. I have seen the night closing in upon your homes—but all hope is not extinguished yet. If you act upon the wicked advice given you by this man, who, believe me, has no end to serve by it but his own, you will regret it to the last day of your life. Hitherto the folks of Glendalough have been God-fearing and law-abiding, setting an example to a whole county. Do not, I implore you, break that godly record—do not put yourselves in the power of the police. The arm of the law is like a vice, and the man who has been in prison is never the same man again. Therefore, I say, listen to him no more, but rather to me, who have your best interests at heart. These hard times will blow over ; the Lord will not forget those who keep His law, and you can well leave your oppressors to Him who has said—‘ Vengeance is mine ! ’ ”

He paused, overcome by his emotion, which communicated itself to the whole meeting. He had a great power over them by reason of his long and faithful ministry in their midst. Somehow the heart seemed to be taken out of the meeting, and M'Carthy saw that his inflammatory speech had been robbed of its intended effect. The meeting slowly dispersed, and after speaking privately, but not less impressively, to one or two of the chief farmers Father O'Hagan went sorrowfully to the manse. He had some hope that his words would not be without effect ; but no sooner was

he at a safe distance from "The Harp of Erin" than the meeting was quickly reorganised, and his wise advice was forgotten. About midnight Ted Rooney returned to Arraghvanna. Kitty, filled with a consuming anxiety, had not undressed, but merely thrown herself on the top of the bed, where she snatched some fitful sleep until she heard her brother's foot on the threshold. Then she hastily entered the little kitchen.

She saw at once that he was not only much excited but had drunk more than was good for him. It was well for Ted Rooney that he had hitherto kept himself a sober man, because his nervous excitable temperament was such as drink influences beyond all bounds.

"Ye are very late, Ted; it's afther twelve," said Kitty, reprovingly.

"Shure, an' what if it be afther wan, asthore, so we get everything sittled up and the plan av campaign arranged," he inquired with bantering bravado. Kitty shuddered at the words, which she recognised as a stock phrase among the agitators, from whose ranks she had tried so hard to keep her brother during the last few years.

"What was the matin' about, Ted? Sit ye down, an' tell me iviry mortal thing. I'm dyin' to hear it all."

"I can't do that, Kitty, for we're pledged to secrecy," said Ted. "But when Moran an' the peelers come to evict, they'll find something they didn't reckon for."

"You'll kill me, Ted, and mother too," said Kitty. "What's the use av tryin' to fight thim. They've only got to send to Wicklow for the soldiers, an' it's all up wid us."

"We'll see, we'll see," said Ted, with the maudlin look of intoxication, and Kitty's heart grew as heavy as lead.

"Perhaps something 'll happen yet to sthoph thim—the evictions, I mane," she said, desperately. "I can't belave it'll all happen."

"It will, honey. Moran has got his orders, an', as shure as we are livin' now, next Wednesday we'll be put out of Arraghvanna—at least if they can; that's to be seen yet, Kitty."

"Well, I'm going to bed, Ted," said Kitty, shivering again. "Mother's been very poorly all evenin'. If she's no better to-morrow you'll have to go into Rathdrum for Dr. Macmahon. I thought about nine o'clock she looked loike death."

Ted, however, was too much muddled with drink and the exciting events of the evening to comprehend fully what she was saying; and he only looked at her stupidly as she bade him good-night and went to bed.

Next evening at the darkening Kitty stole out and made her way to the little dell in the Ballymore woods where she had kept tryst several times with its laird. Ted had gone to Rathdrum to another meeting in the Avon inn; her mother, who slept so much now, appeared to be quiet for the night, and Kitty had a tremendous stake to play. She betrayed very little excitement, though her eyes had a strange glitter in them which was not quite natural. Lyndon was at the trysting-tree before her, and to his enamoured eyes she had never appeared more lovely than at that moment.

"You are late, darling, or is it only I who am impatient?" he cried. "I seem to have been waiting hours here."

"I come when I can," she answered, enigmatically, and she leaned against the fallen trunks, keeping them, however, between her lover and herself.

"Well, what is the decision?" he asked, eagerly. "I hear there was a meeting in 'The Harp' last night, and all sorts of rumours are abroad. Have you any news to give me?"

"None," answered Kitty, and her sweet lips shut firmly.

"Then are there to be evictions or not?—that's the question we, or rather you, have got to settle to-night, Kitty."

"You won't stop them without—without—I go wid you?" she said, falteringly.

He shook his head.

"I can't. Father O'Hagan was at me to-day, and I promised to think over it. I didn't tell him everything depended on you. If you promise to marry me—it's nothing less I'm asking you, Kitty—I can tell his reverence his good counsels have prevailed; then there will be no suspicion. I don't think anybody has ever seen us together, except that fellow Fletcher—confound him!—but I don't think he'll say anything——"

"It won't matter after—after—I'm away," said Kitty. "But, oh, it's me poor ould mother! It'll be the death av her entirely!"

"Not a bit of it. Just think of her joy and pride in you when you come back the Lady of Ballymore."

Kitty shook her head. She was too full of forebodings to be dazzled by the prospect.

"If—if I promise to go wid you, and marry you, you'll stop the evictions for sure?" she said, fixing her eyes keenly on his face.

"What do you take me for, Kitty? I'm not an out-and-out scoundrel, though I may have my faults. I'll promise you—swear it to you, if you like—that if you come to me, not a man of them will go out. I'll simply tell Moran Father O'Hagan has persuaded me to leave matters alone for a time and give them another chance. I'm going to Scotland on Tuesday, Kitty. I've got some bowels of compassion left, and I couldn't fancy the idea of stopping to see the evictions, though they'd be carried out faithfully. This visit happens very opportunely. You must follow me there, Kitty; or, better still, go before me. You must leave on Monday, and go to Glasgow by the night boat. I'll meet you there next day."

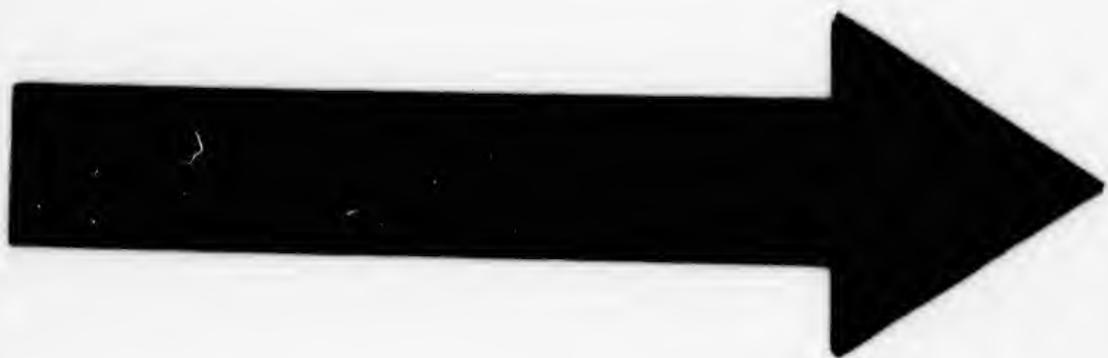
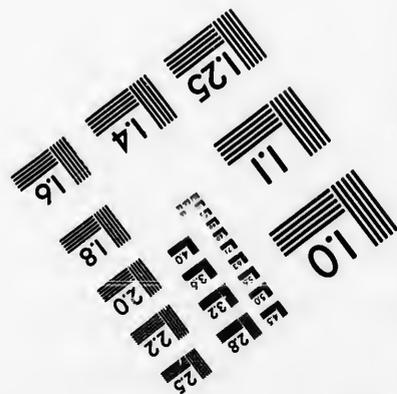
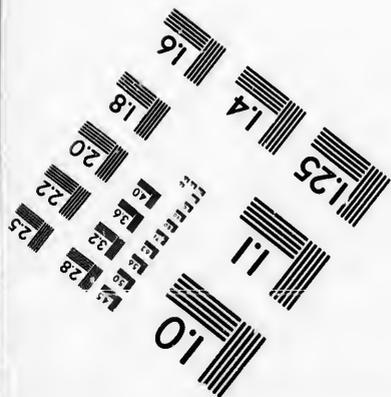
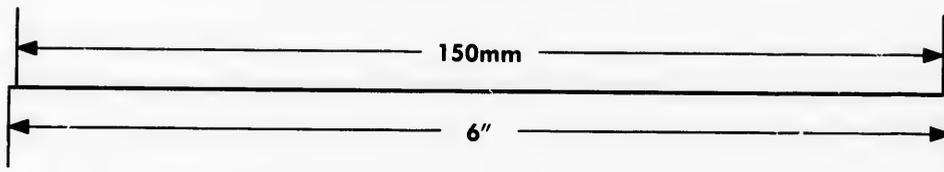
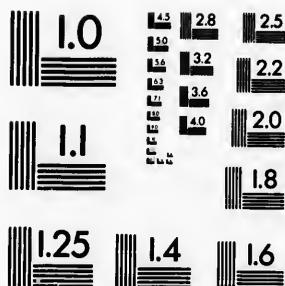
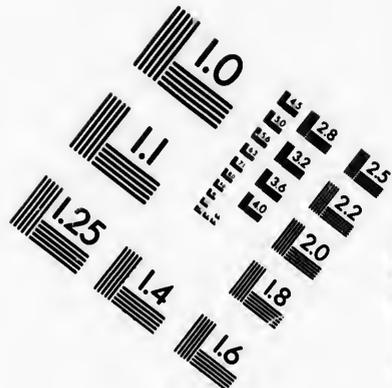
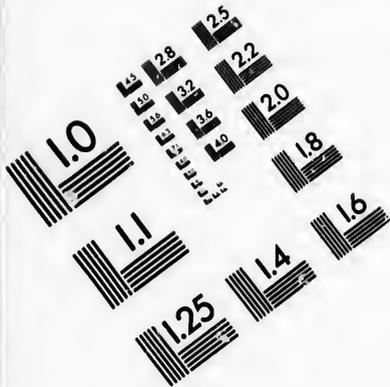


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CHAPTER XXII

TRAITOR AT HEART



THE Ballymore tenantry had received notice that on Wednesday of the following week those who had paid no attention to the earlier notice about the rent would be forcibly ejected from their holdings.

Sunday was a day of subdued but distinctly-felt excitement throughout the whole glen. The attendance at the morning mass was much less than usual ; they had other things to occupy their attention, and, besides, all knew that Father O'Hagan would not approve of the share they intended to take in the exciting events of the forthcoming day. The whole of the castle folk were in the Ballymore pew at morning mass, and when it was over Lyndon purposely waited behind in order to speak to Father O'Hagan. Lady Lyndon, who did not really believe that her son had yielded to the priest's softer counsels, fully expected that the original programme would be adhered to. She had laughed at the idea of her son going off to Scotland to escape actual participation in the evictions, about which she had no qualms what-

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soever. She belonged to that particular type of the aristocracy which regards the common people as existing merely for their use and benefit, and not as human beings with rights of their own, and the capacity for suffering.

As Father O'Hagan bade the young squire good-morning he anxiously scanned his face, as if seeking to gather some hope there for the unhappy people of whom his heart and thoughts were full.

"Well, I hope you have given heed to my counsels, Mr. Lyndon?" he said, earnestly. "I have never ceased to pray that you would."

At this question Lyndon assumed a becoming gravity, and answered at once.

"I have thought of little else, I assure you, father, since I saw you on Friday, and I have come to the conclusion that in the meantime I will not press the evictions."

"Thank God, thank God! You will never regret it, my young friend," said the priest in tones of unspeakable relief. "I felt sure that when you really gave the matter serious consideration you would hesitate before destroying all the traditions of your house. There has always been good feeling existing between Ballymore and its people. In your lamented father's lifetime I don't think there was a murmur from one end of the glen to the other."

"Ah, but, father, times were different then. I question very much if my father had lived to participate in these evil days whether he would not have taken precisely the same course. But I have instructed Moran to tell them that another six month's grace will be given them to pay up arrears, and in the meantime I must think whether something

cannot be done to better the condition of things so that all parties may have a chance."

Father O'Hagan could scarcely believe his ears. He had never heard such moderate words from Tom Lyndon, and he inwardly wondered what good genius had been at work within him to bring about such a happy change. He was too much relieved, however, to seek to inquire too closely into it; the fact was sufficient for him, and he could not repress his lively feelings of joy and satisfaction.

"I trust that there will be no delay in communicating the good news to the people, who are expecting something very different," he said. "From what I have been able to gather, although a good deal has been kept secret from me, there was not the least intention of giving in without a struggle. I have heard from private sources that quite a large body of men were coming up from Wicklow, and also some of the Invincibles, I believe, from Dublin."

"I daresay it would have been a very hot struggle," observed Lyndon, carelessly. "But, of course, Moran had taken every precaution, and there would be a strong contingency of the Wicklow constabulary, and the military would be within call if necessary; but in the meantime Glendalough will be saved such lively proceedings. I had arranged to go to Scotland to my uncle in Argyllshire to-morrow to escape the whole affair. I don't suppose you ever gave me credit for as much feeling, did you, father? I think that I shall still go on Tuesday or Wednesday. There is nothing doing here just now, and I may as well go until the whole affair blows over."

"That is as you please, Mr. Lyndon," answered the priest; "but when the good news spreads through

Glendalough you will be a welcome sight to every man, woman, and child of them. It might pay you to wait for that."

"Oh, I sha'n't be gone long, only for two or three days, and I want to escape all the talk the people will make. If only they would mind their own business," he said, rather irritably. "By the bye, have you heard what a splendid reception Mr. Parnell had in Cork yesterday?"

"I have heard rumours; but no man knows what is truth and what are lies in these days," said the priest, sadly. "But I think there can be no doubt he will be the greatest leader the Irish party has ever seen."

"It is certain he is the strongest man we have," assented Lyndon. "But his views are ultra-moderate. Good day to you, father! I hope you will tell the Ballymore folk what they owe to you; it will perhaps make them pay more attention to your ministrations."

Father O'Hagan did not like the tone of this remark, and he was not certain whether it contained a gibe, or was only an honest expression of opinion. He was, however, too thankful for the sudden and unexpected relief to trouble himself about smaller matters. Lady Lyndon and Terry had driven home, and Lyndon's walk only brought him back in time for lunch. He found his mother in no good mood.

"What were you saying to Father O'Hagan, Tom?" she asked, sharply. "You don't mean to tell me honestly that you have listened to his grandmotherly counsels and that you are going to restrain Moran from carrying out the instructions you have already given him?"

"That's about it, mother," answered Tom, in-

differently. "I have taken a second thought, and, after all, surely a man is entitled to change his mind."

Lady Lyndon made a gesture of impatient dissent.

"You are childish, Tom, after having gone so far. It is weak and cowardly to draw back at the last moment. You have destroyed your own position, and you never will have such a chance."

"Perhaps not, but I daresay we shall struggle through," he said, in the same indifferent manner, which was extremely galling to her. "After all, it's deuced hard on the poor beggars. It is all very well to talk of evictions in the abstract, but when it comes to the actual fact it makes a man sit up. I am not going to do it in the meantime, anyhow. I have given them a fright which will perhaps improve the situation from my point of view."

"You are not fit to have the power, boy," said his mother, sourly. "I only wish it was in my hands instead of yours. I shouldn't show myself such a weakling."

"I know that, mother," he said, good-humouredly, and withdrew, leaving her to her own bitter and angry reflections.

Next day it was known throughout the length and breadth of Glendalough that the threatened evictions would not take place. By this time they had got themselves worked up to such a pitch of excitement that the announcement fell like a damper upon certain of the more warlike spirits, especially those who were not anticipating eviction themselves, but were only going to view the lively proceedings from afar. When Ted Rooney first heard the news he could not believe it, and quite early on Monday he drove his old car into Rathdrum to make personal inquiries at the

agent's office. When he returned home about six o'clock in the evening his face wore a happier look than it had done for many a day. His mother, who had recovered from the bad turn which had caused so much anxiety for a few days, was again able to sit up at the kitchen fireside, and the hope that she would be allowed to die in peace in her own home had made her feel better all that day. She was dissatisfied with the strange reticence which marked Kitty's demeanour. She had gone about her household duties as usual, yet scarcely uttering a word. She had been entirely occupied with herself, trying to plan some way in which she could leave home in a natural manner. She had again seen Tom Lyndon in the Ballymore woods on Sunday evening, and he had said that if she got clear away from Glendalough on Tuesday, it would be time enough, as he did not intend to leave Ballymore until Wednesday, or perhaps even Thursday, of the same week. She shrank from the idea of slipping away like a culprit, still further did she shrink from telling a direct lie about it, and yet something must be done. It was a strange and thorny path into which poor Kitty Rooney had strayed, and she was almost distraught that day trying to devise some natural means of escape from Arraghvanna. Circumstances strangely favoured her. About five o'clock in the afternoon a boy from "The Harp of Erin" brought up some letters which had been left there by the afternoon postman. They were all for Ted, save one for Kitty, which came from Monaghan. When she opened it it seemed to her that the way had opened up for her in a wonderful way.

"Why, mother," she said, as she stood in the window hastily perusing the badly written lines, "this is

bad news from Monaghan. This is a letter from me cousin, Dan. Poor Uncle Timothy is very ill, near death's door, he says, and my aunt would like if I could go down for a day or two. Dan is to be in Dublin to-morrow, and he says if I could meet him there he would take me with him, and that if I don't go he will know that you are too ill to be left."

"Well, shure, and you can be goin', darlint," said Mrs. Rooney, at once. "I am so much better to-day that I think by to-morrow I shall be up and about again."

"I hardly think that, mother; but you are so much better that I might run down for a day or two perhaps. We'll see what Ted says when he comes home."

"It'll be all right, Kitty, me jewel," said Mrs. Rooney, cheerfully. "Now that there'll be no evictions it's made a new woman av me, entoirely. I shouldn't wonder now if I was able to get about with the best av ye. But I wish that Ted would come back and tell us for certain."

At that very moment his shadow darkened the doorway, and Kitty gathered at once from his face that all was well.

"It's all right, mother," he called out. "I've been to Moran, and there'll be no evictions. I can see that he's sore disappointed, and is braithing out anger agin Father O'Hagan. It's his riverence we've got to thank for it all, mother!"

"I thought as much, my son," answered Mrs. Rooney. "May the Holy Virgin send him a swate reward, and God rest his sowl for iver and iver."

"What's that you are busy about, Kitty?" called

out Ted. "Can't you look round and give us a smile av your face for the good news?"

"It's a letter from me Cousin Dan, Ted," she answered, passing it to him. "Mother and me have just been wondering whether I could be spared."

Ted read the letter, but his face scarcely clouded. He had only a very slight acquaintance with his kindred in Monaghan, and his own affairs at that moment were of so much importance that they excluded everything else.

"I daresay you could go for a day or so if mother could be left," he said. "She looks better to-day; and I daresay Mary O'Neill would look in to her every day."

After a little further discussion it was settled that in the morning, if Mrs. Rooney was no worse, Kitty should proceed to Dublin.



CHAPTER XXIII

A JEALOUS HEART



ON Tuesday afternoon, of a set purpose, Tom Lyndon showed himself at Killane. He arrived about five o'clock in the afternoon, and was received by Aileen in the drawing-room alone. Both good and ill news travel quickly in country places, therefore it was not surprising that the Byrnes were already in possession of all the facts relating to the abandoned evictions at Ballymore. Aileen had received many visits from the excited and indignant Terry, and had done her utmost to soothe and quiet the boy's bursting heart. She blamed Tom a good deal, but in her heart of hearts believed that the person who was at the bottom of the whole unhappy business was Lady Lyndon herself.

"How do you do, Tom?" she said cordially. "I didn't think that after this week I should ever see you in this room."

"Now, why, Aileen?" he asked, with affected concern.

"Oh, well, you know what I told you—that if you had carried out these abominable evictions you would never have been received on a friendly footing here

again. My father had his mind made up on that point, and even if he hadn't, I should have declined all further acquaintance with you."

"Dear me, you are very harsh in your punishments," said the young man, as he leaned easily against the cabinet, and surveyed the girl whom he had known since her childhood, and with whom he had sometimes fancied himself in love. She was very fair and winsome to look at, but he drew an inward comparison between her and Kitty Rooney, much to the latter's advantage. He could not imagine Aileen in a moment of excitement and passion—she was placid, reserved, self-contained always; a restful and pleasant companion no doubt, but lacking in that variety which in the eyes of connoisseurs is a woman's chief charm. Now, Kitty was a creature of sunshine and storm, and one flash of her piercing eye was sufficient to make a man's pulses beat more quickly, and send the blood coursing through his veins. He could not imagine Aileen Byrne having such an effect upon him or upon any man; and yet there could be no doubt there was something extraordinarily winning about her. Then she was of his own order, and could always be trusted to act and almost to speak exactly as might be expected of her.

"I am not harsh at all, Tom, and you know it," she answered. "I have never concealed my views on the subject of the evictions. I think they are horrible, cruel, wicked, and that those who permit them on their estates will be punished for it, as sure as there is a righteous God above us."

"Dear me, you are quite melodramatic, Aileen. May I ask who informed you that I had abandoned my real intention?"

"Mr. Fletcher brought us the news yesterday. He was walking in the neighbourhood of Glendalough, and met Father O'Hagan, who was simply overjoyed about it."

At mention of Fletcher's name Lyndon's brow grew black.

"That fellow Fletcher is always prowling about Glendalough and other places where he has no right to be. Surely your father does not provide him with sufficient work. I think he's a confoundedly meddling fellow."

At this unexpected and quite uncalled-for outburst Aileen looked up in mild surprise.

"To hear you one would think you had some personal animus against Mr. Fletcher, yet I think you have only met him once here, have you not?"

"Yes; but it was once too often. I don't like the fellow; he's too presuming. You don't keep him in his proper place, that's what's the matter with him."

"You're quite mistaken," she said, with a distinct touch of hauteur. "Mr. Fletcher is a gentleman, and one who will never presume upon any position; and I will say even more than that—it would be impossible to have a more delightful inmate of a household than he is. My father is constantly congratulating himself upon his good fortune in having met him."

"Indeed! He is fortunate in having wormed himself into your confidence so quickly, but I am not surprised. Pray, what are his duties here? I don't think I've ever heard them defined."

Aileen hesitated a moment. She had known Tom Lyndon all her life, and there had always been a good deal of familiarity between the two families, but she

regarded his remarks as offensive and impertinent, and felt inclined to tell him so. She could not understand why he should have conceived such a strong dislike towards a man of whom he had so little knowledge.

"You know perfectly well what his duties are, Tom," she said, with dignity. "You were told when he came that he was to help my father to write his book. It is getting on splendidly, and though I used to be rather amused at papa's literary ambition, I see now that there is a prospect of great success for the book. It will be published in March, and I am sure if it does make the success I for one expect, it will be due quite as much to Mr. Fletcher's labour as to my father."

"It's a kind of pleasant partnership, then," said Lyndon, and the sneer did not leave his face. "I heard from Terry that he had been over more than once at Avondale. What does he go there for?"

"Why, because Mr. Parnell asks him, of course," said Aileen, shortly. "He thinks very highly of his abilities, and he has written some political articles which have attracted a good deal of attention. I can assure you Mr. Parnell thinks that Mr. Fletcher will make his mark some day."

"Well, I'm sure it's of no consequence to me at all," said Lyndon, "only I should not object to the opportunity of giving him a good kicking. It would relieve my mind and do him a lot of good."

"You forget that you are in my drawing-room and not in the stable-yard," said Aileen, rising, her face flushed with anger. "I must ask you to excuse me, as I don't find your company particularly agreeable."

"Well, I am quite willing to apologise if I have said anything to offend you, Aileen," he said, quickly.

"I don't want to do that; but it just sickens me to see an upstart like that on such intimate terms here. I assure you he is playing his cards well; but let us dismiss this disagreeable subject. I thought you'd be pleased to hear that I had laid your counsels and those of Father O'Hagan to heart, and it's rather disappointing to a fellow, especially when he has sacrificed as much as I have done, to be received like this."

At this Aileen stared at him in simple amazement.

"Well, that is good," she said. "I never heard a more Irish speech than that. Pray, who introduced the disagreeable subject by being as disagreeable as possible? But there, I forgive you, only don't let me hear any remarks of that kind again. Now let's sit down comfortably and discuss the matter. What does Lady Lyndon say about this sudden change in your plans?"

"Oh, my mother is furious, simply furious. In fact she's making it so hot for me that I am going to accept that invitation to the M'Neills I told you I had refused. I am going to Glasgow on Thursday, so I really came to say good-bye to-day."

"Are you to stay away long?"

"No; only a few days. I expect to be back early next week."

"And you have really made up your mind to leave the people alone until better times come, Tom?" said Aileen, with an expression of satisfaction on her face. "I am quite sure you will never regret it."

Lyndon winced, and slightly turned his head away. Knowing himself a traitor at heart, he felt a passing sense of shame at the praise he so ill deserved.

"I am not at all sure what I shall do in the

future," he answered, rather brusquely; "but meantime at least I will let them alone. But, mind you, I don't believe I am acting wisely."

"You are showing the quality of mercy, anyhow, to those who are suffering through no fault of their own," she replied, earnestly, "and Terry at least will be overjoyed."

"Terry's very soft-hearted; he ought to have been a girl," answered Lyndon, carelessly. "It is a good thing for himself and the family interests that he is the younger son. Well, I must go. Good-bye, Aileen; try and not think so hardly of me in future."

"I shall never think hardly of you again, Tom," she replied, with much cordiality; and on such good terms they parted.

As he rode slowly down the avenue he met Fletcher full in the face; but only stared at him with that insolent haughtiness he knew so well how to assume, and passed on without the slightest recognition. This, however, did not trouble Fletcher in the least. He had no desire to obtain even a friendly recognition from Lyndon of Ballymore, whom he distrusted and despised; but each chance meeting seemed to deepen the strange antagonism between them.

After he had gone about half a mile on his way Lyndon, evidently taking a second thought, turned his horse's head again, and rode quickly back, passing the gate of Killane, and cantered on briskly to Avondale. He was not certain whether the leader of the Irish party was then at home. He had heard that he was expecting a party for the shooting at a small lodge some miles distant; he was agreeably surprised therefore to meet Mr. Parnell a few yards from the house.

He was walking alone, and appeared, as usual, deeply immersed in thought. He greeted Lyndon cordially, but without marked pleasure, and asked him to put up his horse and stay for an hour.

"I can't do that; my mother is expecting me. I have been to Killane, and thought I would call and see how you were after the great demonstration at Cork. I scarcely expected to find you alone."

"As a matter of fact, I am not alone," answered Parnell. "O'Connor and Shaw are here; but they have gone to Glendalough this afternoon. It is quite possible they may call at Ballymore.

"Oh, then I must hurry home. I should be sorry not to see them, although my mother will be delighted to receive them. I suppose you have heard that I have taken a second thought about my evictions?"

"Oh yes," said Parnell, as if it were a matter of small moment. "I think in the meantime you are wise, and it is possible that even the threat may improve the situation. It will at least prove to you which are the well-doing among your tenants. Did you say you were going to Killane?"

"No, I have been there; but is it anything I can do for you, it is on my way? I can easily ride up to the house if you wanted a message sent."

"Oh, thanks. I only wanted to see Fletcher, the captain's secretary. I can easily send, or perhaps stroll over myself later on."

"Do you find anything in that fellow?" he asked with apparent indifference, and yet he was himself surprised at the anxiety he felt concerning the reply.

"Anything in him? Well, if you want a frank opinion, I think he's one of the coming men," answered Parnell with unwonted frankness. "Ryder Mullins

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has just resigned his seat in Tyrone, and I want young Fletcher to contest it. Well, if you won't stay, I must bid you good-afternoon. Give Lady Lyndon my kind remembrances. How's that bold brother of yours? He has the courage of his opinions. It is to be hoped matters will improve before his political opinions are developed, or he will give us lively times."



CHAPTER XXIV

A GREAT UPLIFTING



ABOUT eight o'clock that evening a messenger summoned Fletcher from Killane to Avondale. He felt some natural curiosity, and even an inward trepidation, over the probable reason for the summons, but no suspicion of what was about to occur entered Fletcher's mind. During the last few weeks he had been once or twice at Avondale, and had spoken with the leader of the party several times out of doors. During these interviews he had been distinctly conscious more than once that he had been drawn out to speak at some length on the question of absorbing interest to them both. Fletcher was naturally reticent by nature, but, so strong was the influence of the leader's mind upon him, that he had spoken with a frankness which surprised no one more than himself. Parnell, therefore, knew what were his political views, and also thoroughly understood his grasp of the burning questions of the hour. Fletcher was a man of original mind, capable of reasoning to the end every question to which he gave his attention; then he would form his own

judgment, which he would not readily set aside. All these characteristics Mr. Parnell had observed, and had formed a very high opinion of the young man's capabilities. Affairs were even then in a desperate condition, and none knew better than the leader of the Irish party himself the overwhelming importance of having attached to him a body of men whose views were thoroughly in sympathy with his own, and whom he could trust. Personally, Fletcher had been drawn to this strange man with a fervour which surprised himself. Perhaps there was in his own nature something not dissimilar. Whatever the reason, it is certain that even in these early days, Fletcher conceived for the great man, whom so few have understood, a warm personal devotion which never faltered even when the last dark page of his troubled life was turned down for ever.

When he arrived at Avondale he was immediately shown into Mr. Parnell's study. It was a bare, ill-furnished apartment, the carpet on the floor worn by the feet of years. That severe simplicity of surrounding was indicative of the nature of the man, who, whatever his faults, was not then a slave to the luxury of self-indulgence.

He was sitting at his desk, and even at the opening of the door scarcely looked up. His face wore that strange look of self-absorption which seemed at times to withdraw him beyond the touch of his fellow-men. He was always pale, but it seemed to Fletcher that that night, seen by the light of the small reading-lamp on his desk, his face looked almost death-like in its pallor. His strange compelling eyes, which could read the secrets of most men, but kept their own inscrutably hid, had a worried look, and the extreme

delicacy, even fragility, of his whole appearance struck Fletcher painfully.

"Good evening," he said courteously. "I hope it was quite convenient for you to leave our good friend the captain? It is rather an important matter I wish to discuss with you. Pray sit down."

Fletcher obeyed. He was conscious of a growing nervousness, and felt the approach of some crisis in his life.

"You will be surprised at what I am going to say," said Parnell, quickly. "But I have given the matter considerable thought, and I think I am taking a step the wisdom of which future events will prove. Will you stand for Tyrone?"

Fletcher stared stupidly before him, scarcely able to believe his ears. He had only been a few months in Ireland, and though he yielded to none in his passionate devotion to her interests (the devotion which a patriot feels for the country of his birth and his love), he had scarcely expected to be called upon, even at a very distant date, to give that interest any public voice.

"Sir, I—I scarcely understand," he faltered. "Do you mean—are you asking me to offer myself as a Parliamentary candidate for Tyrone?"

"That is precisely what I do mean," answered Parnell, with his slight but always sweet and winning smile. "Of course you know that Ryder Mullins has resigned. I never expected to be relieved of his obnoxious connection so soon. It seems he is going to marry a rich American, and adopt her nationality; so much the better for the nationality he has disgraced," he added, with a sarcastic and meaning inflection in his voice. "It is imperative at this moment

that the new adherents of the party should be men about whom we can have no doubt. I have confidence in you, and if you are still of the mind you were in when we first met you can be nominated. It will be a tough battle, but I really do not know what is the Gladstonian power there. We shall have to find out."

Fletcher sat silent a moment, and finally covered his face with his hand. Parnell leaned back in his arm-chair, and, with his white tapering fingers meeting together, he regarded the young man keenly, and waited with the utmost patience until he should make some remark. He did not dislike the evident effect of the announcement upon him. A keen student of men and things, the leader of the Irish party well knew that assurance and incompetency very often walk hand in hand. The man of parts is usually modest in his estimate of himself. At last Fletcher looked up. His face was pale, but it wore a fine look of resolve, even of pride, which added some dignity to a personality by no means to be despised.

"Sir, I never expected this, and I have no words ready in which to express what I feel; but surely you do not quite understand my position. I am a penniless man, dependent entirely on the salary paid to me by Captain Byrne. Through your kindness, and that of others, I have earned a little by my pen since I came here."

"And you will earn more," said Parnell, encouragingly; "but go on."

"Well, that is all. How can a man who has his own livelihood to earn enter Parliament?"

The leader leaned back in his chair, and laughed silently, and his sphinx-like eyes were full of many deep thoughts.

"There speaks youth and inexperience," he answered. "Don't you know that quite the half of those who enter the House do so either to make a living or to improve the living they have got?" he asked, with one of his caustic touches. "The question of money matters nothing. The expense of the election will be borne by the party. An unattached young man can live very cheaply in London. You would be surprised if you knew at what very little cost I have lived there during the last two or three years; and as a member of the House you would of course be able to command a much higher price for anything you might find leisure to write."

Again Fletcher was silent, overwhelmed indeed by the prospect. It is not given to many to reach the goal of their ambition so quickly, and with so little personal effort.

"If you think I am fit," he said at length, "I am ready."

"I thought so," answered Parnell, in tones of some satisfaction. "As I have already told you, I have given the matter all the consideration it requires, and the difficulties, such as they are, can be easily surmounted. You had better stay until O'Connor and Shaw come back from Glendalough, then we can make all the arrangements for the contest, at least as far as they can be made until you have paid a visit to the constituency. I expected them back before now. They must have accepted Lady Lyndon's invitation to dinner, I think."

"Does Captain Byrne know anything about this, sir?" asked Fletcher.

"He will not be unduly surprised. I told him some time ago I should find you a seat. By the bye, do you

know anything of your actual parentage? Captain Byrne told me there is some mystery attached to it."

"I know nothing," answered Fletcher, "except that I was deserted in the streets of Edinburgh either by my mother or the woman in whose charge I was left."

"And you have no clue at all? In novels there is generally a mysterious birth-mark or relic of some sort which proves the identity. I am sure you are Irish-born."

"I am sure of it also," said Fletcher, fervently. "No alien could feel as I feel towards Ireland."

"Well, it is not a matter of great moment," said Parnell, kindly. "In these days a man is what he chooses to make himself, and sometimes the demoralisation of our old aristocracy seems so complete that one longs for the triumph of the new democracy."

Fletcher sat silent, much impressed. He had often heard it affirmed by those who, for public or private reasons, hated this strange man, that he belonged to the tyrannous aristocracy; that he was an aristocrat at heart; and that the ultimate goal of his ambition and his policy was to crush the people.

"I was thinking of Lyndon of Ballymore; what a brainless fool he is. Now, his father was a prince among men; the younger boy is like him, and yet he has no power. That's where the evil of the system appears. You are very comfortable at Killane, I think?" he said, suddenly striking off to a new subject.

"I have never been happier in my life."

"And how does the book get on?"

"It nears completion. I hope that I shall be able to finish it before any active duty would be required of me."

"Oh yes, you must finish it. There is plenty of time between this and the beginning of January. There can be no doubt that we shall have the session opened immediately after Christmas; but that is two months hence. I hope that you have not found the captain's daughter the greatest attraction at Killane?" A smile played about Parnell's mouth; but at the same time his shrewd eyes never for a moment left the face of the young man opposite to him. He attached more importance to the question than Fletcher dreamed.

"Miss Byrne has been more than kind to me, sir," he answered. "I have not presumed upon my position in the house, nor indeed have I ever had the least temptation thereto."

"That's well," said the leader, with satisfaction in his voice. "I can tell you from observation rather than from experience that it is that kind of influence that plays the devil with a man's public life. You will be wise if you keep yourself unaffected as you are now. You will save yourself a good deal of heartache perhaps, and be able to reserve your strength for other things."

Years after, when the final act of the tragedy of this strange life had been played, Fletcher recalled these words in painful and almost mocking memory.

Their talk then drifted into more private matters connected with the immediate interests of the party, and after sitting for another hour, waiting in vain for the return of the two guests at Avondale, Fletcher rose to go. As he did so he took his pocket-book out, and from the inner flap removed the little amulet which he had carried there since it was put into his hands by the only mother he had ever known.

"You asked me a little time ago whether I had any clue or relic relating to the past. This was given to me by my adopted mother when I came here."

"Indeed," said Parnell, and, extending his hand, laid the trinket flat on his palm.

"This is very odd," he said. "I seem to be familiar with this little trinket. Would you care to entrust it to me? I know a man in Dublin who is an adept at this sort of thing. I have no doubt that through this you might be able to unravel the mystery of your birth."



CHAPTER XXV

IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING



LL Lyndon's actions during the three first days of that week were carefully studied, and he showed himself as much as possible in Glendalough and the immediate neighbourhood. As he rode back from Avondale that evening he made a detour from "The Harp of Erin," and skirting the barren fields of Arraghvanna he actually rode right into the farmyard and stopped at the cottage door.

"Holy Mother!" exclaimed Mary O'Neill, who had just looked in to prepare the evening meal for the little family, "it's the squire his own self, and he's coming in, he is indade."

"Get a chair for him, Mary," cried Mrs. Rooney, excitedly. "Now, where's Ted; he's never to be seen when he's wanted? When the squire comes in just slip out, will ye, and see if ye can find him about the place?"

"All roight, honey, just kepe quiet, and I'll do everything that's roight," said Mary, with an important air; and by the time the squire had alighted and given his smart knock at the door, she had

managed to sweep in the hearth, and whisk every possible speck of dust from the mantelshef and the shining oak chairs.

"Good evening, Mrs. Rooney," Lyndon called out in a loud, cheerful voice. "I was passing up your way, and thought I would look in. Is Ted at home?"

"Yes, sor, beggin' your pardon that I'm not able to rise to make me curtsey," said Mrs. Rooney. "Shure, an' it's a welcome sight ye are now that all the throuble we feared has gone by like a drame."

"Second thoughts are always best, aren't they, Mrs. Rooney?" said Lyndon, as he leaned easily against the dresser and surveyed the bright and spotless kitchen, interesting to him because it had so long sheltered Kitty, who, alas! had now left it for ever. It showed a singular callousness that he could stand at his ease there, knowing that in a few hours or days at most the shadow of desperate anxiety concerning Kitty must fall upon the little household.

"I was just thinking as I rode across the fields that the place looked hungry enough. I am not a great farmer, but it seems to me as if the land wanted a lot of feeding."

"Ay, shure an' it does," said the old lady, rocking herself rather mournfully on her chair. "Faiding it'll never get so long as times is hard, and niver a tater fit to eat."

"Oh, but times will mend again," said Lyndon. "I think we must get up a conference to consider the depression, and see whether we cannot fall on some improvement. I am sorry to see you still confined to your chair."

"Oh, but I am much better, thank your honour," said Mrs. Rooney, "and Kitty has gone into

Monaghan to her poor uncle Tim, who has had a stroke, God be good to him. Her cousin Dan was to mate her in Dublin yesterday and take her down."

"And I suppose the good woman I saw when I came in is looking after things until she returns?" he observed, carelessly.

"That's just it, sor; she's gone to try and find Ted. There they are."

Ted, it must be told, came with some unwillingness, not at all sure what this unexpected and unusual visit might portend. The young squire had never taken much personal interest in his tenantry, all his dealings with them having been conducted through the medium of his agent. Still there was sufficient gratitude in his mind for the respite which had been granted to them to make him wish at least to meet his landlord half-way.

"Evenin', squire," he said, respectfully enough, and Lyndon returned the salutation cordially.

"Your mother has been thanking me because she is still at her own fireside, Rooney," he observed, "but I ought to have said she should thank Father O'Hagan. I suppose I had not really seriously thought of the real consequences until he laid them before me. I have also been saying to your mother that I think we must get up a conference of some sort, so that we may arrive at a better understanding of the grievances, and see whether we cannot redress them."

Ted could scarcely believe his own ears. This was an attitude so entirely unexpected that for the moment he could do nothing but stare at the young squire in astonishment. It was an attitude likely to fill a reasonable man with hope and satisfaction. Ted was and had been all along entirely reasonable, doing

his utmost to fight against circumstances the most adverse, and making the best of every possible opportunity, nor had he ever asked anything exorbitant or impossible. His face grew brighter than it had been for many a day, and he blamed himself inwardly for the many harsh things he had said about the young squire.

"If that could be done, sor," he answered, "it would help things a lot. It's not so much money as toime we want, and, whatever Mr. Moran may have tould yé, there's not a man on Ballymore but would pay his rint like a brick if he had it."

"Well, well, the thing is past in the meantime. I passed my word to Moran, you see, and I had to make some show. You won't hear anything more about the evictions, I promise you, for a long time, and I'll give orders at Rathdrum to-morrow for Michael M'Ghee to come up and put a new roof on that cow-house of yours. I'll take a turn with you round the place if you like, and see what's wanting to be done."

Again Ted stared stupidly before him, wondering whether he heard aright, while tears of silent joy and thankfulness rolled down his mother's cheeks.

The next half-hour the two young men, whom fortune had treated so differently, spent among the miserable outhouses of Arraghvanna. To do Tom Lyndon justice, he was rather shocked to find the place in such a wretched, tumbledown condition. Like many others of his class, he had suffered himself to be led by a self-seeking bailiff, who to serve his own ends wished to keep the tenantry under his thumb, and who constantly assured him that he had done everything that could in reason and justice be expected from him. For the first time he found him-

self face to face with the actual facts of the case, and although the object which had brought him to Arraghvanna was a base one, he forgot it for the moment in his newly-born interest in the matter to which he had hitherto scarcely given one intelligent thought. Ted was amazed and gratified, and in the fulness of his heart explained everything to the young squire with a minuteness and intelligence which left Lyndon no loophole of escape. It showed him two things. First, the hard, almost impossible, conditions under which his tenants lived, and his own failure to fulfil the obligations his position entailed upon him. Lyndon even forgot that it was Kitty's brother to whom he was speaking, and for the first time felt an active personal interest in his own affairs.

"I'm very much obliged to you, Rooney," he said, as he walked round to the front of the cottage to mount again. "I am obliged to you for two things—for the trouble you have taken to explain everything to me, and also for the light you have thrown upon the methods of Mr. Moran. I shall not be saying too much when I tell you that he has taken upon himself a great deal more than I ever dreamed, and had I known that things were in such a bad way with you I should at least have tried to redress them long ago. It isn't too late to mend, however, and I shall to-morrow give Mr. Moran a few instructions which will open his eyes."

At that moment all that was best in young Lyndon was at the surface, and as he saw the quick look of gratitude on Rooney's face as he tried to murmur his thanks, he turned away hastily, overwhelmed with misgiving and remorse; for whatever he might do to better the outward condition of the Rooneys, he was

about to deal them a more terrible blow than any that had yet overtaken them. He felt like a traitor as he rode slowly across the bare stubble towards his own castle, and even for a moment felt tempted to recall Kitty and send her down to Monaghan, so that none might know what had been in contemplation. He came to a five-barred gate presently, which made an obstacle in his path, and, as it was padlocked, he had to take it at a gallop, but his finely-bred mare was equal to it, and took it as easily as if it had been a ditch.

Next day Lyndon again showed himself at Glendalough and Rathdrum, and after having given instructions to the village carpenter to go up to Arraghvanna, and do whatever he was bid by Ted Rooney, he turned into the little office where Mr. Justin Moran conducted the whole business of Ballymore to his own satisfaction and the extreme dissatisfaction of everybody else. He was a little, stout, bald-headed man, with a shrewd, hard face and an odd, squeaky voice, out of all proportion to his appearance. He was much disgusted with the sudden change affairs had taken. There was nothing he would have enjoyed more than the evictions he had so frequently urged at Ballymore. He was not beloved in the district, and he had many old scores against the tenants which the evictions would have given him an opportunity to wipe out. During the last forty-eight hours he had puzzled himself incessantly to find some explanation for this sudden change in Lyndon's plans. He did not for a moment believe that the counsels of Father O'Hagan had really prevailed, but so far he had not been able to find the slightest clue to what was to him a mystery.

"Good morning, Moran," Lyndon observed as he stepped into the office and threw his riding-switch and gloves on the table. "I am going away for a day or two, as you know, to Scotland. I should have gone yesterday, but, as it happens, I had some other matters to attend to, and since I changed my mind about the evictions I have been gathering up a little information on my own account. I was at Arraghvanna for an hour last night. Why, Moran, that place is in an awful mess."

"I never said it wasn't," said Moran with an air of injured innocence, and at the same time stroking his bald head perplexedly. "In fact I've said all along that it's more than time some one who really understood farming and had a little money at their back should be at the place, for it's good land, Mr. Lyndon, and it wants looking after as every place does, and every person does, too, for the matter of that."

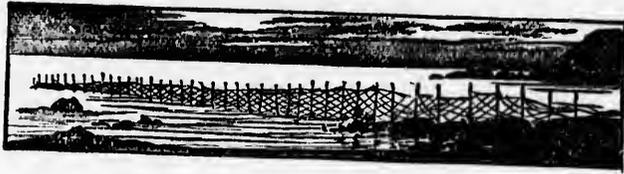
"Well, God knows that I thought it was a hungry enough hole," answered Lyndon, "and the out-buildings are simply disgraceful. Why, if we have a hard winter, they'll never be able to keep a beast free of pneumonia."

"Oh, nonsense! Irish cattle are not so delicate in their chests," observed Moran, facetiously. "Now, I could take my affidavit Rooney's been fitting it on to you."

"Yes, I saw him, and had a talk with him for over an hour."

"I thought as much. If I had been there I guarantee he'd have talked less. I suppose he worked on your feelings to that extent that you've promised him the Lord knows what? I hope you'll excuse my freedom, sir, but I don't want to see you got the better of."

"I don't want any more of your gratuitous remarks, Moran," observed Lyndon, with a touch of hauteur, which none knew better how to assume. "What you've got to do this morning is to listen to me, make no remarks, but see that my orders are put into execution without delay."



CHAPTER XXVI

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

NEXT day it was through the whole length and breadth of Glendalough that a mighty change had taken place in the attitude of the Squire of Ballymore towards the tenantry, against whom he had been prepared only a few days before to carry out his extremest threats. Not only were the improvements begun upon the homestead of Arraghvanna, but all who required any similar repairs on their steadings were bidden leave their requirements in writing at the estate office in Rathdrum, when they would be attended to in due course. Before Lyndon left on his projected visit he said nothing whatever to his mother about what he had done, nor to Terry; but that youth was not long in discovering what was in the wind. Out the morning after his brother's departure, with his gun in the fields, as usual, as he skirted the out-lying portion of Arraghvanna he caught the gleam of new wood, and a general air of bustle about the place. Depositing his gun in the hedge he vaulted the low stone wall, and took the intervening dreary black patch of potato land at a run.

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Ted saw him coming and met him at the other side, and Terry was quick to discern that it was a different Ted from the last time he had seen him.

"Hello, Ted, what's up? Have you had a windfall?"

"No, sor," answered Ted, glancing in the direction of the cowhouse, the broken roof of which was being deftly and substantially repaired by the hand of Mr. Michael M'Ghee. "It's the squoire's orders, sor," he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "Though it's Father O'Hagan we've got to thank for it all. Pat Finnigan was here just after breakfast to ax whether it was the end of the wurld."

"Why, I never heard anything about it," said Terry, completely bewildered, although, of course, immensely pleased. "My brother left this morning for Scotland. He ought to have gone yesterday. I suppose he stopped to give these orders, but he never said a word about it up at Ballymore."

"But he's done it all the same, Mr. Terry," said Ted, "and it's working me fingers to the bone I'll be, to pay me rint. I'll pay it somehow, and all the boys are of the same mind wid me."

Terry turned his head away quickly because his eyes were moist. Perhaps he was ashamed of his passing weakness, and yet he need not have been. It was no dishonour to his young manhood that he should so warmly sympathise with men like Ted Rooney, who were not only willing but anxious to do what was right and just, if only the hard conditions of their lives would permit it.

"I am very glad my brother has come to look at matters in this light, Ted, but I don't understand it all the same," said Terry, frankly. "But I'm sure he won't regret it."

"That he won't, sor," said Ted, with great earnestness. "As I said, I'll pay my rint somehow, if I should have to go in the town for the winter and earn it, just to show the squire that I'm a man of me word."

Terry smiled, and, stepping forward, examined with great interest the plan of repairs. Then he walked home to lunch, pondering the thing in his mind. He could not understand it, and mingling with his undoubted satisfaction there was a vague feeling of uneasiness lest all was not right. And yet what could be wrong, or what more natural than that, having had his sympathies awakened by the good priest, Tom should take some steps to redress the sad state of affairs existing on Ballymore? But what astonished Terry most of all was that Tom should actually have sympathies to arouse. Terry had not hitherto believed him to be possessed of any. He found his mother waiting on him, and, as usual, he plunged into the subject nearest his heart without a moment's hesitation.

"Mother," he cried, excitedly, the moment he was within the dining-room door, "just guess what has happened? I don't suppose Tom has told you anything about it."

"About what?" asked his mother, languidly. "You're so boisterous; you're just like a hurricane coming into a room."

"I beg your pardon," said Terry at once, "and I ought to have washed my hands. I'll do so in a minute when I've told you my news. Did you know that Tom had given orders for all sorts of improvements and repairs to be done at Arraghvanna, and on Finnigan's place, and goodness knows where else?"

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Lady Lyndon stared at him helplessly.

"What can you be talking about, Terry? Who told you such an absurd story?"

"Nobody told me anything. I saw it. Michael M'Ghee is up from Rathdrum at Arraghvanna putting a new roof on their cowshed, and I saw Ted. He told me that Finnigan's house is to be repaired, and they have even talked of building a new one, perhaps in the spring. Did Tom tell you anything about it?"

"No, he did not," answered Lady Lyndon, with an emphasis which left no doubt as to her views on the subject. "I suppose he did not dare, but I can hardly believe it yet. Are you sure there's no mistake?"

"Why, certain. Didn't I tell you I saw M'Ghee with my own eyes on the roof at Arraghvanna? I must say it's about the last thing I would have expected from Tom. Surely Father O'Hagan must have been talking to him again. I think I'll go down after lunch and see."

"I shall go into Rathdrum," said his mother, and the gloom on her face seemed to deepen. "I must find out from Moran what is the meaning of all this, and if possible put a stop to such frightful folly and extravagance."

"But you can't stop it, mother, if Tom has left his orders," said Terry, with undisguised glee. "Good old Tom, I wish he were here so that I could dance a jig round him."

"Go away and make yourself fit to be seen, you silly boy," said his mother, sourly, and Terry, slightly subdued, took himself off. Immediately after lunch Lady Lyndon ordered the old family coach, and

gave the order to drive to Rathdrum, which she reached about four o'clock in the afternoon. She found Moran in the office up to the eyes in business. He was surprised at receiving a visit from Lady Lyndon, but not displeased. He had frequently wondered how she regarded the new order of things. He did not long remain in doubt.

"Send your young man out, Moran," she said, with a glance at the clerk, and the moment they were left alone she broke out. "Now, what in Heaven's name is the meaning of all this?" she cried, shrilly. "Has my son suddenly gone mad, and are you aiding and abetting him in this outrageous folly?"

Moran shook his head.

"I know as much or as little as your ladyship," replied Moran, shrugging his shoulders. "There's a mystery in it, that's all."

"I should think there is. Surely you know something, since Mr. Lyndon has spoken on the subject to you. He never mentioned it to me," she said, irritably.

"My lady, all I know is that Mr. Lyndon came here yesterday and gave me some orders that nearly knocked the wind out of my body, begging your ladyship's pardon. And when I tried to reason with him in his own interests he told me to shut up, neither more nor less."

"I can't understand this strange influence Father O'Hagan has acquired over him all of a sudden. Can you?"

"No, my lady, I can't; and what's more, I don't believe Father O'Hagan has had anything to do with it, though he's getting the credit of it all over Wicklow. In Glendalough they're making a little tin god of him and nothing else."

"What reason have you for thinking he has little to do with it?" asked Lady Lyndon, struck by the agent's words. "And if he hasn't, how are we to account for it? It was certainly after he had a talk with Father O'Hagan last Friday that he changed all his plans."

"Yes; but—but my own opinion is that there's a woman in it, my lady."

"What woman?" she asked, with sharpness, and her eyes positively flashed.

"Miss Aileen Byrne, I think; but I may be wrong," said the agent, eyeing Lady Lyndon's face to note the effect of his hazard remark.

"I wonder if that can possibly be?" she said, thoughtfully. "I can soon find out. Now, listen to me, Moran. Do as little in the matter of expenditure as possible till Mr. Lyndon returns. Do not appear to disobey the orders, only see that there is no hurry, do you understand?"

"I do, my lady. There will be no undue hurry; but the cowhouse at Arraghvanna will be finished, they tell me, in two days."

"Well, say you have no further instructions in the meantime. Something must be done to stop this useless outlay, which we can ill afford. How much better if the place had been cleared of the whole pack of lazy, presuming good-for-nothings. I am bitterly disappointed. As I said to my son, he will never have such a chance again."

"I quite agree with your ladyship, and I wish with all my heart I had had my way; but, then, what's the use of saying anything; we are powerless."

"Yes; it is not right that we, at least that I, should be. I think it is an unjust law that takes the

power from a woman of experience and gives it to a foolish and headstrong youth directly he attains his majority. There are few men fit for power until they are thirty."

"I quite agree with your ladyship; but I must say I thought Mr. Lyndon was pretty shrewd and determined for his age; and I say again I can't make out what has changed him," said Moran, and he showed Lady Lyndon obsequiously to her carriage.

"Tell him to drive to Killane," she said; and leaning back in the carriage she gave herself up to thought. The idea of Aileen Byrne as a possible daughter-in-law had more than once occurred to her, though it had never given her any pleasure. She had no active dislike to the girl, but there was neither sympathy nor intimacy between them. The disparity in their characters and natures forbade it. Although nothing could be actually said against the marriage, it was not the brilliant alliance of which Lady Lyndon had dreamed. Her son was very handsome, and, being so closely related to the once powerful Bantry family, might claim a right to mate with one in a higher sphere.

"There is not even any money," she said to herself, as she looked out when they passed through the gateway at Killane. "They are beggars, like ourselves."

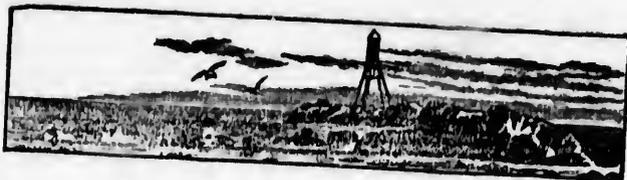
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CHAPTER XXVII

A WOMAN OF THE WORLD



HE gloom of her thoughts was not permitted to tinge Lady Lyndon's demeanour as she entered the drawing-room at Killane. Aileen thought she looked like a woman without a care, and remarkably young for her age.

"How do you do, Lady Lyndon? This is a pleasant surprise. It is a very long time since you were here. I thought you had quite forgotten us," she said, cordially.

"There you did me an injustice, Aileen ; besides, to forget you were impossible with two sons hopelessly in love with you," said Lady Lyndon with a sly smile.

Aileen laughed, and coloured slightly.

"Terry and I are old sweethearts, Lady Lyndon, but to accuse me of having two in the family is—a slight exaggeration, shall we say?" replied Aileen, easily. "Isn't it a cold afternoon? We are going to have a severe winter, I think. There were quite a score of robins on the lawn this morning—always an ominous sign."

"Yes, it is cold. I have been in Rathdrum, Aileen,

interviewing Moran on my own account. Tom has not treated me well. Not content with stopping the evictions, when all would have been conducted thoroughly, and the trouble would have been at an end, he has given orders for all sorts of extravagant repairs to be carried out on the steadings. Can you tell me the meaning of it?"

"I, Lady Lyndon?" repeated Aileen, in surprise. "I never heard of it until this moment. But, of course, I am glad. Knowing my views, you will not expect me to say anything else."

"Then you have had no hand in persuading him to it?"

"What can you mean, Lady Lyndon? I have only twice expressed my views to Tom on the subject—once long before the evictions were even talked of, and once after he stopped them—on Tuesday afternoon in fact—and he did not say a word about any repairs."

"Then it remains as great a mystery as ever!" exclaimed Lady Lyndon, helplessly. "He seems to be bewitched."

"Dear Lady Lyndon, don't look doleful. Whatever has brought about the change, believe me, neither Tom nor you will ever regret it. And see how happy Terry will be! The former state of things was eating into his heart."

"Oh, I don't take much notice of Terry," replied his mother, lightly. "But I should like to know what's at the bottom of all this. I made sure I should find a clue here, and I must say I feel rather glad to find you innocent."

"Denis, tell the gentlemen Lady Lyndon is here," said Aileen, as the butler set the tea-tray before her. "My father and Mr. Fletcher are working what they

call double tides in the study in view of the election. Of course you have heard the news?"

"What news?" asked Lady Lyndon, quickly.

"Why, Mr. Parnell has asked Mr. Fletcher to stand for Tyrone, and he is going to visit the constituency next week."

"What!" Lady Lyndon's blank stare as she uttered the monosyllable only partly expressed her feelings of bewildered indignation. Aileen much enjoyed the effect of her words.

"You are as surprised as I think Tom will be. Why is it that you have all, except Terry, such a prejudice against papa's inoffensive secretary?"

"You are mistaken, Aileen. How is it possible to entertain a prejudice against a person one does not recognise?" asked Lady Lyndon, loftily. "I confess I am surprised. What on earth can Mr. Parnell mean? We thought he, at least, would do something towards raising the tone of Irish politics, and that he would dignify the party. Surely we have been grossly mistaken?"

A smile of quiet amusement played round Aileen's expressive mouth.

"Some of us think he does dignify the party; and in this case, at least, papa believes he could not have made a better choice."

"It is just possible the constituency he proposes to honour may take a different view," observed Lady Lyndon, with dry sarcasm.

"After Cork I rather think they'll receive their leader's candidate with open arms. There is no doubt that Mr. Parnell has more than fulfilled every expectation, and that he fills his position like a king," said Aileen, with the earnestness of one who felt deeply

what she was saying. Indeed the expression of her face and the extraordinarily eloquent look in her eyes raised in Lady Lyndon's mind an odd suspicion, of which she found it difficult to rid herself. Although Parnell was many years older than Aileen Byrne, he was still a man in his prime, and his personal qualities were exactly such as would appeal to a warm, impulsive nature like Aileen Byrne's. Could it be possible that there was anything between them, or that Aileen had given her love unasked? Dismissing this interesting problem to be considered at her leisure, Lady Lyndon made another remark which caused Aileen's cheek to flush angrily.

"Well, I suppose the fellow will be so much flattered that he will be insufferable, where before he was merely objectionable."

"Oh, Lady Lyndon, you are harsh. But, hush! here they come. May I beg you to conceal your feelings, or at least respect mine. It cannot but be painful to me and to my father to see our guest uncourteously treated."

"Your dependent, you mean, Aileen. But don't be afraid. These are levelling days, and I shall bear in mind that I am talking to the possible member for Tyrone, and, who knows, perhaps the future leader of the Irish party."

Aileen looked nervous and embarrassed as her father and Fletcher entered. On more than one occasion she had witnessed an exhibition of Lady Lyndon's haughty and overbearing demeanour, and feared a repetition of it. In this, however, she was agreeably disappointed. After shaking hands with Captain Byrne, Lady Lyndon greeted Fletcher with an urbane cordiality which surprised no one more than the young man himself.

He did not respond to it very heartily, and Aileen inwardly admired the distant gravity of his salutation. He immediately attached himself to the tea-table, and left the captain to entertain Lady Lyndon. But of this she by no means approved. Again she felt puzzled, almost irritated, by the strange sense of familiarity caused by his appearance. She had seen him only a few times—each look at his face deepened the impression. It was one with which she had long been familiar. The very trick of his expression troubled her, and once, as she saw him place his hand behind his back and bend towards Aileen as she spoke, an icy something seemed to clutch at her heart, and the fine colour for which she was renowned visibly paled. It was as if the spectre of the past haunted and mocked at her. She turned to the captain with a ghastly smile.

"Your young protégé may thank the lucky star which guided him to Killane," she said, indicating Fletcher with a glance. "Aileen has been telling me of the distinction Mr. Parnell proposes to confer on him. Is it not a little premature?"

"No. I assure you, Lady Lyndon, Fletcher's an extraordinary fellow. He's a genius. You will admit I have had the best opportunity of judging during the last few months," replied the captain, confidentially, and with undoubted enthusiasm. "Wait till my book comes out. It bears the mark of his masterly touch all through. I tell him his name ought to be on the title-page with mine. I have only supplied the skeleton; he has clothed it, Lady Lyndon, in language which will compare with the finest in any literature. You should hear Mr. Parnell on it. I gave him some of the early sheets to read, and that made him desire

further acquaintance with Fletcher; but he was undoubtedly drawn to him, from the first."

"Indeed, very interesting," said Lady Lyndon, and, putting up her lorgnette, she deliberately surveyed Fletcher attentively. But he never once turned his eyes in her direction. Presently, however, she raised her voice.

"Mr. Fletcher, may I be permitted to congratulate you? Come here, and tell me how it is you have managed to make yourself necessary to one of the most unapproachable of men?"

Fletcher looked at her steadily, feeling the same sense of antagonism towards her as he had often felt towards her son.

"Go and talk to her," whispered Aileen. "She is very sarcastic, but I think you are her match."

Fletcher crossed the room. Lady Lyndon kept her lorgnette to her eyes, thus accentuating her somewhat supercilious look.

"What is it you wish me to say, Lady Lyndon?" he asked, courteously.

"I want you to tell me how you have conquered Mr. Parnell? He does not make friends readily, and he is a very proud man. Doubtless you have brought strong family influence to bear on him."

Captain Byrne, laughing silently, went to Aileen's side to have his cup refilled.

"Madam, I have no family, replied Fletcher, quietly, "except an adopted father and mother in Scotland, who out of their charity took me from the gutter, where some one responsible for my care had left me—that is all there is to tell."

"Where did this happen?" she asked, less superciliously, and with deepening interest.

"In the city of Edinburgh."

"Edinburgh," she repeated, musingly, and with an odd sense of relief. "Have you no further clue to your real birth?"

"None; nor do I seek it. I am fortunate in the parental care these Christian people bestowed on me. I want no other."

"Are they in poor circumstances?"

"They are poor working people, madam."

"They have brought you up well; but if you go on as you have begun you will be able to repay them."

"Lady Lyndon, there are debts in this world it is impossible to pay—my debt to my parents is of that number. There is nothing I could give them which they do not possess. I could not make them richer by a hairsbreadth, except, perhaps, by my gratitude and love, which, I pray God, will never fail them."

He spoke from the fulness and passion of his heart, and his words made a strong impression on all who heard them. Aileen hurriedly wiped the moisture from her eyes. Each one in the room was conscious of the personal power of the man who uttered them. Lady Lyndon shrugged her shoulders as she rose.

"You are very odd. I suppose that is why you have interested Mr. Parnell. Well, you are about to be launched on the tempestuous sea of Irish politics. It has wrecked many a promising barque. Take care of yours, if only for the sake of the good people of whom you have told me. Well, Aileen, I must go. When are you coming to Ballymore to behold our transformation scene?"

Aileen smiled.

"I should like to come soon. When does Tom return?"

"Not later than Tuesday. It is a duty visit he is paying. The M'Neills are a sour lot, given up to psalm singing and other forms of godliness not approved by Master Tom. Shall I tell him you will postpone your visit till his return? Such a message would undoubtedly hasten it."

"You can tell him anything you like," Aileen answered with a merry laugh, and the smile lingered in her eyes after Lady Lyndon had left the room with her father.

"How well you spoke to her, Mr. Fletcher," she said when the door was closed. "She isn't always so disagreeable, but she has been much annoyed because the evictions have been stopped."

"I thought so. But I cannot imagine Lady Lyndon to be a pleasant person in any mood," answered Fletcher, making a directly personal remark for the first time in Aileen's recollection.

Lady Lyndon's carriage had to pass the gate of Avondale on her way home, and when she came within sight of it she looked out, half-inclined to go up to the house. But already the early winter darkness was closing in, and she was by no means sure of finding the master at home. On the brow of the hill she met one of the station cars bringing a solitary passenger, when she immediately recognised. She drew the cord, and the carriage came to a standstill. Only then recognising her as she put her head out of the window Mr. Parnell leaped from the car, paid the driver, and sent him away.

"Lady Lyndon, how do you do? I hope you have not been calling at my deserted house?"

"Not to-day; only at Killane. How are you, and why do you never come to see me at Ballymore? I

kept those two uninteresting guests of yours the other night in the hope that you would come in search of them."

"I had something else to do, and I am sorry you found them uninteresting," he said, and while he was speaking he kept his eyes steadily on her face. If only she could have read his thoughts!

"Where have you come from; and why don't you ride in a proper conveyance? The leader of the Irish party should not journey so shabbily."

"He journeys according to his means," answered Parnell, with his faintly melancholy smile. "I have been in Dublin on a purely personal matter. Will you excuse me if I ask you a question regarding an almost forgotten episode of the past?"

"Certainly; ask anything you please?" she answered, hurriedly, conscious of a growing nervousness.

"Did you never find any clue about the poor little chap who disappeared so mysteriously from Ballymore so long ago?"

"What can you mean by asking such a question?" she said, shrilly. "Of course it was known that he was drowned in Glendalough."

"Was the body ever found?"

"No; but there was no doubt whatever. The nurse disappeared, too. But tell me why you have raked that hideous memory up just now? I have been trying for five-and-twenty years to forget it."

"I am sorry. I meant no ill. I shall not offend again," he answered, and scan his face as she might and did its sphinx-like gravity revealed nothing to her. But when he bade her his suave good-bye she sank back trembling among her cushions, oppressed by a vague sense of approaching evil.



CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BLOW FALLS

SEVERAL days passed, and though no letter came from Monaghan, neither Mrs. Rooney nor Ted felt greatly alarmed. They had half expected a line on her arrival to say how she had found her uncle; but the absence of any news they accepted as a hopeful sign, and fully expected that Kitty would return any day to give them full particulars in person. When she left it had been on the understanding that a week would be the limit of her visit, even for that time she could ill be spared from Arraghvanna; but the strange and unexpected turn affairs had taken had infused new life into everybody, not only at Arraghvanna, but over the whole estate. Ted went singing about his work, delighted to see his tumble-down place growing trim and taut under the capable hands of Michael M'Ghee. He felt as if he had received a new lease of life, and all that was best and brightest in the young man's nature came to the surface. His mother had not been so well for years. Mary O'Neill came in with unfailing regularity to do all the hard work of the house; but Mrs. Rooney was

able to move about slowly and do a great many little things in which she took the greatest possible pride. She was constantly thinking of the surprise it would be to Kitty to see her moving about so actively when she should come back.

"I can't make it out why Kitty has never sent a loine, Ted; it's not loike her. I hope everything's right. If there be no word from her to-morrow ye must write and say that I am gettin' a bit anxious."

"Oh, I don't think there's anything to be anxious about, mother," answered Ted, carelessly. "Ye know what a bit av extra work sickness makes in a house. I'm not thinking there can be any bad news, or we would have heard. I'll go down presently and see if there's been any letters left at 'The Harp.'"

It was a slack time on the fields, only the ploughing to do, and all the winter before him to do it in, so that Ted was not overdriven at all in these days, but employed himself in giving very substantial assistance to Michael M'Ghee with the repairs. About ten o'clock he cut across the fields to "The Harp" for the letters, which were always left there instead of being delivered at the outlying homesteads. Ted paid many visits to "The Harp," although he did not consume very much of Mickey Malone's whisky. Mickey Malone's pretty daughter was the attraction, and among her many admirers there was none of whom she thought more highly than Ted Rooney; but her father had often warned her that he would never give his consent to her marrying a man unless he could keep her in proper comfort. These views were known to Ted, and hitherto his pride had kept him from saying a word to Nora, although he had often had the heart to do so. Now, however, it seemed to him

that everything had changed. Once more hope had spread her joyous wings across the horizon of his life, and he had even anticipated a possible and glorious day upon which he should be able to tell Nora what was in his heart without fear of being turned away from her father's door.

"Good morning, Ted," said Nora, fresh as a daisy, as usual, as she stepped briskly from the little parlour at the back. "I was just going to luk for a spalpeen to send up to Arraghvanna wid yer letters. There's only three, but wan, I think, looks loike bad news."

"From Monaghan?" said Ted, eagerly, as he stretched out his hand for the broad black-edged envelope.

"Yes, Monaghan. I was curious enough to read the postmark, Ted, knowing Kitty was there, and why she had gone."

"Poor Uncle Tim must be no more," said Ted, soberly, as he broke the seal. Nora stood sympathetically by and watched him while he read the letter, which appeared to be very short. She saw a gradual and curious change come upon Ted's face, as he stood with the letter in his hand helplessly staring at it.

"What's the matter, Ted?" she asked, moving to his side and glancing over his shoulder. "Is it worse news even than you expected?"

"It's just what I expected, Nora," he said hoarsely; "but there's something here I don't understand. Read it, Nora, and tell me what it manes at all, at all."

Nora took the letter, and ran her bright eyes over it.

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"WHAT'S THE MATTER, TED?"

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in such a sad way. Why, Kitty is there, isn't she?"

"Yes," answered Ted, helplessly. "She went away about ten days ago to meet Dan in Dublin, but from this letter she can't have arrived."

"She certainly can't have arrived," said Nora, in the utmost perplexity. "He says they have expected to hear, and have supposed that your mother must have taken a turn for the worse. Why, whatever can it mean, Ted? Something must have happened to Kitty."

Ted stood quite still, and his face became white and set.

"Something has happened to her. I daren't take this letter home and show it to mother, Nora. I must try and find out something first. Do you think your father would lend me a pony to ride into the telegraph office at Rathdrum? It would save me a good hour."

"Why, yes, I'll lend you one, Ted. Father's gone to Wicklow, but I know he'd be the very first to say you could have it. What can have happened to poor Kitty? A whole week! Oh, Ted, it's terrible."

"It's worse than terrible," said Ted, and Nora never forgot the look on his face. Mickey Malone kept very good horse flesh, and in little more than half an hour Ted was in the telegraph office at Rathdrum, from which he sent a message with a pre-paid reply to Monaghan. What he suffered in the interval while he waited for the return message no one ever knew. The suddenness and unexpectedness of the shock, and the awful mystery surrounding the whole affair, seemed to knock the spirit out of him, and he could do nothing but tremble and feel inclined to cry

like a child. Within the hour a message came back from Dan—"Kitty never been seen or heard of." What to do next Ted could not imagine. He was able to cope with the ordinary affairs of life, but this strange and terrible catastrophe, which had so many elements of mystery in it, seemed to knock his usual self-reliance away from him, and he felt as helpless as a child. Father O'Hagan was the first person that occurred to him. He was always ready to help in any emergency or trouble, and no doubt would be able to give him some advice. He got back to Glendalough just after one o'clock, and leaving the pony at "The Harp" strode up the village to the manse gate.

Father O'Hagan had just come in for his modest mid-day meal, and at sight of Ted's pale, set face, he knew that something terrible must have happened. In a very few words Ted put him in possession of the facts he knew. The good father's face grew grave as he listened.

"This is a terrible story, Ted, and how to get at the bottom of it I know not, but something must be done. Now, the first thing I want to know is, had your sister any lover, or was she in the habit of meeting any one outside?"

"No, sir; she didn't hold with swateheartin'. Many a loikely chap has sought her; but she would have none av thim. No, whatever has happened to Kitty, your reverence, it isn't that."

Father O'Hagan stood silent a moment, and there flashed upon his memory the night that he had met Kitty and young Lyndon, not together, certainly, but suspiciously near the same spot. He did not think it wise, however, at this early stage of affairs to mention his suspicion to Ted. He knew his hot and impulsive

temper, and it was a matter which required great delicacy and care in handling, in order that the girl's reputation might not suffer in any way.

"How did your sister seem when she left home, can you remember?"

"Yes, your reverence, she was all roight. I drove her to Rathdrum station myself; she cried a bit when she said good-bye, and I taised her about it, but that was all."

"How is it that you have not been alarmed before, especially when she has not written?"

"Well, you see, sor, we are not a wroiting folk, and me mother and meself just thought that no news was good news, and that Kitty would be steppin' in any day to tell us all about it. She's often been at Monaghan a whole week and never written a word."

Father O'Hagan stared rather helplessly before him. Eleven days since Kitty had disappeared! What might not have happened in those eleven days?

"Well, the only thing we can do, Ted, and what we must do, is to put the police on her track. Give me every particular—the train she went by, where she expected to be met in Dublin, all you can think of—and I'll go in myself to Dublin by the three o'clock train and see the Superintendent of Police."

"I must go wid yer honour. I can't stop at home doin' nothing," said Ted, desperately.

"But, my dear lad, there's your mother to consider. I think it will be wise to say nothing to her just at present, at least until we are certain that Kitty is really lost. Are there no other friends she could have gone to visit?"

Ted shook his head.

"No. It's my opinion she's been murdered, Father

O'Hagan," he answered, jumping to the most desperate conclusion at once.

"I don't think there is any likelihood of that, Ted. In the first place I don't suppose your sister had an enemy in the world, and in the second place she was not carrying anything with her that could make it worth any person's while to kill her for what she had. I should dismiss that idea from my mind if I were you. But there, all the talking in the world won't mend matters or help us out. What we've got to do is act. You go quietly back to Arraghvanna, and hold your tongue, if you can, before your mother until I come back. I shall be very late, of course, but I'll come up to Arraghvanna before I go home."

"I could come and meet you, sor, if you are coming by the last train," said Ted. "My mother wouldn't take any notice of that, because, you see, I am often at 'The Harp' av an evenin'."

"Very well, you could do that, perhaps. It would arouse your mother's suspicions less if I were not to make an untimely visit to the house."

So the matter was settled. The good priest, who grudged no labour or trouble for his parishioners, and, besides, being keenly anxious concerning Kitty, who was one of the flowers of his flock, departed to the capital by the afternoon train. Ted went back to Arraghvanna, and, dodging his mother's questions as best he could, spent the whole afternoon out of doors.



CHAPTER XXIX

DIRE SUSPICIONS



FATHER O'HAGAN could not get rid of the fact that Kitty Rooney and the squire had disappeared from Glendalough simultaneously, and he firmly resolved to make it his business on the morrow to discover the movements and present whereabouts of Tom Lyndon ; but, of course, as yet not a hint of these suspicions must be breathed to Ted. They had rather a melancholy drive along the frostbound roads under the clear starry sky. Both were disinclined for conversation—Ted because his mind was full of a thousand vague alarms, and the priest because he feared the worst was yet to come. It was late, of course, when Ted reached Arraghvanna, and he let himself quietly into the house, much relieved when his mother did not summon him to her bedside to ask where he had been, and also to reiterate her anxiety concerning Kitty. He knew that on the morrow she must be told. He did not know how to set her aside, and he feared that the shock in her weak state of health would be a serious one.

Father O'Hagan rose early next morning, and,

having dressed and breakfasted with a somewhat heavy heart, he proceeded to Ballymore. His errand was a difficult one ; but in his long experience as guide, philosopher, and friend to the people of Glendalough, he had learned to tread lightly over difficult ground, and to handle delicate subjects with a touch peculiarly his own.

It was about ten o'clock when he passed through the great gates of Ballymore. The gatekeeper came out curtseying as usual, surprised to see his reverence so early on the road. The priest turned aside a moment to inquire for her well-being and that of her small family, and he obtained from her a piece of unexpected information. :

" If you be going up to the castle, your riverence, the young squire is home. He came home last night by the mail, and druv all the way from Wicklow, because the train did not stop at Rathdrum."

" Are you sure of this, Kathy ? " he asked, almost unable to believe his own ears.

" Why, shure, yes, your riverence. Didn't I have to get up in the middle of the night and open the gates ? and sore frightened I was, too, having had no notice."

" He was alone, I suppose ? " said Father O'Hagan, involuntarily.

" No, your riverence. There was a young gentleman wid him, one of his honour's cousins from Scotland come back wid him on a visit. They're going to hunt this morning I heard them say, and there's enough of noise at the kennels. Don't you hear them ? "

The deep baying of the dogs filled the stillness of the morning. Father O'Hagan listened to it a moment in silence. While in a sense the gatekeeper's words

filled him with relief, it deepened the mystery of Kitty Rooney's disappearance, and made it appear more difficult, if not indeed impossible, of solution. It was now eleven days since Kitty had left; nine, he knew, since Lyndon had followed. The fact that he had come back accompanied by one of his Scotch cousins, seemed to make his participation in Kitty's flight entirely out of the question. What, then, was to be done? What had become of the sweet girl who had made the sunshine of Arraghvanna, and was beloved in Glendalough, from one end to the other? His face wore such a troubled look that involuntarily the gatekeeper put the question to him,—

"Shure, and your riverence looks sorrowful. May I make bould to ax what is the trouble?"

"I can't tell it to you to-day, Kathy," he answered. "It may pass, but in the meantime I am very anxious and perplexed as well; in fact, I don't know where to turn."

"That's bad, your riverence; but shure, have you not often tould us yourself when things has been hard wid us, that our extremity is God's opportunity?"

At hearing one of his favourite counsels thus neatly applied to his own case, Father O'Hagan could not forbear a smile.

"Thank you, Kathy, not only for having remembered my words, but for having spoken them to me in a moment of need. I shall remember them. Good day to you. If the squire is riding to hounds this morning I need not go up and see him; my business can wait."

Leaving the gates of Ballymore, Father O'Hagan struck across the fields to Arraghvanna. He felt more thankful as he walked that, although sorely

tempted, he had not communicated his suspicion of Lyndon to Ted Rooney, and he somewhat rebuked himself for having been so ready to think evil of the young man, who apparently was less culpable in many respects than even he had thought. So the good priest read himself a fresh lesson in charity that winter morning, and inwardly prayed that he might be kept from the sin of harsh judgment. He had not been at Arraghvanna since the improvements had been made, and he was surprised as he approached the homestead to see its trim and prosperous look. He felt rebuked again, remembering at whose instigation these repairs had been carried out. Lyndon was not and never had been, a favourite of Father O'Hagan's, and perhaps he had been prejudiced against him, and too ready to attribute evil to him. These thoughts brought him in a very penitent mood to the cottage door, at which he knocked, and was immediately bidden come in by Ted. The moment he entered he saw from the appearance and attitude of poor Mrs. Rooney that Ted had communicated part at least of the bad news to her. She was rocking herself to and fro in her chair piteously, and refusing to be comforted. Ted, whose face was pale, and bore traces of the sleepless night he had passed, looked much relieved at sight of Father O'Hagan.

"Good-morning, your riverence. I have just been telling my poor mother that Kitty has never got to Monaghan. It's hard on her, but I'm bidding her try and not despair. We may hear of her yet. I was thinking all night long of it, father, and perhaps, who knows, she may have been taken ill in the streets, and been taken to some of the hospitals."

"I thought of that, Ted, in fact I went to the

Rotunda on my way to the train and inquired, and there was no one there bearing the least resemblance to your sister; but to-day the whole length and breadth of the city will be scoured by the police."

At mention of the police Widow Rooney rocked herself to and fro again, and wailed more loudly.

"Oh, my poor darlint! Why did I ever let you go? It's kilt and murdered she is, and we'll niver see her purty face any more. Oh, Father O'Hagan, it's shurely a wicked woman I must have been all me days to have so many sorrows heaped on me."

Father O'Hagan drew nearer to the distracted mother, and tried to comfort her, but it was a futile task. She was like Rachel mourning for her child, refusing to be comforted.

Throughout the day the news gradually spread in Glendalough that something had happened to Kitty Rooney, that she had never reached Monaghan, and that no one knew where she was, or what had become of her. That day there was a meet of the Wicklow hounds on an adjoining estate to Ballymore, and Lyndon was riding with the best of them. Late in the afternoon the huntsmen, with the hounds in full cry, swept over the cross roads at "The Harp of Erin," raising the usual excitement among the loungers at that favourite corner.

Father O'Hagan's anxiety concerning Kitty was almost as great as that of her mother and brother. He could not rest, and about four o'clock in the afternoon he borrowed the accommodating Mickey Malone's pony, and rode into Rathdrum to telegraph to the police asking whether any clue had been found. In the interval which must elapse before the reply was

received he rode up to Killane, only to find that there was no one at home but the captain's secretary.

"I will speak to him for a moment if he can spare the time," he said to Denis Doolan, and in a few minutes was joined by Fletcher. They had met several times at Killane and elsewhere, and Father O'Hagan had formed the highest opinion of Fletcher's gifts and character.

"I must apologise for disturbing you at your work," said the priest, as they shook hands; "but I am in great trouble about a family in my parish, and while I was waiting a telegraph message from Dublin I thought I might as well walk up here."

"Captain Byrne and his daughter will be sorry not to have seen you," answered Fletcher. "They went to the meet at Derrybawn this morning, and have not yet returned."

"Oh yes; I might have thought of that. However, it does not matter very much. You know the Rooneys, of Arraghvanna, don't you? At least you have heard of them?"

"Yes; I have been in their house," said Fletcher, with interest. "They were in great trouble then about the threatened evictions, but I understood from Miss Byrne that all that was over, and that Mr. Lyndon had even gone the length of making some improvements on the place.

"All that is quite true; the trouble has nothing to do with agrarian matters," answered Father O'Hagan. "Less than a fortnight ago the only daughter, one of the best little girls in my parish, went off to visit her uncle in Monaghan who was supposed to be dying. She has never written, but it did not raise any anxiety until quite recently in the minds of

her mother and brother, because it appears she has often spent a week and more from home without writing at all; but yesterday morning a letter came from Monaghan, announcing the uncle's death, and they learned from it that Kitty had never arrived."

Fletcher started.

"Never arrived! What can have become of her?"

"That's exactly what I have been trying to find out. I went to Dublin yesterday, and put the matter in the hands of the police, but I must say I am not very sanguine of success. I am waiting now to hear whether any clue has been found. I don't suppose for a moment that you can help me; but you know how one feels in a matter of this kind—it seems less overwhelming when it is shared with another."

Fletcher hesitated a moment, while there rose up vividly before his mind what he had seen in the woods of Ballymore on the night of his first visit to Glendalough. He looked at the priest, and the priest looked at him.

"You have something to tell me, I think," said Father O'Hagan gently.

"I have, but whether it is a clue or not is another matter," said Fletcher. "One night a good many weeks ago as I walked back from Glendalough I came upon Kitty Rooney in the woods of Ballymore in close talk with Mr. Lyndon. They looked like—well, like lovers; and I think you might do worse than ask him whether he knows anything about her."

Father O'Hagan groaned. It was terrible to have his old suspicion not only reawakened but confirmed.

"I thought of that, and indeed this morning I went up to Ballymore for the express purpose of questioning his mother about his actions during the

past week. You know, or perhaps you may not have heard, that he has been absent on a visit to his relations in Scotland. It is only nine days since he left, eleven days since Kitty disappeared; yet he came home last night accompanied by one of his Scotch cousins. I do not see how we can connect them at all in this matter."

Fletcher hesitated a moment before he spoke again.

"It is a terrible charge to bring against a man, Father O'Hagan," he admitted, frankly, "but as I stand before you this moment I have not the slightest doubt in my mind that the only person who could throw any light upon this mystery is Lyndon of Ballymore."

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CHAPTER XXX

MORE LIGHT



WHILE these stirring events were happening in Ireland, life flowed on in gentle, even tenor as before in the rose-covered cottage on the banks of the Spital Water. After Robert's departure it seemed to John and Mary Fletcher that they drew together more closely, their common love and common sense of loneliness making a new bond between them. They only knew after he had gone how much he had been to them. Perhaps of the two Mary missed him more. He had always been a dutiful and obedient boy since understanding what duty and obedience meant, but of late years he had endeared himself to her by a thousand tender and thoughtful ways. She missed him at every turn. He had always been at hand to save her failing strength; he had done the little services which generally fall to a daughter's share; how necessary he had been to her existence Mary only realised now that he had left them never to come back. They both knew that while he would without doubt hold them in loving memory, and it might be revisit the old home, the life that had been, and which they had so sweetly and kindly shared

together, could never be renewed. He had gone out into the great world to make or mar his fortune, while they remained in the safe anchorage which they should never leave until they set out on the last lonely voyage. There was some sadness in the thought, and even to each other they had never given it voice ; but their pride and joy and hope in him was wonderful. Since the day he had taken up his abode at Killane he had written two letters to them every week, giving them such minute and graphic descriptions of his life that they could follow him through every turn of every day. They saw Killane, the grey, old house among the trees, and felt as friends towards all its inmates. They knew the Lyndons by name, and Father O'Hagan, and even old Moran, of Rathdrum, and had waited breathlessly to hear of the result of the evictions. Nor was Mr. Parnell forgotten. It seemed the most wonderful thing of all to them that in so short a time Robin should have made friends with so great a man. After that it seemed as if nothing could further take them by surprise. It must not be thought, however, that Fletcher wrote in boastful spirit. Tall talk of any kind was impossible to him. He simply related events as they happened, described things as they were with a vivid clearness which seemed to photograph them on the minds of those who read his descriptions. He wrote also out of the fulness of his heart because he loved the recipients, and had not the temptation to send the careless, hurried epistles which would have betrayed the fact that he found the duty irksome.

Very often the Irish letters came by the evening post, and that pleased them best at the cottage, for then they had leisure to read, and ponder, and enjoy

them. Sometimes John would read the letter over first himself, then aloud to his wife, then they read it together. It was all touching, but it was unconscious pathos. Tuesday evening the letter never failed; it was delivered at the door about eight o'clock, and long before Jamie Sanderson could possibly have reached the Haugh John would be at the door, or pacing the garden paths, restlessly looking for the flash of Jamie's lantern. By that time Mary would have all the tea-things cleared, the spotless hearth swept in again, the fire burning cheerily, and John's slippers on the fender end. The Book, ready for the evening lesson, would be in its place on the little round table beside the lamp, and she herself waiting with a secret tremor for the next news of her boy.

"A' richt, Mary," John called at the open door. "Here's the letter. Are ye ready?"

He came in eagerly bearing the precious missive in his hand, and, sitting down on the arm of his big chair, opened it carefully with his penknife.

"Mercy upon us, Mary," he cried, before he had read many lines. "What d'ye think has happened noo? He's gaun into Parliament."

"A'ready, John? No, no. It'll be a joke. Gie me the letter, see, and let me read it for mysel'. It's a mistake ye're makin' this time."

"No, it's no, my woman," answered John, firmly. "Listen to me."

Mary put on her spectacles, and never took her eyes from her husband's face while he read word for word of the wonderful news. It was not so long a letter as usual, but gave the plain facts of the case; described his last interview at Avondale, and concluded by telling them he was going to begin his

campaign at Tyrone at the beginning of the following week.

"Weel, that's maist wonderfu', Mary," said John, as he took off his spectacles and wiped the moisture of excitement from them. "To think o' Rob makin' political speeches in the very thick o' an election. Eh, what wad I no gie to hear him?"

"I wad greet just as I grat that nicht in the Music Hall when you spoke, John. Eh, d'ye mind that nicht, an' hoo we fand him at granny's door among the snaw?"

"Fine I mind it, Mary; but I maun read it again. "Eh, I hope the Lord will guide his feet an' gie him sense."

"He's no glaiket, John," said Mary, proudly. "An' he has mair sense than mony a man thrice his age."

"Ay, but the fu' cup is ill to cairry, an' he's but young," said John, shaking his head. "I think I maun go up to Halliwell the nicht, and tell the maister the news. I canna wait till the morn."

Mary smiled indulgently, not ill-pleased at the thought. Then they went over the letter again, conning every sentence, weighing every detail.

"Mr. Parnell maun think a terrible heap o' him, John; but, oh, I wish it was in Scotland, instead o' Ireland. It's sic a wild place. Ye never ken what'll happen there next," said Mary, with a sigh.

"It's a fine place for a young man to buckle on his spurs—an' win them, lass," said John, as he went to the press to take down his overcoat.

"Ye'll no bide, John?" she said, as she went with him to the door. "Ye'll only tell the maister an' come awa'. It's very eerie sittin' here alane."

"I'll no gang at a', my woman, if ye feel that way," said John, promptly, but she gave him a pat on the back and pushed him out.

"Hoots, awa'. I'm no a bairn. Besides, I want them to ken."

"Pride, pride, Mary, an' ye ken what gangs before it," observed John, shaking his head as he stepped to the path. "I'll be back inside an hour."

Mary put the bolt in the door, and went back to the cosy hearth, where she sat down dreamily, too much absorbed to heed the knitting lying invitingly to her hand. She had not long been alone when a low hesitating tap came to the door. It was just on the stroke of nine, a late hour for a neighbour's visit. Since her long illness Mary had been a prey to nervousness, and she hesitated whether to open the door. But when the knock came again she braced herself, and cautiously undid the bolt.

"Who's there?" she asked, in a suspicious voice and holding the door open far enough to see that a woman stood on the step.

"I'm a stranger, Mrs. Fletcher, but I want to see you very particularly. I beg you to let me in."

Mary did not hesitate, though her heart beat a little faster. When the light from the lamp fell across the little passage she saw that the late visitant was a woman of middle age, respectably, even richly dressed, and that she had nothing suspicious about her.

"Come in," she said, cordially enough, "though I dinna ken ye, nor what ye can hae to say to me."

"You will hear presently. You are alone, I saw your husband leave the house——"

At this odd remark Mary turned sharply round. Perhaps after all it was some thief who had watched

her chance, but another glance at the woman's face reassured her.

"Tell me your business quickly," she said. "I dinna like the way ye have come."

"I have come to speak to you about the boy you have reared as your own, whom you call Robert Fletcher."

Mary began to tremble violently, and the old fear which used to visit her in the days of his babyhood clutched at her heart again. Had she then come after all these years to take him away?

"What about him?" she asked, fiercely. "Are you—are you the hizzie that left him?"

The words forced themselves from her without any will of hers. She was dumbfounded that they were received with a nod.

"I am."

"Are you—are you his mither?" asked Mary then, and there was agony in her voice. To his mother she would have to give him up, but to none else.

"No—I am bad, but not so bad as that. Had he been mine I would have kept him," answered the strange woman, as she threw back her veil and revealed her haggard face, which bore traces of much sorrow. "I don't ask where he is, because I know. I have watched him from afar all these years, and I know he is in Ireland now—within a stone's throw of his father's house. The very finger of fate, Nemesis itself, has led him there, and the plotting of a lifetime has been overthrown."

Mary sank almost fainting into her chair.

"Is his father alive?" she managed to gasp.

"No, dead many years; but let us go back and

begin at the beginning of the story. Has the boy ever in his writing to you mentioned the name of Lyndon of Ballymore."

"Yes, he has told us all about that family, and their trouble with their folk——"

"Well, he is the eldest son, the child of the former Lady Lyndon, who died when he was born. His real name is Brian Lyndon."

"An' why—why was he sent away or stolen?" asked Mary, desperately.

"Why can you ask? Why is the child of a former marriage unwelcome in the house when the second mother arrives? Because he usurps the place her child might occupy. It is a child's question. I was maid to the first Lady Lyndon, and when she died I took care of the child. I need not go through the whole story, I daresay. You can follow it for yourself?" When the new wife found she was expecting a child of her own she conceived a dislike against the little one which amounted to hatred; but she was obliged to hide it from Sir Tom, and he never guessed it. I was in her confidence, and at last she bribed me to take away the child. I agreed to do so if she would pay me a thousand pounds, and to go to France, which was my native country. But I did not go there. I came no further than Edinburgh, where I lived six months with the child, and then when a good offer of marriage came to me I had to get rid of him. I was lodging at the time in the same street as Mrs. Middlemas, who was your mother, and I had spoken to her more than once. But she had never seen the child, nor knew that it was in my care. I knew all about you before I saw you, and when I laid him down where I did I was not cruel

to him, because I believed that you would take him and care for him. If he had been put in the work-house I should have taken him out."

Mary Fletcher sat still, trembling in every limb. What the strange, black-browed woman called the finger of fate she acknowledged to be the hand of Providence leading Robin back to his own folk. The wonder of it all held her in thrall; she had no desire to speak a word. The idea of seeking to cast a doubt on what had just been told her did not once suggest itself to her mind. It was wonderful, yet natural, and as easy to follow and understand as a simple story book.

"You say nothing," observed the stranger at length, struck by her silence, "but I see that you believe."

"Oh yes, I believe, it is very plain and easy. That Lady Lyndon must be a wicked woman, and you, too," she said, with a sudden flash in her eyes—"to have robbed an innocent bairn o' a' that rightly belonged to him. Woman, how could ye do it?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"I was paid, it mattered little to me; but I was fond of the child, and I have never lost sight of him. I have come here to see him play in this very garden; once I sat in your big barn of a church on the hill outside, and saw him sit in the pew with you. I knew he was cared for, and unless I am mistaken he has not so ill repaid that care."

At that Mary's eyes filled.

"He has been a guid son to me and my man, an' I dinna believe that this will mak' ony difference to him. He is bound to be a great man. We've had news the night that he's to be a Member o' Parliament.

What think ye o' that for a lad that has done his day's darg in the Halliwell Mill?"

"I am not surprised. He was bound to be clever, his father was a splendid man before him. The only regret I ever had about the business was on Sir Tom's account."

At that moment Mary heard her husband's foot on the gravel outside. Next moment he stepped into the kitchen, looking inordinately surprised to behold a strange lady in such close and intimate conversation with his wife.

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CHAPTER XXXI

A STRANGE STORY



FEW moments sufficed to put John Fletcher in possession of the facts the strange lady, who gave her name as Therese Maxwell, had come to relate. While she was speaking he kept his keen eyes fixed on her face, and though her tale seemed somewhat improbable, he did not for a moment doubt its truth. Perhaps he was less surprised than Mary had been. It had long been borne in upon his mind, especially since their adopted son had grown to manhood, that he must have been born in a family of some distinction. The quick development of his powers, and the extraordinary facility with which he had accommodated himself to the altered conditions of his life, had still further convinced John of the correctness of his own views. His face, however, was rather stern as he listened to the woman's words. He had small sympathy with evil-doing wilfully done, and to steal a child from its parents and its home, for whatever object, seemed to him a crime so enormous that it could scarcely be forgiven. He was aware, however, that in the woman before him he only saw the tool of another, and prob-

ably a stronger, mind, and he proceeded to cross-examine her in a manner which filled Mary with surprise and admiration.

"Supposing your story to be true, mistress," he said, deliberately—"I am not saying I dinna believe it; but where is your proof?"

Therese Maxwell smiled.

"The proof! I am the proof. All I have got to do is to go to Ballymore and face Lady Lyndon. There is nothing else needed."

"Does Lady Lyndon think you have kept him all this time?" asked John.

"No, she thinks he is dead. I told her so after I saw him safely established here."

At this Mary, to whom truth was as the breath of life, raised her hands in horror. John's eyes were not without their indignant flash, and he took a step backward from the woman, as if there was contamination in her presence.

"I suppose ye did that for your ain ends, an' it's an account ye will hae to settle wi' your Maker."

"Exactly," said Therese, with a grave nod. "I'm trying to make some reparation now before it is too late. When I took the child away from Ballymore Lady Lyndon gave me five hundred pounds. She was to give me another five hundred pounds if I told her the child was dead."

"Oh, the Jezebel!" cried Mary, unable to restrain her wrath. "It's a wonder a fire from heaven hasn't burnt her up long ago."

Therese Maxwell smiled. The simple goodness of these people in contrast with the darker side of life with which she had so much acquaintance seemed almost inconceivable.

"Lady Lyndon is a person without a conscience," she answered. "Of course, the offering of the second sum was a distinct bribe to me. I was to get rid of the child no matter how, no questions would be asked; but I had some bowels of compassion, and I congratulate myself on having done well by the child. He was much happier in this peaceful home than he would have been in Ballymore, at least until he was able to fight his own battles."

"That does not alter your sin, my woman," said John, sternly, "and if there's a law in the land ye shall be punished for it."

"Oh, I think not," she answered, calmly. "I did not come here to discuss anything of that sort; but I think now that the young man's career is beginning it is as well that it should be known who he is, and I am quite prepared to face the consequences, although I do not think there is any chance of punishment such as you suggest. Matters stand like this with me," she said in the same calm, deliberate way. "While I had the child in my care, as I told your wife, I received an offer of marriage from a good man, one of your own countrymen. He was in some difficulties at the time, and the money was useful. He knew that I was taking care of the child, but believed him to be the son of my widowed sister, and, of course, he asked no questions when I told him that the child had been taken back to his own people. We were married, we were happy and prospered greatly. I am in comfortable circumstances; I can pay back Lady Lyndon the thousand pounds she paid me, although I earned it well."

"It is a marvel to me that ye have been permitted to live, woman," said John Fletcher with a kind of

stern sadness. "Truly the wicked flourish like a green bay tree."

"That is so," said Therese, amiably; "but I suppose everything will be made even by-and-by. Well, I have at least done my duty so far that I have come here to you first, and I am prepared to go to Ireland with you on any day that you may appoint in order that this wrong may be righted at last. I think upon the whole I shall rather enjoy the confusion of Lady Lyndon, and even this will only be a blow to her ambition and her pride. She is incapable of any deeper feeling."

In these few merciless words did the woman who had been a dependent under Lady Lyndon's roof draw her character to the life. Mary shuddered to think that such people were permitted to cumber the ground. She looked helplessly at John, but found great strength and comfort in his calm, undisturbed face.

"Do you hear, Mary?" he said, turning to her. "Robin has often spoken about the trip we are to take to Ireland in the summer. It's only hurrying it forward a little."

"Will ye go to Ireland, then, John?" asked Mary, dumfounded at the course of events.

"Yes, of course," he answered. "The sooner this wrong is put right the better. When can you make it convenient to go, mistress?" he added, turning to the stranger.

"Oh, I am at your service any day," she answered, lightly. "I am a woman of leisure and means, but I think it well that there should not be much delay, because when the whole truth is known about our young politician it will cause him to enter upon his new career with great *éclat*."

Mary only partially understood this speech, but John saw the point of it at once.

"It's late," he said, as the clock struck ten, at the same time he glanced towards his wife. "Could we—could we gie her a bed, Mary?"

"We could, but I will not," answered Mary, quite calmly. "The woman that has been so wicked shall never sleep under my roof."

"Now, Mary," said John, reprovingly, "that's not the Christian spirit."

"Yes it is," answered Mary, with unusual spirit.

"We are bidden not quench the smoking flax nor crush the bruised reed."

"But this woman is not sorry for what she has done; she glories in it. She shall not sleep in this house."

Therese Maxwell faintly smiled.

"Your wife is right. I am not fit to sleep under her roof, and even if she were to ask me I would not. I have some sense of the fitness of things. But I, too, loved the child. I love him yet, and whether she may believe it or not, I was kind to him when I had him, and he loved me, too."

At this Mary's heart melted, and her tears fell.

"Oh, I dinna ken what to do," she cried. "I would not be too hard on anybody, but it was a terrible wicked thing to do; and his father—it must have broken his heart."

At this the stranger hurriedly drew down her veil. The memory and thought of Sir Tom Lyndon, who had ever been so good and generous a master to her, had followed her like a spectre through the years, disturbing many a waking hour, and haunting all her dreams.

"I have taken a room at the hotel," she said, as she turned to go. "I will see you in the morning, and then we can make arrangements. Good-night, Mrs. Fletcher. I don't blame you for what you have said, only I would ask you to remember that it is easy to be good when no temptation to evil is offered." With these words, which gave Mary considerable food for reflection, the strange woman left the house. John put on his hat, and walked with her along the lonely path by the Spital Water, and only left her when they came within sight of the hotel in the High Street where she was to stay the night.

There was little sleep that night for John and Mary Fletcher. They sat far into the morning talking of all that had happened, and of the still more wonderful things which were likely to happen after this great revelation should be made to the boy they had reared and loved as their own.

"She said it was the finger of fate, John," said Mary, as they rose at last, feeling the need of a few hours' rest. "It's nothing but the hand o' God. I canna get owre the thought that he should have been so wonderfully led away to Ireland."

"It is indeed wonderful, Mary," answered John, dreamily, "and how his heart has been filled with indignation at the way that the hard-working, decent folk on the estate hae been treated. Something telt him they were his ain folk, but he didna understand. I hae nae pity for the young man that will be put out when the story is kent; he isna fit to fill the position he is in."

"It will be a terrible business," said Mary, with a shiver. "I would fain stop at hame to be oot of it all, and yet something makes me want to go."

"Of course, you'll need to gang, Mary," said John, decidedly. "Ye'll get strength, woman; dinna trouble yoursel' about that."

"Will ye tell Mr. Bremner?" asked Mary, eagerly.

"No, not yet. I'll just ask if I can get awa' for a week. I'll tell him we're going to Ireland, of course; but until the whole thing is settled I dinna think that we have any right to tell the story to onybody."

To this Mary quite agreed, and they went off to bed, but she at least could not sleep, her mind was in a whirl of excitement. Her quiet days on the banks of the Spital Water had not prepared her for such strange developments as these, but at length some calmness came to her, and she was able to leave the whole matter, as she had left all the affairs both great and small all her life, in the hands of One who takes care of His creatures, and who maketh all things work together for good to those that trust in Him.

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CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE RANKS



MR. PARNELL had received a piece of information in Dublin intimately concerning Fletcher's future. It was his nature to satisfy himself without delay concerning any matter which claimed his interest and attention ; but, satisfied himself, he never was in any haste to communicate the result to others, even though they were scarcely less interested. For two weeks he kept to himself information of the utmost importance to Fletcher ; it was a habit of mind which marked his private as well as his public life. For some reason he had conceived a strong personal liking to the obscure young man, and perhaps in the light of his warm interest exaggerated his character and attainments. To say that Fletcher warmly reciprocated the kindly feeling shown towards him by the leader of the Irish party but feebly describes his mental attitude. Parnell was indeed at that time eminently calculated to win regard. He was in the zenith of his power and popularity. Handsome, winning, highly intellectual, he swayed the multitude as he willed. Perhaps his very reserve, which, even in the flush of victory or the

mad excitement of party politics, he never wholly laid aside, was the secret of his greatest power. Men felt that there was something behind, a reserve of power; that the inner man had been reached by very few. Perhaps at Killane he unbent himself more than anywhere.

There he was at home. The captain's large, unaffected, honest heart, troubled by no doubts, was like a stronghold to the harassed politician, even then oppressed by the futility of the struggle and the growing dread of ultimate defeat. In the presence of Aileen Byrne he became genial, tender, gentle in thought and expression. Often Fletcher wondered whether there was any warmer feeling than friendship between them. Of Aileen he had scarcely any doubt. She worshipped him; but whether it was the ardent passion of a patriotic heart towards one in whom she beheld her country's salvation, or the love of a woman for the man whose wife it is her hope to become, Fletcher could not guess. Of Parnell's feelings he was equally uncertain, but there came a day when he was no longer left in doubt. Two days after his talk with Father O'Hagan he visited the constituency for which he had been asked to stand, and during the next few weeks had no room in his mind for anything except the immediate events relating to it. He met with a good deal of opposition, which, however, his modest and manly bearing did something to modify. As a speaker he was not at that time a conspicuous success. The most that could be said of him was that he acquitted himself creditably. His utterances were moderate, yet tinged by a passionate though quietly expressed devotion to the country which made itself felt. The cry that he was an upstart and an alien

died down before a week was out, and his utterances began to command respect. But from the first the result was a foregone conclusion. The Gladstonian candidate won the seat by a large majority.

"Never mind, Fletcher," observed Parnell, as they set out from Omagh in a dismal deluge of rain the day after the contest, and without a friend to cheer them "You have led a forlorn hope. Perhaps it is as well for your own sake you were defeated."

"May I ask why you say so, sir?" asked Fletcher, upon whom defeat was sore. He had tasted for the first time the sweets of conflict and the chagrin of being conquered.

Parnell smiled his inscrutable smile.

"I might explain, but it would take some time," he answered, amiably. "Experience will teach you what I mean."

"It amazes me to see how imperturbably you came through such a scene as we had last night. Most men subjected to such indignity would have showed a different front."

"What! Give myself away to an ignorant mob clamouring for God knows what—they don't?" replied Parnell. "These things—the actual incidents and details of the contest—do not touch me. I seem to stand outside of them. Perhaps I lack sympathy or some other quality which other men possess."

"Whatever you may lack, sir, you have a terrible power," replied Fletcher, recalling the scene of the previous evening, when, amid the pitiless rain, when the result of the poll was known, a howling mob had gathered under the windows of their hotel shouting execrations at Parnell and himself, he had showed himself at the window, pale certainly, but unmoved and

smiling, and thanked them for their courtesy. Something in his immense self-control seemed to lay a hush on their fervid spirits, and sent them away cursing, but quiet, feeling the edge in some strange way taken off their victory. Fletcher never forgot it. It was one of the examples of the man's strange power which remained in his mind for years. It showed the terrible and pitiless side of his nature in sharp contrast to the kind, encouraging, always interested demeanour towards the young candidate who had come forward at his bidding.

"Tell me, has your first taste of the fighting sickened and discouraged you, or the reverse? Would you go through a similar experience again for the cause?"

"Any day, sir, at your bidding."

"It is something to have won such personal devotion," observed Parnell, with a slight tinge of melancholy. "I may yet stand in need of it, if indeed I do not now. You have done well. The man who fights a losing game with a brave heart will not fail in any emergency. I believe you have a future before you."

These unexpected words of praise fell like balm on a heart still smarting under defeat. Fletcher coloured, and was for the moment unable to speak.

"Captain Byrne will not be ill pleased at the result, which will enable him to finish his book at leisure," said Parnell, easily turning the conversation into a slightly less personal groove. "Are you still indifferent to the undoubted charm of his daughter?"

Fletcher looked at him in surprise; his own secret thoughts having in no way prepared him for such words.

"I am of the same mind as I was when you spoke to me before, sir," he answered.

"Well, you are wise. He is prudent, though I will not say a happier, man that keeps clear of her charming sex. I have never met one I respected more highly, or whose presence gave me that peculiar sense of rest and repose which it is one of the privileges of women to bestow. Yet how often they neglect it, clamouring, as the Tyrone mob did last night, for they know not what."

Fletcher hesitated a moment, greatly daring. The words were in his mouth when Parnell himself answered them.

"Had I been matrimonially inclined I might have been drawn to Aileen Byrne. But she has never moved me in that way. I shall be glad to get back to Avondale and you to the captain's study, I doubt not. The physical discomforts we have endured have been very great. I am no Sybarite, but as I grow older I suppose the inclination to rough it becomes less keen."

In the train Parnell slept, and Fletcher was left to ponder the exciting experiences of the past fortnight. They stayed the night in Dublin, and proceeded to Rathdrum early on the following day. They parted at the station, and for the next few days the Squire of Avondale shut himself up in strict seclusion in his lonely house, refusing to see callers on any pretext whatever. Even the captain was denied admittance.

Fletcher returned to Killane keenly disappointed. His friends there, of course, already knew the result of the election, and the captain, who expected him by that train, was on the look-out in the park to offer him a word of sympathy and condolence.

"Well, if you haven't come back with flying colours, you have fought well. I heard of you, besides what I read in the newspapers."

"It was a hard fight," answered Fletcher. "I ought to have written more frequently, but there seemed to be never a moment to spare."

"Oh, don't apologise. Don't I know what electioneering is? Haven't I been at it all my life, and glad to leave it to you young fellows? But where's the chief? Didn't he come out with you?"

"Yes, he's gone home. He's very tired. What a man he is, Captain Byrne. I have lived with him intimately for the last ten days, and I have never even heard of anything to equal his endurance, his patience, his splendid courage."

The enthusiasm with which Fletcher spoke caused a slightly sad smile to dawn on the captain's face. He was old, and had lived through many illusions. He did not doubt the existence of patriotism, nor hold, as some did, that chivalry and honour and political integrity were dead; only experience had taught him to expect nothing, and to look at things through the level eyes of plain common sense.

"I like to hear you, lad—it takes me back forty years. I like you better for your faith and for your hero-worship. You're the stuff that heroes are made of. It's enthusiasm that takes the forlorn hope. Well, well, come in to luncheon, and let's hear all about it. Aileen will be disappointed the leader has not come with you."

Aileen welcomed them at the door. Fletcher thought he had never seen a fairer picture than she made in her neat-fitting gown of Donegal tweed, with linen collar and cuffs, the masses of her bright hair

giving dignity to her small, neat, well-poised head. If she were disappointed that he was alone she made no sign. She shook hands with him warmly.

"So you have come back vanquished but not discouraged. You do not look so battered as I expected," she said, gaily. "I have haunting memories of papa dishevelled and unkempt—as he returned from the last election. Is it not a tiring business—or have you enjoyed it all, as the novice does, until custom makes the excitement pall?"

"Not so many questions, Aileen, at least until we are at the table," said the captain. "Don't forget that Mr. Fletcher has had a long journey, and wants a substantial meal."



CHAPTER XXXIII

AT BAY



FLETCHER had given many thoughts to the disappearance of Kitty Rooney even while his mind was full of his own affairs, and one of the first questions he asked on his return was whether anything had been heard of her; but Kitty had disappeared as completely as the little heir of Ballymore himself had disappeared five-and-twenty years before.

The first afternoon he was at leisure after his return Fletcher took a walk to Glendalough to call upon Father O'Hagan. It was a fine hard winter day, one on which it was a genuine pleasure to be abroad. The sun shone brilliantly in a cloudless sky, and the roads, held with a grip of iron, gave pleasant and easy footing. The slight depression caused by his defeat at Tyrone had almost entirely disappeared from Fletcher's mind. His joy at being back in the place where he felt so much at home, and where he was so truly welcome, was greater than he knew. He arrived at the Manse of Glendalough about four o'clock in the afternoon, only to find that Father

O'Hagan was not at home, nor could his housekeeper give any idea of his whereabouts or the probable hour of his return. Loth to go back without hearing some later particulars concerning the Rooneys, after a moment's hesitation he turned his steps towards Arraghvanna, sure of finding the poor mother at home, and perhaps Ted also. When he arrived at the cottage door, and gave a gentle knock, a somewhat feeble voice bade him come in. He found the Widow Rooney alone, propped up in her big easychair by the side of the fire, her hands listlessly folded on her lap, and her whole demeanour indicating the quiescence of hopeless sorrow. The latest blow had indeed robbed poor Widow Rooney of the brief spell of light-heartedness which had returned to her, and she had now but little interest in life, and frequently expressed her desire to leave it. She recognised Fletcher at once, and greeted him with a somewhat mournful smile.

"Troth, and it's a sad house ye come to, sor," she said, as she extended her hand in greeting. "Have ye heard av the terrible throuble that has come on Arraghvanna?"

"Yes, Mrs. Rooney, I heard of it some time ago, and had I been at Killane I should have come to express my sympathy with you at once; but I have been absent in Tyrone for the last fortnight, and only returned last night."

"Sure, an' it's good av ye, sor, to take an interest in the throuble of a poor lone widdler whom the Lord has forgotten at last."

"Perhaps not quite so completely as you think," said Fletcher, sympathetically. "They could not tell me very much about poor Kitty at Killane, but I

understood them to say that nothing has ever been heard of her."

The poor mother wrung her hands, and rocked herself to and fro in the peculiarly despairing manner of her class.

"Nothing. She's at the bottom av the sea, I belave, or else the Evil One has run away wid her. The police have been doing everything they can, every wan says. But what good is the police? They've never done anybody any good that I ever heard av, although they're always at hand when nobody wants them."

Fletcher scarcely smiled at this scathing criticism. His own mind was full of suspicion, which indeed in this case almost amounted to certainty, yet he dared not communicate these suspicions to poor Kitty's relatives. There was no doubt in his own mind that Lyndon, and Lyndon alone, could throw any light on the girl's mysterious disappearance; but until he had further proof he dared not open his mouth. He resolved, however, to set to work quietly, and learn step by step what had been Lyndon's movements from the day he had left Ballymore until his return.

"If the poor child had had a swateheart or even an enemy," moaned the unhappy mother; "but there's nothing to help us out. It's just as if she had been spirited away, and a better daughter never lived. Oh, Kitty, me purty darlint, to think I'll never see ye more."

The tears rained down her worn cheeks, and Fletcher, whose feelings though well under control were quick and fine, felt a lump in his throat.

"What does your son think about it?"

"Think about it!" repeated Mrs. Rooney, vaguely. "Oh. Ted's not the man he was. The troubles he

has had, poor boy, since his father died, have taken the heart clane out av him. He goes out and in doing his bit av work to drown his care, but he neither eats nor sleeps as he ought."

"Poor fellow!" said Fletcher, sympathetically. "Is the search at an end? Has everything been done that can be done?" he asked, as he rose to go.

"Shure, and I think so," answered the Widow Rooney, mournfully; "at least his riverence says so, and he should know."

"It seems incredible that a fine young woman like Kitty should disappear so mysteriously. This is the second tragedy of the kind in Glendalough. I suppose you can recall the time when the heir disappeared from Ballymore?"

"That I can," said the widow, her thoughts for the moment diverted from her own terrible sorrow. "That was a cruel thing. It killed Sir Tom—God rest his sowl. There was some that said me lady herself had done away wid him. God forgive me for saying it, but I was one that believed it."

"She is not a favourite evidently in Glendalough," observed Fletcher. "Yet I don't see how she could commit such a crime and escape detection. We don't live in the Middle Ages, Mrs. Rooney."

Mrs. Rooney shook her head.

"I've lived seventy long years in this weary world, sor, and I've seen many a quare thing. Wan thing I know—that they in high places can do a heap that poor folk wouldn't even dare think about. But it'll be all made even some day when the sea gives up its dead." The old woman spoke with a mournful solemnity which left a strong impression on Fletcher's mind. As he slowly crossed the fields in the direction

of Ballymore he could not help dwelling on her words, which were full of wisdom and truth. He felt moved to look once more upon the outside of the old house of Ballymore, but he had not been made welcome there on the occasion of his last visit, and no temptation to enter the house came to him; he merely skirted the outer rim of the park, from which, however, through the now leafless trees he could obtain occasional and picturesque glimpses of the fine old building. He had no desire whatever to meet any of the Lyndons, even Terry. Some day, he believed, he would have a reckoning with the elder brother, but the time was not ripe for it yet, and even should he meet him now, he had no excuse for approaching even indirectly the subject of Kitty Rooney's disappearance. But though we may reason out a certain course for ourselves, it is not always easy to adhere to it.

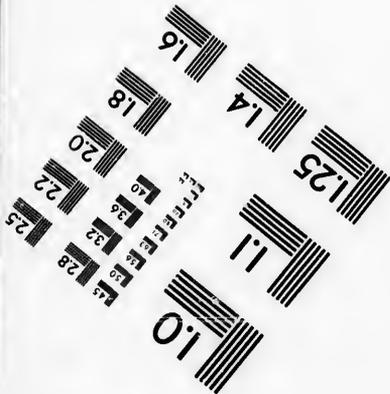
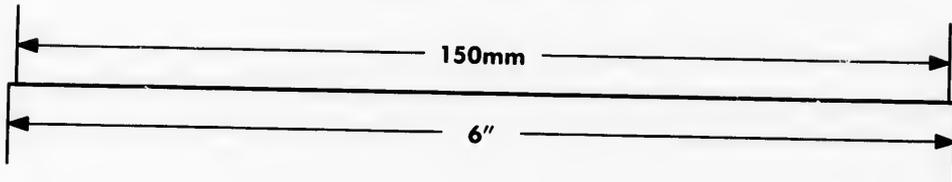
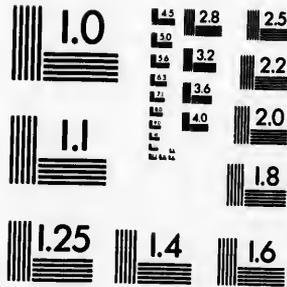
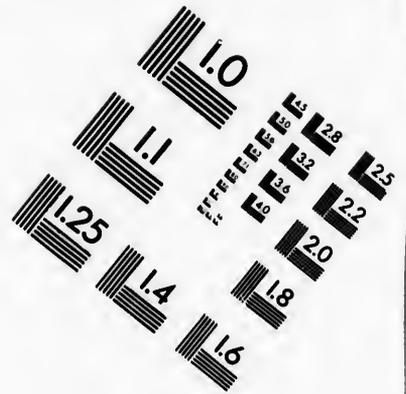
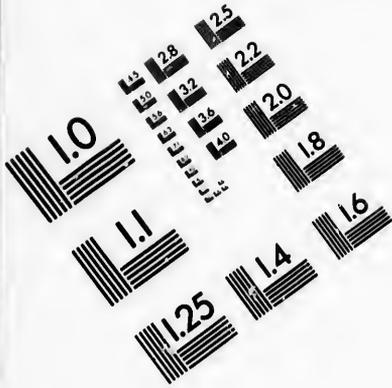
As he crossed the last field which separated the lands of Ballymore from the road he suddenly met Lyndon full in the face. He was out with a shooting party; but at that moment happened to be alone. He was in a very ill mood, already regretting what he had done. It was but little satisfaction to know that the girl he loved belonged to him, and was now completely in his power, since she was hundreds of miles away. At the sight of Fletcher Lyndon's brow grew black. He was in a mood to welcome a quarrel with anybody, and all his deeply-rooted and somewhat inexplicable vindictiveness against this man, of whom he actually knew so little, leaped to the surface. Fletcher was about to pass on with a distant recognition, when Lyndon, planting his gun between his feet, stood directly in front of him and forced him to stop.

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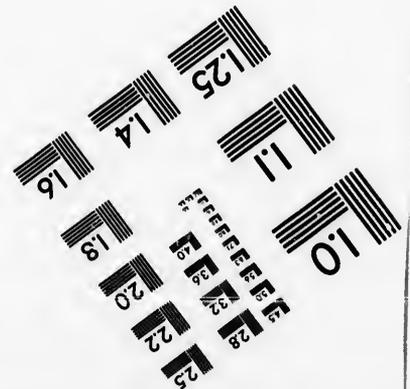


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"DO YOU KNOW THAT THIS IS PRIVATE PROPERTY?"

[Page 267.]

"Now, what the devil are you doing prowling round here? This is the second time I have caught you. Do you know that this is private property?"

Fletcher slightly smiled, as he replied, quietly,—

"I must apologise for trespassing. I was merely taking a short cut to the road, and at this season of the year I did not think the fields would suffer."

"That's not the point," cried Lyndon, angrily. "You know that you are trespassing here, and you've got some motive for it. I suppose you've been sneaking round my tenants at Arraghvanna?"

"I have been to Arraghvanna, certainly, answered Fletcher. "Your tenants are not your slaves, Mr. Lyndon; they are at liberty to receive what visitors they choose."

"I shall tell them that if they can't shut their doors against such sneaks as you, I'll shut the door on them."

"Yes? Say that to Ted Rooney; the result would be interesting," said Fletcher, with slight sarcasm in his voice. At this Lyndon's fury broke loose.

"I've a jolly good mind to put a bullet through your impudent hide!" he cried, almost choking with passion. "You think because you have had the good fortune to get a place in a gentleman's house, and by some tricks known only to yourself wormed yourself into Parnell's favour, that you are going to lord it over everybody. I'll give you a piece of advice, sir. You mind your own business, or one fine day you'll wish you had."

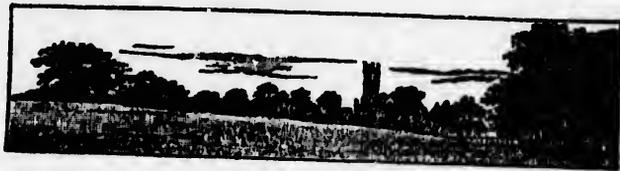
Fletcher stood still a moment eyeing him steadily. If only he could penetrate below the surface and read all that was passing in Lyndon's heart how easy his course would be!

"I am not going to stand here bandying words with you," Lyndon said. Then imagining that because Fletcher was silent he was in a manner cowed he continued: "You see that fence; put yourself outside of it as fast as you can, and the next time I catch you trespassing on my land I'll set the dogs after you."

"Will you?" asked Fletcher, quietly. Then suddenly fixing him with his eyes, which had a strange, compelling glance in them, he added deliberately—"What have you done with Kitty Rooney?"

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CHAPTER XXXIV

STRANGE CURRENTS



LYNDON was not entirely taken by surprise. Some intuition had told him all along that Fletcher suspected him, and that through him Nemesis would follow upon the heels of his ill-doing. His face grew a shade paler, and his hands clutched the barrel of the gun with a firmer grip, but, brought to bay, he had sufficient courage to show a brave and defiant front.

"I thought that's what you had in your head. Pray, do you think that because you happened to see me speaking a word to her in passing one night that I have spirited her away?"

"I think that you are the only man in Glendalough that could throw any light upon this unhappy business," said Fletcher, steadily. "Why I have come to this conclusion is my affair, not yours, but I give you fair warning, I will unearth this mystery, and track it out to its bitter end if it should take me twenty years."

"You can try," said Lyndon, with a sneer; "but it'll take a cleverer man than you to bring that particular matter home to me. Supposing for a moment that there was any truth in your suggestion—do you

think I would make such a fool of myself? I could have had the girl here for the asking, and nobody would have been any the wiser. Why should I take the trouble to entice her away?"

"You lie, and you know it," answered Fletcher, steadily. "Kitty Rooney was a decent, self-respecting, and honest girl, and you have lured her away from her home under false pretences. Of that I am quite certain. I can only assure you again that, as you have made that poor girl and her whole family suffer, so your sin shall be brought home to you. You shall not escape."

Fletcher, who had now not the slightest doubt of Lyndon's complicity in the affair, strode on towards the fence which Lyndon had indicated, and vaulting lightly into the road pursued his way towards Killane. Lyndon stood a moment looking after him, and as he fingered the trigger of his gun there was murder in his heart. When Fletcher finally disappeared he wiped the damp perspiration from his brow, and took his way across the fields. A sudden impulse drew his feet towards Arraghvanna. He knew that at that hour he would not be likely to encounter Ted, for whom he was indeed as yet not prepared. By making a visit of condolence to the bereaved mother he might make an ally of her, and help to allay the suspicions which he felt were gradually being disseminated throughout the whole glen.

The widow was sitting as Fletcher had left her, and looked up with melancholy pleasure in her eyes when the young squire entered. As yet no one had ever breathed either to Ted or his mother the breath of their suspicions regarding Kitty and the squire. She therefore welcomed him effusively, and blessed

him for all his kindness in the matter of the repairs.

"Shure and we thought the sun had riz on Arraghvanna after a long settin'," she said, in her quaint manner. "We are born to trouble, the Book says, and shure it's little else I've had all me days. But this—oh, this is the worst av all."

"What is the general opinion about poor Kitty's disappearance?" asked Lyndon, speaking with the utmost self-possession, and at the same time leaning easily against the spotless wooden table which stood between the two windows. His whole manner and appearance were careless, indicating only the natural and sympathetic interest a kindly man might take in the trouble of his dependents.

Widow Rooney shook her head.

"Oh, people say all sorts av things, sor," she said. "My own belief is that Kitty must have got out of the train at Wicklow, or Bray, or some of them places, and walked into the sea. She may have been tuk like that. One of me own sisters went quare in her head wance, and did that very thing."

"Did she, though?" asked Lyndon, with a very deep interest. "Then I should think it was more than likely that something of the sort has happened to poor Kitty. These things run in families, I've always heard."

"That's what I've said to Ted again and again," said Mrs. Rooney, rocking herself to and fro again; "but he won't listen. He says that Kitty was as sound as a bell, and that she never went to do herself any harm. That she's fallen in wid some evil man or other, that's what Ted believes, and if it should be, and if he iver comes within the reach av Ted, then God help him, for his last hour will have come."

At these words, spoken with the utmost deliberation, a slight tremor crossed Lyndon's face. In his mad passion he had forgotten that he would have somebody to reckon with besides Kitty. Truly he had surrounded himself by a network of sin, from the consequences of which it would be difficult to escape.

"But perhaps things will be explained before it comes to such a deadly pass," he said, as he rose to go. "The place is looking very nice. M'Ghee has done the repairs well."

"Oh yes, the place is all right; but things being as they are, and this dreadful trouble come on us, we can't take the comfort in it we ought. Ted's not the man he was. I have just had a visit from that kind gentleman that lives at Killane, and I was telling him that Ted neither eats nor sleeps, and he's wearing himself to a shadow. Of course, Kitty and him were very thick; they've never had a word that I remember since they were born."

"I am sorry for you, Mrs. Rooney," said Lyndon, as he turned to go. "But don't let your spirits get too low. I feel sure you will hear of Kitty again."

"Thank ye, sor. I'll tell Ted what ye say; an' good day to ye, an' may the Holy Virgin kape ye from all evil."

Lyndon hasily withdrew. He was still young, and not sufficiently hardened in wickedness to be able to listen unmoved to the old woman's blessing. It haunted him much more persistently than the measured threat uttered by Fletcher. From that day Lyndon was a miserable man.

Fletcher had sufficient to occupy his thoughts as he covered the ground between Glendalough and Killane. He was amazed at the strength and violence of

his own antipathy to Lyndon. He blamed himself for it, and tried to convince himself that it was inexplicable and quite unreasonable; but it was of no avail. He was now absolutely convinced that Lyndon had enticed Kitty Rooney from her home, and his mind was full of schemes for her discovery and restoration to her friends. As he came within sight of Rathdrum he met one of the station cars, in which sat Father O'Hagan to whom he gave a hearty good evening. The moon was now high in the heavens, and shedding its full radiance over all the peaceful landscape. The light was so bright that it was possible to discern things at a great distance. Father O'Hagan instantly called to his driver to stop, and Fletcher stepped on to the roadway.

"You are late on the road, father," he said, as he shook hands.

"Not so very late. I've been at Bray, at the funeral of my old college friend, Pells Mahon. It has made an old man of me," said the priest, sadly. "There is nothing like memories for bringing a man to the actual facts of life. I am sixty-five; I feel it to-day for the first time."

"But you don't look it, and nobody would ever believe it, father," said Fletcher, almost affectionately. The homely kindness and exquisite simplicity of the good old priest's character and life had upset all his Scotch implanted prejudices against the Church and creed he represented. It had done him good by showing him that there are the good and the noble and the self-sacrificing to be found under the banner of every creed.

"Ah, you are too flattering, my young friend. Well, I have not seen you since your campaign. Of

course, you don't expect me, being on the enemy's side, to condole with you. If we had lost Tyrone, I should have been in the dumps indeed."

Fletcher smiled and said nothing. He had no temptation to a political discussion with Father O'Hagan.

"I've been in Glendalough, at Arraghvanna, in fact, and I saw Mrs. Rooney. What do *you* think about Kitty's strange disappearance, Father O'Hagan?"

The priest slid from the car, and putting his hand through Fletcher's arm drew him a little aside in the roadway.

"I have many thoughts, Mr. Fletcher, and the last talk we had on this very matter often recurs painfully to my mind. Are you of the same opinion still?"

"I am. I met Lyndon to-day, and taxed him with it."

"You did!" exclaimed the priest, looking at him with mingled surprise and admiration. He had often felt tempted himself during the last fortnight to put a straight question to Brian Lyndon; but had hesitated, partly because his charitable mind urged him to give the young man the benefit of the doubt, and partly because Ballymore was the great house of his parish, and he did not wish to offend it without serious cause.

"And what—what did he say?" he asked, almost tremblingly.

"Oh, denied it; but it was the denial of a coward and a braggart," replied Fletcher. "I told him I should not rest until I had cleared up the whole mystery."

"If you can do this, Mr. Fletcher, you will earn the

gratitude, not only of a family, but of a whole parish. I have it in my heart to do it; but I am old, and the old do not take the initiative successfully. But any help and co-operation I can give you may command."

"I shall think of my plan. I hear that Captain Byrne and his daughter are going to Scotland soon—then I shall have more leisure."

"Unless Mr. Parnell requisitions your services elsewhere," said the priest with a significant smile.

"Precisely!" An answering smile touched Fletcher's lips and after a few more words, chiefly relating to the affair in which they were both interested, they bade each other good-night. As Fletcher pursued his solitary way he was conscious of a more overpowering feeling of home-sickness than any he had yet experienced. Perhaps some natural and pious touch in the good old priest had reminded him strongly of that other good old man whom he loved with a son's love. His mother's face—sweet, patient, heart-satisfying—rose up before him, and he longed as he had never yet longed for her actual presence. If there be such a thing in this complex life of ours as communion of spirits, it is certain that at that moment Fletcher felt an incomprehensible nearness to those who, though he knew it not, were actually near him in the flesh. When he reached Killane a car which had been driven from the same train as that by which Father O'Hagan had come stood before the door; and when Denis Doolan admitted him he wore a distinctly excited look.

"There's some av your friends here, sor, from Scotland," he said, confidentially. "They're in the library now wid the captain."

Fletcher looked inordinately amazed at this announcement, and without pausing to question Denis further strode towards the library. Before, however, he reached the door it was opened from within, and Aileen stepped out. The colour was high in her cheeks, and her eyes shone with conspicuous brightness.

"Oh, you have come back ; I am so glad," she said, excitedly. "Has Denis told you who is here ?"

"He says some friends of mine have come from Scotland. Who is it ?"

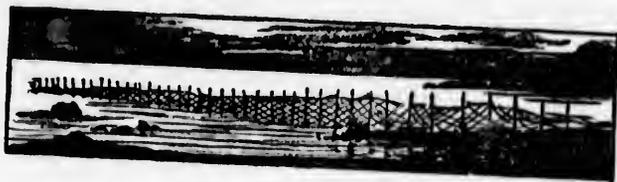
"Your father and mother," she answered, "and a strange lady with them. They have come on a matter of great importance to you ; they are now telling my father something of the story. A more wonderful thing I have never heard."

He passed her by, and strode through the half-open door, she following. At that moment he took no thought of her significant words. His one desire was to look upon the faces he loved, to clasp those true hands once more, and feel that he was not solitary upon the face of the earth. When Mary Fletcher saw him come in, and read aright that indescribable yearning on his face, she ran to him, and, forgetful of the strange eyes upon her, threw her arms about his neck. Then John came forward also, and, still holding his mother in a tender clasp, Fletcher gripped the old man's hand fervently. The one thought precious and soul-satisfying was that the child of their love had not forgotten or grown cold to them—nay, that time and change of circumstances had but served to knit his heart more closely to them in the bond of an affection which death alone would break.

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CHAPTER XXXV

THE TRUE LYNDON



SUCH supreme moments happen but seldom in a lifetime, and they are never much prolonged, the tension is too great; they are rather among the exceptional episodes which owe their very preciousness to their rarity. Of those who witnessed that touching scene the one upon whom it made the greatest impression was Therese Melville, also it stirred in her a vague envy; such love might have been hers had she not entrusted the child to their hands. Yet she did not regret it. Although she was only a woman of the people, she had great natural gifts, among others an astonishing power of discrimination where character was concerned. She had not erred in her estimate of John and Mary Fletcher, and anxious to atone so far as lay in her power for the great wrong she had done to the child, she had placed him within reach of such fostering parental influences as are vouchsafed to very few. Fletcher looked with careless surprise at the tall figure in its heavy mourning, wondering at her presence, and yet so absorbed in the joy of the moment that he could

not connect her in any way with his past, present, or future.

"Oh, Robin, my man, but it is a joyful thing to see ye agen," said Mary, tremblingly, still keeping her gentle, clinging touch on his arm, in this giving expression to the fear that had never left her during the last days—that the great and wonderful news they had to tell would be the means of taking him from her for ever. "And looking so well, an' everybody speaking so kindly and praisingly o' ye," she added, with a glance at the captain and his daughter. "And to think o' the news we bring—it's just a miracle, nothing less."

At this Fletcher looked round inquiringly, conscious of his own growing excitement, and feeling that some great crisis in his life was at hand.

"Tell him, John," said Mary, feverishly, "tell him quick; ye will tell it best."

Thus admonished John began his tale. As it was gradually unfolded the varying emotions of Fletcher's soul were visible on his face. Once or twice he passed his hand across his brow in a somewhat dazed manner, as though he found it difficult to comprehend and realise what was being told him.

"There never has been a mair wonderful story written or heard tell o', my lad," said John. "To think that you should hae been guided to this place, almost to the very gate o' your ain father's hoose!"

"Where is it?" inquired Fletcher, excitedly. "Which is it?"

"Hae ye no' guessed?" said John, quietly. "I would hae thocht now that ye were so clever ye would hae put two and two together already. Ye are Robert Fletcher no longer, not even Robbie Burns, as we ca'd

ye in oor pride that Januar' nicht, but your real name is Brian Lyndon. Man, do ye no see it? Ye are the lost heir of Ballymore."

At that intense moment all eyes were fixed upon Fletcher's face. He became suddenly and deadly pale, his features worked, and the veins seemed to stand out like cords on his broad, square brow. In a flash of deep intuition it all came home to him; his unexplained and yearning love for Ireland; his strange and ever-deepening interest in the affairs of Ballymore; the stirrings of heart of which he had been conscious when he stood before its old gateway and tried to make out the signification of its coat-of-arms; all became clear as noonday to him, and there seemed scarcely need for a single question.

"And this, I suppose," he said, turning his eyes for the first time on the face of Therese Melville, "this is the woman who has had the secret all these years."

"Ay," said John, "and she has repented before it is too late. You will not be owre hard upon her, Robin. She did ye an ill turn, but we canna blame her."

The tender significance of these words awakened a quick response in Fletcher's heart.

"Nor can I," he answered at once, and his arm tightened about the slender, drooping figure at his side, "since if she had not done the ill turn you speak of I should never have known the joy of a parent's love which you have bestowed on me so lavishly."

"Oh, my laddie, my ain, ain son," cried Mary, her heart relieved of its last misgiving, certain now that never, never would Rob disown them or be estranged from them even for a moment. A sob disturbed the stillness; it broke from Aileen, and, opening the door hastily, she left the room. Therese Melville stepped

forward to the table, and looking Fletcher full in the face spoke steadily, though in a low voice,—

“I will not ask you to forgive me. I have no right to your forgiveness,” she said. “The only comfort I have in looking back upon these years is the knowledge that you have not suffered at all, nay, that you have been surrounded, as you have said, by a wealth of love which would have been bitterly denied you at Ballymore. But I have robbed you of your birthright, all the same, for all these years. It is not too late, however, to reclaim it; and I am here at no small risk to myself (since you can punish me if you will) to furnish all the proof that is required. Bring me face to face with Lady Lyndon, and you will ask no more.”

“I do not for a moment doubt what has been told me, madam,” said Fletcher, with gentleness. “Nor have I any wish to blame you; you were tempted, no doubt, and you fell. None of us are exempt from temptation and its consequences. I have suffered little, if at all. You have in reality done more harm to those who up till now have imagined themselves in an assured position which nothing could shake.”

He had Tom Lyndon in his mind as he spoke, his own half-brother, sons of the same father. The thought thrilled him, and yet filled him with a vague shrinking, because as far as the dreadful word hatred had a meaning to him he knew that he had hated his brother in his heart, and that his one desire had been to pursue him with relentless persistence in order that he might be made to suffer for the sin which had brought so much suffering upon innocent heads.

At that moment the captain intervened.

“It is plain that nothing can be done to-night, and

you must all stay here. There is no help for it, and there is room enough and to spare in the house. I daresay my daughter has gone to arrange matters now. In the morning we can meet and talk over things with a more impartial mind. Meanwhile I think it would be well to telegraph to Wicklow to Mr. O'Grady, who is the family lawyer and adviser of the Lyndons, to come up here the first thing in the morning. Everything must be done decently and in order, so that our young friend may come to his own in a legal and dignified manner."

The wisdom of this advice instantly came home to the minds of all present. A look of quiet satisfaction came upon John Fletcher's face, and Robert himself looked relieved. It was a great thing for him in that critical and exciting moment, when temptation to rashness of speech and behaviour was natural and excusable, to have at his elbow the shrewd, practical common sense of Captain Byrne, who was a man of the world, and had a long and practical experience of life.

"I will not intrude here," said Therese Melville as she drew her cloak about her throat. "I have no claim to your hospitality, Captain Byrne, nor to the consideration of any friend of Mr. Brian Lyndon."

Fletcher heard the sound of the name, but did not apply it to himself until he noticed a faint, tremulous smile on his mother's lips. Then his own face hotly flushed and he turned aside to conquer the emotion he could not altogether control. At that moment Aileen, composed and cheerful, returned to the library and was at once appealed to by her father.

"You can accommodate all the unexpected guests, Aileen, I suppose?" he said, brusquely. "This lady

talks of leaving Killane, but it is very late, and a long distance to the Station Hotel at Rathdrum."

"Why, certainly," said Aileen, quickly. "I have already given orders for the rooms to be prepared? Perhaps Mrs. Melville would like to go upstairs now. There is a fire, and some refreshments will be brought to you at once."

Therese Melville bowed, and at once withdrew. She had no part nor lot with the united and happy hearts left in the library. She needed their pity, for she was a solitary and desolate creature upon whom the sin of her youth had lain with a heavy hand for many years. Aileen was quietly attentive, but scarcely cordial to her. It was not, of course, the difference of social position which gave a certain hauteur to her manner, but rather an inward indignation which the thought of the wrong done to the real heir of Ballymore made it difficult for her to be her usual kind and gentle self. In the woman's presence she did her utmost, however, seeing to her comfort in every possible way, and then left her with a kind good-night, and begging her to ring her bell for anything she required. She was conscious of a distinct sense of relief, however, when the door was shut between them, and she sped back again to the library.

"Now, will you come with me, dear Mrs. Fletcher?" she said, linking her arm affectionately through hers, while Robert looked on, not so much astonished as he might have been perhaps, because, after all, true hearts will respond to each other in any circumstances all the world over, and there are few barriers which the true gentlehood, with its hallmark of simple manners and sincere words, will not break down.



CHAPTER XXXVI

NEMESIS



ADY LYNDON had observed that her elder son had not been quite himself since his return from Scotland. He had always been a high-spirited and cheerful youth, not subject to the moods of the more sensitive Terry. It was a new thing entirely for Tom to sit silent through a meal or to appear a prey to melancholy, yet such was the condition of affairs all the time his cousin Harry M'Neill was at Ballymore.

"You seem awfully down on your luck, Tom," he said the morning before his own departure. "I think you'd better come back with me to-morrow and finish your visit. I'd a letter from Duncan this morning, and he's got the new yacht down from the Clyde anchored in Loch Moira. Wouldn't you just like to see her?"

The sea was a passion with Tom Lyndon, but Ballymore being an inland estate he had never had the opportunity, nor indeed the means, to go in for yachting. But the old castle of the M'Neills, on the island of Glen Moira, was only accessible by boat,

and the whole family were as much at home on sea as on shore.

"He says it's a stunner," pursued Harry, seeing the impression he had made. "Don't you think, Aunt Emily, Tom should come back with me, and Terry, too, if you could spare them both?"

"I hardly think it would be advisable at this season of the year," answered Lady Lyndon, at the same time she kept her eyes attentively fixed on the face of her elder son. During the past few days she had been conscious of a vague uneasiness concerning him, although she could not have put it into words.

"Well, but, Aunt Emily, just think what an apology for a visit it was to come all the way to Moira and stay three days. We were all jolly wild, I can tell you."

"Shut up, Harry!" said Lyndon, with extraordinary asperity. "What's the use of exaggerating, you know I was longer than three days."

"No, you weren't," answered the boy, promptly. "You came only on Tuesday morning, and we came back here on Friday."

"Oh, well, if you're so bent on the visit being finished, I'll go back with you," said Tom; but he kept his eyes on his plate, and was careful to avoid his mother's gaze. She was much surprised, and had her own thoughts, though she said nothing at the moment. She did not, however, dismiss the subject from her mind. As the young men were preparing to go out as usual with their guns she had an opportunity for a private word with Tom.

"I don't want to pry into your private affairs, Tom," she said, "because I am not one who believes that a young man should be tied to his mother's apron string

all his days ; at the same time I would like to know what you were doing during the week after you left here, and before you got to Moira ? ”

Tom kept his eyes fixed on the nozzle of his gun, and his mouth was hard set. At last he looked up, and said, quietly,—

“ I am not going to tell you, mother ; it's my affair.”

“ Just as you like,” his mother answered, not betraying the slightest annoyance. “ You are quite capable of looking after yourself, only take care not to get yourself into any serious scrape. It is not so easy to get out again.”

Lyndon had already proved that, and for the moment felt tempted to make a confidante of his mother.

“ May I ask you one question, Tom ? It is not a matter of very much moment to me ; but, still, for some reasons I would like to satisfy my curiosity on a certain point.”

“ Well ? ” he asked ; but his tone was not encouraging.

“ Do you know anything about Kitty Rooney ? ” she asked.

At that moment, and before he could answer, the hall bell rang a tremendous peal. Lady Lyndon stepped to the projecting window of the gun-room, which was in one of the gables of the house, but which from its curious shape commanded a view of the whole front.

“ It's a carriage full of people, Tom. Captain Byrne and his secretary, and Mr. C'Grady, and goodness knows who also—a perfect army of besiegers. What on earth can it mean ? They're asking for me, Tom ;

but I hear O'Grady asking if you're at home, too. Now, what on earth does this mean?"

She was a bold, brave woman, but she also grew pale and felt the bondage of a slavish fear. Mother and son had grievously sinned, and the hour of retribution was at hand. The butler, looking much perplexed, presently came to tell them of the company which had assembled in the drawing-room.

"It's a crowd of people, me lady," he said, with a distinct note of wonder in his voice, "and they want to see your ladyship and the squoire at once."

"There is nothing for it, Tom; we must go. Whatever it is we've got to face it now. You take the cue from me. You may trust me to do the best possible in all circumstances." With these enigmatical words which Tom, harassed by the burden of his own fears scarcely understood, the mother and son crossed the hall together to the drawing-room door. Within the room they found assembled a party of six persons, only three of whom Lady Lyndon recognised. She seemed to draw herself to her full height as she swept into the room, leaving Tom to close the door behind her. Her haughty face wore a look of determination and defiance, and she scarcely returned the grave salutations bestowed upon her by Captain Byrne and Mr. O'Grady.

"To what do we attribute the honour of this invasion as I must call it?" she asked, with a slight smile. At that moment, however, the tall figure in mourning standing in the furthest window, a figure which Lady Lyndon had neither observed nor recognised, turned slowly and put back the heavy widow's veil of crape which enveloped her face. Then a ghastly and awful change came upon Lady Lyndon's face, and she almost gasped for breath.

"I see from your ladyship's expression," said Mr. O'Grady, with cold politeness, "that an explanation of our 'invasion,' as your ladyship has called it, is hardly necessary. Here stands Therese Melville, who at your instigation stole your step-son, Brian Lyndon. These are the Christian people who have been parents to him for over twenty years, and here," he said, turning to Fletcher, "stands Brian Lyndon himself, rightful Squire of Ballymore."

A dead silence followed upon these measured words. Lady Lyndon stood absolutely still, without a tremor on her set face or a single indication of emotion. It was far otherwise with her son. At this announcement which, if it were true, robbed him of his name and place, he turned upon her with a look which none present ever forgot.

"In God's name, mother, is this true? Is it that fellow there, whom I have hated with a hatred I could not understand? Is it true that he, and not I, is the master of this place?"

"Softly, softly, Tom," said his mother, with a strange smile. "These good people have to prove their point. Therese told me the child was dead many years ago, and gave me such proofs as I thought necessary. For her own ends, doubtless because she has been well paid for it, she has agreed to give this ambitious young man and those in league with him the benefit of her services. The proof, Mr. O'Grady!" she said, turning swiftly to the lawyer. "With these people I have nothing to do. I will not speak to them, nor will I listen to a word they have to say. With you alone shall I deal; and I give you warning that I will contest this claim to the uttermost for my son's sake and my own fair name."

A pitying smile touched for a moment the grey-headed lawyer's lips. He had been the trusted friend and adviser of the late Sir Tom Lyndon, and for his sake had never relaxed his interest in the old place, though he had but little in common with those in authority over it.

"The proof will not be lacking, Lady Lyndon," he said, somewhat sadly. "It is hardly likely that I should be taken in with a story which will not bear investigation. But before we enter upon the smallest detail I would only beg you to look for a moment at Mr. Brian Lyndon. I think that you will agree with me no other proof is needed."

Brian stood on the hearthrug directly below the portrait of his father in his hunting garb. Captain Byrne gave an exclamation of surprise, marvelling that never until this moment had the likeness struck him. As Mr. O'Grady had said, there was no other proof needed, his identity was practically established there and then. Tom Lyndon gnashed his teeth, and swearing a dreadful oath flung himself out of the room.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

THE HARVEST OF SIN



THAT strange interview lasted half an hour longer, and with such consummate skill and effrontery had Lady Lyndon borne herself throughout that, when they left, the simpler minds among them felt somewhat confused, and were inclined to believe that it would be impossible for Brian Lyndon to establish his claim to Ballymore.

"So far as I am concerned," he said, as the carriage rolled slowly down the long avenue, "they are welcome to remain where they are. I have no desire to take possession of the place. It is enough if my title and claim are established; only," he added, significantly, "there will have to be a change in the relations between landlord and tenant."

At these words Captain Byrne and the lawyer exchanged glances which Brian could not misunderstand.

"The first thing to be done, anyhow, is to establish your claim, my boy," observed the captain. "What a woman Lady Lyndon is! Did you ever see such effrontery, Mr. O'Grady?"

"I have known her ladyship for a great many

years, Captain Byrne," answered the lawyer, quietly, "and I am no stranger to her capabilities."

While they were thus quietly discussing the extraordinary turn in the affairs of Ballymore, Lady Lyndon, left alone, gave way for a moment to the terrible reaction bound to follow upon such an exciting hour. The moment the door closed upon her she sank into a chair breathing heavily. Her face lost its proud, defiant look, and expressed only the anguish and despair of her soul. If there was one being on earth she loved it was her son Tom. He was the very counterpart of herself, and the thought that he was now practically homeless and nameless seemed to burn like a hot iron into her soul. She had not failed to observe the terrible expression on his face as he hastened from the room, and though she knew that she would not be a welcome sight to him, she felt moved to know and to hear the worst. It was imperative, besides, that they should consult together without delay in order to decide upon their course of action. She rose at length, and, wiping the cold perspiration from her brow, proceeded to the dining-room, where she took from the sideboard a small glass of brandy, which brought the colour back to her pale cheeks, and infused a new courage into her heart. Then she went in search of her son.

In the lower rooms he was nowhere to be found; evidently he had not joined the shooting party, because she found his gun where he had dropped it. For a moment the fear struck her lest he had done some harm to himself, but she was able to dismiss it almost as quickly as it came. She knew her son well, and believed him to be too thoroughly a coward at heart to lay hands on himself. It occurred to her as

she stood aimlessly in the middle of the gun-room floor that he might have gone to a little quaint room in the turret of the castle which was used sometimes as a smoking-room, and had always been a favourite retiring-place with his father. She mounted the long and winding stairs with feet which somewhat lagged. She was not less brave and unscrupulous than she had been twenty years before, but her physical strength was less. She felt the effects of the shock in every limb, and was, perhaps, on that account less able to bear the look of almost vindictive hatred with which her son greeted her when she entered the room.

He was crouching on the window-seat, with his eyes fixed on the rolling uplands of the fair domain which was no longer his. Whatever his faults, Tom Lyndon was to be pitied in that most bitter hour. He was young, but during the years of his short life he had made few friends and many enemies. Being without resources of any kind his position was desperate indeed. His mother closed the door, at the same time taking the precaution to turn the key; then she approached the window. She had a hard task before her, and she knew it well.

"Look at me, Tom," she said, with a touch of peremptoriness which only betrayed her inward agitation. "Look up, and let us talk this dreadful business over. It is only by taking counsel together that anything can be done."

He turned his head sullenly.

"All the talking in the world will neither make nor mend it," he answered. "I wish you'd go and leave me alone. You've done enough, God knows, to make me hate the sight of you."

These were cruel words, but Lady Lyndon scarcely winced under them. She was prepared for them, and able to make every allowance for anything he might say.

"I know how you feel," she said ; "but before you blame me too much you might take into consideration for a moment for whose sake it was done. It was not for my own sake ; I had nothing to lose nor gain, remember that."

"Then it is true ?" he said, in the same sullen voice. "I had hoped that perhaps it might be a trumped-up story."

"We are going to treat it as such," said his mother. "It is that I have come to talk about, and not to listen to any useless recriminations. If you will help me I'll fight the case out to the bitter end, and deny everything ; but of course unless I have your co-operation I can do nothing."

"Where is the good ?" he asked, almost savagely. "It would only be a losing game from the beginning, besides dragging the whole story through the public prints. I don't think that anything would be gained by it, but much lost."

"And will you walk out quietly, then, and allow that insufferable upstart to usurp your place ?" she asked, shutting her lips with something almost like a snarl.

"There is nothing else I can do, and you know it," he answered. "I wish to heavens you had dropped me in the Lough, or over these battlements, before you brought me to this. What am I to do ?" he asked, turning upon her fiercely. "I have no occupation, I have no talents, no profession, whereby I can earn my living. We need not expect anything from him. I shall have to beg or starve."

"No, no, Tom," said his mother, with a half hysterical sob. "I shall have a jointure from the estate, and no doubt your grandfather will do something for you."

"Bantry!" exclaimed Tom, with a slight sneer. "He hates me like poison; he'll do nothing but rejoice over my discomfiture, and tell me to go and dig for my living at the roadside. That's all the satisfaction, I promise you, I shall get from Lord Bantry. He may do something for Terry, but never for me."

Lady Lyndon was silent, and her thoughts were bitter. She knew that Tom did not exaggerate. For some inexplicable reason her father, the old Earl of Bantry, had conceived an unaccountable dislike to his elder grandson, for whom, with the gruff outspokenness of his race, he had frequently predicted a bad end. At that moment life seemed bitter, almost impossible, to the proud woman's heart.

"I suppose you will go to Moira with Harry tomorrow?" she said, presently. "It will be as well, I think, if you go out of the way for a few days; at least until matters shape themselves a little."

"I am going to-day," said Tom, flinging up his head with the first display of energy or interest. "I sha'n't stay another hour in this house to be trampled on by that sneak at Killane. I wish I had put a bullet through him the other day as I felt inclined."

"Have you had some words with him?" asked his mother in surprise.

"Yes, more than once. I can't stand the fellow; he is too beastly meddling, and there is one thing in the world I am certain of, mother—it is that he won't show us any quarter, and I believe the sooner we clear out the better."

"I don't propose to give in so easily, Tom," said his mother. "As O'Grady has gone over without a word to the enemy's side, I shall have to get some one else to take up our case. Understand, I shall not deny having tried to get rid of the child; what I will deny and fight to the bitter end is the pretence that he is still alive, and that that fellow is he."

Tom looked at his mother for a moment, secretly admiring her courage, although he knew it was a forlorn hope.

"You'd be a fool, I think," he said, "to take up any such position. I tell you it won't hold water. I don't believe you'd even get a lawyer to act on your behalf. Believe me, mother, it will be far better just to go out quietly without any fuss; it will pay us much better in the end. I am going to clear out, anyhow, and I question whether Ballymore will ever see me again."

"But what can you do, Tom?" his mother asked, anxiously. "As you have said only a moment ago, you have no resources."

"I shall have to make them, then," was his sour retort. "Anyhow, I'm going, and this very day."

"Where?"

"Oh, I don't know. Don't ask me any questions. Leave me alone. You've ruined me, and destroyed my whole life. Leave me alone!"

So this was Emily Lyndon's reward for the crime she had committed for the sake of her unborn son. The sharp anguish of her soul was such that she could have cried to him for mercy, but she sat silent, stricken dumb by the despair which seemed to be closing her in on every side.

"I forgive you, Tom," she said, in an unusually

gentle voice. "Of course, I know that it is a terrible thing for you; still, you are young—your life is all before you. We have still some influence—if not through your grandfather, in other quarters. It may be possible to get you a good appointment at home or abroad."

"Abroad it must be," said Tom, sullenly. "I will not stay here to be the laughing-stock and the jibe of the whole country, and to see that upstart usurping my place."

"Promise at least to wait until to-morrow?" she said, entreatingly, "and go away quietly and naturally with Harry. There is no use giving people undue occasion for talk."

He smiled somewhat bitterly.

"You will try to keep up appearances to the last, mother," he answered, but gave her no promise good or bad. So little heed did he pay to her wishes that he was a passenger by the night boat from Dublin to Glasgow, where he arrived in the chill grey dawn of the winter morning to find the city enveloped in an impenetrable yellow fog, through which the rain fell with pitiless steadiness. Nothing more dreary could be imagined than that cab drive in the early morning to the obscure street on the South Side where Tom Lyndon had hidden the *Pride of Arraghvanna*.

Kitty Rooney had given up much for those she loved, but she had only realised the stupendous magnitude of her sacrifice when she found herself alone in that dismal city where throughout the long winter days she never caught a gleam of the sun, or inhaled a breath of fresh, purifying air. Sometimes the poor caged bird grew desperate, beating its wings against its prison walls, and felt inclined to brave all

consequences and fly back to the sweet air of its mountain home. Accustomed all her life to early hours, Kitty was unable to sleep long in the morning, and was always astir before seven o'clock. She was therefore dressed and sitting down to her simple breakfast in the dingy little sitting-room when Lyndon's cab rattled noisily up to the door.

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"SHE SPRANG UP WITH A CRY OF MINGLED JOY AND APPREHENSION."

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

HUSBAND AND WIFE



WHEN she saw him she sprang up with a cry of mingled joy and apprehension. She did not love him with her whole heart, but she was his wife, and she had given up everything for him. She saw that he looked haggard and worn, as if he had passed a sleepless night, and the thought that he might be in trouble awakened in her heart a rush of tenderness towards him warmer than anything she had yet felt for him. He was still sufficiently in love with her to forget for a moment in the joy of meeting the desperate errand upon which he had come. He clasped her to his heart, assuring her again and again of his unaltered affection.

"But why have you come so soon, and without any warning?" she asked, anxiously. "You said when you left me that it might be a month before you could come again."

"I expected that it would be a month dearest, before I could get away comfortably and without suspicion."

At the word suspicion she winced. The idea of a

hidden and secret marriage, and the whole mystery surrounding her present life, was hateful to the frank and open soul of Kitty Rooney, and she only endured it because of the benefit it had conferred upon those she loved better than anything on earth.

"Tell me how they are, my mother and Ted?" she said, feverishly. "Have you seen them, and oh! what are they saying about me? What do they think?"

Wholly absorbed with his own troubles Lyndon for the moment felt inclined to resent her anxious solicitude for those to whose cruel anxiety he had given but little thought.

"Oh, they are all right. It is not long since they discovered that you had never been to Monaghan. Of course, they are a bit anxious, and think of all sorts of things. I saw your mother the other day. What do you think is her fear?"

Kitty clasped her hands, but she could not form a question. The matter was too serious and terrible to her to be treated lightly.

"She thinks that you have followed the example of some ancestress. I forget precisely what relation she was. I mean the lady who walked over the Brow Head at Bray and put an end to herself."

At this Kitty laughed hysterically, but her eyes were full of tears.

"It will be all right by-and-by," he said, soothingly. "They'll soon know the right way of it. The secret will have to come out sooner than I expected, or indeed intended. I have come to tell you, Kitty, what a fearful calamity has happened to me. I am no longer Squire of Ballymore."

"What can ye mane?" asked Kitty, with round,

wondering eyes. "Tell me quickly, or are you only playing a bit joke off on me?"

"No; I only wish it was a joke," said Lyndon, gloomily. "I don't need to ask whether you know the old story about the child, my half-brother, who disappeared from Ballymore before I was born."

"Yes, I have heard av him often and often," said Kitty, and then waited for him to tell her the rest, not caring to repeat what had often been the common talk of the parish, which had never scrupled to blame Lady Lyndon for that strange mystery.

"Well, he's turned up," said Lyndon, with the same gloomy grimness, "and there's nothing left to me but to walk out as gracefully and with as little fuss as possible."

Kitty sat aghast, scarcely able to comprehend the full meaning of his words.

"And where has he been all these years?" she managed to ask at last. "It was thought that he was drowned in the Lough."

"Well, he wasn't. I may as well make a clean breast of it to you, Kitty, and tell you the whole story. My mother paid his nurse to get him out of the way. It was a mistake, of course, and I wonder that such a clever woman as my mother could ever have made it. It is only in novels that these things ever turn out successfully. A secret can only be kept by one person, Kitty, not by two or three."

"And he has come back, did you say?"

"Yes; I don't think that I should have minded so much if it had been anybody but the person it is. You know that sneak of a fellow that is Captain Byrne's secretary at Killane. You do know him, because he's been at Arraghvanna more than once; that's the

man who has ruined me, and in whose favour I have go. to resign."

Kitty sat silent, overwhelmed indeed with her surprise at this strange story.

"I never saw him," she said, at length. "I was out at Father O'Hagan's the day he called at Arraghvanna. He only spoke to mother."

"But you have seen him," corrected Lyndon. "It was he who passed us that night in the Ballymore Woods. Don't you remember?"

"Oh yes, I do," said Kitty, and shivered slightly as the memory of it swept over her. It struck Lyndon all of a sudden that she had received the information very calmly and indifferently, and that the warm, loving sympathy which he had expected, and which he told himself he had a right to expect, was not forthcoming.

"You don't look very sorry for me, Kitty," he said, in rather an aggrieved tone. "Perhaps you don't realise what it all means. It means that that fellow is Squire of Ballymore, that he will live there, and that I shall have to turn out and get my living as best I may."

"Ballymore is a very big house, Tom," said Kitty, innocently. "Would there not be room for all? Mother said that he was such a kind gentleman, I'm shure he wouldn't moind."

At this guileless suggestion Lyndon laughed bitterly.

"You don't know what you are talking about, Kitty, and perhaps I ought not to expect that you should; but what I want to know is what I am going to do with you. I shall have no means; I have never been taught to work. I shall have to go abroad to seek my fortune."

Kitty sat still, looking through the narrow, rain-blurred window with a strange far-off look on her face. She was thinking that her sacrifice had been in vain, that she had given herself to a man for whom she had no real love, only to find too late that the destinies of those she loved were lifted clean out of his hands or hers. She had occupied most of her lonely hours in looking into the future, picturing herself as the Lady of Ballymore dispensing good gifts with a royal hand to those who had been oppressed so long; and now these dreams were all shattered, not even the smallest or least ambitious of them could have any fulfilment. A despair almost as blank and overwhelming as Lyndon's own seemed to settle down upon her soul, shutting out all else. She did not even give a thought to the deprivations of which Lyndon had spoken so feelingly, and which would be to him matters of more serious moment. To her it was not and never could be any hardship to work, nor could she see that a young man with life all before him, blessed with health and strength and mental capacity, could be an object for much pity. So they sat silent regarding each other, as far apart in heart and in purpose as if the Poles had separated them, yet they were husband and wife, at least so Kitty believed, though Lyndon himself thought otherwise. He did not seek to break the silence, his own thoughts were of a very peculiar and conflicting nature. At that moment the greater calamity seemed to fade in some inexplicable manner from his mind, and he was wholly absorbed by thoughts of the girl sitting so quietly opposite to him. What was he to do with her? She was the first to break the silence.

"What for would you be going away to a foreign

country, Tom?" she asked. "Shure, there's plenty av work in Ireland or in Scotland. It won't take much to kape us, and I can work myself. I have been used to it all my days."

Lyndon faintly smiled. Kitty spoke in good faith; but the unconscious irony of her speech created in him a grim amusement. It was a comedy they were enacting, a comedy which at any moment might be turned to tragedy. He had but to tell her the actual facts of their relation to each other to raise the tempest in her undisciplined soul. But he would not be premature; he must wait until things were matured a little, until events were developed. Meantime it was pleasant and comforting to be at her side, once more to hear the sweet music of her voice, and see the slow wonder gather in her beautiful grey eyes.

"What are you thinking, Kitty?" he asked presently, observing the concentration of her look.

"I was just thinking that there'd be no more word of evictions in Glendalough," she said. "Mother said Mr. Fletcher was all agin' them."

"Well, we'll see. It is very easy to talk righteously about what another man ought to do with his property; it's a very different matter when it comes to one's own. For me, I don't care a hang what becomes of Glendalough, or how he manages the place, so long as I am not there to see, and I only hope I won't come across him, or I'll put a bullet through him as sure as I'm saying it now."

"Oh, Tom, you wouldn't" cried Kitty, in distress. "It isn't his fault, poor gentleman; and, besides, look how hard it has been for him all these years when he ought to have been at Ballymore. What are they going to do to her ladyship for it?"

"I don't know; nothing, I expect. I am sick of the whole thing, and I've a good mind to take a passage for you and me to America, and never look on the place again."

Kitty shook her head.

"I won't go to America," she answered, quietly.

"But why, Kitty?" he asked, more out of curiosity than anything else. "It can't matter to you where you go now; besides, a wife has to follow her husband. Isn't that the reading of Scripture?"

Kitty made no reply for a few moments, then she put another and quite unexpected question.

"I have been thinking that now it can't matter how soon I go back. If I am not to be the Lady of Ballymore, but only a poor man's wife as you say, I can go back now to Arraghvanna to mother and Ted. There is no use for you to spend money kaping me here, it would be better to save it."

"Are you, then, so anxious to go back?" said Lyndon, jealously.

"I must go soon," she said, quietly, but with a depth of feeling there was no mistaking. "If you hadn't come to-day I think I should have gone, I could not wait another day."

"But listen, Kitty; you can't go back yet, it would be madness to let the secret out so soon. You must wait at least until I have made some plans, until we know what is going to happen. I am disappointed," he said, assuming an aggrieved look and tone. "I came expecting to be comforted and cheered, only to find you grumbling and discontented."



CHAPTER XXXIX

AT HIS WITS' END



LYNDON soon tired of staying in Glasgow beside Kitty. It had been a relief to escape from Ballymore in the first shock of the unwelcome revelation regarding Fletcher's real parentage, but very soon he found himself longing to get back to learn all that had transpired during his absence. He gave a good deal of thought to the ultimate fate of Kitty Rooney, but supposed that sooner or later she would go back to Arraghvanna. He intended to take care, however, that he got himself clean out of the country before that happened. He had quite decided to go abroad, nor had he any intention of taking Kitty with him, although he continually spoke as if it were a settled matter that they should go abroad together. Had he been gifted with even ordinary powers of observation he might have taken alarm from Kitty's very quiescence. She listened to what he had to say on the subject, but seldom made any remark on her own account. Lyndon imagined her to be indifferent, or at least only too willing to follow in any arrangement he might make ; but it was far otherwise. Kitty



was no fool, neither was she one of those plastic and accommodating natures that leave their destinies entirely in the hands of others. She had left Ireland with Lyndon for no other reason than to avert the threatened catastrophe of the evictions from Glendalough and to ensure her mother's continuance in the home which was so dear to her, but she had no intention of turning her back for ever on her native land. Already a longing desire for her old home and those she loved had become so strong that it sometimes refused to be set aside; but she never uttered it to Lyndon. He was not, and never had been, sympathetic where her family was concerned; nay, she saw that he was jealous of her affection for them, and that he never encouraged her to mention their names. Kitty had too much pride to press an unwelcome confidence; she therefore held her tongue. Lyndon did not know how unwise he had been in his own interests; he had made the profound mistake of imagining that because Kitty was a girl of the people her feelings were less strong and her scruples less binding than his own.

"When shall I see you again, Tom?" she asked, as it came to the moment of good-bye.

"Very soon, darling; I am just taking a run back to Ballymore to see what has happened, and what is going to happen. I'll write to you to-morrow night without fail, and tell you everything, also my plans for the future. It is possible that if I decide that we go to America we will sail from here; but I'll write and tell you everything, and if possible at all I'll come next week."

Kitty gravely nodded, but made no comment, good or bad, on what he said. Lyndon was too much

occupied with other thoughts to take particular notice of her silence, besides, he had become accustomed to it, and had often said to himself that Kitty had left all her spirit, and with it a good deal of her charm, in Glendalough. He did not believe for a moment that she would take any desperate or extreme step without consulting him. So far he had not had a bit of trouble with her. She had been amenable to every suggestion he had made, especially regarding the need for keeping their marriage secret. He was too superficial himself to divine that there was the smouldering fire of a volcano under that calm exterior, ready at any moment to burst into flame. So he took himself away with a comparatively light heart from Glasgow. He had taken the trouble, however, to make sure that she could not possibly follow him by the very simple precaution of not leaving her sufficient money. He made an arrangement with the landlady so that she would have everything she required, but took care not to give her any hard cash himself.

"I am so beastly hard up, darling," he said, as he tried to explain his apparent niggardliness. "I have made it all right with the landlady, and you must just try and get along with these few shillings until I come back. I must tell my mother at once, so that she may understand that I must have some money immediately. Don't look so woebegone; I'll make it all right; that's what I'm going back for now, and perhaps I'll telegraph for you instead of coming myself. It would save the expense of the double journey."

"Yes, it would," answered Kitty; but there was neither elation nor hope in her heart. She did not believe a word he was saying. The last look on Kitty's face haunted Lyndon until he was half-way

across the Irish Sea, and he cursed the folly which had made him burden himself with such an incubus. Although he had not admitted it as yet to himself, his secret intention was to go abroad, leaving her behind. As he came nearer his journey's end, however, his thoughts became more engrossed with the affairs of Ballymore. He felt feverishly excited as he drew nearer home, wondering whether he should reach Ballymore to find it already in the possession of the usurper. He hired a car at Rathdrum, but the man who drove it was a stranger to him, and he felt no inclination to put a single question. He dismissed it in the roadway a little below the gates, and, walking to the lodge, tapped lightly at the gatekeeper's door. She came out curtseying as usual.

"Good day, Kathy," he said. "Is my mother at home?"

"Yes, yer honour; her ladyship is at home all by herself."

"Oh, where is Mr. Terry?"

"Shure, an' he's gone to Scotland with the young gentleman that was here."

Lyndon nodded and passed on, relieved for the moment to know that as yet no radical change had taken place. He felt glad also for some unexplained reason that he should not have to encounter Terry. There was but little sympathy between the brothers, and the feeling that Terry was willing to welcome the interloper to Ballymore made Lyndon feel bitter against him. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when Lyndon entered the house. His mother had just finished her lunch, and was sitting idly in her own sanctum, bitterly resenting her son's absence and the fact that she was left to bear her great

trouble alone, when the door was suddenly opened and he entered. She sprang up with an almost hysterical exclamation of surprise. The shock of discovery and the inevitable strain of the past week had told upon Lady Lyndon's hitherto iron nerves. She would start at the slightest sound, and lived in a state of hourly dread lest the public exposure which she dreaded should come upon her. The absolute quiet of the past week had been more trying to her than if she had been called upon to fight in open court. Apparently neither Fletcher nor those representing him had taken any action as yet, not even a communication had passed between the lawyers, and it seemed to Emily Lyndon that the last stage of her endurance was reached, and that unless something happened soon she must do something desperate.

"At last," she called out, shrilly, and without greeting of any kind. "I wonder you dare show face after your treatment of me. Surely I am entitled to be told at once where you have been, and why you have not even sent me a line?"

"All right, mother. Sit down, and I'll tell you all about it, presently," said Lyndon, struck by the ravages which that week of anxiety and suspense had wrought on his mother's beautiful face. "I thought the best thing I could do in the circumstances was to clear out, so I cleared. I didn't know what to expect when I came back. I have thought I would find Fletcher installed here in state. Has nothing been done?"

"Nothing," she snapped, angrily. "You ought to have been at home looking after your own interests, and until you explain your absence I will tell you nothing. You must understand that I am not a child to be treated with whatever rudeness you please."

"Terry has gone to Scotland," said Lyndon, choosing to ignore this passionate speech. "I have amused myself once or twice wondering what his attitude would be. What did he say about it?"

"Nothing. What would you expect Terry to say? He has neither family pride nor any idea of duty or common sense," she snapped, in the same angry tone. "Will you tell me where you have been, Tom? Until you do I can have nothing further to say to you."

Lyndon eyed his mother steadily for a moment, leaning up against the marble slab of the console mirror opposite to the sofa upon which she sat. She was, he well knew, his only real friend in the world. Since matters had reached such a desperate crisis with him, it might be as well to tell her the whole truth, and be guided by her advice. Then, it would be a comparatively easy task to tell her, since he felt sure that she had her well-founded suspicions regarding Kitty Rooney.

"I suppose nothing has been heard of Ted Rooney's sister at Arraghvanna?" he said, firing a shot at a venture. She was quick to follow up the clue thus offered.

"No; nothing. Am I right in thinking that you are the only person that can throw any light on her disappearance?"

Lyndon nodded, and the colour slightly flushed his cheek.

"You took her away, I suppose?" said his mother, and her brow grew dark with her high displeasure.

"I did."

"And what have you done with her, may I ask?"

"She's in Glasgow. I came from there last night."

"You have made an unspeakable fool of yourself,

Tom," said his mother, angrily. "To begin with, it was too bad of you to entice the poor creature away from a home where she really is needed. Even when you could write yourself Squire of Ballymore you were a poor man, with no money to spare for such episodes. As you are now situated the affair is positively disastrous. What are you going to do with her?"

"I don't know what to do, mother, and that's the truth," he answered, frankly. "She imagines that she's going abroad with me; but——" He ended his sentence with a shake of the head. His mother regarded him steadily, and for the first time in her life and his felt an inward loathing for the callous selfishness of his nature, which had never been more openly shown than at that moment. She was not a good woman herself, and she had taken no pains to teach her sons the higher meanings of life, yet it gave her something of a shock to see that the one whom she had made her idol could be capable of such baseness.

"You can't expect me to help you," she said, coldly "I am ashamed of you, and the sooner we take ourselves away from this neighbourhood the better. Do you know that if it was suspected in Glendalough for a moment that you had anything to do with Kitty Rooney's disappearance your life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase."

Lyndon shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll take good care of my skin, mother; you needn't be afraid of that. I'm jolly sorry now, of course, that I did it. A man always sees his own faults too late. I would only like to know what is going to be Fletcher's next move, and then I'll turn my back on this cursed place, where I have never had a moment's peace or enjoyment since I came to it."

"It's a case of sour grapes, Tom," his mother said, with a slightly sarcastic smile, assumed to hide the unspeakable bitterness in her soul. "You ought to have been happy here; but you were never fit for your position."

"If that is the case, I am but as you made me," he answered, readily. Thus did these two, absolutely without resources in the hour of adversity, hurl their taunts at one another instead of co-operating to bear their reverses with a becoming dignity.

"How do you know," he asked, presently, "that the feeling is so high in the glen? Before I left I went about a good deal, and I thought there was remarkably little interest shown in her disappearance."

"You can go out now and you'll hear a different story," she answered, sullenly. "They say that her brother is almost beside himself, and that he has sworn to trace her, and to be revenged on whoever has enticed her away."

Again Lyndon shrugged his shoulders; but the words sank into his heart, and remained there to haunt him with their unpleasant significance.

"I suppose you deluded her with a mock marriage, or something of that sort," said his mother, presently. "I always thought that she was rather a superior girl, who would not hold herself so cheaply."

"I'll tell you all about it another day, mother," he said, as if wearying of the subject. "What I am more particularly interested in now is what you are going to do. Are you going to stay here?"

"If I do not hear from O'Grady within twenty-four hours," she answered, decidedly, "I shall either write to him, or seek a personal interview with your half-brother."

Lyndon winced, and with his foot angrily spurned his mother's little toy spaniel gambolling on the carpet at his feet. She saw the expression on his face, noted the vindictive gleam in his eye, and, knowing herself the object, she turned her head away swiftly, too proud to let him see the two tears wrung from the very anguish of her soul which forced themselves from under her eyelids and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

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CHAPTER XL

THE LOST LAMB



NOTHING was yet known, of course, in Glendalough or Rathdrum about the impending changes in Ballymore. Those interested kept their own counsel—until the time should be ripe for the publication of affairs. The most engrossing subject of talk and conjecture in Glendalough was still the disappearance of Kitty Rooney. Father O'Hagan was sorely puzzled over it. There were times even yet when he doubted Fletcher's strongly-expressed convictions that Lyndon alone could throw any light on that strange event. He was sitting in his study late one evening, and it oddly happened that he was quite alone in the house, his housekeeper having gone to Kildare to see her dying sister, when he heard a low tap at the door. He went at once to open it, holding his little bronze candlestick with its flickering light high in his hand so that it fell full on the figure standing within the quaint porch. His hand shook and his voice faltered as he uttered an exclamation of surprise, almost of dismay. For, unless his eyes strangely deceived him,

it was Kitty Rooney who stood before him in the flesh.

"Are you alone, father?" she whispered, hesitatingly. "May I come in and speak to you?"

"Certainly, certainly, Kitty," said the old man, at the same time extending his hand to grasp hers, almost as if he sought to convince himself that she was actually a real person and not a creature of imagination. He drew her in and shut the door, then motioned her to follow him to the study, while he set the candle down on the table. A reading lamp stood there also, and in the fuller light he saw that the girl was pale, and looked tired, as if she had come off a long journey.

"You are weary, my daughter. Before we speak you must take something to revive you. Be seated, while I bring you some refreshment."

She could not demur, because she was too moved for speech. She sank into a chair, while Father O'Hagan unlocked a little cupboard in the corner, where he kept a little store of good wine which had been given to him from time to time by charitable persons for his own use. But Father O'Hagan even on his days of extremest weariness never touched it himself, and seldom unlocked the cupboard unless he had a sick parishioner to whom such stimulant was absolutely necessary. He filled a full glass, and giving it to the weary girl, bade her drink it and eat a morsel of the biscuit he set by her side before she spoke a word. She revived somewhat, and a touch of colour stole back into her pale cheeks.

"You have walked, I suppose, from Rathdrum?" said Father O'Hagan, when he had watched her in silence for a few moments.

"Yes, your riverence; I have walked from Rathdrum."

"And how much further, Kitty—how much further have you journeyed?"

"Oh, a weary way, father. All the way from Scotland."

Father O'Hagan shook his head slowly, and his face became more sorrowful in its look.

"If you are sufficiently rested, Kitty, I am ready to hear what you have to say to me."

"Before I say anything, your riverence, tell me of my mother and Ted," she said, with a little gasping breath.

"Your mother is still alive, but she has never risen from her chair, nor turned her face from the wall, since it was known that you had never reached Monaghan."

"Oh, but if she is alive it is enough," cried Kitty, almost wildly. "I will nurse her well again, and niver, niver leave her."

"It may be that the sight of you will not be so pleasant as it was, Kitty," said Father O'Hagan, struck by the manner and speech of the girl who ought to be upon her knees.

"Oh, she will forgive me, father, as you will, when you know all," she said, more quietly. "I am not come back in shame to Glendalough, though I see from your face that you have believed it av me."

"It was hard to know what to believe, Kitty," said the old priest, gently. "And remember I am waiting still to hear what you have to tell."

"What do they think?" she said, feverishly. "What have they said av me, father? Tell me that, an' I will explain it all."

"There have been many rumours—there are a few

who believe that the Squire of Ballymore alone could throw any light on the mystery, and I am one of those."

"I went away with Mr. Lyndon—at least, I went before him, and he came in a few days; but I am his lawful wedded wife, your riverence, nothing less."

"Have you proof of this, Kitty?" asked the old priest, with great eagerness, leaning forward in his chair, his thin spirituelle face full of eagerness he was at no pains to suppress.

She nodded, then in a few words told him the whole story of her temptation and her flight. Father O'Hagan's soul was moved as he listened, and discerning that she had actually made a sacrifice of herself for those she so dearly loved, he looked at her with compassion and admiration. He had always known her to be a dutiful daughter and a quiet, well-behaved girl, but the depth of her nature and character was now revealed to him for the first time.

"You forget the injunction—'Ye may not do evil that good may come,'" he said, almost sadly. "The motive was good, but the act was desperate. You ought to have sought advice. If only you had come to me."

"Father, I could not—he forbade me."

"Is he aware that you are here to-night? If you are his lawful wife how comes it that you are alone at this late hour, and that you have come on foot from Rathdrum? Mr. Lyndon's wife should travel in different fashion."

"He doesn't know. He is full of trouble himself since his half-brother has been found——"

"Child, what are you talking of?"

Kitty hesitated, seeing her mistake. But, having

gone so far, she must now give Father O'Hagan her full confidence. Great was his amazement as he listened. He uplifted his hands more than once, and hung breathless on her words. Life moved slowly, and in the main uneventfully, in that quiet parish. Never in the whole of Father O'Hagan's ministry had such exciting events followed so quickly on the heels of each other.

"I can scarcely take it all in, Kitty. You are here in the flesh talking to me, telling me in one breath that you are Squire Lyndon's wife, and in the next that he is no squire at all, but will have to give way to his half-brother so strangely restored from the dead. But it will be a terrible reckoning for Lady Lyndon."

"Father O'Hagan," said Kitty, nervously rising, "as nothing is known as it here, will you say nothing? I may be doing great wrong even to talk as it. I am so perplexed I know not what I do."

"My child, you need not fear. Many a secret in Glendalough is safe with me. I shall not betray you. Well, what are you going to do? Is it to Ballymore or to Arraghvanna you wish me to take you now?"

"Home, home to me mother an' to Ted," she said, feverishly.

"Ted is a desperate man, Kitty. You will be hard put to it to convince him the story you have told me is true."

Kitty winced, and glanced wistfully at the priest's benevolent face.

"You will help me, father. I have nobody but you," she said, simply. Father O'Hagan turned away suddenly, and wiped from his kind old eye a surreptitious tear. Then he made ready, without another word,

to take the lost sheep back to the fold. They talked much as they walked to Arraghvanna, and as things became more clear and connected in the mind of Father O'Hagan his admiration and pity for Kitty increased. What astonished and touched him more than anything was the undoubted fact that Kitty had little or no love for the man to whom, if her story were substantiated, she was bound for life. She had given herself in exchange for Lyndon's promise, which, to do him justice, he had kept. What was to be the future of this strange pair ; or could they have any future together? Kitty became very quiet as they neared Arraghvanna, and leaned very heavily on her companion's supporting arm. The solitary light, which Kitty herself had been wont to set in the kitchen window, shed its cheery beam across the little strip of garden-ground, and guided their steps through the thick darkness of a moonless winter night.

"Stay here, Kitty," the priest whispered at the door, "until I see how matters are within."

He tapped lightly at the door, and then lifting the latch walked in. Ted sat alone by the ruddy peat-fire. Either he had awakened from sleep, or from absorbing thought. He had a dazed look as he got to his feet and tried to reply to Father O'Hagan's greeting.

"All alone, Ted, I suppose? Your poor mother within is asleep?" said the priest. "I am glad to find you alone. I am the bearer of great news——"

"Of Kitty!" cried Ted, on the alert at once. Kitty, with her heart almost bursting outside the door, heard his voice and felt its tense anxiety thrill her through and through.

"Of Kitty. She has come back, Ted, wife to Mr. Lyndon," said the priest, in measured words, and at

the same time keeping his mild, compelling gaze on the young man's face, as if to quell the expected tumult. But none was visible. Ted regarded him stupidly, evidently not comprehending the full significance of his words.

"Wife to Mr. Lyndon! Is she at Ballymore?" he asked then, and the priest saw that his task would be more difficult than he had expected. He hesitated a moment, then laid his kind, detaining hand on the young man's arm.

"Listen, Ted, and I will tell you a story. Do you remember some weeks ago how the fear of eviction lay heavy on so many hearts in Glendalough, and how the peaceably inclined lived in dread of strife and bloodshed, and how the whole parish was full of sinister rumours and unnamed terrors?"

"Yes, yes, your riverence; shure an' it's not so long ago that I cannot moind it all," answered Ted, hastily.

"It came to an end suddenly and quickly, Ted, so suddenly and quickly that many could not understand it, but had to ponder it as a mystery in their hearts. Did you not think it strange and sudden that Lyndon should without warning change his attitude, and become a fair friend to the people whom he had driven nearly desperate by oppression and harshness?"

"It was strange, your riverence," observed Ted, slowly. "I thought it at the time."

"It was not that Lyndon became a new man all of a sudden, Ted; it was some one else's doing—a kind and gentle heart tried to show him a better way, but could only persuade him to it by a great sacrifice—the sacrifice of herself!"

"Holy mother!" cried Ted, in a strange whisper. "Is it Kitty ye are spakin' av?"

"Yes, Ted, it is Kitty I am speaking of. It was for Kitty's sake Lyndon spared the people of Ballymore; it was for their sakes she went away, knowing very well what would be said of her, and that even those she loved so dearly might blame her most of all."

"But she has come back, father?" said Ted, in a hoarse whisper. "I heard you say she is his lawful wife."

"She says so, and she has the proofs. Yet she has come back from Scotland to-night alone; her longing to see her mother and you would no longer be set aside."

"Alone! and she has gone to Ballymore first, as she ought, to her husband's house?"

The priest noticed the persistence with which Ted dwelt on the fact that she was Lyndon's wife. The breath of dishonour would have killed him, especially dishonour which touched any woman of his house. In this the pride of the peasant equalled—nay, perhaps excelled, that of the peer. Father O'Hagan saw that the pride of the Rooneys, of which he had often heard, had not been exaggerated in Glendalough, but was a real quality which no man could measure.

"You must understand, Ted," he said, in his gentle, soothing voice, "that a marriage such as this has been is necessarily hedged about by many difficulties. It was a runaway and secret marriage to begin with, and the difference in their position increases the difficulties of which I spoke. Lady Lyndon will not approve it. We could not expect it. No doubt Lyndon is wise to try and reconcile his mother to it by degrees."

"Why," cried Ted, fiercely, "Kitty is as good as any Lyndon that ever lived! If she is his wife he shall acknowledge her openly, by God I swear it?"

"Gently, gently, Ted; it shall be done in good time. Kitty's name is as dear to me as it is to you. I shall not stand by and see her wronged; but nothing can be done to-night. We must wait until the dawning of another day."

"But where is Kitty? Ye say she is not at Ballymore. Where is she?"

Father O'Hagan stepped back to the door and threw it open.

"Kitty is here, Ted. Remember what she has done for you, and don't stint her of your loving thanks."

Kitty ran in with an inarticulate cry. Only for a moment Ted regarded her sternly with the look of awakened suspicion in his honest eyes. But she ran to him unheedingly, and his arms were not shut against her. Father O'Hagan only waited to see them thus, with their cheeks close to each other, then he slipped gently out and closed the door. He had done his part, love would do the rest.



CHAPTER XLI

THE BITTER END



DIRECTLY he was without the door Father O'Hagan took out his watch, and by the glow from the kitchen window studied its face. It was now nine o'clock, an hour considered late in that primitive parish, too late to make a call unless on some urgent errand. Father O'Hagan felt that the errand was urgent; therefore, after a moment's consideration, he turned his steps across the fields to the Park of Ballymore. He knew every inch of the way, and could have found the wicket gate blindfold. For the moment his mind was set at rest concerning Kitty and her people. For a few hours at least they would be entirely occupied with each other. But, when morning dawned, no man knew what might happen; and it was well to be prepared for any emergency. Father O'Hagan wished to see Lyndon, chiefly to satisfy himself regarding the validity of Kitty's marriage. That from every point of view was the matter of chief importance to him and to others at the moment. There was plenty of lighted windows in the old house, and, though the



great door was closed for the night, Father O'Hagan had not to wait long for admittance. He was relieved to hear that Lyndon was at home, and while he awaited him in the library he pondered much on the vicissitudes of life. Had Father O'Hagan been of a literary turn of mind he could have filled a volume with his unique experiences in Glendalough. But he had no such thoughts or ambition. His memory was his only notebook—he was turning its pages now, and recalling all he had known of the Lyndons. From his interesting reverie he was recalled by the entrance of Tom Lyndon himself. He looked apprehensive as he returned the priest's salutation. The man who has deviated from the straight path, and who has grievous sins of committal to answer for, is not usually enamoured of priestly intervention. He feared that Father O'Hagan's visit could only have ominous import.

"You are a late visitor, father," he said, with attempted ease of manner. "I hope you are not in trouble of any kind?"

"Not on my own account, Mr. Lyndon," he answered. "And it strikes me that you scarcely need inquire my errand, which concerns Kitty Rooney, or, to speak correctly, your wife, Mrs. Tom Lyndon."

At this Tom Lyndon looked thunderstruck, and for the moment could not utter a word.

He saw that it would be futile to deny any knowledge of Kitty, as Father O'Hagan undoubtedly possessed authentic information which enabled him to speak with authority.

"I don't know what you mean, father," he said lamely. "Please explain yourself."

"That is easily done. Kitty came back to Glenda-

lough to-night. I have just left her at Arraghvanna, though her place is here."

Lyndon grew ghastly pale, and with difficulty repressed a strong expression of his consternation. He stood silent, because he had nothing to say. The priest regarded him with somewhat sorrowful eyes, remembering his father, the good Sir Tom, and wondering how it came that so noble a man should have begotten so craven a son.

"You did wrong to entice the poor girl away," he said, at length. "And as you have made her your lawful wife, I fail to see what object was to be gained by the secret flight."

Lyndon eyed him keenly; but Father O'Hagan preserved an expression of face which baffled Lyndon's rather limited powers of discernment.

"She had no right," he said, sullenly, "to return without my knowledge or permission. In the present desperate condition of my affairs it was most important that all should be concealed. You cannot have heard, of course, what has happened," he added, almost cagerly, grasping at what would give him a brief respite from the priest's cross-questioning, and enable him perhaps to formulate some line of conduct. "A man has turned up claiming to be my half-brother who was drowned in the Lough over twenty years ago. Until that matter is settled it would be disastrous to bring forward any further complications. I told Kitty so. She promised to remain quietly in Glasgow until I told her she might join me here."

"She is your lawful wife?" asked the priest in a steady, judicial voice, determined to bring Lyndon to the point. The young man shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, and he wished he dared bid the

priest with an oath to mind his own business. But Father O'Hagan was a very old man, and by virtue of his office exercised a certain awe even over Lyndon's undisciplined soul.

"She believes herself to be so," he said, cautiously; "but it was an irregular marriage. I need not hold it binding unless I choose."

Father O'Hagan gravely nodded. These words revealed to him as much of Lyndon's inner nature as he wished to know.

"I understand, then, that it would not cost you much to repudiate her, that, in fact, if it should seem expedient, you would have no hesitation in doing so?" he said, keenly.

"In my desperate plight, Father O'Hagan, what am I to do? If this interloper's claim should be established, as I fear it will, I have nothing. I am but a homeless wanderer on the face of the earth, homeless and penniless—what have I to offer Kitty, or anybody?"

"That does not alter the situation, nor lessen your sacred obligations to her," said the priest, sternly. "You are young and strong; you must work for the woman you have wronged. It may be your soul's salvation."

Lyndon shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall go abroad. I cannot possibly take her. She must stay at Arraghvanna now that she has returned against my expressed desire."

"You have no intention, then, of bringing her here and publicly acknowledging her as your wife?"

"No, sir, I have not," said Lyndon, boldly. "I have my mother's feelings to consider. You would not have me totally disregard them?"

Father O'Hagan made a quick gesture of impatience and dissent. A righteous anger burned within him ; his old heart was hot, and he felt moved to take the cowardly cur by the throat and shake the very life out of him. But he controlled himself, and there was scarcely a tremor in his voice as he spoke,—

“I infer from your words that you do not regard your obligations to Kitty as binding ?”

“Since you drive me to bay, I will be honest, Father O'Hagan, and tell you frankly I don't. If she doesn't worry or harass me I'll do what I can for her, but I will not be forced or badgered by her, or you, or anybody.”

Lyndon threw aside the cloak of respect he had worn throughout the interview, and stood revealed in his true light—a coward and a scoundrel at heart. The nervous colour rose pink in Father O'Hagan's thin cheeks, and he clenched his hands at his side. The hot temper of his youth came back to him again, and he had difficulty in commanding his voice.

“Perhaps you will find it less easy than you imagine to rid yourself of these responsibilities,” he said, calmly and coldly. “Have you ever heard of Scots Law ?”

“I don't know what you mean,” said Lyndon, rudely.

“I hardly expected you would. You are not a person of much resource or of wide knowledge. But I am surprised that you did not take a little more trouble, since you have been so grossly selfish all through, to safeguard yourself. Let me enlighten you. According to Scots Law it is sufficient if two persons in Scotland declare themselves to be husband and wife before two witnesses—nothing but death can part them. This is the position in which you now stand, Mr.

Lyndon. You cannot repudiate your poor wife, much as you evidently desire it. She is legally entitled to share your title and estates, and that she will do so I and others interested in the cause of right will make sure. I wish you good evening, and I pray that the God whose laws you have broken may in His good time bring you to some comprehension of your great and grievous sin."

So saying the old priest quietly withdrew himself from the house of Ballymore, and his heart was very heavy as he sought his way through the thick darkness of the night to his own lonely fireside, where he had nought but the sorrows of others to bear him company. He left Lyndon in no enviable frame of mind. He was by turns furious, desperate, and apprehensive. What to do for the best was the question he put to himself again and again, and when morning dawned it found him still undecided. So quickly had his passion cooled, and so fully did other selfish matters engross his mind, that the thought of Kitty's nearness had scarcely power to stir in him any emotion save that of exasperation. He had never had a wish or a whim thwarted in his life. To have his directly-expressed desires thus calmly disregarded and disobeyed filled him with anger. Well, she should suffer for it. He would show her she could not do just as she liked with him. In this mood the morning found him. He bore traces of his troubled night in his face, and also in his demeanour at the breakfast-table. He had scarcely a word to say—the dilemma in which he found himself was sufficient to make him look gloomy enough. His mother left him to himself. She also was anxious and worried, uncertain of the future, and filled with forebodings.

Another day, and no letter from O'Grady—not a sign or indication of Brian Lyndon's intention.

"I am going in to Wicklow this morning by the twelve train, Tom," she said at length. "I must see what is in the wind. Will you come?"

"No," answered Tom, shortly, and his mother regarded him thoughtfully and without irritation. She had done him a great wrong, she knew, and to expect him to be amiable under the circumstances was to expect too much.

He rose from the table at the moment, and left the room without a word of apology. It was then half-past nine; after lingering about aimlessly in the gun-room and hall he put on a cap and left the house. It was a dismal morning—one of the dreariest of winter days. A wet, clammy fog hung low over hill and dale, and a fine, small rain filtered through it drearily. The bare trees stretched out their ghostly branches weirdly, and the air was filled with the dank odours of dead and dying leaves. Lyndon shivered as the chill air caught him; but he did not turn back to the warmth and comfort of the house. He strolled round to the stables—relieved his feelings somewhat by finding fault with the men hanging idly about there; then, almost against his will, he turned his face across the park towards the wicket gate opening upon the Arraghvanna pasture, and there, just without the gate, he saw a figure come out from the wet folds of the mist, and found himself face to face with Ted Rooney.

Both men stood still. Ted was not angry, but his face was white and set—he had the look of a man who had a set purpose in view which he would accomplish at all hazards.

"I was comin' to Ballymore to see yez," he observed, calmly. "Maybe ye were goin' to Arraghvanna to see Kitty, yer wife!"

"No, I was not," snapped Lyndon, stung to quick resentment by the quiet insolence of Ted Rooney.

He had inherited his full share of the Bantry pride, and he regarded Ted Rooney and his kind as little better than the dust beneath his feet. It was a bad basis on which to start a discussion with a desperate man.

Ted eyed him steadily, noting the sullen gleam of the heavy-lidded eyes, the sour look, the contemptuous sneer.

"She's there," he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of Arraghvanna. "If ye are not goin' to fetch her now, perhaps ye'd loike me to drive her in the ould cart up to the front door? Any way yer honour plases."

"She's very well where she is. I did not tell her to come back. If she chooses to come at her own time instead of mine, why, then she must take the consequences."

"She's yer wife," repeated Ted, steadily, "and she shall come to Ballymore this very day, if I have to carry her meself."

"You are taking a very high-handed line, Rooney," said Lyndon, with a touch of haughtiness. "You'd better have a care."

"It's the roight line, the only wan there is to take," observed Ted. "If there is any other maybe ye'll be good enough to tell me what it is?"

"She can't come to Ballymore just now, Rooney. Nobody knows that better than Kitty herself, and unless both she and you can hold your tongues, for a time at least, there will be disaster all round."

"It's me sister's good name agin your convanience," said Ted. "The wan is of some impotence, the other—— We shall spake just as little or as much as we please, Mr. Tom Lyndon, without askin' ye lave."

"All right," said Lyndon, with a supercilious nod. "You can do precisely as you please; but when the reckoning comes don't blame me."

"The reckoning is here," cried Ted in a voice which gave his passion vent. "Where you stand here, ye blessed villain, ye'll tell me what it is ye mane to be afther? Is Kitty Rooney your lawful wife, or is she not? If she is not, by the Blessed Virgin, I'll kill yez where ye stand."

They were both young, and their worst passions were aflame; also, they were equally matched. No man saw that fight save the ghostly trees and the shivering birds among the dripping boughs. But it was a fair battle, and the one who fell died game.

Before noon that day, as Father O'Hagan was putting on his brogues for a tramp through the muddy glen to visit a dying man at the farther side of the parish, Ted Rooney, white faced and dishevelled, burst into the manse. In a flash of intuition Father O'Hagan guessed what had happened before Ted spoke the fatal words.

"I've come to give meself up, yer riverence," he said, in a voice of unnatural calm. "I've killed the squoire. They'll foind him lying at the Dareen gate. Send fur the police!"

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CHAPTER XLII

BRIAN LYNDON OF BALLYMORE



IN the flower-laden window of a little house in Mayfair Aileen Byrne and Adair Bremner were sitting together on a June day. Across the pink geraniums and white marguerites in the window-boxes they could see the throng of Park Lane and the abundant greenness beyond. It was a pleasant house, though tiny—an expensive toy. It sufficed for the need of the Bremner family, who could never be in London all together. On this occasion Adair was keeping house for her father, and Captain Byrne and Aileen had come over from Killane on a long visit.

"I feel distinctly excited," observed Adair, as she clasped her white hands above the dainty muslin of her Paris gown. "Mr. Brian Lyndon of Ballymore, M.P. for Rossmoyne!—quite an imposing personality. Seriously, Aileen, did you ever know or hear of a more exciting romance?"

"Never; but the odd thing about it is that when one sees him it is impossible to think but that it is the most natural thing in the world."

"Came over last night, did they?"

"Yes, Mr. Parnell and he travelled together last night."

"They are very intimate?"

"Very. Mr. Parnell has the highest possible opinion of Mr. Lyndon. He has repeatedly said to papa and to me that he will have a distinguished career."

"How interesting! Do you think they will call? I should so like to see Mr. Parnell."

"They will, without doubt, call some time," answered Aileen, and her colour rose, a sign which did not escape Adair's watchful eye. She had no doubt whatever that the blush was on Brian Lyndon's account. Well, it was natural and fitting, perhaps, and yet—why that sigh? At the moment things seemed a little out of joint in Adair Bremner's life.

"Rossmoynce is not a very distinguished constituency, perhaps, but it is a stepping-stone, and one must begin somewhere," observed Aileen. "Mr. Parnell was determined to have him in the House this session. I have heard him say so often."

"It is a wonderful story," repeated Adair. "Of course I am a little sorry for Lady Lyndon. Are you not?"

"Not very," answered Aileen, frankly. "I believe she is in London at present getting Terry settled at the War Office. He has got a clerkship there, which will also be a stepping-stone."

"Terry, that's the second son? He must feel rather bitter against the new squire."

"He doesn't. Wait till you see Terry, you'll understand. He would like to call here to see me, if he may?"

"Why, certainly, the more the merrier. Here's some one coming now."

The door opened, and two men entered. Adair sprang to her feet with an expression of pleased surprise. Adair knew Fletcher at once, though he was much changed, the other she had no difficulty in recognising as the leader of the Irish party. It was an interesting moment. Lyndon's behaviour was perhaps the most important detail in Adair's eyes. He bore himself admirably. Not until she came forward with frank hand extended did he seem to intrude himself on her notice, but he was perfectly at his ease; indeed more so than she was.

"So we meet again, and in very altered circumstances," she said, making room for him on the couch where she sat, appropriating him at once, as Aileen observed with some amusement.

"It is a fairy tale, nothing less. Tell me how you feel; a real personage?"

"Oh yes; you see life is mostly reality," he answered, with a smile. "May I ask for Mr. Bremner and all the members of your family? I hoped for the pleasure of seeing him to-day."

"You may. I don't know where he is at this particular moment. He dines out to-night, however, so he is sure to come home early. Of course, the House is not sitting to-day, or we should not have had this pleasure."

"I am going down to Scotland to-night."

"Are you, really, to Spitalhaugh?"

"Yes; to my father and mother. They will not be pleased until they have the details of the contest from my own lips—though some of them, I fear, I shall have to modify or suppress," he answered, with a laugh at the memory of some of the wild Rossmoyne experiences.

"Your father and mother?" Adair repeated questioningly. "You still think and speak of them as such?"

"They have granted me that priceless privilege," he replied, quietly, and though he intended no rebuke she accepted it as such for hazarding one doubt regarding him. "It is hardly likely I shall let it go. Need I remind you such privileges do not go begging in this life?"

"You are dreadfully serious," she said, deprecatingly. "Of course, I meant nothing. They must be immensely pleased."

"I question whether they are," he answered, and the sadness on his face was quite marked. "Will you believe me, Miss Bremner, when I say that I should have been a happier man than I am to-day if I was plain Robert Fletcher, of Spitalhaugh?"

"But tell me why?" she exclaimed, in wonder. "Surely it is a great thing to know yourself so nobly born, and to step into such a heritage."

"At others' cost," he answered. "And I am one who wanted to fight my way up, taking each advantage honestly as it comes."

"There is something in that; but in politics birth hardly counts, does it? The battle is *always* to the strong there."

"Well, I should not like to accept your statement unchallenged. I believe myself that one of the secrets of our leader's power over men is his birth. He is an aristocrat to his finger tips."

Adair glanced at Parnell where he was in close talk with Aileen. Had she been less interested in him she must have observed Aileen's face—its rapt

expression, its absolute adoration. Lyndon saw it, and his own face changed.

"He looks it," she admitted; "but I should not have expected such a sentiment from your lips, Mr. Lyndon. It is treason, nothing less, against Spitalhaugh, and a libel on your old name. Have you forgotten 'A man's a man for a' that?'"

"That's precisely my point," said Lyndon. "It's the personality of the man that dominates his fellows."

"You think very highly of him evidently, as he does of you. Miss Byrne has told me you are quite inseparable, and that he was determined you should have a seat in the House this session."

Lyndon's face slightly flushed, and his eye grew soft as it fell on the pale, calm, clean-cut face of the man who had lifted him to a high place, and given to him his heart's desire—had placed all things within his reach. Adair watched him with the most intense interest. It was just the sort of thing to appeal to a nature in which imagination and emotion, though well controlled, held a dominating place.

"I think it's beautiful!" she exclaimed, involuntarily.

"What?" he asked, with a smile.

"The way you regard your leader. It makes me think of the knights of old with their Arthur. It is not in common with the nineteenth century."

At that moment Aileen looked towards them, and Lyndon rose. For a few moments the talk became general. In the midst of it Mr. Bremner and Captain Byrne entered, and then Lyndon had a moment's quiet talk with Aileen.

"Lady Lyndon has come to London. I heard it in Rathdrum last night. Can you tell me where she is to be found?"

"Yes," answered Aileen. "Did you stay last night at Ballymore?"

"No, at Avondale."

"Poor Mrs. Rooney is dead. I heard the news last night."

"Yes; I went to Arraghvanna after dinner and saw Kitty."

"Ah, poor Kitty! What is she to do now?"

"Wait at Arraghvanna until Ted is released from Kilmainham in six weeks' time."

"And then?"

"I had thought they might emigrate together; but I rather think there will have to be another arrangement. Did you know that there was a love affair between Ted and Micky Malone's daughter?"

"No; I did not hear of it."

"She has been to see him several times in Kilmainham, and probably they will be married when his sentence expires."

"Does Micky approve?"

"Yes. Of course you know the whole sympathy of the glen from one end to the other is with Ted. They'll give him a triumphal welcome when he comes back."

"I am not surprised at that—yet, poor Tom Lyndon!"

Her eyes filled, and her thoughts were tender of the dead.

Fletcher did not grudge them—she had only known the best and the pleasant side of his half-brother, and the tragedy of his untimely death had been a great shock to them all.

"I hear you are to provide very handsomely for Kitty, which is right and fitting, she being one of the

family now," she observed presently. "Is there any truth in the rumour that you want also to make a provision for Lady Lyndon?"

"Surely there would be something right and fitting in that also?" he said, quickly.

"But she is so bitter against you. There is no bridle on her tongue."

"That will not hurt me, nor does it alter my position or responsibility. I feel for her most deeply, also for Terry. I want to go and see them to-night before I go to Scotland."

"Well, I can give you the address. They are living in a flat in Victoria Street. You can easily walk from here."

He took out his notebook, and jotted down the address.

"And now I have hardly congratulated you. You had a stiff fight again. Papa was immensely interested, and could not have rejoiced more over your success if you had been his own son."

Lyndon's face twitched as he glanced towards the white-haired captain who had been so true a friend to him through the past years. Then his eyes came back to Aileen's face. He thought her pale, but the sweetness of her eyes had never been more haunting.

"You are not so fresh as when at Killane," he observed. "London and late hours do not suit you so well."

"No," she answered, frankly. "At Ballymore I am always happiest and best."

"Have you ever seen him look so well?" asked Lyndon, observing where her gaze fell. "I wish you had heard him at Rossmoyne. I have never heard his quiet incisive eloquence more powerful, nor his

magnetic influence so strong. He simply bore down the weight of the opposition by his personality. It was the most signal triumph I have ever seen."

Aileen said nothing, but her speaking eyes were eloquent. Again Lyndon was conscious of a chill sense of disappointment, followed by a quick thrill of envy. To win a glance from these eyes were worth a life's endeavour.

He did not imagine himself in love. He knew, though Aileen herself had not admitted it, even to her own heart, that her whole love was given, unasked it might be, but never to be recalled. He felt jealous over her, as well as compassionate, because he knew too well that Parnell was cold to her, cold as the ice to which he was so often compared. The pain of these thoughts was so intolerable that he was glad soon to make his adieux. He left the house alone, and walked through the blossoming park a little way until, suddenly recalled to himself, he remembered he must turn in the opposite direction. About five o'clock he reached the little flat in Victoria Street where Lady Lyndon, in the bitterness of her discomfiture, had hid herself. She had thought to go to Bantry, but the old earl, rough and ready of speech, though of true heart and upright life, had indicated in no ambiguous terms that she would not be welcome there. The maid who answered Lyndon's knock ushered him straight into the drawing-room, where Lady Lyndon and Terry were taking tea together.

It was a strange moment. Both sprang up as if apprehensive as to what his visit might portend. Of the three Lyndon was the most at his ease.

"Good afternoon," he said, in a perfectly matter-of-fact voice. "I have only come from Ireland this

morning. Miss Byrne was good enough to give me your address. Won't you shake hands with me, Terry?"

Terry, red and confused, gave him a hesitating hand. It was so warmly grasped, however, that it seemed to infuse some new strength into his despondent heart. These were indeed the dark days of Terry Lyndon's life, and he may be forgiven the rebellious thoughts they had engendered in his soul. Lady Lyndon herself was confused only for a moment. The friendliness of her stepson's look reassured her. She had failed in every quarter in which she had applied for help. To do her justice she had never thought of Brian, even as a last resource, until that moment when he appeared, cordial and gracious, before her.

"Will you have some tea?" she asked, stiffly. "If I dare ask you to break bread in any house of mine?"

"I shall take tea gladly," answered Lyndon. "Well, Terry, have you heard the news? We have won Rossmoyne."

"And you are an M.P. as well—as well as other things?" asked Terry, in a choking voice.

Lyndon nodded, feeling a choking sensation in his own throat.

"It was an awful fight. Some day I'll tell you some of my experiences; but I did not come here for that to-day, but to lay a plan of my own before you, Lady Lyndon. Will you listen to me for a moment?"

"Certainly." The word forced itself from her lips in a kind of jerk. Her nervousness was increasing, and he saw it, almost pityingly.

"I shall have to be in London now for the greater part of the year. I intend to be a politician, not

merely a member going and coming as it suits his own convenience," he began, going directly to the point, as he had conspicuously done in his election speeches. "As I cannot be much at Ballymore I came really to ask you, Terry, to go back there and fill my place."

Terry grew pale, and his sad face fell upon his hands. Lady Lyndon stared before her as if doubting that she heard aright. Lyndon then addressed himself to her.

"If you will kindly go back to Ballymore, Lady Lyndon. I shall be much obliged," he continued, a trifle awkwardly.

"If Terry should think well of my suggestion he can hardly live alone. It is the best family arrangement I think we can make in the meantime, at least. We shall be able to arrange it all, I think, on a satisfactory basis. I shall pay Terry a salary, as I should have to pay Moran, with whose services I have dispensed."

"You are very just," observed Lady Lyndon, and her lips were so dry that the words were little above a whisper.

"It will be a great thing for me to know that the place is in good care. Terry will have a free hand in the management. He knows all the people, and is far more competent than I should ever be. Will you think of it, Terry?"

"Brian Lyndon, what are you made of?" queried Lady Lyndon, with a shrill, strange note in her voice. "After what I have done, and the way I have spoken of you. Why are you so different from other men?"

"Not so very different, I fear," he said, raising his hand deprecatingly. "I am to benefit by this little arrangement. It will make me happier to think you

are back in the old place, and that it is not left to the management of strangers. Look up, Terry, and tell me what you think of it."

He let his hand fall lightly and with a strangely caressing touch on the boy's bowed head. But his only answer was a bursting sob.

"Come, be a man," whispered Lyndon, encouragingly. "Get your hat, and come out with me on the Embankment for half an hour. We can talk better in the open air."

Terry rose hastily, and almost ran out of the room.

"What do you think of my plan?" asked Lyndon then, feeling that any speech was preferable to silence.

"It is an excellent plan," she answered. "But—but I do not understand your motive."

"I have none," he answered, frankly, "except a natural desire to make the best of existing circumstances. Terry has no profession, and but little prospect, so far as I am aware; and I am convinced that he would be happier at Ballymore than anywhere I should guarantee him an income of three or four hundred, and there would be no expense of living. I have gone into the matter most carefully, Lady Lyndon, and I feel sure that in the meantime it is the best arrangement we can make, and the arrangement which will perhaps most quickly shut people's mouths."

"You are right; but that you should consider us, or me at least, in any way is what I cannot understand."

"We will not talk of it, if you please," said Brian, simply. "Do I understand then that if Terry is willing you will be agreeable?"

"I should be a fool if I were anything else," she said, grimly. "Only I cannot understand it."

It was impossible for her to abase herself or to make any scene. Her pride was too strong. But Lyndon could read her like an open book; he saw the conflict of feeling in her heart, and it filled him with hope for the future. She was to be pitied indeed, and he had pitied her, else he could not have been in her presence on such an errand.

When he left her presently to join Terry, whom he knew was waiting for him outside, he offered her his hand, which he had not done on his entrance. She took it, and, flashing a strange deep glance at him, touched it with her lips. What it cost her to do that even he did not guess. It was her mute prayer for forgiveness, which was granted before she uttered it. He took Terry by the arm, and they walked in silence across the magnificent Square of Westminster, and turned down in silence, too, upon the quieter stretch of the Embankment.

"You'll come, Terry, I think," said Lyndon. "Just think what an easy mind I should have here knowing you are at Ballymore taking care of everything. And how the people love you. I shall never have that place in their hearts, Terry; you ought to be Squire of Ballymore, and will be some day, if I can manage it."

"Why are you so good to us?" cried Terry, impetuously, "You ought to hate us. What does it all mean?"

"We are brothers, lad, sons of the same father," said Lyndon, simply. "There is something in the tie of blood. I think I felt it the first time I saw you. We can help and encourage each other. Let me hear you say you'll go back, at least until something better turns up?"

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"I don't want anything better," answered Terry. "I don't know how to thank you. You put heart into a fellow, Brian—may I call you Brian? I was very low down when you came. I had even contemplated the river as an end to it all. The future seemed so dark."

Lyndon pressed the boy's arm to him affectionately, and, with their heads almost close together so that many remarked their affectionate and absorbed attitude, they walked on together, talking hopefully of the future, which was full of possibility for them both. When they parted at last, it was as brothers part, with the joy of another meeting in view. The sun shone again in Terry Lyndon's heart. Once more life seemed the bright and joyous thing it might be to such as he. Left to himself, Lyndon took a turn across Westminster Bridge before he went back to the Victoria to prepare for his journey. The stately pile of the Parliament Houses fascinated him. As he stood in one of the embrasures of the bridge, and looked upon the myriad windows ablaze with the glory of the sunset, his heart was stirred within him with a vague mighty stirring which he could hardly control. He was young, and had come soon to the realisation of some at least of his early dreams. It was not surprising that at that moment life seemed to him a lovely thing to be clasped ardently to his breast. He stood upon the threshold of his career, he bore a noble name, and had an ancestral home which could compare with any in the land.

He had many friends, too, and a leader to whom he could look up, a great leader who had deigned to notice him, and lift him to his heart's desire. Nor was he without the love which sweetens all these

things. He had a home in Scotland, a humble home it might be, but one to which his heart still turned as a bird to its nest. If one thing should be denied him—the love of woman—well, one greater than he had bidden him beware, and told him that it would be but a hindrance in his path. So that was well also. And no misgiving, scarcely a regret, was in Brian Lyndon's heart as he turned reluctantly from the sunset-gilded minarets only to see the dark and noble pile of the Abbey—home of the illustrious dead—outlined against the crystal clearness of the sky. It seemed to recall him a moment from the material side of things and point him to the immortal, the immortal to which in his early home his thoughts had ever been directed in reverence and love.

And so we leave him, in the joy and hope of young manhood, as yet without stain or disillusionment, turning his face bravely and gladly to the battle. Whether we follow him further into the highways of life rests only with you.

THE END.

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