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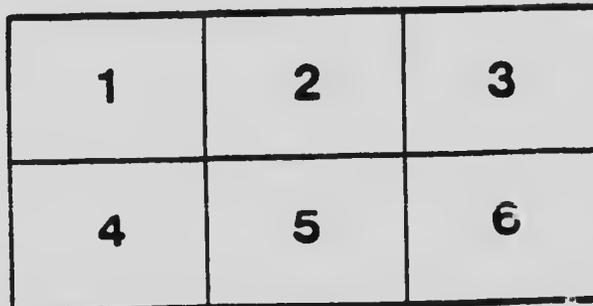
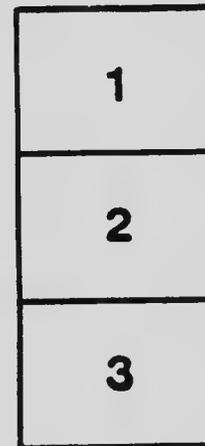
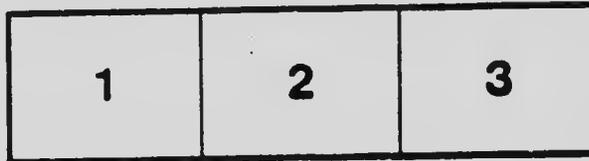
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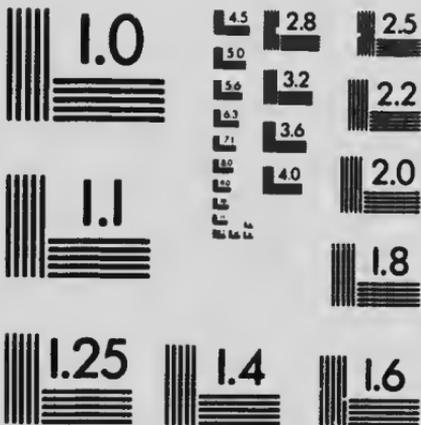
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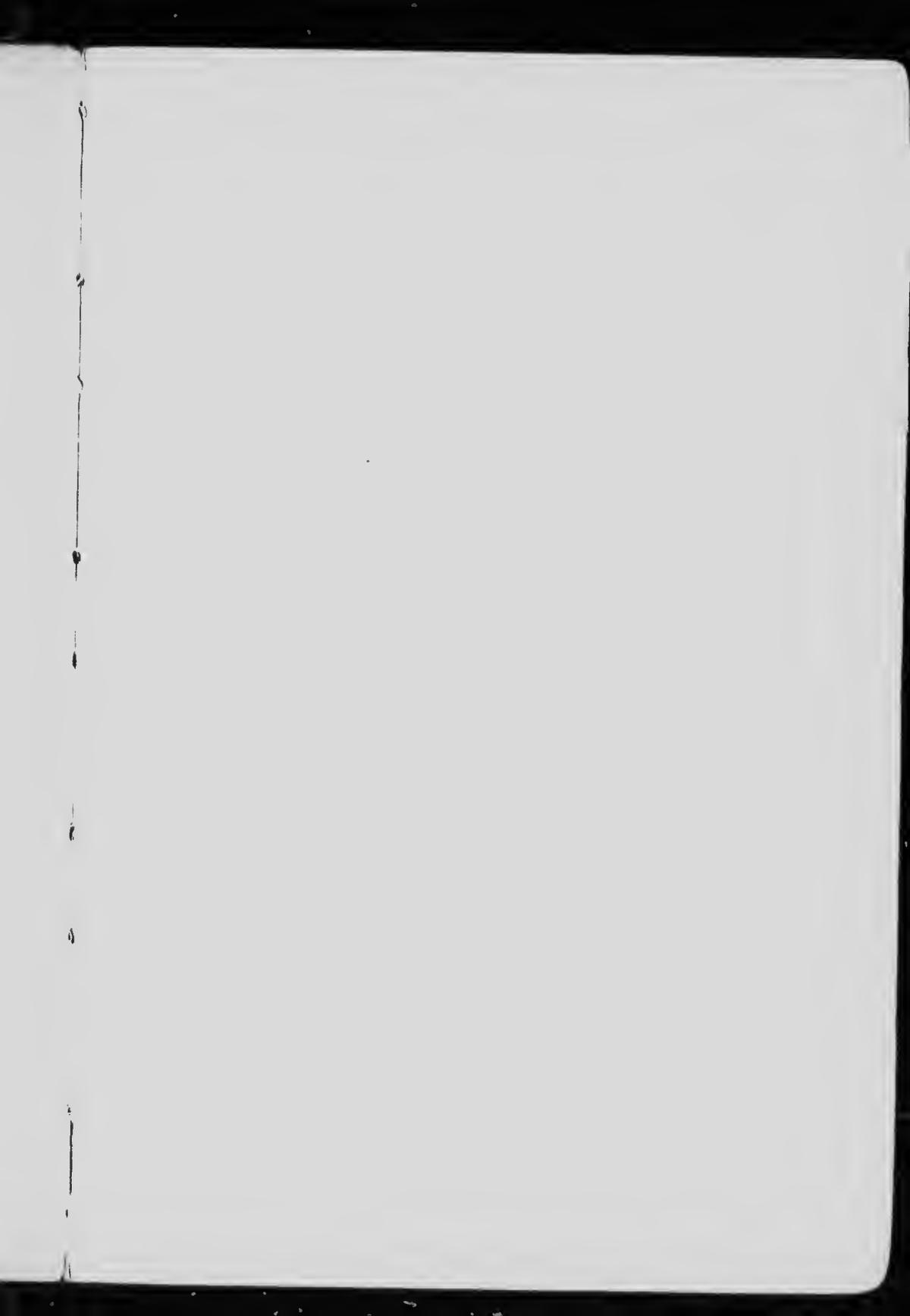
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THE HOUSE OF THE SECRET







"SHE TOOK A STEP OR TWO . . . THEN THE SOLID EARTH SANK BENEATH  
HER FEET."

# THE HOUSE OF THE SECRET

BY

KATHARINE TYNAN *second.*

AUTHOR OF "FOR MAISIE," "HER LADYSHIP," "THE STORY OF BAWN,"  
"MARY GRAY," ETC., ETC.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. F. SKINNER

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MAEVE ARRIVES . . . . .	9
II. THE END OF THE JOURNEY . . . . .	21
III. A NEW FRIEND . . . . .	32
IV. MISS HENRIETTA O'NEILL . . . . .	41
V. CORNEY REARDEN . . . . .	50
VI. ARMISTICE . . . . .	58
VII. A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD . . . . .	68
VIII. A MASQUERADE. . . . .	77
IX. THE JEWEL CASE . . . . .	86
X. IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT . . . . .	97
XI. LOVERS' PARTING . . . . .	106
XII. A MAN'S SHADOW . . . . .	115
XIII. MISS O'NEILL ACTS FOR HERSELF . . . . .	125
XIV. CORNEY RETURNS . . . . .	134
XV. THE DREAM AND THE SLEEPER . . . . .	144
XVI. LADY MARY . . . . .	153
XVII. THE CHILD'S GRAVE . . . . .	164
XVIII. THE FIRE. . . . .	175
XIX. THE NORTH ROOM . . . . .	184
XX. A SOUND IN THE NIGHT . . . . .	193
XXI. THE WELL IN THE ORCHARD . . . . .	203
XXII. THE LONG NIGHT . . . . .	216
XXIII. THE LOCKED WING . . . . .	227

# Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIV. THE STORM . . . . .	238
XXV. A DISCOVERY . . . . .	249
XXVI. POOR JUDY . . . . .	259
XXVII. THE WILL . . . . .	268
XXVIII. THE SECRET OF THE LOCKED WING . . . . .	277
XXIX. THE HOUSE GIVES UP ITS SECRET . . . . .	289
XXX. THE RETURN HOME . . . . .	300
XXXI. JOY COMES TO CHAPEL . . . . .	308

# THE HOUSE OF THE SECRET

## CHAPTER I

### MAEVE ARRIVES

MAEVE STANDISH'S first impressions of her father's native country were of the most depressing. It was October. It was wet and muggy; rain hid the mountains and veiled the town when Colonel Vereker and she, side by side, stood on the boat waiting to get alongside the pier.

If she could only have seen it, the prospect is one of the most beautiful. But she could not see it. She was dizzy from the noise of the train and the throb of the screw. She was dreadfully afraid of the new life. She was suffering pangs of loneliness for papa, two months in his grave. Papa had talked a great deal of Ireland, painting it in colours of delight. But he had been so long away from it, nearly twenty years.

He used to say to Maeve that there was nothing to go back for: not one of his family alive. The only creature who might remember him and be good to him was old Miss O'Neill, who had befriended him for his father's sake, and might be willing to befriend his child for that same. Not that Walter Standish anticipated that his Maeve would need befriending as he had needed it. He had toiled and broiled to make her independent

## The House of the Secret

of the chances of the world. He had sent the child home to England, to a select ladies' school at Cheltenham, and left her there eight years, with only one or two flying visits home to relieve the dreary solitude of his life up-country in India.

His only child was his one interest in life since her mother's death. He used to imagine the time when they would be together in one of those little houses near Dublin which he remembered—delightful old-fashioned houses hidden behind high walls, with a garden and kitchen-garden, shrubberies and an orchard, a paddock and a little stream.

That calm evening to which he looked forward sweetened the heat of the day for him. What if he were yellow as a guinea—a taciturn, sad man, whom the terrible climate and the terrible loneliness had made old before his time—Maeve and he would yet be together. The cool rains and dews of Ireland—how he thirsted for them in the hot weather!—would make him young again: the companionship of his child would make up to him for his arid manhood.

He had paid one of those flying visits to England, when he was accustomed to find a little country cottage for himself and Maeve for a few weeks—exquisite weeks as they seemed to Maeve's sick heart of longing now—and sudden news had come to him. Someone had died. There was promotion waiting for him out there: if only he were on the spot.

Since he was not on the spot it was just as likely the promotion would go elsewhere. And he coveted promotion and the increased pay for the child's sake.

Maeve went back to Cheltenham in a tremendous

## Maeve Arrives

hurry. Things were packed—flung together in breathless haste. The cottage was locked up and the key handed over to someone. Almost before she could realise that she had been defrauded of the precious weeks with papa he was gone, and she was back at Cheltenham, where there was only the German governess in charge, the principals and the pupils who remained with them during vacation being away at the seaside.

The German governess slept a good deal and wrote interminable letters. In the evening she read Schiller or played the piano for her own delight. Maeve was glad it was Fräulein. Any of the other governesses would have been less acceptable.

Fräulein was soothing. She said nothing when Maeve wept for papa and the spoilt holiday except "Ach, poor maiden!" and she said it rather to herself than to Maeve. She tried to make the music speak to Maeve in the long twilit evenings. She was kind, in a motherly, unobtrusive way. Maeve, who had laughed with the other girls at Fräulein's speech, at her spectacles and her love-story—she had a betrothed in Germany whose letters she used to weep over and carry in her breast—Maeve was ashamed of the cruel school-girl ways, and resolved to champion Fräulein next term against all comers. And she had power as the eldest girl in the school and the most distinguished in her attainments.

Alas! there was to be no text term for Maeve! It fell to the lot of the terrified Fräulein to break to Maeve the terrible thing that had befallen her.

Walter Standish had travelled day and night to get back to his post. It was killing weather, he wrote to

## The House of the Secret

Maeve in the last letter he ever sent to her, which was written in the train. No matter, he must push on. He must get the promotion for Maeve's sake.

He arrived at the broiling station utterly worn-out, and went to bed without eating anything. In the morning he did not appear at the usual time. His servant, after patient waiting, entered the Sahib's room with an official letter and his bath-water. Walter Standish was lying on his back with his arms flung out. He had died in his sleep.

The official letter contained his appointment to the higher post. It would have meant his being stationed at a place where a European might live comfortably. It was a coveted post—the station some way up the hills—plenty of society and gaiety for a great part of the year. Above all, it was a place where a father might have his young daughter with him without fear of her health suffering.

Walter Standish lost his chance of promotion. But he missed also the calamity which was speeding to him as fast as telegraph wires could carry it. The company in which he had invested Maeve's fortune, a company which had always ranked as one of the gilt-edged securities, had proved to have been rotten all the time. It had failed, involving many harmless people in its ruin. Fortunately for himself, Walter Standish was past caring; and as for Maeve, shivering under the blow of her father's death, the announcement that her comfortable fortune had vanished in thin air seemed a matter so unimportant as not to be worth speaking of.

She hardly realised at first that her new impoverished state would mean the necessity of her leaving school at

## Maeve Arrives

once. To be sure it was time for her to go ; there was not much more the finishing governess could do for her ; and she had only remained so long because papa and the dream-house were not yet ready for her. When she did realise it she was hardly sorry. She was going back to papa's own country : to papa's friend who had helped him long ago when he needed help. He had left her to Miss Henrietta O'Neill in a will which was ignorant of the fact that his child would be practically destitute.

As the boat moved slowly because of the mist Maeve pieced together the things papa had told her of Miss Henrietta O'Neill. Plainly papa had admired the lady immensely. He had only been a boy, and she had been nearly twenty years his senior, but he had described her as a very magnificent person, somewhat eccentric in her manner, but of a most striking personality and beauty.

At forty she had still been a famous sportswoman. She still rode and hunted, bred horses and exhibited them. She looked a spirited country lady in Walter Standish's memory of her. Apparently at one interview she had worn a riding-habit. She was tall and of magnificent figure. She had red hair, a beautiful red and white complexion, and the bluest of eyes. And she went everywhere. She danced through a Dublin season without dimming the brightness of her eyes or the roses of her cheeks. She entertained lavishly at her house in a Dublin square and at her country house in the midst of the bogs of Central Ireland.

She had been something of a romance to Maeve as she had been apparently to Walter Standish. Maeve wondered how she would receive her—whether she

## The House of the Secret

would shelter her for papa's sake till she could go out into the world and earn for herself. Papa's old friends out in India, Colonel and Mrs. Urquhart, had decided that Maeve was too young at eighteen to fly out into the world. She must go to Miss Henrietta O'Neill as her father had desired. The Urquharts were old-fashioned people to whom Maeve was still a child. They would only too gladly have taken Maeve in themselves, despite their big family. Indeed, they wished her to stay on with the Misses Seeley at their expense and to come to them as another daughter when her schooling was done; but Maeve, wise beyond their thoughts of her, would not hear of it.

The elder Miss Seeley found an opportunity to transfer her charge to Ireland. Colonel Vereker had come over with his two daughters to place them at the school. He had consented, not altogether willingly, to look after Maeve on the journey and leave her with Miss O'Neill.

He was a busy man and his cares were written in his face. He was mechanically kind to Maeve during the journey, but plainly he would not be altogether sorry to be quit of her.

Ah! With a jerk the boat at last was alongside. The sailors were getting out the gangways. The passengers were crowding to the sides with their luggage. Smiles of recognition, shouts of greeting, were being exchanged between the passengers on the boat and the little crowd on the pier. Among the waiting faces Colonel Vereker caught sight of a familiar one.

"Helloa, Godfrey!" he cried. "What are you doing here?"

## Maeve Arrives

Maeve looked at the young man whom the Colonel had addressed, briskly, as though the sight of him was cheerful. He was a big fellow with chestnut hair, a freckled face and honest eyes. He was quite carelessly dressed in country homespuns, but for all that he had a clean, well-groomed air; and something about him, perhaps the faintest suggestion of a bowing at the knees, told of one who was constantly in the saddle.

"Up for your exam., eh?" went on the Colonel. "But what are you down here for? Come to meet someone? You oughtn't to fritter away your time like that, Godfrey. That's not the way to get through; and you've only another chance."

He was talking over the top. Now the gangways were down and they were free to pass over amid the press of passengers. The young man came forward to meet them, and without waiting for an introduction, took the few articles Maeve was carrying out of her hands.

"It was you I came to meet, sir," he said. "They have proclaimed a meeting at Shanballymore and you will be wanted. And Mrs. Vereker has not been very well. I thought I would let you know so that you could push on at once."

"Thank you, boy. My wife is no worse than usual?" His voice had a note of anxiety.

"No worse than usual. She has missed you and the girls; she feels frightened and nervous in the disturbed state of the country. I stayed at Drumsheera Monday and Tuesday nights. I left Lance on duty last night as I had to be up for the exam."

The Colonel looked uncertainly from the boy to the girl.

## The House of the Secret

"What time is your exam.?" he asked.

"Begins at twelve noon, sir."

"I ought to go back straight to Drumsheera. I don't want my wife to have another heart attack, and it is no time for a resident magistrate to be absent."

He hesitated.

"Can't I find my own way now?" asked Maeve.

"You have been very kind."

They were in the train by this time on the way from Kingstown to the city.

"I am in charge of this young lady, Godfrey," said the Colonel; "bound to hand her over to the care of Miss Henrietta O'Neill, of Me-ion Square. I intended to have given her breakfast first; it is only half-past six; the boat was early, and probably no one would be up at Miss O'Neill's."

"Let me do it, sir," said the boy, turning to smile at Maeve. It was a good, honest, reassuring smile. "Let me give Miss ——"

"Miss Standish. I forgot you hadn't been introduced. Miss Standish—Mr. Godfrey Barron."

"Let me look after Miss Standish for you, sir. It will be much better for me than loafing about till the Examination Hall is open. I haven't had my own breakfast yet."

Colonel Vereker sighed his relief.

"Very well, Godfrey," he said. "I know you're to be trusted. Take Miss Standish to the Shelbourne and give her breakfast. Afterwards deliver her to the proper quarter. He is a very good boy, Maeve, or I should not trust him to look after you. I shall go on by the first train, breakfasting on board. You won't mind, child? My wife has a weak heart and is very nervous."

## Maeve Arrives

She ought not to be the wife of a resident magistrate in Ireland in disturbed times. My poor Maud! She will never believe that they wouldn't touch a hair of my head. That is the worst of being English and literal."

Maeve was only too anxious that Colonel Vereker should not stay on her account. She was not at all shy or nervous of Godfrey Barron; and she thought it very kind of him to be willing to look after her.

She had her first experience of an Irish outside car driving across the city from the railway station, and would have been rather frightened if it had not been for the kind, reassuring, young face turned round to her from the other side of the car.

She had accepted the boy's assurance that the outside cars were the jolliest things in the world to drive on, and she listened with as much interest as she might for her perilous position to the odd, delightful conversation which was being kept up between young Barron and the car-driver, which seemed to be mainly on the subject of horses, and was full of strange, racy turns of speech. Some of them she had heard from papa; and it gave her a shock, half-painful, half-pleasant, to hear them now in ordinary use.

They drew up at the Shelbourne with a great flourish. Somewhere near at hand was the house for which Maeve was bound, and the wonderful Miss Henrietta O'Neill, of whom Maeve could only think as a Diana, with the skirt of her riding-habit over her arm, and the top-hat which was the mode for riding ladies in the 'sixties set upon her magnificent red hair. She tried to realise that she must be sixty or more now and settling down into an old lady.

## The House of the Secret

Presently they were sitting at a table in a window overlooking the quiet, wide road where the traffic had not yet begun and the brilliant autumn foliage of the Green beyond.

"I have ordered grilled trout," the young man said, "devilled kidneys and eggs and bacon. I hope you're hungry."

Maeve confessed that she was. She had eaten little on the journey. As though to give her welcome to papa's country, a sudden gleam of sunshine had pierced the clouds and was filling the window-space, bathing them in light and warmth.

"I wish I could show you some of the sights," he said. "But I am bound to attend an exam. for the Army at twelve o'clock. Don't you hope I'll get through? I failed the last time, and it was a blow to the mater. They're expecting you over at the Square, I suppose?"

He indicated the direction of the Square by a nod of his close-cropped head.

"We hadn't heard from Miss O'Neill," Maeve said. "But Miss Seeley—that is the lady where I was at school at Cheltenham—thought I ought to start with Colonel Vereker, as I was not likely to get the chance of another escort."

"But of course they are expecting you. Still, someone ought to have written to say so."

In a little while they were talking as though they had known each other all their lives. Maeve heard several of the unimportant events in Godfrey Barron's life, which hitherto seemed to have been devoted mainly to country sports. He and his brother, Lance, were the only children of Lady Mary Barron, a widow, who

## Maeve Arrives

according to her son was the best little mother that ever lived. Hitherto her eldest-born had done very little but enjoy himself and do a little desultory horse-dealing. He had failed on going up for the Army, but he was going to pull through this time. He had been reading awfully hard for two months, had even resisted the temptation of the Horse Show, although he had a filly entered in the Hunters' Class and she had taken a Highly Commended.

Maeve listened with interest. For the first time she seemed to lose the desperate loneliness which had been hers since papa died, or at least the pain of it was quieter.

Presently the breakfast was over and it was time for them to go. The young man paid the bill, sternly pushing back Maeve's poor little offered purse. "Never try to pay when a man is with you in Ireland, Miss Standish," he said, so severely that Maeve was alarmed; but he smiled as happily as ever a second later.

The outside car, with Maeve's scanty luggage, was waiting outside. She climbed once more to what she still felt to be a toppling seat.

"200, Merrion Square," Godfrey Barron said to the driver.

The man opened his mouth in amazement.

"Isn't that the empty house, sir?" he said. "Sure it's been empty for nigh twenty years. They say it's haunted. Many a time when I was a small bit of a boy I've run by it with my knees shakin'."

"200, Merrion Square," young Barron repeated. "It can't be empty. Miss Henrietta O'Neill lives there. This young lady is going to stay with her."

## The House of the Secret

"Perhaps I made a mistake, sir," said the driver, with the easy pliability of the Irish. "Anyhow, we'll soon see. I'll have ye there in a brace of shakes."

He drove up one street and down another with a speed and recklessness which made Maeve's heart quake. They reached the Square. They heard him count the numbers under his breath, with an ascending certainty.

"200!" he said, triumphantly, as he pulled up. "Sure everyone in Dublin knows the haunted house!"

They had halted at the door of a most forbidding building, cobwebbed and dingy amid its smart neighbours. The windows of the house behind their iron bars were covered thickly with dust. A pane here and there was broken. The paint of the hall door was faded and blistered. The dusty area railings were rusted. Beyond the bars and the grime it was possible to see that the lower windows were shuttered. Dreariness, dirt and neglect lay over everything.

## CHAPTER II

### THE END OF THE JOURNEY

FOR a second or two young Barron looked the dismay he felt.

"Perhaps it is the wrong house," he said to Maeve, who, in spite of her spirit, was looking a little frightened. "There! don't look unhappy about it. We'll find out where Miss O'Neill lives. Perhaps she has moved. Supposing we try the next house."

The houses around the Square had just begun to draw up their blinds. A young servant, with her cap very much awry, came out on the doorstep of the next house and looked at them with curiosity.

"Can you tell us where Miss O'Neill, the lady who used to live here, has gone to?" Godfrey Barron asked.

"There hasn't been a lady living in the house since I came here," she answered, "nor for long enough before that. But there is someone in the basement if you can only make them hear. The old woman is rather deaf."

He ran up the steps and rang at the area bell. A thin jangle sounded somewhere in the lower regions.

"Ah," he said, smiling at Maeve, "I was afraid the bell might be broken. Since it isn't I'll make them hear, even if they are deaf. What a horrid place! I wonder why they don't clean it."

He lent across the railings, still ringing at the bell. Maeve, who had come to his side, peered down into the

## The House of the Secret

obscurity of the place below. The area had been covered over by iron bars, which made a support for innumerable cobwebs. Through the bars she could see that the place below was filled with all manner of *débris*.

"'Tis the boys that does it," said the next door maid, coming to their sides, the mat she was shaking still held in her hand. "They do always be dropping things between the bars—even a dead cat now and again, though the polis do be after them. 'Tis a shame, so it is, for the poor old souls are past their work and can't be always clanin' up. There she is, sir. There's Mrs. Mulligan."

"Who's ringin' the bell?" asked a cracked voice from the depths of the area. "Run away now, or I'll send the polis after ye. Yez are terrible bould children, so yez are."

An old face, seamed with dirt and wrinkles, looked up at them, then disappeared, and there was the clang of a door.

"Goodness help her, she's blind as well as deaf," said the little maid-servant, dropping her mat. "'Tis often on my mind that herself and the ould man'll get burnt in their beds, and no one'll be able to get in to put them out. Mrs. Mulligan! Mrs. Mulligan! Ring like mad, sir, till th'ould bell gives out, an' I'll run round and shake the area-gate."

She was as good as her word. She shook vigorously, and Godfrey Barron pulled vigorously; and presently the woman reappeared, muttering threats against the street boys who were supposed to be pulling the bell.

The girl at the area-gate succeeded in attracting her

## The End of the Journey

attention at last. She came feebly up the stone steps, but as she recognised the next-door maid, her face perceptibly brightened.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said. "I thought it was some of them tormints of boys. Poor Pat's very bad this mornin'. By his breathin' he's got an impression on the chest. And I can't get the kitchen fire to light."

"I'll come down and light it in a minit. An' as soon as the mistress can spare me I'll run round for something from the druggist to rub Mr. Mulligan's chest."

"'Tis a pity it isn't himself," she said, turning to her listeners. "He has his hearin' fine. But she can never make out what I say most of the time. Mrs. Mulligan, here's quality axin' for Miss O'Neill."

"Goodness save us, what are they axin' for her for? Why, she hasn't been in it these twenty years."

"They want to know where she's gone to."

A look of senile cunning came over the old face.

"Sure, dear, how would I know? Aren't Mulligan an' meself only here to mind the house? 'Tisn't concernin' ourselves wid the business of quality we'd be."

The maid, who had a very pleasant round face, turned a glance of consternation on the young lady and gentleman.

"You won't get a word out of her now," she said. "Once she makes up her mind she'll be as deaf as a post. Would you see the mistress, sir? She'll maybe know something. She's been living here a long time."

"If you think she would not mind," said Godfrey Barron, glancing at Mrs. Mulligan's face, which was inexpressive as that of the sphinx. "You see, it's very awkward. This young lady has come to stay with Miss O'Neill, only to find an empty house."

## The House of the Secret

The girl made a soft clucking sound indicating concern and pity.

"The mistress'll do what she can to help you, sir," she said; "she's a very kind lady. If you'll step in an' wait I'll let her know, and she'll come as soon as she can."

They accepted the suggestion gratefully, the more gratefully that a little crowd was gathering to watch the young lady and gentleman who were parleying at the haunted house, among them a very burly policeman, who was looking on with an air of official indifference.

"Better drive on a bit, me man," he said to the car-driver, with a sudden alertness. "The young lady and gentleman don't want all the corner boys in Dublin gapin' at them. Move on, if ye plaze," to the little crowd. "Move on about yer business, or my duty'll compel me to run in a few of yez."

Maeve and her escort followed the servant into the next house. They were shown into a rather dingy and faded parlour, the windows of which were screened by wire blinds, where presently a very soft-faced and sweet-voiced elderly lady came to them.

"Dear me," she said. "So you were looking for Miss O'Neill, my Anne tells me. What a curious thing! I don't suppose anyone has asked for her for many and many a year. As it happens, I can give you her address. Chapel House, Ballymacswinford—that is it. The old caretakers were obliged to forward some letters and parcels after she left here, and as they couldn't write they came to me to address the things. When you see her, I wish you would tell her that the Mulligans are growing too old to be shut up in the house. I am always

## The End of the Journey

afraid of an accident happening to them. And I fear they keep the place in a very insanitary condition."

The two young people looked their relief at each other. This seemed like daylight.

"Thank you so much," Godfrey Barron began. "You see, this young lady has been committed to the care of Miss O'Neill by her father's will. It would have been very awkward if we could not find her. The young lady's friends in England wrote to Miss O'Neill and received no reply; but they thought it was all right."

"If the letter was delivered at the house, as it might be by a new postman, it may lie there undisturbed for many a day, unless Miss O'Neill makes up her mind to come back. The old people below have no access to the upper part of the house."

"And who cleans it and looks after it?" Godfrey Barron asked.

"Why, it isn't cleaned. It must be in a shocking state inside. These houses are very old, you know, my dears." Somehow the epithet came quite naturally from the kind woman. "You've no idea how difficult it is to keep these houses clean. They are beautifully built, but the floors and the walls crumble from age. The last maid I had before my Anne used to grumble about the cleaning. She said what was the use of always cleaning? It wasn't as if we hadn't to die."

"It's the same with them in the County Limerick," said Godfrey Barron, with a grin. "'Sure, what's the good,' they say, 'of bothering about this dirty world?' when they leave the machines in the field from one year to another."

"It's a pity about next door," the lady went on. "I

## The House of the Secret

was in it once in the old days. It was beautifully furnished, acres of Turkey carpets, lovely old furniture, chandeliers with a thousand drops, valuable pictures and china. And to think they are all mouldering away there in the darkness. I wonder, will she ever come back? Dear me, I remember Miss Henrietta O'Neill, one of the beauties of Dublin. There wasn't another figure like hers in Grafton Street of an afternoon. I remember her in white with an emerald sash, playing the harp. She had a lovely arm and hand for it. Dublin was very gay in those days, my dears; not like it is now. Sure, the Land League has destroyed the gentry. We're all trying to earn a living, when we aren't in Homes, by letting lodgings or turning dressmakers, or one thing or another. But we don't make much out of it—we don't, indeed. Sure, what would we know about business? We weren't brought up to it. And half the waste that went on in our homes when we were young would keep us in comfort now."

"We'll never teach them thrift," said Godfrey Barron, as though he enjoyed it. "They say in the County Limerick that a good house is where there's as much wasted as there is used."

"Indeed, I'm afraid we're very thriftless," Mrs. Bourke assented.

Maeve had been thinking with a curious fascination of the darkened rooms of the great house next door with all the fine things mouldering in the darkness.

"But why did she leave her house shut up all those years?" she asked, suddenly. She had not been listening to what the others were saying.

Mrs. Bourke's face took on an added kindness, although that would have seemed impossible before.

## The End of the Journey

"My dear," she said, "I've given you Miss O'Neill's address. I've no doubt she's there still, or I should have heard. But, if you've any other friends I think you ought to return to them. I'm afraid you may find poor Miss O'Neill a little eccentric and difficult to live with."

"There is no one else," said Maeve. "My only friends are in India."

"Ah, well, you need not stay with Miss O'Neill if you are not happy. People said she was eccentric even before she locked up her house and went away from everyone who knew her. For myself I never saw anything wrong with her. She was not like other people certainly, but then she didn't look like other people. A big, beautiful, generous creature. And all the gentlemen mad about her in her young days."

"I suppose Miss Standish must go on to this place in the country?" said young Barron, with an unwilling air.

"I should think that a girl like Miss Standish might do a great deal for poor Miss O'Neill," Mrs. Bourke answered. "She might even bring her back here. There must be a good many people in Dublin who remember Henrietta O'Neill, besides myself, and would be glad to see her again. Be sure to tell her about the old people, my dear."

"You might go down to my mother till we make inquiries," suggested young Barron, with a protecting air, which made Mrs. Bourke smile to herself. "The poor old lady might be quite off her head by this time. Why don't her relatives look after her?"

"She has none."

"It isn't as if I could take Miss Standish down to this place myself," the boy said, with a fretful air.

## The House of the Secret

"I'm up for an exam. at twelve o'clock to-day. I shall only just have time to see her off—for Chapel, or for Deelish. Better make it Deelish, Miss Standish. My mother would be delighted."

"She could stay here," said Mrs. Bourke, "while we found out something about Miss O'Neill."

"Oh, you are both very kind," said Maeve, almost weeping. "Papa always said the Irish were so wonderfully hospitable, that there was nothing like it on earth. But, indeed, I must go to Miss O'Neill. It seems as though she must need me. She was so good to papa long ago. If she is old and lonely and sorrowful, I might be able to repay something of papa's debt to her."

Young Barron looked at her with a considering air.

"Well, of course," he said, "after all, Ballymacswinford is not in the wilds. I shall have to let you go there alone; but you will write to me and tell me about it. If things aren't perfectly satisfactory you must come to my mother."

"If Mary Barron is what she used to be when she was Mary O'Callaghan, she won't object to helping a girl in a difficulty," said Mrs. Bourke, demurely. "You must tell your mother, Mr. Barron, that you have met an old school-friend of hers, Helen Bourke, who used to be Helen Kilkelly. And now, unless Miss Standish will stay with me, I'm afraid Time flies. Better hand her over to me, Mr. Barron, and I'll give her lunch and see her off at the Broadstone myself."

"You are awfully good. But Colonel Vereker put me in charge. I must be able to tell him that I did all possible for her."

Mrs. Bourke smiled again.

"Oh, very well, then," she said; "but be sure to

## The End of the Journey

come and tell me how you got on at your exam. And I, too, shall expect news of you, Miss Standish."

So Maeve, before she was half-a-dozen hours in papa's country, had made two friends, with a potentiality of others.

There was another wild flight across Dublin to the Broadstone terminus, standing high amid its dingy streets.

The young man took her ticket for her, saw to her luggage, found her a corner seat in a carriage, and having placed her there, set out in search of papers to relieve the tedium of her journey.

He came back with half-a-dozen, also with a tiny luncheon basket.

"Colonel Vereker would have wished me to," he said, with a blush. "You may have to drive miles over the bogs, and you had an early breakfast. It is a pleasure. I wish I could have got you something nicer."

Their eyes met, and Maeve's dropped, while the colour in her cheeks became more brilliant than usual. She was a brilliant creature to look at at any time, tall, upstanding, with an exquisite complexion and a mass of magnificent bronze hair. The blush seemed to have the effect of making Godfrey Barron bold. He leant through the window.

"I wish I could have come with you," he said. "But since I can't—well, I'm coming one day to see how you are getting on. I've got the guard to lock the carriage door. You oughtn't to be travelling alone, you know. You're too lovely!" It was said so shyly as to rob the compliment of its audacity. "Remember, you're to write to me, and I'm coming to see you."

The promise comforted Maeve oddly during the

## The House of the Secret

lonely journey, unrelieved by any incident, during which she had time to realise the strangeness of this following a woman who had been gone from amongst those who knew her for a score of years—who might be dead, or gone elsewhere, for anything anyone seemed to know to the contrary.

She needed comfort, for on her arrival at Ballymacswinford station—in a melancholy country of bogs, where the eternal Irish hills seemed at last to have receded below the horizon—the porter of whom she asked instructions as to how she was to reach Chapel stared at her in amazement.

“It isn’t Chapel House you’d be wantin’, surely?” he said.

“Yes, Chapel House. Miss Henrietta O’Neill’s,” said Maeve, with a sinking heart, despite the courage which had always been hers. “Can you find me a fly to take me there?”

“Is it a fly?” he repeated, without any appearance of jocosity. He had never heard the word before as applied to a hackney coach. “Sure ’tis a fly you’ll have to be before you’d get into Chapel at all. Isn’t the doors and windows always bolted and barred, till ’tis only the wind that can creep in at the chinks?”

“But Miss O’Neill lives there, doesn’t she?” asked Maeve, her heart sinking a little lower. The October evening closed in early, and the next train back to Dublin was five hours ahead.

“She does; but sure she’s mad, miss, or at least she’s very quare in herself. No one gets in but Corney Rear-den an’ the sister Judy. ’Tis sorra a soul ever goes near the place. Sure, if I was you ’tis goin’ back by the next train I’d be.”

## The End of the Journey

Maeve looked at him forlornly. She had a wild thought of flinging herself on Mrs. Bourke's hospitality. The next speech of the friendly porter made her change her mind.

"There's some do say that she isn't as mad at all as Corney makes out, the poor lady. He does be featherin' his nest finely, so the people say. I wonder meself no one interferes; but sure it's no one's business."

Courage and compassion leapt up in Maeve's heart. Papa's old friend—at the mercy of unscrupulous servants, old and sick and alone.

"I think," she said, deliberately, "that if you can find me a conveyance I will go on to Chapel House."

"To be sure," said the porter, cheerfully. "I'll find you a conveyance fast enough, miss. Let Pat Cosgrove wait for you, and if you can't get in you can come back with him. I don't think you'll be stayin' at Chapel very long. Wouldn't you be lost there—a young lady like you?"

His eyes pointed the compliment, which had not a suggestion of impertinence. Maeve remembered. It was always so in papa's country.

She had various other details imparted to her by Pat Cosgrove, on whose rickety outside car she covered the seven miles between Ballymacswinford station and Chapel, none of them encouraging; but they only made her more resolved to go on. Her courage had risen to it; but indeed it hardly seemed to her that it was a question of courage. What could happen to anybody in these days with police and magistrates all about one? Yet the thought of Godfrey Barron coming one of these days to see what had become of her was not without its warm sense of comfort and protection.

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW FRIEND

THE last mile or so of the journey had been particularly lonely. Houses had become less and less frequent. There was here and there a ruined cabin, its gaunt, unroofed walls and hollow window-spaces desolate against the illimitable sky. Now and again a house stood among trees on a patch of reclaimed bog-land. The road, set higher than the bog, and with a sort of moat to either side of it, trailed away through miles and miles of red-brown and green bog-land. The day was a still, grey day of autumn, and the silence was only broken by the lonely call of the snipe and the plover. They passed two or three ancient ruined churches, mere gables standing up behind stone walls. Peering above one Maeve saw the serried ranks of the grave-stones thrusting a head and shoulders above the coarse grasses.

Presently they left the bog behind for a bit, and for a quarter of a mile or so they drove under overhanging trees. They passed through a ragged collection of cabins with one or two larger buildings, which Pat Cosgrove informed her was the village of Meelin.

"'Tis nearin' the end of your journey you are now," he said. "Unless you'd be changin' your mind and comin' back with me. 'Twould be a pleasure to drive ye. If 'twas me own car I'd do it for nothin', for the

## A New Friend

pleasure of lookin' at ye, miss, axin' your pardon for makin' so bould."

"I shan't go back," said Maeve, smiling and shaking her head in Pat Cosgrove's imploring face. Already she liked the people—papa's people. With Meelin village, its police-barracks, its couple of shops, its church and convent barely an Irish mile away, what could happen at Chapel? She remembered that the Irish were given to picturesqueness of narrative, so papa had told her; they were an imaginative race. Why, papa himself was given to overstating a case in words. She, Maeve, had been credited with an exaggeration of statement by her more stolid schoolfellows. She would doubtless find when she reached Chapel only a very ordinary state of things after all.

The car turned into a narrow *boreen* or lane, full of deep ruts. The hedges on either side trailed their thorns, their hips and haws and blackberries, against the sides of the car and the knees of the occupants. Maeve had to push away the briars from her face sometimes with both hands.

"What an extraordinary approach to a house!" she said. "Why doesn't someone have it widened and cleared?"

"Och, sure, there's nobody comes next or nigh it exceptin' Corney Rearden and Judy when they do be going' down to the village for the few things for the house. 'Tis a sorrowful road sure enough. Wirra——" as one wheel of the car sank in a deep rut, nearly dislodging Maeve, "bad luck to it, it isn't fit for pigs, savin' your presence, miss."

A bit more of the uncomfortable jogging and shaking, at which Maeve only laughed, being young and conscious

## The House of the Secret

now of an adventurous spirit which papa's count seemed to have wakened up in her; and they arrived at what had been originally the gates leading to a lawn. Now one gate swung forlornly on its hinges and the other gate was missing. There were pigs and poultry grubbing about among the shrubs of the lawn, the clumps of laurestinus and Portugal laurels, the flowering currants, the hydrangeas, all looking forlorn in their autumn decay and their general air of dishevelment and neglect.

Pat Cosgrove led the mare between the gate-posts, having carefully propped back the broken gate. The wheels made a grinding sound over the rough stones which, popping up among the long grasses, marked where the carriage way had taken its course.

There was a big square house with wings in front of them. An ivied side of it was turned to them as they approached.

There was a chattering of birds in the ivy. A broken shutter at one of the windows flapped and creaked. Drifts of autumn leaves were under the mare's feet. Through a gap in a grey stone wall Maeve caught a glimpse of orchard, yellow apples on the almost bare boughs. A wind of autumn sighed to her ears from across the bog-land.

They turned the corner of the house and came out in front of it.

It was a big house, three-storied in the main body of it, two-storied at the wings, with pillared porch and wide windows with green outside shutters—a beautiful old house in prosperity, but now, with broken windows and the white stuccoed walls streaked with the rain and the stains of the weather, sadly desolate.

## A New Friend

There was a sunk storey which made the centre of the house really four storeys in height. The windows of the sunk storey were grimed with the dirt of ages. There was not a sign of life about the place.

Maeve sprang off her side of the car lightly, as she would not have dared to do yesterday. She approached the broken doorsteps with a heart that quailed a little despite her courage and her strange, new sense of adventure.

Before she could ascend the steps a long lean dog came round the corner of the house, a dog with grey, bristling hair, whose low growl was not reassuring.

The dog came straight up to Maeve, the hair standing up along his back. There was no time for her to return to the car, if she were so minded, but she did not feel at all frightened. She remembered what papa had taught her; papa had always been devoted to dogs and all animals.

"Close your hand so that he can't grip it and let him smell it; let him find out that you're all right, that you're honest and have no reason to be frightened and are a friend of dogs."

She remembered the words, though they were spoken long ago. Papa had taken her where there was a bull-dog and she had been inclined to scream and run away. A clear vision came before her eyes of the dog's honest, ugly face with its china-blue eyes; of papa closing her little hand and holding it to the bull-dog to smell. Many a time since she had followed his instructions.

She closed her hand and held it to the dog, smiling a little to herself as she heard the car-driver's exclamation of terror. Still growling, the dog approached his muzzle to the hand, smelt at it, at first suspiciously.

## The House of the Secret

The muzzle went all over her hand. She felt the dog's hot breath on it. She stood looking down at the long wolfish grey head. And suddenly something warm and soft passed across her hand. The dog had licked it. He looked up in her face and wagged his tail.

"Sorra the like of that ever I saw," said the car-driver, who had not left his car. "Why, even Corney Rearden's terrified of Viper. They say he wouldn't go next or nigh him without a big whip in his hand."

Maeve put her hand on the dog's head and looked down at him.

"He seems half-starved, poor thing," she said, compassionately, while the dog, wagging his tail, stood looking up at her with half-blind eyes.

"I wouldn't make too free with him," said the man, apprehensively, "though you do seem to have put the comether on him. I wonder what Corney'll say. He ties him up with a chain like a cable, I've heard tell. Would you mind knocking for yourself, miss? The bell looks to me to be broke. I darsent lave the car for fear of that dog. There isn't much I wouldn't face, but I'm afeard of him."

"I'll knock for myself," said Maeve. "But you must help me to take down these things. I can't manage that for myself. Supposing I hold the dog."

She had taken out her purse to pay him, but he interposed.

"You'll be coming back with me, maybe, miss. No hurry about paying till you see if you'll change your mind."

Why did they all think she would turn back? She felt a sudden impatience about it. Papa had tried to make up to his motherless child for her mother's loss

## A New Friend

by instilling into her the virtues as he knew them. Courage was one of the virtues. He had taught his lesson so thoroughly that Maeve had grown up singularly free from the feminine thrills and terrors.

"You can wait," she said, "till someone lets me in, if you like. But I don't think I shall go back."

It was fortunate she was not afraid. Where, indeed, should she go to? She had very little money at her disposal. If she found Miss O'Neill did not need her she would look for something to do out in the world. But the more she heard the more it seemed to her that Miss O'Neill did need her. It was not fitting, thought Maeve, with indignation, that a lady should be left to a rough farm-steward or bailiff and his rough sister. There must be something very wrong about that.

She went up the steps and pulled at the bell-pull. It was broken, as the car-driver had anticipated.

Next she tried the knocker of the great double doors, which was so heavy and rusted by disuse that at first she could hardly move it. While she knocked the dog stood by her side, watching her anxiously, while Pat Cosgrove, gazing across the well of his car, made pessimistic remarks as to the unlikelihood of her gaining an entrance.

Once or twice she went down the steps again and turning about looked up at the unresponsive long rows of windows, many of them broken, which turned their black faces to the grey reflections of the sky. Then she returned, and with a greater air of determination than before again lifted the knocker and let it fall, producing no result except to make the sparrows and starlings in the ivy chatter with excitement.

At last she gave up the hall door as a bad job.

## The House of the Secret

"I don't believe there's anyone in the house," she said.

"Don't you believe it, miss," Pat Cosgrove replied, leaning across the car to make his speech more confidential. "As like as not one of them ould villains, Corney or Judy, is lookin' at you from one of the ould windows."

Perhaps the suggestion made Maeve a bit indignant.

"I'll get in somehow," she said, lifting her fearless young face proudly. "There must be some sort of entrance at the back. Come along, Viper."

"Bedad, I admire your spirit, miss, so I do," said the man, gazing after her, but without making any effort to follow her.

When she had turned the corner of the house he was suddenly active.

"She's not goin' to be beaten," he said to himself. "So I might as well be gettin' down the boxes while the dog's out of the way."

At the back of the house Maeve entered an enormous stable-yard, surrounded on three sides by stables and outbuildings, all empty and silent. The house made the fourth side of the quadrangle. There was not a sign of life in the great echoing square with all its outbuildings; but Maeve noticed at a glance that a door which led into the house stood open, and went quickly towards it.

As she crossed the cobbles of the yard, between which the grass had grown up thickly, she noticed the dog's kennel, with a great chain lying beside it. Her hand went out and touched the long wolfish head.

"You are not going to be chained up any more," she said, and the dog, as though he understood, wagged his tail and looked up at her with eyes of gratitude.

## A New Friend

The door opened on to a narrow flagged passage, damp-smelling and dark. Beyond was an arched stone kitchen, its huge grate brown with rust. Beyond that another kitchen, sculleries, pantries, cellars, wash-houses, dairies; there was a great stretch of the dark, cold places, the roof raised on stone pillars, which, empty and echoing, were almost sufficient in themselves to daunt even Maeve's spirit. She glanced at a huge barrel in one of those underground places and instinctively put her hand on the dog's head, feeling glad when he pressed up against her as though he felt she needed his protection.

At last she found a staircase ascending and went up to find a locked door at the top. However, the key was in it and after one or two attempts it turned gratingly in the wards. She stepped out into a hall paved in black and white marble, with a wide staircase beyond. Over a tattered and frayed screen of Spanish leather she could see the tops of the gilt frames of oil paintings, set between the medallion heads in stucco work which apparently went round the wall-space at intervals.

Before she could step beyond the screen, a singularly ugly face came round it, the eyes of which stared at her in amazement oddly mingled with consternation.

The owner of the eyes and face was a woman of middle age, with whom Nature had dealt very unkindly. She had one shoulder higher than the other, and her whole body seemed built awry. The face was very unsymmetrical and scarred, apparently from small-pox. She had thin, reddish hair, an arid skin, a misshapen mouth, almost toothless, and yet there was something in her expression that prevented her being altogether repulsive.

## The House of the Secret

Her speech was like her person, grating and uncouth – that is, when she did speak. At first she only gasped and stared at Maeve Standish, in her long grey travelling cloak, so fresh and fair and young, in strange and piteous contrast to her own ugliness.

“How did ye get in?” she asked at last, looking behind her as though in terror of someone who might appear. “Whoever ye are, 'tis well for you my brother, Corney Rearden, isn't here. Ye'll be getting out of it as fast as ye can. We don't want any strangers here. Is that Viper ye've got wid ye? Sure, he isn't safe, or so Corney says. How did he get out? Hould him fast. I'm afraid o' Viper. Maybe he knows I'm Corney's sister, an' he doesn't like Corney. Take him out o' that, will ye?”

She put the screen between herself and Maeve with obvious terror, Maeve heard her heavy thud across the hall and the slam of a door. Judy Rearden was out of the path at all events.

## CHAPTER IV

### MISS HENRIETTA O'NEILL

MAEVE went up the stairs, which she noticed with some wonder were of white marble, the balustrading being of very fine and delicate wrought-iron work. Over her head the stucco decorations of the ceiling hung in flower-shaped and fruit-shaped stalactites. On the staircase wall were the same calm Grecian faces with the closed eyes and filleted or ringleted heads which decorated the hall. Plainly, Chapel House had been a house of great consideration in its time. But now everything was deep in dust. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling and swung between the ironwork of the balustrading. Dirt and neglect were within and without the house.

A voice followed Maeve as she went.

"Don't be goin' up there," it said. "Sure, my brother Corney'll murder ye when he comes back. I don't want to see murder done."

Maeve was not disturbed. She knew the Irish imaginativeness of speech. Besides, there was Meelin and its police-barracks not a mile away; and there was Pat Cosgrove sitting on his car, visible from the great oriel at the head of the staircase which she was passing at the moment. Her only feeling was one of sympathy for papa's old friend and benefactress, the Diana-like creature who was her vision of Miss Henrietta O'Neill, in the hands of such a rough creature as Judy Rearden.

## The House of the Secret

At the head of the second flight of steps she came to an open door. She had been aware as she came up the stairs, through Judy Rearden's shouted entreaties and warnings, of a faint, tinkling sound as of a worn-out and imperfect musical instrument.

Through the open door of the room she caught glimpses of things that told of the former glories of Chapel. Long windows hung with ragged and faded lace and velvet; tall pier-glasses and consoles; an inlaid table; the gilt pipes of an organ; great chandeliers, their thousand drops dim with grime and damp.

She went into the room, the dog following her. It was a double drawing-room, separated by an archway. The walls were panelled and painted; the ceiling finely gilt and painted in blue skies with nymphs and roses. There was a grand piano, Louis chairs and settees covered in a Pompadour satin, a soft carpet luxurious to the foot. But everywhere was the same grime and disorder, the same rags and tatters.

The dog bounded from Maeve's side to a lady who sat at the further end of the long room, sweeping the strings of a harp, and fawned upon her.

Her hands dropped from the harp strings.

"Why, Viper," she said. "Viper, I understood you were dead. Rearden told me so, or I misunderstood. I often misunderstand in these latter days. Well, I am glad you are not dead. There are too many dead and dying nowadays. Don't you agree with me?"

She turned without any appearance of surprise to Maeve, who had forgotten her manners and stared in amazement at the queer, fantastic figure Miss O'Neill presented.

There was no doubt that this was papa's old friend.

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"YOU FIND ME AT MY HARP . . . IT IS MY GREAT SOLACE. NO ONE  
EVER COMES TO SEE ME NOW."

## Miss Henrietta O'Neill

If Maeve had doubted there was the full-length picture which hung in the recess above the fireplace, with the label, "Portrait of Miss O'Neill, by J. Hungerford." This Miss O'Neill was woefully changed from that, as woefully as she was from the exquisite child in the miniature which hung by the larger picture, a little ivory face in a cloud of golden-red curls, with the bluest eyes, and a spirit and daring which might have become a boy.

The child wore white satin. The young woman in the portrait was in a riding-habit of Lincoln green, her arm on her horse's neck.

The woman who was looking at Maeve, with a growing intelligence in her eyes, might have moved anyone to tears by the contrast of her present state with that exquisite past.

She was wearing a bunched-up sacque of black satin over a pink satin petticoat very much faded and frayed. Her hair had an intention of ringlets, but the intention had plainly not gone very far. It was white in patches, and the face was oddly bleached as though by long imprisonment. Her faded eyes, which were peering at Maeve curiously now, had a wild look. She was plainly pinched with cold. You could see she had been a big woman once, like the gracious creature in the riding-habit, but she had shrunken away within her garments which hung loosely upon her. The lace mittens, the openwork stockings and satin shoes, were sadly unsuitable to the damp autumnal afternoon.

"You find me at the harp," she said to Maeve. "It is my great solace. No one ever comes to see me now. You are a new-comer in the neighbourhood, I presume? How was it no one showed you up?"

## The House of the Secret

"I found my own way in."

"Ah, they are neglectful, those old servants of mine. And you found Viper and brought him with you. I wonder how it was he stayed away from me so long." She was caressing the dog's grey head. "He is an Irish wolfhound, and such a kind creature—to his friends. I am glad you were not afraid of him. Rearden and his sister are, dreadfully. I think it is a mark of the *canaille* to be afraid of dogs. You agree with me, don't you?"

"Papa taught me not to be afraid," said Maeve. "Your dog has escaped from his chain. He has been chained up. That is why he did not come to you."

Miss O'Neill stamped her foot with a vehemence that surprised Maeve.

"How dared they!" she said. "Rearden forgets himself. My poor Viper! I shall flog Rearden for his insolent deceit. It will not be the first time. I think he drinks, my dear. There is no knowing what a man may not do if he drinks. My poor Viper! Thank you very much for bringing him to me. Will you not sit down? I hope you do not find the room very chilly."

Maeve sat down. Miss O'Neill turned about and faced her. A string of precious stones sparkled in the old lace that was about her neck. Her fingers were bejewelled. Looking at her in the clearer light that fell upon her Maeve was struck by a curious dark hue which was on her cheeks and about her lips; during the last year or so of his life papa had had the same shadows upon his face.

"You have not told me your name?" Miss O'Neill went on. "I believe I ought to know you. There is

## Miss Henrietta O'Neill

something in your face which reminds me of somebody. Who can it be?"

"It must be my father, or perhaps my grandfather," said Maeve, beginning to open the bag in which she carried the precious letter which commended her to the care of Miss Henrietta O'Neill.

"Not your grandfather, child," Miss O'Neill returned with a note of offence in her voice. "How could I possibly have known your grandfather? Your father, perhaps."

"Yes, my father, Walter Standish," said Maeve, feeling very guilty over her mistake. She had found the letter by this time and was holding it out to Miss O'Neill. "You were so good to him. He is dead. He thought you might be willing to be good to his child."

"Walter Standish!" Miss O'Neill repeated, stretching out her hand for the letter. "I remember him. Dear fellow, he was dreadfully in love with me. And so you are his daughter. He fell in love with me in my first season. I believe I fell in love with him. He was too diffident. A man ought not to be diffident. He was true and brave and proud. I ought to have married him in my first season. And so you are his daughter."

Maeve did not dare to tell Miss O'Neill that she was confusing her father with her grandfather, so she was silent.

The old lady held the letter at arm's length as though she were reading it; but Maeve perceived that she was not reading it.

"I grow a little short-sighted of late," she said at last. "Perhaps you would not mind reading it for me. It would be too absurd for a woman of my age to wear

## The House of the Secret

glasses, although I am told they are quite the fashion. Is it true that crinoline is in again? Poor Walter! He was a handsome fellow. He ought not to have been so diffident. I remember him in a bottle-green coat and lace ruffles to his shirt, kersey small-clothes and silk stockings. That was the year the young Queen paid us her first visit—'51, was it? Dear me, poor Walter! So he is dead and has left a daughter, and you are she. He died young."

Maeve took the letter and read it with a shaking voice. She had read it many times, but she had not yet learnt to control her eyes and her voice in the reading.

Miss O'Neill listened with her head inclined. The pale light from the sky shone in her jewels. Her eyes were suddenly bright and alert.

"I am grieved that you have lost him so early," she said, when Maeve had concluded. "He was quite right to send you to me, quite right. I hope you don't dislike a country life. Dear me, why, you might have been my daughter."

Mists and shadows seemed to drop over the brightness of her eyes; and the intelligence which had been in them became clouded over.

"I ought to have had a child of my own," she said, "for, of course, I was married. You must call me 'ma'am' when you speak to me. I am always telling that insolent fellow Rearden to do it, but he will persist in calling me 'miss.' He is annoying."

"I ought to tell you," said Maeve, "that I have scarcely any money. When papa committed me to your charge he thought he had made a provision for my future. As a matter of fact it was all lost in the

## Miss Henrietta O'Neill

bank in which he had invested it. I am glad he was spared the pain of knowing."

Miss O'Neill seemed to bring back her attention by an obvious effort to what Maeve was saying.

"Tell it to me again," she said. "I have not quite understood you."

Maeve repeated the speech.

"But money!" said Miss O'Neill, with a thin laugh. "Who thinks of money? It will be a very sad day when the Irish begin to think of money. It is what differentiates them from the—ah—commercial peoples. You are heartily welcome to my house and hospitality. Why, now I think of it, I have been wanting a companion for a long time. Rearden would not hear of it. He is very tyrannical, my dear, and often frightens me."

Her face puckered up as though she were going to cry, and Maeve's young, generous heart was suddenly hot within her.

"He shall not tyrannise over you any more," she said, taking up the thin old hands which had such a dark stain on them as she remembered to have seen on papa's. "I am so glad I came. It is monstrous that you should be left to these rough people. I am going to take care of you now."

Tears came into Miss O'Neill's eyes.

"It is so good to hear you say that," she said. "I really have been very lonely here. And they have neglected me. Judy Rearden can do very well if she likes; she was kitchen-maid here in the old days. But they have been neglecting me shamefully. Promise you will not leave me!"

She implored Maeve with her eyes.

## The House of the Secret

"I have been so lonely and frightened here by myself," she said. "I seem to realise all at once how lonely it has been. You can't imagine the things that come into one's mind when one is alone here for so long, without going out or seeing anyone."

"I shall not leave you," said Maeve, putting a strong young arm about the thin shoulders. "And you must go out. You shall go walking with Viper and me, or driving. It is dreadful for you not to go out. Of course, the strange things come when one is too lonely; but you will forget all about them when you go out, and when I am with you, as I shall always be now."

Miss O'Neill's eyes suddenly narrowed and her face took an expression of cunning.

"You don't know what might be waiting for me outside the gates," she said, in a whisper, while she glanced furtively from side to side. "I am much safer where I am, Maeve. Maeve is your name, isn't it? I am much safer where I am. Rearden is quite right when he says I must keep to the house."

"Rearden is not right," said Maeve, indignantly. "He is playing on your loneliness and fears. What could await you that would be any harm? Rearden ought to be in the hands of the police."

Miss O'Neill's teeth suddenly chattered in her head.

"Don't talk of the police, Maeve. For heaven's sake, don't talk of the police," she whispered, shaking as though in an ague. "I'm between the police and the madhouse, Maeve. Think of it! I used to have so many friends, and I was greatly admired. I was indeed. And now think of me, between the police and the madhouse!"

She hid her face in Maeve's dress, crying and shaking,

## Miss Henrietta O'Neill

and Maeve pressed the disordered head closer to her in a sudden passion of protection.

"They have been frightening the life out of you," she began, tenderly.

At that moment Viper growled, and the ridge of coarse hair stood up along his back. He looked at the door. There was the sound of a heavy tread coming up the stairs.

## CHAPTER V

CORNEY REARDEN

"THAT is Rearden coming. He will be so angry," said Miss O'Neill, uncovering her face and cowering behind Maeve.

Maeve turned towards the door. The heavy feet came up clumsily. She put her hand on the dog's head and felt his hair bristle under it. Except for the low growling of the dog there was not a sound in the room.

There came in a queer, misshapen figure of a man, burly beyond the ordinary, with a great rough head set low between the shoulders, one of which, like his sister's, was higher than the other. The same want of symmetry which marked his sister's face was in his, but more pronouncedly. In fact, the whole face was askew—one eye smaller than the other; the nose bulging one side; one ear projecting more than the other; the crookedness of the mouth more marked one side than the other.

There was a brutal anger apparent in his looks and the manner of his entrance. Maeve felt rather than saw Miss O'Neill cower behind her, and turning herself about, one hand on the dog's collar, she put her right arm protectingly about the frightened woman. All her spirit and courage were up to meet Corney Rearden. There was an exhilaration in it. She could hardly think

## Corney Rearden

of herself as the Maeve Standish of yesterday, who had not dreamt of these strange experiences.

"I heard ye had a visitor," the man said, addressing his mistress, with a grin of anger that showed all his wolfish teeth. "Ye didn't tell me ye wor expectin' wan. Her man's below still waitin' to see if she'll have her trunks down or no. 'Tis a nice house for a young lady to come visitin' at. Ye'd better be goin', miss."

He advanced a step or two around the wide inlaid table behind which he had stood, and caught sight of Viper. Immediately he backed to the door.

"Lord save us!" he said. "How the divil did that brute come here? Hould him hard, miss, or he'll be doin' murder. I wish now I'd brained him with a spade when I had him tied up, only that he kep' the people from pryin' and shtearin' about the place."

The sudden transition from bullying anger to abject terror brought into Maeve's feeling towards Corney Rearden the touch of contempt which was what she needed.

"The dog came in with me," she said. "And he's going to stay, and so am I. Please do not come up here unless we send for you. You can go now."

She felt Miss O'Neill straighten herself, as though unconsciously, out of her cowering position; and it raised her heart up with a generous exaltation in the feeling of protecting the weak.

Rearden retired outside the door as to his body, but his eyes still looked around the door, which he held in his hand, ready to close it behind him at any moment.

"Take that dog outside and I'll talk to you," he said.

"I'm not going to take him outside. He will stay

## The House of the Secret

with me and your mistress, whom you have dared to deceive about him, telling her he was dead. "Come,"—she turned to Miss O'Neill—"I want to dismiss the man who drove me here. We have nothing more to say to this man, have we?"

She advanced towards the door, her hand still on the dog's collar, and Rearden retreated before her down the stairs. As the dog followed, he went faster, till he was safe on the kitchen staircase, from which they could hear him muttering inarticulate threats.

Outside Pat Cosgrove sat on his car, with an expression in his face as though he accepted the strangeness of life and refused to be disconcerted by or surprised at it.

"That man, Rearden, was terrible impident," he said. "As though I'd take my orders from the likes of him. So you're not comin' back with me, miss? Well, I'm sorry for it. It doesn't look a place for a young lady like yourself. I'll have the trunks down in a brace of shakes, if only you'll put the dog in a safe place."

At that moment Miss O'Neill showed herself at the door. He touched his hat to her, his face showing no surprise at her fantastic appearance.

"I'm glad to see ye well, ma'am," he said politely.

"It's a beautiful day for the time of year."

"It is so," said Miss O'Neill, looking about her at the man and his horse and car, at the trees and the shrubs, thin, and wearing the last rags of their autumn glory, with a surprised, unfamiliar air as of one who has been long immured in the darkness. "It is so. I don't know when I have been out, Maeve, not for a long, long time."

"'Twould do ye a dale o' good," said Pat Cosgrove,

## Corney Rearden

sympathetically, "if you was to have a drive on the car."

But Miss O'Neill drew back into the doorway as though the suggestion had frightened her.

"Come," said Maeve, "you will have to keep Viper out of sight if I am to get my trunks in. Will you stay with him in here till I am done with them?"

She opened one of the doors that led off the hall.

The room beyond was shuttered, and a damp and mouldering air came out to meet her. But through heart-shaped openings in the shutters there came a little light, enough to show the tall, sheeted shapes of furniture glimmering in the dimness. She went towards a window, unbarred the shutter, and turned it back, letting in the light of day.

The room was so close and damp as to be stifling; but some of the panes of glass were broken, and the autumn air blew in sweetly through them. Exerting all her young strength, she threw up a window. Cobwebs stirred in the room, and the dust drifted.

"What a shame," said Maeve, "to neglect such a beautiful room! Why, the lovely furniture is all spoiling. And the beautiful painted walls. We are going to change all that."

She shut the door of the room behind her as she left it, feeling that Miss O'Neill would be safe from Rearden's insolence as long as she had the dog with her. Then she waited while the car-driver carried in her trunks.

"Where to, miss?" he asked.

She shook her head. She did not yet know where she was going to sleep. From what she had seen of the house it seemed pretty well uninhabitable.

## The House of the Secret

"Better leave them here in the hall," she said. "And—do you know any woman who would come here and clean? The place is in a shocking state."

He shook his head.

"They're all too much afeard of Corney," he said; "and Judy, for the matter o' that. They're terrible fierce, so they are. And Judy's looks are agin' her. 'Tis hard on a faymale to look like Judy—ah, it is so." His eyes dwelt on her face with a kind, considering expression.

"I don't half like lavin' you wid them, miss, indeed I don't," he said. "Many a wan's afeard of them. I don't suppose your papa or mamma would like it if they was to know."

Maeve's eyes looked down at her black frock, and his followed the direction of her gaze.

"I'm sorry, miss," he said. "I was a great ould jackass not to have noticed your black. But I wouldn't stay miss, if I was you."

"So far as I can see, poor Miss O'Neill has been here alone with them these many years."

"Thru for you, miss. But then, she's cracked. 'Tis better for her thin the 'sylum. That's what the people do be sayin'. 'Tis nigh a score years, I've heard tell, since the mornin' she come down here. She was mad, then; never spoke a word to the man that druv her, but to tell him to go faster, and keepin' lookin' behind her all the time, as though the divil himself was after her, savin' your presence, miss. 'Tis nobody's business to meddle. They say at first one or two friends came after her, but she wouldn't see them. She's not so mad that she doesn't know what she's doin'."

## Corney Rearden

Maeve glanced apprehensively at the door of the room where she had left Miss O'Neill. It was tightly closed.

"I've seen no sign of madness in Miss O'Neill," she said. "Thank you very much for thinking about me. But I am not at all afraid of Rearden and his sister. I think they ought to be dismissed for the state of neglect to which this house has come."

"So they ought. But th'ould lady won't do it. She's under their thumb. She wouldn't see her lawyer when he come down from Dublin to see her—a very pleasant-spoken gentleman. He was towerin' mad about it whin he had to go back without a bit to ate even. She's not that mad she can't transact her business."

"Thank you," said Maeve, a little coldly. For all the evident kindness of the man's solicitude concerning her, this discussion of Miss O'Neill was not to her mind.

She gave him his fare.

"And you don't think," she said, "that there is any woman who could come?"

His face suddenly brightened.

"There's !Jane Kelly," he said. "She's a terrible scold; but she's as strong as a horse, and afraid of nothin'. A clane woman, too, although very plain in her faytures. You wouldn't mind if you was to hear a terrible scoldin' match goin' on downstairs?"

"I shouldn't mind indeed. I believe I should rather like it."

"Very well," he said, briskly. "I'll try to get you Jane. If she'll come, I'll be back with her in no time."

## The House of the Secret

He went off, and Maeve returned to her charge, whom she found seated on one of the shrouded sofas, with the dog lying at her feet. She was watching the door anxiously, and as soon as Maeve came in she stood up and the dog with her.

"The room's very cold, Maeve," she said. "And I've been feeling dreadfully frightened about Corney Rearden. He's a terrible man when he's angry. Judy's not so bad. You can't imagine how he's raved at me sometimes; but Judy was sorry for me."

"You shouldn't have allowed it," Maeve said, severely. "Imagine a servant behaving like that to his mistress! You must empower me to dismiss Rearden and his sister for the matter of that. They are an insolent and worthless pair of creatures."

Miss O'Neill looked up at the inflexible, brilliant young face, and a look of cunning came into her eyes.

"You see, Maeve," she said, "they are very faithful servants. You can't dismiss faithful old servants like that."

Maeve stared at her in amazement.

"Why, they are an abomination," she said. "There, don't look so frightened! I can see they have frightened you out of your life. Why did your friends allow it? Come, I will make them light a fire. What time do they give you your food at? You must be hungry, and I have had nothing to eat since early morning."

"To be sure," said Miss O'Neill, in trembling eagerness. "You must be hungry, after your journey, poor child. The dining-room is across the hall. Ring the bell for food. I remember now I've had no lunch. I ought to have had it hours ago. And, now I think of it, a fire will be very pleasant."

## Corney Rearden

Maeve drew the old hand through her arm, and Miss O'Neill looked at her gratefully.

"You are not to leave me, Maeve," she said in a whisper. "Remember you are not to leave me, whatever happens. You don't know how I have been frightened in this house. It is so good to have a young, strong thing like you, so fearless, so confident, with me. There was a time when I was afraid of nothing, of nothing. Some time I shall tell you about it. I have forgotten how I came to be so afraid of everything. You won't leave me?"

Maeve lifted the withered hand to her lips.

"Be quite happy," she said. "I shall not leave you."

## CHAPTER VI

### ARMISTICE

THE dining-room was as dreary and neglected as the other rooms, but, somewhat to Maeve's surprise, there was a table set for a meal, with old damask upon it, old silver and glass, the two last standing in need of polishing, but at least fairly clean. But the table was only set for one person.

Miss O'Neill noticed the omission, and rang the bell sharply. Her moods changed almost from moment to moment. She was afraid and terrified now; the next minute she was the lady of position, exacting the service and respect that were her due. With almost uncanny suddenness her eyes dimmed and brightened. Now she was apparently only a somewhat eccentric lady; again she was plainly one with a cloud on her mind.

Judy Rearden came in answer to the bell, and stood scowling just within the door.

"Ye rung the bell?" she said.

Miss O'Neill's eyes flashed.

"Don't address me like that, Judy Rearden," she said. "I have had to complain before of your uncouth manners. If you offend again you shall leave my employment."

The woman looked abashed.

"What did ye be plazed to want?" she said, lowering her eyes.

## Armistice

"You haven't set a place for this young lady."

"I didn't know we was to have visitors," the woman said, pleating her dirty apron between her fingers and looking out from under her thin-lashed lids.

"Set a place," said Miss O'Neill, haughtily, "and light the fire. The room is miserably cold."

"The jackdaws have built in the chimbley. Yez'll be smoked out of the room."

"The jackdaws should not have built in the chimney," Miss O'Neill said, sharply. "I shall speak to Rearden about it. No woman was ever worse served. Now bring the lunch, if you please."

The woman went off, muttering under her breath.

"It is a long time since I have asserted myself," Miss O'Neill said, turning to Maeve. "It didn't seem worth while—one lonely woman. And they are faithful creatures, although they are uncouth."

"Why do you keep them?" Maeve asked in wonder.

Again something of the fear and helplessness came into Miss O'Neill's expression, blotting out the spirit which had been in her face a moment before. Her speech hesitated and stammered

"Keep them!" she repeated. "Keep them! Why, I must keep them. Such faithful servants are not to be found every day."

The door opened, flung back by a furious hand, and Rearden's face appeared in the opening. It was so red and inflamed that Maeve had an idea that the man must have been drinking.

He was about to enter noisily, when a growl from the dog made him draw back. He pulled the door towards him and stood half within the room, half without it, ready to beat a retreat at any moment.

## The House of the Secret

"I've come to tell ye," he said, addressing Miss O'Neill, "that I won't serve two mistresses. If she's to stay, I'll pack up and go. And Judy'll go wherever I go."

"You wouldn't do that, Rearden?" said Miss O'Neill, turning grey as ashes, "after being so long with me. What should I do without you and Judy?"

"That's for yourself to say," he answered with emphasis. "You've got to choose between her and us."

He pointed his coarse, dirty finger at Maeve, who looked at him steadily.

Miss O'Neill began to whimper, feeling about for a pocket-handkerchief somewhere in her satin petticoat.

"I don't know why you come and frighten me like this, Rearden," she said. "I'm sure I've given in to you and Judy about everything. Haven't I lived alone here, shut up, and never seeing a human face, not going to church even? I that was always riding and driving in the open air. Haven't I done all you asked me to do? And this poor young lady has nowhere else to go to, Rearden. Her father and mother are dead, and her father left her to me. I don't think you ever saw him, Rearden, but he was a kind, handsome fellow, and I might have married him if I had liked. Perhaps it was a great mistake that I didn't."

"Aye," said the man, acridly, "there's them that goes through the wood and picks up the crooked stick at last."

Maeve happened to be looking at Miss O'Neill at the moment, and was shocked by the sudden terror that came into her face. It was as though for a moment the veil had been lifted from her eyes and she had seen something terrible. Then her gaze was wavering again.

## Armistice

"Let me keep her, Rearden," she said, humbly. "I've grown fond of her. She's the only young thing I've ever had about me."

The man struck the panel of the door with his closed fist, muttering an imprecation.

"Haven't we enough to do, humourin' your whims and fancies, me and Judy," he said, "without her comin' in to order us about? If she stays, we go—that is all."

"I wish you wouldn't get so angry," poor Miss O'Neill said, dissolving in tears. "You frighten me; you really do. You never used to speak to me like that."

It seemed to Maeve that it was time for her to interfere. Something in the helplessness and terror of the poor woman beside her made her heart so hot with indignation that she could have faced things she feared more than she feared the blustering bully before her.

"I do not propose to go," she said calmly, "unless Miss O'Neill wishes me to go. In that case, after what I have seen, I should consider it my duty to make responsible persons aware of the manner in which Miss O'Neill is living here, which is not suited to her condition or her age."

Rearden's jaw dropped; and though he recovered himself almost immediately, it was plain to see that the threat had alarmed him.

"If you put the law on to us," he said, "'twould be worse for her than for me."

"Yes, indeed it would, indeed, dear," Miss O'Neill corroborated, with a trembling appeal to Maeve, which went straight to her heart. "Don't bring the law in, Maeve; I don't like it. And, perhaps, if you didn't quarrel with Rearden, he wouldn't mind your staying. Why can't we all be friends together?"

## The House of the Secret

The thin hands with the purple patches upon them trembled in her lap, and the girl had an impulse to snatch them to her breast and still their trembling. She remembered just such purple patches on papa's hands, though he was not old.

"It will make no difference to you, her staying. I promise you that," said Miss O'Neill, eagerly, as though she saw some sign of relenting in the man. But he went away, slamming the door after him.

She seemed very soon to forget the violence of the scene. It was something Maeve learned in the time that came after that Miss O'Neill soon forgot.

Judy Rearden brought them their meal, scowling indeed, but without any open demonstration of hostility.

The meal consisted of a tiny chicken, so small that Maeve, with her healthy young appetite, felt she could have eaten it all. Indeed, Miss O'Neill ate so little that Maeve, in spite of her protests, had the fowl pretty well to herself. It was excellently cooked, and there was a dish of stewed blackberries to follow, with cream on top. Two little cups of coffee came up on a tray at the conclusion of the meal.

It was easy for Maeve to say pleasant things, and she was exhilarated to the point of magnanimity. She had an idea that she had scored off the Reardens, and she could afford to be generous. So she praised Judy Rearden's cookery, and was rewarded by a spark of gratification in Judy's eye, which remained there a second before being extinguished in a returning wave of sullenness. For a second there was a grin of pleasure on Judy's mouth which almost touched Maeve. It was good to give a little pleasure to a creature so ill-treated by Nature. No wonder, said Maeve to herself,

## Armistice

if Corney Rearden was wicked, seeing how ill Nature had treated him. About Judy she began to have a little hope. That gleam of gratification proved Judy to be but human after all.

She met Corney Rearden himself a little later on the stairs, and was confirmed in her idea that her threat of outside interference had brought him to his senses. She had left Viper with Miss O'Neill in the drawing-room, where by this time there was a bright fire. The old lady had gone back to her harp, to which she was singing in a cracked voice, which had a hint of former sweetness :

I once had gold and silver,  
I thought them without end.  
I once had gold and silver ;  
I thought I had a friend.  
My friend is gone, my wealth is flown,  
My Love is stol'n from me.  
And here I lie alone, alone  
Beneath the willow-tree.

Maeve would have passed the man with her head in the air, but he intercepted her. There was an oily pretence at amiability in his voice, though his eyes scowled and were cunning; but plainly his intention was conciliatory.

"I'm not sayin'," he said, "that you was to go out of it, if herself wanted you to be in it. She's terrible set on ye. Maybe she'll change her mind by-and-by. She changes like a willy-the-wisp, being ould and a thrifle mad. Why wouldn't you be lettin' me alone, an' me be lettin' you alone?"

"Why not, indeed?" said Maeve, not displeased at the suggestion of an armistice.

## The House of the Secret

"Sure I wouldn't have been interferin' wid ye," he went on, and his voice had a more hypocritical sound than before; "only, 'tisn't a place for a young lady at all. Sure she's mad—rale mad. If you was to bring down the law on us, as you were talkin' about, 'tis to the 'sylum they'd be takin' her. Ye wouldn't like that, would ye?"

The wind had opened the door of the drawing-room below, and the cracked voice floated out to them. The song was changed now:

She wore a wreath of roses  
The night that first we met;  
Her lovely eyes were glowing  
Beneath her curls of jet.

"She's often very quare and cantankerous," the man went on; "'tisn't every wan 'ud put up wid her ways. We've done it for her to keep her out of the madhouse. The sowl does be frightened out of her at the thought of it."

"You've neglected her," said Maeve, severely. She was impressed by what the man had said, but she thought she would not allow him to see it. "I was amazed to find things so neglected. She ought to have her comforts."

"'Tis better than the 'sylum, anyhow," the man persisted. "She does shake like an ashpen to think of it, wid the lunatics chained to the wai! an' bet with whips."

"That doesn't happen now," said Maeve. "Besides, no one would think of putting her in an asylum. She is only a little bit odd, unlike other people."

"Wait! Wait til you know more of her. There's

## Armistice

times she does be dangerous to herself and others. The doctors 'ud find her mad aisy enough. Sure, that's why we've kep' her here, the poor ould mistress. Judy an' me has a heart for her, though ye mayn't think it."

"It was very wrong of you to shut her away as you have done," said Maeve, in her high, clear young voice. "And though your motives may have been good your conduct leaves them very much open to suspicion. I am going to stay here, and though we shall be necessarily quiet, yet we are not going to live with barred doors any more. Your mistress has been leading a most unhealthy life, quite enough to make a sane person mad. There will be no more closed doors for her or the rest of the world."

"Very well, ma'am," said the man, with a poor pretence at humility. "But—you're very young, ma'am. I hope you won't find you're mistaken. There's a woman below there in the kitchen, an' she an' Judy are having a scolding match that druv me out of the kitchen. She says she's come to clane up."

"Ah, so she has come. Well, send her up to me. My room must be cleaned before I can inhabit it."

"I'd like to break every bone in Judy's body," said the man, with sudden fury, "for not mindin' her work. Let Judy do the clanin' for you. There's no better when she has a mind to it; an' I'll brain her if she doesn't do it right."

"I prefer to have Mrs. Kelly," said Maeve, coldly. "This house is too big for even a willing pair of hands."

"Very well, then; but you'll tie up the dog. I'm scared of my life of him."

## The House of the Secret

"I can control him. He seems quite a gentle creature to me. But he looks half-starved. I prefer to keep him with me."

The man muttered under his breath, and passed on, while Maeve went up to the room she had chosen for herself, into which all manner of furniture was piled higgledy-piggledy, a room which evidently had not known fresh air or soap and water for years. But Mrs. Kelly was going to alter all that.

It might have been a couple of hours later, and the scolding woman was swishing away with a scrubbing-brush and a pail of hot water in Maeve's room. The sound was music in Maeve's ears, and she stood enchained by Mrs. Kelly's racy comments on things in general and the Reardens in particular. A look of chastened triumph sat on the good woman's brow, since she had come triumphantly out of the contest with Judy Rearden. Also she was enjoying herself hugely in the routing out of the dirt and damp which so long had held possession of the room.

"I'd ask no better than to clane the house from top to toe," she said, surveying the newly-scrubbed floor and the grate in which a fire was burning. "It's takin' on a natural look already, so it is."

"I'm sure Miss O'Neill will be very glad to have you in to clean. I shall speak to her about it."

"Any wan'll tell you I'm good at clanin', miss. 'Tisn't often wan gets as dirty a room as this to clane. I feel as if I was weetin' the face of that dirty streele Judy, every time I hit the floor wid the scrubbin' brush. It rises my spirits, so it does."

Maeve went downstairs with a grateful sense of the smell of soap still in her nostrils. In the hall she

## Armistice

paused, hearing a raised voice somewhere in the down-  
stairs regions.

"Devil a bit I care about pullin' her down an'  
destroyin' her," it said. "But I can't do it widout  
destroyin' meself. Hold your tongue, woman, or I'll  
make you."

The speaker was Corney Rearden.

## CHAPTER VII

### A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD

THE days and the weeks went on, and Chapel House had altered its aspect a good deal from what it was when Maeve first beheld it. The more flagrant dirt and disorder had disappeared before Jane Kelly and her cleaning utensils. The Reardens were on their good behaviour. Corney Rearden had begun to put in new panes of glass all over the house rather than that Maeve should send for a man to do it. In his leisure moments he was tidying up the disordered lawn and avenue. He had his aptitudes when he chose to exert them, and it seemed that in time he might overtake something of the neglect of years.

Miss O'Neill was no longer a prisoner indoors. She walked daily with Maeve in her own domain, which was quite large enough to give her a reasonable amount of exercise. But she shrank from any proposal that she should go outside her own gates, even to church.

"You shall go if you will, Maeve," she said, "but as for me, child, I gave all that up long ago. I have nothing to do with God or He with me."

She said it in one of her lucid moments, and there was a sombre desolation in her eyes.

Day by day it was borne in on Maeve that she was in the midst of mysteries which Miss O'Neill's strangeness did not explain. There had been moments when the woman, who had once been brave and spirited, fretted

## A Glimpse of the World

and rebelled at the narrow limits of her life and the domination of the coarse servant who evidently overawed her. For the spirit would sink in her eyes before a look from Corney Rearden; and she would cower at his strange, meaning speeches. There were times when she cajoled and flattered him, with a forced humility piteous to behold. Maeve used to avert her face on these occasions rather than see the painful absorption.

There were days when Miss O'Neil was apparently as sane as any one, but they were not long, and in time Maeve came to be glad when she was reminded again on the brooding knowledge of the old-fashioned ones. It was happier when she dressed herself in the finery of a quarter of a century ago, and was happy with her harp or her embroidery frame; or doing a little gardening out of doors, for that was something Maeve had won her to do.

It was a strange, lonely life for the girl, with no companionship but that of an old half-mad woman and an old dog. Viper was always by her skirts, and kept now an attitude of armed neutrality towards Corney Rearden, growling a little and showing his teeth when the man approached him, but making no further show of hostility. For Judy he had evidently something like friendship, and that was another thing which made Maeve hopeful of Judy.

She might have had friends outside, if it were not for the open-mouthed curiosity of people concerning the life that went on inside Chapel House. That curiosity repelled the girl in the case of the rector and his wife and the few other people with whom friendship might have arisen. She had no intention of discussing the strange household in which she found herself, any more

## The House of the Secret

than she had of exposing her poor old friend to curious eyes. And to be sure it was lonely. She had had a few letters from Godfrey Barron. Now and then she heard from her late schoolmistress or the schoolgirl friends. And at long intervals she might hope for letters from India—from the Urquharts.

The schoolgirl letters, the formal epistles of the schoolmistress, seemed to belong to a life with which she was done. Mrs. Urquhart's letters had a poignant, sweet suggestion about them of the old days with papa, even though they were chiefly concerned with the long tale of olive-branches and what was befalling them. Godfrey Barron's artless letters, in the large schoolboy handwriting, with now and again a flagrant mis-spelling, gave her an odd sense of touch with the outside world, of friendliness and protection.

She might have been some two months at Chapel when, one frosty afternoon, she found the young gentleman himself sitting, smoking a cigarette, on a stile which she must pass.

He stood up, throwing away the cigarette, and came to meet her as she approached sufficiently near to be recognisable.

"Your letters tell me nothing about yourself," he said. "So, as I am in Dublin for a couple of months before joining my regiment, I thought I'd run down and see for myself."

He patted Viper as he spoke, and the usually unapproachable dog wagged his tail stiffly and made the licking sound with his lips by which a dog expresses gratification.

Maeve looked at the young man. He seemed to her to have grown older in two months. He was much

## A Glimpse of the World

more carefully dressed, and his head was cropped to a sleek smoothness. He no longer suggested so much the countryman bred and born to stables. He had acquired an air which was almost elegance.

"You look different," she said, while he held her hands in a fervid clasp.

"And you," he said—"by Jove, don't you? You were rather sad and pale that day—though . . ."—his pause was eloquent. "Now you look splendid. The country agrees with you, and you look older somehow. I thought you awfully pretty, you know"—he floundered a little and blushed—"but that thing you are wearing brings out the chestnut of your hair and your beautiful colour."

"It is a gift from Miss O'Neill," Maeve said, looking down at the somewhat old-fashioned sealskin coat she was wearing. "She is awfully good to me."

"Come and sit down here on the stile," he said, "and tell me all about yourself. You won't be cold in that coat. Wouldn't you think the bog over there was on fire with all that frosty red shining in it? I've just been to Chapel House to ask for you. I beg your pardon, but—your man seems rather a brute, doesn't he? He told me you were out, and he couldn't say when you'd be back."

"He is rather a brute," said Maeve, seating herself upon the stile. Godfrey Barron sat down beside her in a proximity which she did not at all resent.

"I've been wanting so much to know about you," he said, "only I've been so busy since I scraped through. I told you I'd scrape through, didn't I? I had all sorts of things to settle at home before I could get up to Dublin. Now I shall be there for a couple of months,

## The House of the Secret

and shall be able to run down now and again. The mater is in Dublin, too. She wants you to come and stay with her, if you will. She'd have come down to see you, only she understood that Miss O'Neill leads a secluded life. Why shouldn't you come up for Christmas?"

"It would be delightful," said Maeve, and her eyes showed the sincerity of her speech. "But I can't leave her now. She has grown to depend so much on me."

"By Jove, I should think so—if the man who opened the door is a specimen of her servants. I beg your pardon, Miss Standish. It looked so dreary. And that brute! Are you sure you're happy?"

"Quite sure."

"Because, if you aren't, you must come straight away to my mater. She is the jolliest little woman in the County Limerick. And there's plenty of room at Deelish. We have always people staying with us, and everything jolly, though we're as poor as church-mice, you know."

"Thank you very much," said Maeve, gratefully. "But I think my place is here. You see Miss O'Neill was very good to papa, and he wished me to be with her. I don't know what she would do without me now."

"I can understand her wanting you," said the boy, with an audacious look from his brown eyes. "However, while I am in Dublin I will run down often to see how you are getting on. The distance is nothing at all."

"Only about eighty miles!" said Maeve with a smile.

"I wish it was nearer, of course," he said. "Still, eighty miles is nothing—to see a friend."

## A Glimpse of the World

He put out his hand and stroked the fur of her coat as though he liked it. Maeve felt much older in her own mind than Godfrey Barron: yet she could not help blushing. It was her first experience of the way of a man with a maid, a way that is so diverse, yet so much the same. To cover her embarrassment, as well as with a tardy sense of her inhospitality, she asked him if he had lunched.

"I had something before I started," he said, "but I confess, now that you've asked me, that I am hungry again. I'm an awfully hungry brute."

"Well, you shan't go unfed," Maeve said, with sudden resolution. "I've been trying to get the Rear-dens—our man-servant and cook—into the way of afternoon tea. You shall have something more substantial than sandwiches, if you desire it."

She jumped down from the stile and stood before him, trying to be unconscious of the way his eyes dwelt on her.

"You will be the very first visitor at Chapel House—if you except myself, who am now an inmate—for about twenty years, so don't be surprised if it seems a little strange. I should——" She stopped and sent him a look of sensitive entreaty. "Miss O'Neill is a little odd. Some people might laugh at her. I should *hate* anyone who did."

"So should I," he said, gravely. "Can't you believe that I laugh with more discretion?"

"I beg your pardon," said Maeve, feeling rather ashamed of her doubt of him.

They turned and strolled back to the house through the neglected woods and shrubberies. Young Barron made no comment on anything he saw. Perhaps he was accustomed to untidiness.

## The House of the Secret

In the garden they came upon Miss O'Neill taking up violet roots and potting them. It was one of her mad days. She was wearing a lace hat trimmed with roses, a mere wisp of ancient finery a-top of her chignon. Covering her completely was a coachman's coat with capes, which had originally been bottle-green, but was now faded to a nondescript hue. She had an old fur tippet round her neck, and tied about her was a smart little muslin apron with pink bows. She had the light wandering look of the eye which with her meant forgetfulness of the years, and the sins and sorrows, whatever they might be, which were contained within them.

Maeve glanced apprehensively at Godfrey Barron. He was looking almost preternaturally solemn. She felt she could not have forgiven him if he had smiled.

Miss O'Neill, who had been kneeling by a box border, made no effort to get up. She sat back a little and looked up at Maeve and her companion with an eye in which the look of a conquering woman grew.

"Ah, Maeve, my dear," she said. "A gentleman to see me. I remember when they were as thick as blackberries. You will excuse country pursuits, I am sure. The clay of the garden adheres so to my gloves that I cannot offer you my hand."

She pulled off one of the huge gloves, which looked like companions to the coachman's coat, and extended a thin hand, covered with old-fashioned rings, plainly so much too large that they could hardly be kept in place, to young Barron.

He hesitated a moment, holding the hand, then with a becoming blush, lifted it to his lips. It would have been an absurd, almost an impertinent thing to have done in the case of anyone else. He flashed a

## A Glimpse of the World

deprecating glance at Maeve as he did it. But he had been right in this case. It was quite evident that Miss O'Neill was delighted with him. She beamed on him.

"Your friend has charming manners, Maeve," she said. "It is very good of him to come and enliven our solitude. I hope he is going to stay a day or two with us. There are still a few birds for the shooting, although it is impossible to preserve in Ireland nowadays."

Godfrey Barron turned his ingenuous gaze on Maeve. Plainly it said that to stay would be delightful. But might he?

Maeve was no older than her nineteen years after all, although she was so wise. Her face encouraged him.

"If you can really have me," he said, stammering with pleasure. "I have nothing particular to do——"

"Of course." Miss O'Neill waved her hand towards the house as though it held a staff of servants ready to do her will.

"See that there is a room prepared for, Mr.—Barron, is it?" she said to Maeve. "And let Rearden know that we have a guest. Let us have some tea immediately, Maeve. All the world drinks tea in the afternoon now, I am told. I remember a Barron—Anthony Barron, of Deelish. A handsome man with a wife he adored."

"My father and mother, Miss O'Neill," the lad said, with the eagerness which was so pleasant a thing in him.

"Indeed! I am very glad to have their son under my roof. I hope you will not find us too quiet, Mr.

## The House of the Secret

Barron. Maeve and I, a pair of lone women, have not many diversions to offer you. Shall we go into the house?"

He gave her his hand and helped her to rise. By the same fortunate instinct which had made him kiss her hand, he now offered her an arm; and in this stately fashion they paced slowly into the house.

"You shall tell me all about Dublin," she said. "It will be very pleasant having you. So nice to have a gentleman in the house. It has been rather lonely. Of course, there are the servants. My butler, Rearden, a rough diamond, but as faithful as a dog, makes the place quite safe, though it is so lonely."

"And the dog," said the boy, looking at the tall, yellow hound that walked by Miss O'Neill's side.

"You need not be afraid of Viper. Viper is devoted to anyone who likes me. Oddly enough, he cannot endure Rearden. It is probably because Rearden is afraid of him."

"Poor old thing!" Geoffrey Barron looked down at the hound. "Why, he must be nearly fangless. I cannot imagine being afraid of any dog myself. To be sure I was brought up with them."

"I always thought it is a sign of *canaille* to be afraid of dogs," Miss O'Neill said with her haughtiest air, as she entered the house. "Unless, of course, one has been frightened in one's youth."

## CHAPTER VIII

### A MASQUERADE

MISS O'NEILL was apparently quite unconscious of the scowl with which Corney Rearden received the new visitor. It was one of her days when her fear of the man seemed to disappear, when she was the mistress and he the dependant, when whatever the knowledge was between them which sometimes reversed the positions it was for the time in abeyance.

Young Barron was not as shocked at the state of the place as Maeve had been on her first arrival. To be sure, things had altered a good deal for the better. The house was still ramshackle and out-at-elbows, but the positive dirt and squalor had disappeared. Jane Kelly's pail and scrubbing-brush had done wonders, and Judy Rearden, as though stirred to emulation by her enemy's deeds of prowess, had turned to the task of cleaning herself. Godfrey Barron would have said that coming from the County Limerick he was not at all likely to object to things for being ramshackle and out-at-elbows.

If, indeed, he had a thought to spare from Maeve after the first day or two. There had been an attraction between them from the first. It was an unconscious attraction which cloaked itself as friendship, to Maeve's mind at least. She said to herself that it was happy to have such a kind and pleasant friend under the same roof with her, realising by the difference his presence

## The House of the Secret

made that it was a lonely and somewhat uncanny life at Chapel House, with the rough servants and the mad old lady and the mystery of the place; and only the dog to be sure of if one should be in any danger.

Seeing the boy and girl so happy together Miss O'Neill used to smile significantly to herself. She began to take an interest in Maeve's looks, to be dissatisfied with her plain, schoolgirl frocks, which Miss Seeley, who had procured Maeve's morning outfit, had thought quite suitable for a fortuneless girl who was going to be dependent on an old lady.

She ransacked her stores of ancient finery on Maeve's account. From various trunks and wardrobes and chests of drawers she pulled out pieces of old lace, delicate faded and yellowed fabrics, in which she insisted on dressing Maeve, whom the garments fitted quite remarkably well.

"I was famous for my beautiful figure," Miss O'Neill said. "I am very glad my god-daughter is going to be equally endowed. Just a little taking in of the bodice, and the dress might have been made for you. I wore it in Paris, child, when the Empress was the goddess of beauty."

The dress was a lavender silk, under an over-skirt of exquisite lace. Maeve looked at herself in the long glass in Miss O'Neill's room, and saw someone who might have stepped out of one of John Leech's pictures. The dress billowed with a suggestion of crinoline. The narrow, pointed bodice, the sloping shoulders, the baggy sleeves, were charming. She drew back with a start and a blush. She hardly recognized her own red-gold head and the brilliant fairness of her arms and shoulders.

## A Masquerade

"I hardly know myself," she said.

"I was considered remarkably like the Empress," Miss O'Neill went on with a self-satisfied air. "Our eyes were the same peculiar shade of intense blue; her hair was paler than mine—mine was deep gold, while hers was pale gold. She was an enchanting creature. I can see her now—two long golden ringlets drooping on those wonderful shoulders of hers. Ah, my dear, that was the age of beauty and elegance. People don't know how to dress now-a-days."

"I shall feel like Cinderella, going back again to my blacks," Maeve said.

"Let our young friend see you suitably attired for once," Miss O'Neill suggested. "Your mourning? Ah, well, my dear, it can't matter for once. Why should one wear black to show the sorrow that is in one's heart? You are really most elegant in that garment. But if you object, why here is another—this black and white silk trimmed with Mechlin. It was copied from a gown worn by the Empress. She wore hers with a lace shawl and a cottage bonnet filled in with roses, lovely creature! Her parasol had deep fringe on it and rosebuds scattered upon the silk. This is not quite so low as the other dress. More suitable to a quiet country evening like ours."

She grew animated over the finery. Since Maeve came and they had been out of doors a good deal the old lady's bleached look had all but disappeared. She had still the odd blue shadows about her eyes and mouth; her flush, when it came, as it did now, was very dark. But she looked much better than the cowed creature whom Maeve had met on that day some eight or nine weeks back.

## The House of the Secret

"You must let me build your hair higher, Maeve," she said. "Your hair clashes with your gown of the Third Empire. A little higher, just a suspicion of chignon, and a loose strand of hair to wave upon your neck. If I had not been Henrietta O'Neill I might have gone out as lady's maid. I could do my own hair better than any maid. There, my dear. How fortunate to have naturally curly hair!"

Maeve had stood, a patient figure, to have the black and white dress slipped on. She sat as patiently to have her hair pulled about according to Miss O'Neill's ideas. It was pleasant to see the delight in the old face which banished from it the lines of fear and sorrow.

"We shall both dress up to do honour to our young friend," Miss O'Neill went on. "I shall wear my tabinet and Limerick lace, and my emeralds. You shall have the rubies, and a monthly rose in the folds of your lace. The ruby star in your hair. I wonder what our young friend will say."

"I wonder."

Maeve looked at her own radiant image in the glass. Why, she was like Cinderella when the Fairy Godmother had arranged her for the Prince. And the Prince, who was he?

Maeve had very few male acquaintances in the world, and had not desired them, having Papa. But, for the last few days she had been learning how much spirit and generosity and honest simplicity lay behind Godfrey Barron's lean, honest, dear face.

Only yesterday she had told him how the corridors of the old house creaked at night, how she had lain awake with her heart in her mouth listening to what

## A Masquerade

sounded like stealthy footsteps and voices in whispered consultation outside her door.

"All old houses are like that," he had assured her. "It is nothing, nothing. But if you are afraid, remember that I am just across the corridor. I shall sleep at night with my sword unsheathed."

He had sent to Dublin for his luggage and there had come down with it his new uniform and his new shining sword. He had displayed the things to Maeve with a boyish pride which had secretly delighted her.

That unsheathed sword! Maeve, who felt ever so much older than Godfrey, was aware that an older person might have smiled at the unsheathed sword. But she loved to think of him lying there with his sword in the darkness while she quaked afraid. Could Godfrey Barron be the Prince? Was it possible that the Prince was come?

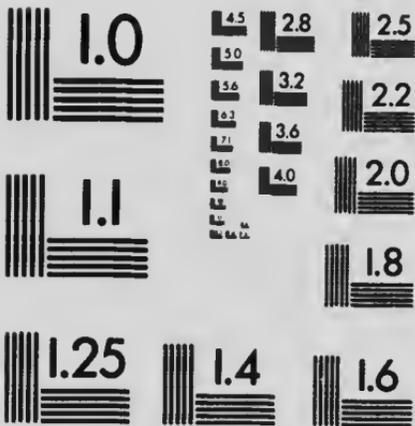
She went downstairs very shyly as the dinner-bell rang. He was in the drawing-room, where Judy Rearden had been prevailed upon to light a fire every evening. He had been out shooting in the rain and had only come in in time to get a bath and dress. The bath was another horrible infliction upon Judy, but she did not openly object to it, lest perhaps Jane Kelly's services might be called into requisition once more.

He dressed as punctiliously for dinner every evening as though he sat to a banquet and had seemed distressed that first evening at dining in his tweeds. Oddly enough, although Judy had grumbled audibly all over the house at the additional visitor, she had come after the first evening on which he had dressed to regard him with a look as though he were pleasing in her sight. Judy pleased was grotesque, where Judy displeased was



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## The House of the Secret

hideous. But there was something that touched Maeve, she did not know why, in the air with which Judy regarded the young soldier, as though she had been his nurse, or an old and faithful dependant of the family and he the young heir.

He was standing with his back to the fire, facing the lights of the great chandelier which was among the things Judy had furbished up. Half-a-dozen candles were lost amid its thousand drops, but they sufficed to show the admiration in his face. Also to show him goodly to look upon, so fresh and shining and wholesome as though the wind and the rains had washed him clean.

"By Jove!" he said. "By Jove!"

Maeve was all at once shyly aware of herself, seen in the many mirrors which were in all the panels of the long room. She looked away from him, from side to side. Everywhere she saw a tall, beautiful girl, with white bare shoulders, and arms flashing with jewels, and a golden head like a queen's in which a red star scintillated and shone.

"What do you think of my masquerade?" she asked, shyly.

"I am afraid of you," he answered. "You are not the girl who raced with me yesterday in the wood. I should not have dared to ask you to drive with me in that shandravan yesterday morning to see the meet."

His eyes were at once bold and shy; and Maeve felt oddly, delightfully embarrassed. For a second she stood where she was under the light of the chandelier. Then she came shyly nearer and stood, with one foot on the fender, by his side.

"It is a dress Miss O'Neill wore in the days of the



"WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY MASQUERADE?" SHE ASKED SHYLY."



## A Masquerade

Third Empire," she said, looking up at him with eyes shy now which had been fearless yesterday. "Does a frock make such a difference? My god-mother is putting on all her splendour too. We have not visitors so often, so we thought we would do our visitor honour."

He took up a dangling piece of fringe which hung from her shoulder, and held it against his lips for a moment. Then he remarked without special reference to anything that in a few months' time he would be grilling in India. Promotion came quickly in India if a man cared for his profession, and worked hard at it. He had had twenty-three years of idleness. He wondered if Maeve would remember him over five years' of absence.

Maeve was saved the necessity of an answer, for at the moment Miss O'Neill came in, very conscious of her own splendour as she clasped the emerald bracelets on her arms. Her perfectly plain gown of rose-pink satin had the air of having been to Court; and it had the effect of making more sadly apparent the ravages of age and sorrow in one who had once been beautiful.

Rearden, who was waiting at dinner, clumsily and awkwardly, scowled with an evil look as the ladies came in in their fine attire. His eyes glittered with anger. Stooping above Miss O'Neill while he took the cover from the beautiful old silver soup tureen, he whispered something to her ears in his guttural voice.

Godfrey Barron looked at him, and stirred uneasily. There was a familiarity in his air and the way he brought his twisted mouth into proximity with Miss O'Neill's cheek, which the young fellow resented.

It was not an evening when Miss O'Neill felt the

## The House of the Secret

ascendency which her servant had over her, or the excitement of dressing up had got into her head, for she turned to him sharply. "Why should the jewels be in the bank, Rearden?" she asked, in shrill indignation. "It is not a servant's business. My good man, if you would be good enough to attend to what is your business, it would be much better for yourself and for me."

The man muttered something about its not being safe to have such things in a lonely house, and was bidden sharply by Miss O'Neill not to interfere with things which did not concern him.

Looking up in amazement Godfrey Barron was struck by the coarse anger in the man's face. He had snatched away his mistress's soup-plate so roughly that a splash fell on her shoulder.

"Oh! la! la!" she cried. "You awkward wretch! You deserve to be dismissed for your stupidity."

But a little later she had forgotten all about it, and her manner to him was that of a great lady to an old and trusted servant.

"You should get rid of that fellow, Rearden," Godfrey Barron said on a sudden impulse when, later on in the drawing-room, he sat holding Miss O'Neill's skeins of silk while she wound them. "I beg your pardon, Miss O'Neill. I know it is an amazing piece of impertinence for me to suggest such a thing; but Rearden ought to go. I wish you would empower me to dismiss him. I distrust him very much."

"Dismiss Rearden!" cried Miss O'Neill, in amazement. "My dear boy, I know it is kindly meant—but, dismiss Rearden! You don't know what you're talking about. Why, Rearden is as faithful as a dog. I

## A Masquerade

acknowledge he has a rough manner. I have spoilt him perhaps. But I could not possibly do without Rearden."

"It would be so much nicer for you and Miss Standish," the young man persisted, "if you had good, decent servants about you. The place is so lonely. You might, perhaps, pension off this man and his sister, if you feel you must. Or, at least, add to the number of your servants. Let my mother help you if you can get no one in this neighbourhood. She will pick you treasures. Do let me write to my mother while I am here."

Miss O'Neill looked at him, narrowing her eyes as she did so, till there was just a cunning glint between the lids.

"You are very kind," she said, "and I am sure Lady Mary would do all she could for me, if I required her help. But, in the matter of old servants——"

She shrugged her shoulders affectedly; and the young man felt baffled. There was nothing more he could say. But he was not satisfied to leave Corney Rearden master of the situation at Chapel House all the same.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE JEWEL CASE

"Miss O'NEILL's men of business ought to know about it," Godfrey Barron said to Maeve next day. "The position is intolerable. That ugly ruffian seems to think that he commands the house."

"She has refused her lawyer," Maeve answered. "I suppose he still manages her affairs, but she does not see him. He is a Mr. Drummond, a partner in the firm of Drummond, Foster & Co."

"He ought to know how things are. I should like to feel that Rearden had got his marching orders before I join my regiment. I should feel safer about you. About Miss O'Neill, too," he added, as an afterthought.

Maeve felt that it was delightful to be a subject of concern to someone. It had been such a lonely interval between papa's death and the coming of this chivalrous, kind young soldier, who had brought such a delightful interest into her life.

"I shall be all right," she said. "Chapel is lonely, but it is not quite out of the world."

"I saw the dog stretched outside his mistress's door as I came up to bed last night. A pity he can't be in two places at once! I should like to think of Viper keeping guard over you when I am gone."

"I have heard him wander about in the night and sigh outside my door, before going back to his mistress's. I think he would like to divide himself between us.

## The Jewel Case

But Miss O'Neill, if there is any guarding to be done, requires it more than I do."

"Would you"—he looked at her eagerly—"would you have my Codger? He is an Irish Terrier, the best blood in the South of Ireland. I've been wondering what I should do with him. Do take him. He will help Viper to keep guard."

"You don't think the old dog would quarrel with him?"

"Not with a puppy like Codger. He is only a puppy—not a year old yet. Viper will teach him his duty. I wonder I didn't think of it before. I shall be happy about Codger if you have him, and happier about you for having Codger."

"Thank you very much," said Maeve, blushing for pleasure. "I should love to have him. Poor Viper!—I don't know how he got such a name. He seems gentle enough with those he's fond of."

"Just as well. I shall be glad to feel that you have Viper and Codger when I am far away."

He looked at her in a way that embarrassed her. He was always on the edge of saying something from which she felt inclined to run away while she desired to hear it.

"I believe you will find us just the same when you come back at the end of five years," she said.

He sighed and pulled at his budding moustache.

"It's a long time," he said, "and you are isolated here. Let me ask my mother to look after you. And I am sure Miss O'Neill's lawyers ought to know how things are going on."

Maeve looked at him as though she found it difficult to speak.

## The House of the Secret

"Thank you for all your thought of me," she said. "But I have to think of *her*. I feel on my honour towards her; I hate discussing her even with you; but I have thought and thought about it. You may be sure I thought when first I came here, when the house was terrible; it was so dirty and neglected. And Rearden and his sister were rude and insolent. But I have come to the conclusion that there are reasons why we can do nothing. There is some mystery which I am sure we ought not to drag to the light of day. Supposing we did, and harm were to befall her. I would never forgive myself. She is terribly afraid in her sane moments of the mad-house, or of something else. These are things I would speak of to no one but you. I have promised to stay with her. Life is quite tolerable here now as it did not look to be at the beginning. I come and go as I will. I make all the difference to her. I am sure it is what papa would have wished, that I should stay with her and be strong and silent. That was the ideal he brought me up with—to have courage and to do things without talking about them. I have plenty of courage. You don't know what it was like at first."

He looked down at her from some height.

"Yet you are only nineteen," he said, with a kind of tender compassion.

"Twenty my next birthday," she corrected him. "And older than my years because of the life I have led. When papa first left me alone in England, shaking with terror and loneliness, yet keeping a stiff upper lip, as he had bidden me, I was only seven, and I was dropped down at Cheltenham into a world of strangers. I seemed to leave my childhood behind me all at once.

## The Jewel Case

I was desolate for papa, but I never talked about it. I used to keep back my tears till the others were sleeping. One night the German governess who was in charge of the dormitory heard me sobbing in the darkness, and she came to me and carried me off to her own bed and comforted me. I was never quite so desolate again. She was kind, poor Fräulein."

"You poor little soul!" the boy said, with compassionate eyes for the child of long ago. "I am glad someone comforted you. I wish it might have been me."

"I will write and tell you all that goes on here," she said. "I am not without hopes of winning Judy. Poor Judy—she is so ugly. It must be terrible to be so ugly."

She had a thought of how terrible a thing it would be to look like Judy Rearden, set beyond love and lovers for ever. No wonder that one who looked so should be harsh and uncouth. Poor Judy!

"I trimmed a hat for Judy yesterday," she said. "I think she was grateful, though she objected to it as being 'too plain.' It was a white hat with a black ribbon and roses on it. I accepted Judy's opinion humbly and found something gayer to replace the black ribbon. She said she could go to church of a Sunday now. I really have hopes of winning Judy."

"Promise me that if you have any need of a friend you will go to my mother," he said. "I am most unwilling to leave you like this."

"Without your sword," she said, smiling.

"Without my sword," he answered seriously. "But," he went on hopefully, "I don't expect to go to India for some months yet. I will run down now and again to see how you get on. This is not my last visit."

## The House of the Secret

"Oh no," she assented, "this is not your last visit."

"I thought only to catch a glimpse of you," he said, with eyes that lingered on her face and would not leave it. "It was so good of Miss O'Neill to let me stay. I never hoped for anything so good."

"We are both on our honour to her," said Maeve, "not to do anything against her wishes, or that might bring her hurt or harm. It is by her goodness that I am here and you are here."

"Of course, we are on our honour," the young soldier assented.

"And I think I shall do wonders presently. Perhaps coax her out of her seclusion to some extent. She has grown very fond of me. She clings more to me every day. Think how lonely she was before I came! After all, what does it matter that Rearden is a disagreeable person? Old servants are often so, especially if they are jealous. What is there to be afraid of? He cannot help his looks. If he were not so ugly one would have no fear of him. Not that I fear him."

The young man made a movement as though he shook off some weight that could be felt though not seen.

"Why, I daresay you are right," he said. "And, of course, as you say, we are on our honour. It is only that . . . I am so anxious for you. . . . By the way, I went to see Mrs. Bourke again and promised to give her news of you. She said such an odd thing about Miss O'Neill. Of course, there could be no truth in it. She said there was a rumour twenty years ago, about the time she left Dublin, that she had married privately a man named Fitzgerald—of my own profession, I am sorry to say. He had been cashiered from his regiment. He was an uncommonly bad egg, a gambler, a

## The Jewel Case

defaulter—and worse things—a dozen years younger than her. Of course, it was not true. Every one knows Miss O'Neill. She had followed her own courses, done pretty well as she liked. She was sure to be the target for gossip.

"It could not have been true," said Maeve, with conviction.

"That there was such a man and that they were always together at one time appears to be true enough. I expect she found him out and sent him packing. He disappeared one fine day. There were plenty of reasons for his disappearance. Perhaps—the shock of finding him out made her . . . odd as she is, poor lady."

They were strolling through the wood at the back of the house while they talked. The boughs, almost bare now, stood black against a cold, bright sky. Drifts of fallen leaves were under their feet. Away and away stretched the tall tree-trunks in fairy aisles and passages. In the thick undergrowth there was a stirring of little unseen creatures. The robin sang his song, watching them bright-eyed. All the undergrowth was brilliant with hips and haws. It was going to be a hard winter, but the winter granary was full.

A shuffling step came behind them over the leaves crisp with frost.

They turned about. It was Judy Rearden who came. In the corner of her dirty apron she was carrying the yellow envelope of a telegram. She was panting and snorting as though after great exertion.

"I thought I'd ha' dropped when the lad from the post-office on wan o' them little wheely things came rollin' up to the door. 'Sure, 'tis news of a death at last,' said I. 'No, ma'am,' says the gorson, 'for quality

## The House of the Secret

sends them things for nothin' at all.' 'Tis a wonder they wouldn't have more to do with their money,' says I."

She stood with her hands on her broad hips, while Godfrey Barron tore open the telegram, surveying him and Maeve with a look like an amiable monster's.

"My mother will be in Dublin at six o'clock," he said. "I shall have to go by an afternoon train."

"Sure, that's bad news," said Judy, sympathetically.

"The young gentleman'll be wantin' his lunch, Miss Maeve. I'll have it on the table in a minute. It's bad being a hungry traveller."

Godfrey Barron looked at Maeve when she had gone.

"Never mind," he said. "It will be only for a few days. The mater cannot bear to be away from her household gods. She'll be talking of a train back before she puts her foot on the platform at the Kingsbridge. You think Miss O'Neill will let me come back again and finish my visit?"

"I am sure of it," said Maeve.

"I am glad Judy is friendly," he said, with an air of relief. "I see the change in her. To think it should have been accomplished by a hat-trimming."

"It may be Rearden, next," said Maeve, with a lightness assumed to hide the fact that her heart was suddenly heavy. "Although I am afraid I can't try the same methods with him."

"Not a flowered hat-ribbon?" said Godfrey Barron; and then the two laughed. They had laughed often within the last few days, for such little things. At the back of Maeve's mind there was something of a hurt and a grief; but it need not come into view yet. And he was coming back. Since he was coming back they

## The Jewel Case

need not think yet of the five years of absence with all their chances.

An hour later he was gone, and the silent house had a strange feeling of desolation. The health and sanity seemed to have gone with him.

Maeve felt as though she could not bear the great house with its darkening shadows. She left Miss O'Neill at her embroidery frame and went out for a brisk walk in the gathering twilight, with the dog for her companion. She tried to fill her mind with pleasant thoughts. It was so good, this young chivalrous devotion which had come into her life. He was coming back; and even when he must go there would be his letters. Maeve had few correspondents. The letters from Godfrey Barron would be a great event in her life—something to look forward to to cheer the long five years.

It was a sad evening. The bright day had gone down greyly; and a lonely wind travelled in from the bog and soughed in the high tree tops.

Coming in she found Miss O'Neill sitting with her cheek in her hand at a dying fire, her embroidery-frame put aside for want of light. She replenished the fire and rang for lamps and the tea, reproaching herself for having left the lonely woman to sad thoughts.

"I am sorry your friend has gone, Maeve," she said. "He is a very pleasant young gentleman. Takes after his father more than after Lady Mary. I shall be glad when he comes back. One misses the society of gentlemen about the house."

"Yes, it will be nice when he comes back," Maeve assented.

"You've been a very good child to me, Maeve, a very

## The House of the Secret

good child," her god-mother went on dreamily. "I have been thinking that I should like to give you a present. I have so many pretty things which you have not seen. You must look at my trinkets. It will pass the afternoon. I have some pretty things suitable for a child like you rather than a woman like myself. The grand style always suited me, even when I was your age."

Maeve's eyes sparkled. What girl's eye would not, its owner hearing of a jewel?

"It must be something very little and inexpensive, god-mother," she began, shyly.

"At your age you would not of course, wear expensive jewellery," Miss O'Neill said with a considering eye. "You are too young for the rubies, but they shall be yours if you stay with me and are a good child. I do not care what Rearden says. Impertinence! As though a lady could not give a present of jewellery without a servant interfering. Run upstairs, Maeve, my dear. In my wardrobe you will find a locked jewel-case. Bring it to me and we will amuse ourselves looking over the things."

When Maeve returned the tea was on the table. She set down the heavy box and poured out the tea. When they had finished she rang for Judy Rearden to remove the tea-tray. When it had been taken away she sat down by the lamp-lit table to look at the jewels. It was a good diversion for the afternoon, much better than reading, for when one reads one sometimes thinks while pretending to follow the lines of print.

Miss O'Neill opened the heavy old case and took out tray after tray with an air of enjoyment. The contents sparkled in the lamplight, made a constellation against

## The Jewel Case

the dark table-cloth. There were all manner of things, valuable, little valuable, scarce valuable at all. But Maeve glanced indifferently at the *parures* of diamonds and emeralds and rubies, and went on with cries of delight to the delicious old-fashioned things, the brooches, and necklets, and rings, and bracelets, set with seed pearls, with topaz and amethysts, to the pieces of old paste exquisite in design.

Miss O'Neill watched her with an air of enjoyment.

"Foolish child!" she said. "Some of those things you are hanging over have little intrinsic value. The stones are hardly precious. Yet you are right. The workmanship is excellent. I like your barbaric ornaments of red Indian gold; but this will be better suited to your girlhood."

She picked out a chain of seed-pearls with a pendant of amethyst set in a little twist of gold, surrounded by seed-pearls, and clasped it about Maeve's neck.

"That is for being a good child," she said.

Maeve blushed with pleasure, and with a sudden impulsiveness kissed her god-mother's hand.

"How lovely!" she cried. "But isn't it too good for me? I wish papa could have seen it."

There was a stir outside the door and with a sudden air of panic Miss O'Neill swept the trays together. For a second she seemed to listen with an intensity which showed itself in her face. Then she began to put the things back hastily.

"Take away the necklace, dear," she said, "and keep it safely. I wouldn't wear it. After all, your Indian things are quite good enough for our solitude."

She still kept an alarmed eye on the door while she hastily restored the trays to their places.

## The House of the Secret

Suddenly the door was flung open violently, and Corney Rearden came in. His face was a darker red than usual. A smell of coarse spirits came in with him.

Miss O'Neill uttered a faint cry as he advanced with a threatening air.

"You're givin' away what doesn't belong to ye," he said. "Can't I turn my back but what ye're gettin' into mischief?"

With a bang of his fist on the table he swept the jewel-case on to the floor. Maeve stood up between him and Miss O'Neill, conscious of nothing but an intense indignation.

"How dare you!" — she began.

But there was a howl from Corney Rearden. Viper, lying forgotten under the table, had pinned him by the leg.

## CHAPTER X

### IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT

CORNEY REARDEN had made his escape muttering vows of vengeance against the dog. Miss O'Neill sat huddled over the fire, talking and sobbing to herself; while Maeve in hot indignation knelt on the floor, picking up the pretty things which had rolled in all directions.

The old jewel-case had come to pieces from the fall. The back had fallen out, revealing a hidden place in the lid of the box. She put it together with fingers that trembled with anger. Miss O'Neill's alarm was piteous to see. She was muttering to herself that Rearden would never forgive her; and what was going to become of her? She didn't know why Viper had been so sharp with him. There was some one else Viper had always hated, but that was long ago; she forgot about it now. Viper was nearly always kind to her friends.

The old dog lay along the hearthrug, sighing as though in sympathy with his mistress's trouble, and turning a wistful eye upon her.

"Rearden will poison Viper, I'm sure he will," Miss O'Neill went on. "What dog was it he poisoned long ago? It couldn't have been Viper. Perhaps it was Viper's mother. They called her Venom. Venom and Viper. I forget between them. They were always

## The House of the Secret

fond of and faithful to me. I was kneeling beside Viper ; no, it was Venom, when she died, and her last look was for me. There was some one she could not bear."

"Dear," said Maeve, kneeling on the carpet, "get rid of Rearden. A man who would poison a dog from motives of revenge would poison a human being. He is an intolerable wretch."

Miss O'Neill began to cry softly.

"Don't you see, Maeve, I can't get rid of him?" she whimpered. "He is my Old Man of the Sea. He will hang round my neck till I am dead."

"Why should he? I believe he is terrorising you needlessly. Let me send for the police if you are afraid of him, and let them stay while I get rid of him. You need do nothing. Leave it all to me!"

"Police!" Miss O'Neill turned a scared face upon her. "Who was talking of police? There is no one here who need be afraid of the police. What are you talking about, Maeve?"

Maeve jumped up and took the poor old distraught head to her breast.

"If you would only let me act for you," she said.

"This man, Corney Rearden, has been frightening you to death. I am sure, quite sure, that you have no reason to fear him, or anything he can do. Let me deal with him; or let Mr. Barron deal with him when he comes back."

But Miss O'Neill pushed her away with an air of offence. Her moods shifted so that there was no knowing where one might find her from one minute to another.

"Now you are talking nonsense, Maeve," she said.

## In the Silence of the Night

“One can't dismiss old servants like that. I am very sorry that Viper should have bitten Corney. I must give him a handsome present to make up. To be sure, it would be absurd that you, or an acquaintance of yesterday like Mr. Barron, should dictate to me about whether I should retain or dismiss my servants.”

There was nothing for Maeve to do but to mutter an apology, and go on with her task of picking up the jewels and restoring them to their places.

It was finished at last, and the case locked and put away.

By this time Miss O'Neill had forgotten both her terror and her offence. She talked quite cheerfully to Maeve of the great days long ago. All her talk was of her youth, her youth and beauty and triumphs, her many lovers. Sometimes Walter Standish was mentioned and Maeve would listen eagerly. But, of course, it was her grandfather, not her father who was spoken of. Miss O'Neill searched for and found a miniature of Walter Standish the elder—a ruddy, pleasant-faced young gentleman in a scarlet hunting-coat and black velvet cap. Maeve held it in her hand, and looked long at it. She could see something of papa in the wholesome face.

The dances, the drives, the picnics, the hunting-days of forty years ago were in the old woman's disjointed talk.

“I remember at the last dances I went to,” she said, dreamily, “that I thought more of the dead than the living. I did not sit out a single dance, and the girls and their mothers scowled at me. But I was thinking of all the fine fellows that were dead and gone with whom I had danced. It's a pity not to give it up

## The House of the Secret

before you come to that, Maeve, before you come to dancing with ghosts instead of the living. It made me think of settling in life. Why, some of the girls who scowled at me had sat on my knee when they were babies. And I was the belle of the ball for all that—the belle of the ball, someone said. I wore a flowered silk muslin flounced to the waist—they were all the rage—and white roses in my hair. And someone said I was the belle of the ball.”

Judy Rearden coming in to replenish the fire leant down to Maeve.

“I’d keep th’ ould dog out of Corney’s way for a bit,” she whispered. “He says he’ll kill him if he gets a chance at him. He’s been takin’ a drop an’ it does always make a brute of him. I’ll try to keep him out of your way this evening, miss. Maybe to-morrow when the drink’s off him he’ll be sorry.”

“Thank you, Judy,” Maeve said, oddly touched by the kind intention apparent in the woman’s warning.

They saw no more of Corney Rearden that evening, and Miss O’Neill seemed to have forgotten about him and his violence.

But some time in the night Maeve was wakened out of a deep sleep to find Miss O’Neill standing by her bed. She was in her nightdress, with her long, grey hair falling about her shoulders. The night was very cold, and her teeth chattered while she spoke.

“I’ve lost something, Maeve, I’ve lost something,” she said. “It was in the little secret place at the back of the jewel-case. There was a piece of paper, and there was a ring. They must be found, Maeve. How do I know but that they may have fallen in some rat-hole, and be beyond recovery now?”

## In the Silence of the Night

"Get in here," said Maeve, quietly. "You will die of a chill if you don't. Why, how cold you are! I will look for the ring."

She slipped out of bed and pushed the trembling figure into her warm place, tucking her in comfortably. Then she found her own dressing-gown and slippers. There was moonlight in the room broad enough to see by, but she lit the candles in the sconces on the dressing-table. She glanced at the fire which Judy Rearden had set in the grate yesterday, and striking a match stuck it between the bars of the grate.

"You are frozen," she said, as the shivering and shaking of the figure in the bed continued unabated.

"I have been searching for the ring."

"In your nightgown. What madness a night like this! I shall have to get you something to stop the chattering of your teeth. Why didn't you come to me first?"

"Hurry, Maeve, hurry! Find me my ring. I am in suffering till you do. And the paper. Be sure to find the paper, Maeve."

"I shall find both. They have only fallen behind something."

Carrying a candle in her hand she went down the stairs. The dog, who had followed Miss O'Neill into Maeve's room, went with her. She wanted some milk and a saucepan from the kitchen in which to warm it. Dare she explore these regions, unvisited since the day of her arrival, alone?

To be sure, she had the dog. Her candle cast immense grotesque shadows on the walls and ceiling of the staircase as she went down. She said to herself that she would *not* be afraid. She must get something

## The House of the Secret

to counteract the effects of the chill Miss O'Neill had evidently taken. A great tenderness and compassion for the poor lonely old soul filled her heart. What were the silence and shadows of the house as compared with what was her obvious duty?

In the hall a stertorous breathing reached her ears. It came up from the kitchens through the open door at the head of the staircase. Plainly down there Rearden was sleeping off the effects of his potations.

She had to force herself to go down, refusing to listen to the terror that assailed her. Her heart thumped so in her ears as she went down the stone steps that she could hear nothing but that. She took the dog by the collar, quieting him with low whispers lest he should waken the sleeper.

Viper seemed to understand, for when they entered the first kitchen he padded softly and slowly beside her although his enemy seated by the kitchen-table slept an ignoble sleep, his mouth open, his head fallen to one side, his loud snoring filling the place with discordant sound.

Maeve muttered a prayer to herself as she passed him, and thanked Heaven mentally for the protection of the dog. If the man were to awake, with the effects of the drink still upon him, the results might be very unpleasant. All of a sudden she felt the loneliness of the great house, so far away from everyone, only a mad woman and a rough servant in the house beside herself; and that brutal creature there, more ugly and distorted than in his waking moments, muttering in his drunken sleep. She thanked Heaven for the dog as she hastened through the kitchen to the place beyond.

She had all she could do to keep a blind panic from

## In the Silence of the Night

seizing her. She found the saucepan and a jug of milk : and now she had to repress the man. Her hands were overfull, and as she passed him the candlestick fell with a clatter, and she was left in darkness.

Rearden woke up with a curse and a shout to know who was there. Still holding on to her saucepan and the milk she stumbled up the staircase, much impeded by her trailing gown, which got under her feet.

She heard a lurch after her, and Rearden's heavy foot on the stone stairs behind her. The dog had preceded her. She had a wild thought that the man might catch her, and drag her back into the darkness, shutting her off from her one friend. There was a glimmer of light from the door at the head of the staircase.

Almost at the top she stumbled, and gave herself up for lost. A cry strangled in her throat. If he touched her she did not know how she was going to endure it. But at the moment when she closed her eyes, half-fainting, she heard the man behind her fall heavily. With a sudden wildness of terror she sprang through the open doorway and closed it after her, holding it in place with her knee while she set down her saucepan and turned the key in the door.

In the cellaret of the sideboard she found some brandy, and went on upstairs with knees that trembled and shook. Her impulse was to lock herself away in her bedroom till daylight should come, the slow daylight that was not due these many hours yet. She had to remind herself over and over again of the spirit and courage papa had always tried to put into his little daughter. She thought of Godfrey Barron and his sword. If only he were near her now! She sent up a voiceless prayer for courage, and found strength to

## The House of the Secret

answer Miss O'Neill quietly when she asked eagerly if the ring and the paper had been found.

"I am going to give you a hot drink first," she answered. "Afterwards I shall find what you have lost."

Fortunately the fire had burnt up brightly, and she was able to warm the milk. The deadly cold was passing from the room before the genial influence of the fire.

She added a little brandy to the hot milk, and made Miss O'Neill drink it before she left her. She locked the door behind her as she went out, with an idea that Rearden might get into the house by some other way and terrify her helpless charge. She wanted the dog to be with her, so she could not leave him.

The intense cold of the house pierced through her as she made her second expedition, and her teeth chattered with cold or fear. The wind blew through all the crevices and crannies of the old house, and suggested an open window, or windows, somewhere. Supposing he were lying in wait for her! Well, she had the dog, the friend that Heaven had given her. Without the dog she could hardly have brought herself to face the loneliness and darkness of the house.

In the drawing-room she saw herself and her uplifted candle reflected in many mirrors, as she had seen that radiant vision the evening Godfrey Barron's eyes had told her she was beautiful. It was eerie, seeing so many tall, white girls holding a lighted candle above their heads. She could not lock herself in, for the key had disappeared; and she glanced fearfully at the tall leather screens behind which something might be lurking, at the shadows in the corners, at the long black spaces of the unshuttered windows.

## In the Silence of the Night

Down on her hands and knees she went to seek what she had come to find. The sooner it was done the sooner over, and she could return to the light and warmth above.

She searched with a quiet and desperate hurry, listening all the time like a hare. She found half-a-dozen things, trinkets which they had overlooked before, which had rolled and slid away into corners—nothing that could be what she searched for.

But at last something—held in the dangling fringe of a tablecloth, a piece of paper yellowed with age caught her eye. She seized on it eagerly, opened it, and spread it out to make sure it was what she sought. She merely glanced at the paper. It was a certificate of marriage torn in two, and then fastened together again with gummed paper. It contained something—a bit of battered and ragged gold.

She held it on her palm. Why, it was a wedding-ring, battered and crushed almost out of recognition, dented as though a heel had been set on it sharply—but a wedding-ring unmistakably.

## CHAPTER XI

### LOVERS' PARTING

SHE was unlocking the bedroom door when she heard a crash of glass below.

She was inside in a breathless moment and heard the dog settle himself with a sigh on the mat.

"You have found the ring and the paper, Maeve," Miss O'Neill said, sitting up in bed.

"Yes, I have found them; they are here."

The old woman seized them eagerly.

"They are all I have, Maeve, all I have," she said, beginning to weep. "Never were generosity and faith so ill-requited. Let me have the candle till I see if they are all right."

She examined the things eagerly by the light of the candle which Maeve held to her.

"Yes, they are all right," she said with a sigh of relief. "You did not read this paper, did you?"

"Only the heading of it."

Maeve was listening with the ears of a hare to the dog growling and a heavy foot coming up the stairs. It paused, turned, and went down again.

"You are not a girl to pry into secrets," Miss O'Neill went on. "You are a proud, honourable girl. I can trust you. I should never like my secrets pried into. But I shall let you see where I keep these, Maeve. Some day, when I am dead, you will produce them. They will be my justification."

## Lovers' Parting

"I don't believe there is anything to justify," said Maeve.

The look of cunning which Maeve had observed before, came into the old woman's eyes.

"Never mind that, Maeve," she said. "Only keep my secrets, and you will have no reason to be sorry. And don't leave me, child. Perhaps one of these days I may tell you to go. Corney Rearden does not like you, Maeve, and he is a hard taskmaster. If I tell you to go you will know that it is he who is speaking, not I. Don't leave me."

"Why should you let him bully you?" Maeve asked, but knew even while she asked the futility of the question. "You ought to be protected from him. Why should not your friends interfere?"

Miss O'Neill caught her by the wrist.

"Listen, Maeve," she said; "if you were to bring others into the matter you would kill me." She shook like one in an ague. "Promise you will stay with me and not interfere. You don't know what you are talking about, child. You will never be sorry if you keep quiet and silent. Promise me you will not bring other people into it."

"I promise," said Maeve; and the terror in Miss O'Neill's eyes slowly grew less and quietened.

All that was a week ago; and Maeve had not forgotten her terrors of that night: yet her common-sense had come to her aid, and she was no longer terrified. The broken pane in the half-glass door at the head of the stairs showed how Rearden had got through that night. But the man himself had been quieter than usual since. Maeve had not spoken to him, had barely glanced at him. He showed himself very little, leaving his sister to do most of the upstairs work.

## The House of the Secret

Maeve was more and more convinced that there was a real mystery at the heart of Miss O'Neill's life, a mystery which she dared not assist in bringing to the light. She did not doubt now the truth of the story about her marriage. The broken ring and the torn certificate had proved to her that the marriage was no myth. But she was sure of one thing, that whatever the secret was, it was not a guilty one where Miss O'Neill herself was concerned. There was something about her which forbade the idea of guilt. Perhaps it was the madness, which at times made her oddly innocent like an old child. The madness in itself was something which held the girl to her bond. If she were to bring in the outside world the dominance of Corney Rearden might indeed be ended. But that would be small comfort to her if it meant her poor old friend's being immured till she died.

All that was a week ago, and she had had three precious ill-spelt scrawls from her lover, epistles which explained how it was that a gallant, hard-riding lad, cut out by Nature for a soldier, had had difficulty in scraping through his exams. Maeve only smiled tenderly over the mis-spellings, and carried the letters in her bosom; placed them under her pillow at night where she could reach out and touch them if she should feel frightened—did twenty foolish, innocent things which proved her just as young as her years.

He was on fire to come back. You could see that in his letters, although they were guarded—as to the beginning at least. All the world might have read the "Dear Miss Standish" of the beginning; all the world might not have read the "yours till death" of the signature. Now and again the ardour looked out of a

## Lovers' Parting

line as though against the writer's will and judgment. Those were the lines which Maeve read over and over to herself.

He was coming back as soon as ever the mater would let him go. He would have a few days at Chapel before going down to Deelish for a bit before he joined his regiment at Aldershot. Meanwhile, the mater was enjoying unexpectedly the Dublin gaieties and requiring his attendance here, there and everywhere. But he was longing to be free and to return to Chapel.

"If there should be a shindy in India, as seems likely," he wrote in his last letter, "we may be sent out sooner than we are due to go; but probably it will come to nothing." Maeve did not feel inclined to smile over that "probably."

She was perturbed within herself as to just how much silence she would keep with him, remembering her promise to Miss O'Neill, remembering, too, with a thrill of delight, his solicitude for her which would never be satisfied to leave her exposed to loneliness and fear. She would have liked to tell him everything; but it was something she did not dare to do lest he should slash through the whole web of secrets and mystery as though with his bright sword and do harm.

She must stand alone, she said to herself; she must be strong enough to stand alone and protect the helpless creature who clung to her. There would be the dogs—Codger had arrived, the wildest and merriest of puppies, and Viper had adopted him with an amiability none would have expected of his looks or his name. She would have the dogs, and:

God's in His Heaven;  
All's right with the world,

## The House of the Secret

she said to herself in the darkness of the night when the enormous tree outside her window, which, bent by the west wind since it was a sapling, leant almost against the house, beat its boughs together in the storm, and flung itself hither and thither.

God's in His Heaven ;  
All's right with the world.

To Maeve's fervent belief the night was not so lonely that there was not room in it for the angels of God and the guardianship of God.

There had been much wind, but this night of great darkness it had fallen and the boughs were quiet. She was used to the twigs snapping against her window on even the quietest night.

On this night while she lay in bed the tapping was unusually insistent. She had just become aware of the fact when she heard her own name called softly and quietly.

At first she thought it must be a simple delusion ; but there it was again—

“Maeve!” clearly and distinctly.

She jumped out of bed with a quickly-beating heart and ran to the window.

There was someone outside it on the great limb of the tree which ran just below the window.

Before she opened the window she got into her white woollen dressing-gown. She had not the faintest doubt of who was there. Her pulses were throbbing wildly. She could hardly fasten the garment, her hands shook so. Why had he come like this?

“Dearest!”

## Lovers' Parting

She leant out, and Godfrey Barron's arms took her to his breast.

"Dearest! Forgive me for coming like this. I could not help it. I've got my marching orders. It was my only chance to . . . see you. I caught the night mail and have walked from the station. I have just half-an-hour in which to tell you that I love you before I must catch the morning mail up. I go by the morning express from the North Wall. There is fighting in India, and we are wanted. I was telegraphed for late this evening."

They clung together in the darkness, her arms about his neck and her long hair falling over his face.

"I hated to come this way, Maeve," he said; "but it was our only chance. I meant to have gone away without saying anything—a poor beggar of a foot soldier. I sha'n't be able to marry for years. But, after all, I couldn't go without telling you, without hearing you say that you loved me."

"Oh, you know, you know," she whispered, meeting his kisses.

"You are not cold?" he said, smoothing back her hair.

"The night is bitterly cold, though I do not feel it."

"Nor I. It is like a night of summer now you are here. Are you safe on that branch? Supposing it were to break with you?"

"No fear! It is as thick as a tree-trunk. Now I come to think of it, you must keep this window closed at night. The tree is like a staircase."

"I know. But why should I be afraid? I am glad it has brought you to me. No one else will discover it."

He strained her to his breast.

"Now that I must leave you I am full of irrational

## The House of the Secret

fears. This lonely house, the poor mad lady and the mysteries of it all. That brute Rearden! My darling, I wish there were time to take you with me. It is agony to feel that you may need me and I be far away."

There was a shrill bark from Codger, who was on guard at Maeve's door. Leaning back into the room she was almost certain she heard a movement in the corridor outside her door. She put a finger on her lover's lips.

"Hush!" she whispered. "I think there is someone about. Hush!"

For a few seconds they listened, and there was nothing more. The moon had gone behind a cloud, and an intense darkness enfolded them. It was time to say farewell.

They clung to each other in an innocent passion of grief that was half rapture because they knew themselves beloved, because the silence had been broken.

"It will not be so long," she said, "five years. It will pass quickly. And there will be your letters."

"You will be twenty-four when I come back, and I shall be twenty-eight. For five years other people will see you and I shall not. I loved you before ever I spoke to you. Maeve, Maeve, how am I going to leave you? Do you feel how my heart is beating?"

She did indeed feel it against her own, in great throbs that half-frightened her.

"Quiet, quiet!" she whispered. "You must not feel like that. Why, I shall be here waiting for you in this solitude. No one will see me. I shall see no one."

"You may see someone," he said, jealously. "You

## Lovers' Parting

may see someone and find out that you care for him more than for me."

"Oh, no, I shall not," she said. "But you; you will see so many girls. It is I who have cause to be afraid; but I am not. The five years will pass quickly."

"I may die," he said, almost roughly. "And then you would marry someone else."

So they whispered their lovers' fears and pains to each other till the striking of a clock from a distant church tower warned him that he must be going.

"I must go, Maeve," he said. "I must go and not look back, else I shall never be able to go. For five years—I commit you to God, my darling."

"And I commit you."

"If anything should happen that would permit it you would come out to me? Five years! How am I going to endure it?"

"If I am free to come, I will come," she said, with a thought of the lonely and forsaken woman to whom it seemed to her she had been sent by God. "This is my post of duty, dear. Being a soldier, you will understand."

He pressed her hard to his breast. Then he began to descend the tree, while she leant out of the window and extended her arms to him. It was all over—and she could not bear him to go without another kiss, with all the chances and changes of the five years before them.

Once he came back, but only once.

"Don't ask me to come back again, darling," he almost sobbed. "You know I must go. I shall miss my train. Help me!"

## The House of the Secret

All the womanliness in her rose to the appeal. She was quiet, watching him as he swung easily from bough to bough. Now he was on the ground. He looked up at her for a second, and his face was white in the moonlight. Then he set off running fast till the night swallowed him up.

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ight

## CHAPTER XII

### A MAN'S SHADOW

MECHANICALLY Maeve closed the window, and with a memory of what he had said to her barred and shuttered it.

It had not occurred to her before how easy it would have been to climb to her window by the tree, while she lay asleep, if any one hated her and wished to hurt or injure her. Now it was almost with a sense of fright that she secured the last bolt. To be sure there was nothing, nothing. Yet how often she had lain asleep there in the great curtained bed, when anyone so easily might come upon her and kill her in her sleep!

The room had three windows, so she could spare that one against which the tree leant. It was almost by her bed-head, and the moon looking through it had often fallen on her face. There was another window on the same side of the room, but further down, and quite beyond approach by the tree. Before returning to bed she went and looked out. Over there was the orchard wall, with the gnarled boughs showing above it and through the many gaps in it. She was almost certain she saw something stir there; but she could not be sure for the shadows.

Behind her curtain she watched. Beyond the deep shade cast by the orchard wall was a white stretch of moonlight. Suddenly on it was projected a shadow,

## The House of the Secret

grotesque and threatening—*the shadow of a man*. Only for a second; then it was gone; it might have been only imagination. Nothing stirred. There was not a sound but the beating of the girl's own heart.

With a sudden panic-stricken desire for companionship she opened her door quietly, and the puppy came frisking in, licking her bare feet, and fawning upon her without making a sound. Suddenly she was conscious that she was chilled to the bone, miserable, terrified, trembling. And it wanted so many hours yet to daylight.

She got into bed with the puppy in her arms and the soft warm contact made her feel less alone. She said her prayers with chattering teeth, repeating over and over to herself a rhyme of her childhood :

Four great angels round my bed,  
Two great angels at my head,  
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John,  
Keep the bed that I lie on.

And presently she fell asleep with the tears on her cheeks.

She awoke next morning with a sense that already the five years had begun, and with an uplifted heart of courage to meet them. While she dressed she did sums childishly; so many years, so many months, so many weeks, so many days, so many hours. Why, the ticking clock was carrying them away already. Soon he would be gone; he would have his face turned to the East and away from her. He would be going steadily away from her for some twenty or thirty days to come. After that distance could do no worse, and he would be looking steadily towards her, towards the ending of the five years. Already six hours of their absence from each

## A Man's Shadow

other was over. She thought of the nights when she would sleep through eight or nine hours of the gulf between them. Five years was a stretch of time not to be thought of without terror. Yet it would pass; already it was running out. Could not one be brave since Time was passing, and commit one's cares and anxieties to the good God?

At Miss Seeley's the school-girls had had their romantic dreams and happenings which had filled Maeve with wonder and something like contempt. There was a drawing-master, Mr. Schofield, who had dark eyes and a little silky moustache and colour in his cheeks, and the girls had raved about him. Maeve could not understand. She thought Mr. Schofield was rather like the wax gentleman in the hairdresser's shop. She said she preferred the Signor, who gave the elder girls lessons on the piano, who was old and snuffy, and very irascible, rapping their fingers with his long pointer when they were stupid, and sometimes even snatching the music from the stand and flinging it in their faces.

She had no sympathy with the young persons who were always seeking romantic adventures. She used to think in those days that she would never care for anyone but papa; that she would look after papa when he could retire and come home to live in England. They would be exquisitely happy together in a country cottage, surrounded by pets, and all sorts of creatures, with an old-fashioned garden and a couple of horses to ride, and plenty of novels to read and a piano on which to play to papa in the evenings. Such a lot would be bliss enough.

She had foretaste of it in the weeks they spent

## The House of the Secret

together every year. But then the sands were always running out, always running out; and the parting imminent. In the dream-future she and papa would be together for years and years, and when the end came, why, if she prayed very hard, the end might come for both of them together.

It had been her dream which she had kept in a jealous sacredness to herself, lest others should not understand it. It would have seemed humdrum, she knew, to Rosamond Jefferson, who wanted to marry a glorious Guardsman; to Stella Daubeny, who would go on the stage, be a second Mary Anderson, and finally marry a Duke. But how lonely she had been for her dream when she had lost it! There had seemed nothing worth doing, nothing worth planning for, any more.

And then Godfrey had come, a mere honest, rather plain, wholesome, chivalrous young soldier, and the face of her desolate world had been changed. In her dreams and quiet communings, and she had many hours of such in her life of isolation from her fellows, she used to refer the matter to her father.

"You would have liked him, my dear," she would say, half aloud. It was a habit which grew upon her in her solitude. "You always liked people to be frank and simple and brave, and he had all those. Much more to me, my dear, to your little daughter, whom he would guard with his life from the smallest hurt or harm."

Indeed, she thought of Godfrey Barron as a St. Michael, a St. George, transfiguring his simple and comely youth with the eyes of her love and the poetry of her unspoilt imagination.

The milestones of his journey away from her were

## A Man's Shadow

punctuated by his gifts. From London came the little engagement ring, very modest and simple, of pearls and diamonds. Also there came a tiny pistol, a pretty thing like a toy, but a very serviceable weapon.

"You must practice firing it in the wood," he wrote, "till you are expert. Take care not to hurt yourself, my beauty. I shall feel happier [he spelt it hapier] knowing you are not defenceless in that lonely place. I am glad you have the dogs. So Codger is learning to growl and bark. He will take care of you when poor old Viper is gone."

From Malta there came a few ornaments in silver filigree, and some little bits of lace. From every port he sent her some little gift accompanying his letters, and she loved him for his young generosity.

Miss O'Neill noticed on one of her better days that Maeve had a very regular correspondent, and, hearing who it was, was interested in the love affair which she suspected till she forgot all about it.

As the winter passed her good days grew fewer and fewer. She seemed to pass more and more within the veil of her delusions, to get further and further from the life around her.

"She gets madder every day," said Rearden, nodding his head towards the fantastic figure Miss O'Neill presented. She had come down to breakfast in a flowered silk muslin, with short sleeves, and a wreath of roses in her hair. It was February now, and mild, wild weather. Every night a storm sprang up about sundown and cried around the house; every morning it was gone: and there was a south wind when there was not a calm. Maeve had run to fetch a shawl to wrap about her at the breakfast table; but she had

## The House of the Secret

refused it, saying that she found the weather uncomfortably warm.

"She gets madder every day," the man said, coming into the drawing-room and addressing Maeve, without any lowering of his voice.

"Hush!" she said, indignantly, "How dare you speak so of your mistress!"

"As for dare," he returned, leaning with insolent carelessness by the mantelpiece, his elbow propped upon it, "I'd dare more nor that. But the divil a word she hears. Th' ould head of her's wanderin'."

Maeve turned away from him haughtily. She had grown accustomed to the man's strange insolent ways and had ceased to be alarmed by them. Life was more endurable for her now since Judy Rearden had become her devoted slave.

"Let us go out," she said, approaching Miss O'Neill. "It is such a beautiful fresh morning. Do you hear the blackbirds and thrushes? And there is such a soft wind. The snowdrops are popping up in ail the shrubberies. It is a shame to be in the house on such a day."

Miss O'Neill was surrounded by a mass of scraps of finery, flowers, feathers, bits of tulle and lace and ribbon, all manner of things, with which she was trimming a very mad looking hat.

"I think I should like a turban with a Paradise plume, Maeve," she said. "They are sure to be worn again this year. Is it really true that they are wearing the crinoline in Paris?"

"I tould ye th' ould head of her was wool-gatherin'," muttered Rearden from the door. "She doesn't hear the half of what's said to her now. I wonder ye'd be

## A Man's Shadow

stayin' in it where ye aren't wanted. 'Tis a keeper she ought to be havin'."

Maeve saw a sudden horror come into Miss O'Neill's expression.

"Never mind him, dear," she said, putting a reassuring hand on the thin arm in its almost transparent sleeve. "He is vulgar and insolent."

"It isn't true, Maeve?" Miss O'Neill whispered with dilated eyes, gazing at the door which had closed behind Rearden. "I'm not so mad as all that, am I? Sometimes I think it is Rearden himself who is mad. And bad; he is very bad to me who was always kind to him. No one would have tolerated him but me. You won't have a keeper here, Maeve?"

"What nonsense!" Maeve put a fond, protecting arm about her. "No, indeed. You have me here to take care of you, and you need never fear anything of that sort. Indeed, you need not."

Miss O'Neill clung to her.

"I've had a great deal of trouble, Maeve," she said, in a whisper; "quite enough to make any woman a little queer in her head. I think there have been times when I've forgotten things, but it has only been because of my sorrows. I am really not half so mad as I may appear."

"Forget about it," Maeve said. "Come out in the wood and hear the birds. It will do you good. Let me find a shawl for you."

She wrapped her up in a soft Indian shawl, and they spent the morning out of doors together. Miss O'Neill seemed to have collected her rambling wits somewhat and talked quite rationally.

"I don't know how long it is," she said, "since I

## The House of the Secret

have seen the snowdrops come up in the wood. I might as well have been in prison these many years."

"Ah! well, you are out of prison now," said Maeve.

Miss O'Neill put a hand on her arm, and gripped it tightly.

"Don't let us talk about prisons, Maeve," she said. "It is an ill-omened word. Someone threatened me with prison once, threatened to have me locked up for the rest of my life. It must have been Rearden, I think. Yet what could I have done that would make them send me to prison? I have always been more sinned against than sinning."

"It was an idle and cruel threat," Maeve said, indignantly. "I wish you could throw off whatever hold the man has over you, and be free to come and go amongst your fellow-men as you ought to. I wish I knew whether—whether——" she paused in embarrassment, "whether you need purchase his silence by tolerating his insolence or not."

Miss O'Neill looked about her fearfully, as though spies might lurk in the wood. But the trees were naked. There was a sparse undergrowth, and through the slender upstanding trunks the extent of the wood was visible even to its edge. There was no covert for anything bigger than a hare or a rabbit.

"Some day I will tell you, Maeve, all I remember," Miss O'Neill said, hurriedly. "I don't like to talk of it. I must keep a clear head if I can, and it makes my head queer even to think about it. Only always think of me, Maeve, as more sinned against than sinning. I was proud and self-indulgent in the old days when I was beautiful. I hurt others who loved me. I was too

## A Man's Shadow

fond of the world, but, indeed, I was punished beyond my deserts."

Maeve said nothing, only stroked the restless and trembling hand that fluttered nervously on Miss O'Neill's knee.

"You are a good child, Maeve," the old lady said, gratefully. "If I had had a child of my own—I thank God I have not a child of my own!"—she put in with sudden passion—"I should have liked her to be like you."

Suddenly over her face came the look of cunning which it hurt Maeve's generous young heart to see. It had such a suggestion of a helpless creature who has learnt to be cunning in self-defence. In the pictures of Henrietta O'Neill in her youth and prime, in papa's memory of her, faithfully transmitted to his daughter, there was no cunning, any more than there was fear. That Henrietta O'Neill would have erred on the side of a too great frankness.

"Rearden goes to Moate Fair to-morrow to sell some sheep," she went on, with the furtive gaze about her, as though she looked for spies and listeners down the slender arcades of the wood. "I'm sure I don't know what he does with my property. He gives me no account. I want to write a letter, Maeve, this afternoon, and I want you to go out yourself and post it. No one but you must post it. Let us go in now and do it. I begin to feel chilly. I remember the time when I did not know what it was to be cold. Let us go in, Maeve. There will be just time for you to get the letter posted."

They went back to the house. Before writing her letter Miss O'Neill would have the drawing-room door

## The House of the Secret

locked. She sat at her writing-table fidgeting with the pens and paper; she could not find a pen to suit her, till at last Maeve offered to write for her.

"Yes, do, child, do!" she said, eagerly. "It's so long since I've written that my fingers are stiff. Say—

"CHAPEL HOUSE,

"MR JOHN NUGENT,

"DEAR SIR,—I should be obliged if you could make it convenient to call here on a matter of business before twelve o'clock to-morrow.—Yours faithfully,

"HENRIETTA O'NEILL.

"February 24, 189—."

Maeve did as she was desired. She put the letter in its envelope, and addressed it—

MR. JOHN NUGENT,

*Solicitor,*

KILDRUM.

When it was done Miss O'Neill sighed, as though a great weight was lifted from her mind.

"Now go, child—go," she said; "and do not delay. It is most important for yourself, as you will understand one day. And keep your own counsel, Maeve—keep your own counsel."

"As though I have anyone to share it with," said Maeve, laughing, "unless it might be the dogs. And they are discretion itself."

## CHAPTER XIII

### MISS O'NEILL ACTS FOR HERSELF

SOMETIME in the night Miss O'Neill was again by Maeve's bed shaking her. Maeve had grown used to these nocturnal visitations, and was not alarmed by them as she had been at first.

"What is it?" she asked, sitting up in bed, rubbing her eyes.

Miss O'Neill sat down upon the bed. She was wrapped in a long black cloak from head to foot, and looked like a particularly terrifying sort of ghost.

"I've been lying awake thinking, Maeve," she said. "Supposing Rearden were to come home early. He never does come from a fair till the afternoon, if he comes then. I have known him to stay out all night. He always takes drink when he goes to a fair, and he has often slept it off in a ditch by the roadside. But it would be just like him if for to-morrow he should be sober and come home early. He might quite well be back by ten o'clock."

"And what then," asked Maeve, sleepily.

"What then? Why, in that case he would find out I had sent for Nugent. He might kill me, Maeve."

"Nonsense," said Maeve, "he couldn't kill you. I think he's a very commonplace sort of ruffian. I am coming to the conclusion that Rearden's bark is worse than his bite."

## The House of the Secret

"You don't know," Miss O'Neill said with a shiver. "He is terrible when he's angry. His anger has been a nightmare to me all these years, when I had no one to protect me and my head used to be so strange."

"He will not frighten you any more now I am here," said Maeve. "Go back and get into bed. You will be cold."

"I daresay he is stirring by this time," Miss O'Neill went on, with what Maeve had come to call her listening look. "He will go off about four o'clock. I always feel better when he is out of the house. Let me stay till he goes."

"Very well, you shall stay," said Maeve, getting up to wrap a rug about her. "I believe he is going now. I thought I heard a door slam. Did you hear it?"

"Yes, I heard it. I always breathe freely when he is out of the house. Promise me, Maeve, that if he should return while Mr. Nugent is in the house you will keep guard and let me know. Or, if he should come before Mr. Nugent, will you go and meet Nugent and tell him to come another day? I don't know when another day might be. Rearden is so seldom absent for any length of time. I don't think Judy will tell. You have won over Judy, Maeve, as I never could. I believe she has been afraid of Rearden all these years, nearly as afraid as I am."

"I will speak to Judy," said Maeve, with a calm assurance of her powers. "Judy will keep a secret for me. Now get back to bed. I shall be on the watch if Rearden does return." She made a little gesture of repugnance. It was exceedingly distasteful to her to act as though she feared a man like Rearden. "Since you wish it I shall be on guard. Now I am going to

## Miss O'Neill Acts for Herself

take you back to your room. Did you hear the door go? The house is free of Rearden for the present, at all events."

Despite her pride and spirit she felt herself that the house had a light and free feeling for Rearden's absence. Everyone seemed to feel it, including Judy, who served them an unusually dainty breakfast, and stood with her hands on her hips smiling broadly when she had set some of her good things on the table.

Mr. Nugent came punctually at ten o'clock, and was shut up alone with Miss O'Neill. Maeve waited in the dining-room, till presently the bell rang and Judy came to tell her she was wanted.

When she went into the drawing-room she found Mr. Nugent, a square-faced, acute-looking man, a very typical country lawyer, sitting at the table with a legal-looking document before him, while Miss O'Neill fluttered uneasily on the other side of the table. Her rational mood continued, and the lawyer, watching her, could have seen in her nothing more than a rather nervous, elderly lady. To be sure, his clients were often nervous on such occasions. And Maeve had persuaded Miss O'Neill to be dressed by her for this one occasion, when she must come face to face with the world as typified by Mr. John Nugent. In the quiet, rich, black silk dress, with the lappets of yellowed old lace, Miss O'Neill looked so seemly that Maeve sighed to think that to-morrow or the next day she would go back to her distraught finery.

"This document requires to be attested by two witnesses," Mr. Nugent said, looking curiously at Maeve. "I think my car-driver will do for one if he can leave his horse."

## The House of the Secret

"Shall I sign?" asked Maeve.

"Luckily for you, you are ineligible," he responded with a smile of grim humour. "But there must be some one else, . . . one of the servants."

"It is Jane Kelly's day," said Miss O'Neill, suddenly alert.

"Better have Judy," Maeve replied. "It would break Judy's heart to be passed over for Jane Kelly. I will send her and the car-driver. I can look after his horse till he returns."

She sent a reassuring glance in Miss O'Neill's direction. She wanted to tell her that she would make Judy understand that she must be silent. Miss O'Neill sent her back an imploring look which said, "Hasten, hasten!" as plainly as ever look did.

She ran down and called Judy from an altercation with Mrs. Kelly in the lower regions. She drew her into the dining-room and put her hand on the ungainly shoulder, and Judy grinned delightedly.

"I've made up my mind that I can trust you, Judy," she said, clearly and distinctly, "and I am going to do it. We want you, Miss O'Neill and I, to write your name on a paper upstairs, and not to tell anyone about it."

"Manin' Corney. The divil a word I'll tell him if he was to break every bone in my body for not doin' it. But I'm no scholar, Miss Maeve. Not but what I can write my name, not like some. That woman, Jane Kelly, wouldn't know B from a bull's foot, though she wouldn't own up to it."

"Very well, Judy. Go up to the drawing-room and sign."

Judy went off, delighted with her own importance,

## Miss O'Neill Acts for Herself

while Maeve proceeded to release the car-driver and tell him what he was required to do.

At last it was all safely done and over. Miss O'Neill, with a sigh of relief, heard the lawyer refuse refreshment on the score of the hour being too early, while he put away in his bag the document that had just been signed. It seemed to Maeve watching her that with the seemly garb had come a return of the old ways and manners.

"I had a great esteem for your father, Mr. Nugent," she said, with an air of lofty kindness. "I am very glad the business goes on and is in capable hands."

"I mustn't blow my own trumpet," the lawyer said, closing his bag, "but our clients are usually satisfied. I'm sure I'm very proud, Miss O'Neill, to number you among them."

"Drummond and Foster, of Dublin, have always had my business. There are disadvantages though in having one's lawyers at a distance. Good-morning, Mr. Nugent. Let me thank you for your quick response to my letter."

She gave him her hand with the air of a queen as he took his leave.

Maeve, standing by one of the long windows, saw the car turn the corner of the house and drive away down the long avenue through the wood, flecked now with broad bars of sun and shade. She put her hand over her eyes as she watched it go, dwindling down a long perspective till it was out of sight.

Suddenly her attention was arrested by something that moved among the tree-trunks, and came out in a clear space. It was so far away that she had not seen it till it moved. It was the figure of a man too distant

## The House of the Secret

to be recognisable. She saw it lurch across a broad patch of sun and disappear in the shadow beyond.

"What is it, Maeve? What are you looking at?" Miss O'Neill asked, coming to her side.

"Nothing. What a beautiful day it is! Let us go out. It is a shame to be indoors on such a day."

"Yes, let us go out. I am so glad I thought of sending for Nugent. I expected to see this man's father and not himself. He tells me his father has been dead these ten years. How time has flown in the loneliness and solitude of this house! You think we can depend on Judy?"

"Judy has a dog-like faithfulness. I am quite sure of Judy. Poor Judy, she is so grateful for a little common human sympathy. I think she must have lacked it sadly during her life."

"I remember," said Miss O'Neill, dreamily, "that I took her into the kitchen because I pitied her. The village children used to shout after her. She was so ugly, poor thing. It is a most dreadfully sad thing for a woman to be ugly."

Something in Maeve assented to what Miss O'Neill had said. It would be dreadful if one were so ugly that one could not be loved and lovely in someone's eyes.

The day passed and they heard nothing of Rearden; but some time in the late afternoon Judy took Maeve aside to inform her that she had discovered Corney fast asleep in the stable.

"I don't know how long he's been there," she said. "Maybe he'll sleep till morning. Better if he does. He's a terrible savage when the drink's in him."

At bed-time when the house was closed up for the

## Miss O'Neill Acts for Herself

night, Judy, coming out of the shadows of the inner hall on Maeve lighting her candle, whispered loudly that Corney was "still sleeping it off."

"He won't get it out of me, Miss, what I done for you and the mistress," she said, her face shining with gratification. "I don't set too much store by Corney. It was cruel to me he always was."

"He shall not be cruel to you any more," said Maeve, with a quick, generous throb of pity for poor Judy, such as she might have felt for an oppressed animal.

She slept soundly, perhaps the more soundly that Rearden was out of the house. She wakened suddenly in the darkness of the morning, although there was not a glimmer of light yet. Something had wakened her, or had she been dreaming that she heard a hoarse scream like an animal in pain?

She jumped out of bed and lit her candle, glancing as the light rose up at the little clock on the mantelpiece. It was half-past five o'clock.

Unmistakably this time a hoarse scream rang through the house, and Codger, on the mat outside the door, began to bark furiously.

She never hesitated. As quick as thought she was into her dressing-gown. Taking the little revolver which was Godfrey's gift, in the use of which she was fairly expert, from a drawer in her dressing-table, she ran hastily downstairs.

It was not Miss O'Neill. Viper thumped a ragged tail from the mat as she appeared and followed her, the bristles rising on his back as they always did when he scented an enemy.

There were no more cries, but a low moaning, broken

## The House of the Secret

by sounds more horrible still, came from the lower regions. Her heart was so aflame with pity and indignation that she forgot to be afraid. Poor Judy! It was certainly Judy who lay moaning below.

There was a lighted candle on the kitchen table when Maeve flung open the door with the air of an avenging angel. By the dim light she saw poor Judy huddled up by the fireplace. Over her her brother was standing. He turned with a wolfish glare as Maeve came in.

"He's done for me, Miss Maeve, he's done for me," sobbed poor Judy. "He's kicked me with his nailed boots. It isn't the first time. But I felt something go inside me. I'm done for this time."

"If you are he'll hang for it, Judy," said Maeve, with sudden elementary passion. For the moment the horror of the scene scarcely affected her. Later on she would break down in sick tears; but at the moment she was conscious of no desire except that the brute should be punished according to his brutality. "He'll hang for it."

"Who's talkin' of hangin'?" said Rearden, coming towards her with a threatening gesture. "Who's talkin' of hangin'? I'd twist your neck, my fine lady, as soon as look at ye."

Suddenly something bright was lifted in Maeve's hand.

"If you touch me, Corney Rearden," she said, and her voice rang out clearly, "I'll shoot you dead as sure as heaven's above me."

Rearden sprang back. The dog glided between them with a stealthy air ready to spring. But his intervention was not needed. Rearden backed slowly before

## Miss O'Neill Acts for Herself

the pistol, his little furious eyes glaring at Maeve and a grey terror spreading over his coarse dark tints. He went backward as though he could not help it; and as soon as he had reached the door he sprang through it, banging it after him, and shot the bolt in the lock.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CORNEY RETURNS

FOR a while they were rid of Corney Rearden ; and the house seemed the better to live in without his sullen and glowering presence.

Judy was in bed, waited upon assiduously by her old enemy, Jane Kelly, who was an extraordinarily tender nurse considering what a termagant she was in everyday life.

It was Jane who fetched Dr. Hudson from Meelin, and kept her counsel when the doctor asked her the nature of Judy's accident ; nay, more than kept her counsel, after the manner of her people.

"It might be that the crathur was kicked by the cow whin she was milkin' her," she said. "Morebetoken she might ha' falled on the bucket, and, anyway, the side of her is as black as the crown of your hat."

"It might have been a very vicious cow," the doctor said, looking at Mrs. Kelly with an intent gaze which, as she said, "nearly dhruv a hole through her." But he said no more. He was used to the people and their ways.

His examination of Judy proved that no great harm was done after all. She was cruelly bruised, but, apparently, there was no internal injury as he had feared at first.

"You probably came just in time to avert worse

## Corney Returns

things," he said to Maeve, who told him something of what had happened. "I know Corney. When he is in that mood, recovering from a drunken bout, he would kick out anybody's brains with just as much realisation of what he was doing, and the consequences, as the bull has when he charges. Not that I could compare Corney to as noble an animal as a bull. Corney ought to get six months; but you'll find Judy won't acknowledge that he touched her at all. It isn't the first time. It isn't by any manner of means the first time. The injury from which Judy has gone lame ever since was caused, I am certain, by Corney; but I have never been able to get her to acknowledge it."

Standing by Judy's bed Maeve was fain to confess that the doctor's prognostication of what Judy would do was right. Judy stuck to the story of the cow's kick, and told it with elaboration.

"I think it was that a wasp stung her," she said, "for she never done the like before. I don't suppose she rightly knew what she was doin', so she oughtn't to be blamed, for she was always a kind cow. She was never wan to kick over the bucket, nor to put her foot in the milk as some unmannerly cows has a habit of doing. So I don't know what come to her at all, unless it was that divil of a wasp."

She said it with such conviction that Maeve wondered if Judy had not made herself believe it after all; but while the doctor averted his gaze Judy sent her a broad wink that expressed at once deprecation of the thing she was saying, and an involving of Maeve in the conspiracy.

Dr. Hudson proved a very sympathetic person. By the time he had pronounced Judy in no further need of

## The House of the Secret

his professional services Maeve had come to like and to trust him.

On the occasion of his last visit, while Maeve entertained him with sherry and biscuits in the little morning-room which led off the hall, he spoke of something that had been in his mind to say.

"I wish you'd let my wife come to see you," he said. "You are a brave girl, Miss Standish; but you are doing too much. I see evidences of mental strain in your face."

"I have been—anxious—about someone dear to me," she answered, with a little blush. "Someone who is involved in this trouble with the Pathans. It is hard not to know what is happening."

"Ah! that is something for which there is no remedy in medicine. Be as much in the open air as you can. It will tranquillise you, and help you to sleep at nights. We have not improved on the old ways. For women certainly, and all who suffer, the old ways were best."

The latter words were spoken as though to himself.

Maeve looked up at him shyly.

"I have the old comfort," she said; "thank God, I have the old comfort."

"I am glad of that. You are in the fashion in this country in having the old comfort. Be sorry for those who have lost it. But—forgive me—the life here is strange and unnatural. Let my wife, at least, find your doors open. You will be able to talk to her. She has the softest heart alive."

"I shall have to ask Miss O'Neill," Maeve said, with a startled air. "I think, perhaps, she will say yes. I think, perhaps, it was Rearden who shut her away in this savage seclusion. He is losing his power with her."

## Corney Returns

"He ought never to have had it," said the doctor, warmly. "Someone ought to have interfered, and turned the fellow out. A dangerous ruffian to have a helpless woman under his thumb."

"One could do nothing, I assure you," Maeve said, earnestly. "It would have been the greatest cruelty to Miss O'Neill to interfere. I know better than anyone else. Do you think I would have tolerated the man for a single day if I could have got rid of him?"

"Ah!" the doctor looked at her with considering eyes. "Then there is nothing to be done. If Miss O'Neill's peace of mind depends on it——"

"It does, indeed," said Maeve, earnestly. "And, by the way, Dr. Hudson, I wish you could have a look at her. She seems to me to grow thinner and thinner. Her clothes hang so loosely on her. And she is much quieter than she was when I came here, much more collected. The quietness seems ominous to me at times. I suppose I am nervous."

"Please let me see her," the doctor said, with professional decision. "Let me see—she is old."

"She would be shocked if you told her so. But she must be over sixty. You understand that she must not know there is any professional significance in your visit."

"I quite understand."

"I had better spring you on her, or she may refuse to see you."

"Very well."

They went up to the drawing-room where Miss O'Neill was sitting, a dog lying on each side of her. She was darning a piece of lace, bending her eyes to the fine stitches. This morning she looked quite an

## The House of the Secret

ordinary, charming old lady. The incongruous finery was laid by once more. Her dress, though in the fashion of a quarter of a century earlier, was dark-coloured and of sober texture. The chignon gave her a pathetic air of youth mingled with age.

"Dr. Hudson thought he would report to you on Judy," Maeve began hurriedly, but she need not have been alarmed. Miss O'Neill was quite pleased with her visitor. To her amazement Maeve heard her suggest further visits, and even make a gracious assent to the doctor's proposal that his wife should come to visit them.

"Most certainly," she said, with a gracious air of conferring a favour. "We shall be very pleased to see Mrs. Hudson, Maeve and I. There is very little society here, very little. But I have grown used to being quiet. I used to lead a very gay life, Dr. Hudson."

"So I've heard, ma'am, so I've heard. Indeed, there's not much society in these parts. If it wasn't for myself and Mr. Daly, the resident magistrate, and Father Sweeney, and the Rector, there'd be none at all. We keep each other alive somehow."

Dr. Hudson seemed to bring in a breath from the outside world. He talked to Miss O'Neill about the things that were going on and encouraged her to talk. She found him sympathetic, as Maeve had, and being led on to talk she brought all manner of curious and interesting things out of her memory.

"You seem to have known everyone, ma'am," the doctor said, staring.

"Pretty nearly everyone that was worth knowing," she answered complacently. "You see, doctor, I was a citizen of the world. I travelled a deal. It is the

## Corney Returns

way to open the mind. I had friends in most of the considerable towns of Europe; and my friends were always people of affairs. I forget things till you remind me of them. You are a good talker, doctor."

"Bedad, ma'am, I'm a good listener."

Dr. Hudson seemed to tear himself away as unwillingly as his hostess seemed to part with him; and he readily promised to bring his wife at an early date. But as soon as he turned and faced Maeve in the little brown-panelled morning-room his eyes were grave.

"She is in a serious state of health," he said. I am sorry to have to say it, Miss Standish, but she ought really to have a nurse. She ought not to be left alone day or night."

"The very proposal would frighten her to death. And" . . . Maeve considered within herself. She had a sudden memory that there were things, secrets in the house, that would not bear the eyes of a nurse upon them. "I can do the nursing," she said. "It is heart, is it not? Papa died of angina pectoris. I knew what to do for him when the attacks came on. He taught me what to do. We used to think that rest would make him all right . . ."

She broke off with a sudden catch of her breath.

"Ah . . . angina pectoris. Poor child, no wonder you are graver than your years. It is terrible . . . for the onlooker as well. I don't think it will come to that with Miss O'Neill. I think hers is a worn-out heart. You can see that she has lived more than a hundred ordinary women put together. She would probably have died years ago if she had not vegetated here. You must be prepared for sudden attack. of heart failure

## The House of the Secret

and have the remedies at hand. I will come any hour of the day or night that you send for me. I still think you ought to have the nurse. It will be too much for you."

"It would kill her straight off. I grudge her nothing that love can do."

"Ah, I am not surprised. She is still a fascinating woman. They say her lovers were legion. Then you must have a messenger. Could you find employment for a boy? I could send you one, Jerry O'Connell, as sharp as a needle; very useful about a stable or a garden. He will travel on his bare feet as fast as a pony,"

Maeve considered.

"A little while ago I should have been afraid of what Rearden would say or do," she answered. "Now, curiously enough, I have ceased to think of Rearden as a person to be reckoned with. Send me Jerry O'Connell. My godmother will be satisfied. She leaves things to me more and more."

"I shall feel better pleased when I know you have someone," the doctor said, taking his leave.

Jerry O'Connell arrived the same afternoon. He was a boy of about fourteen, ragged and bare-footed, with long red hair hanging into his bright eyes that gave him something of the look of a mountain pony. He professed himself able and willing to do anything a boy could do in reason, and mentioned that he was "leppin' to be at the ould garden."

"I never seen sich an ould wilderness of a place," he said. "'Tis time ye'd be gettin' seeds into it. Ye haven't got a fork or a spade handy, miss, have ye?"

The spade and fork were discovered in an outhouse;

## Corney Returns

and looking from a window a little later, Maeve watched Jerry digging in the neglected garden with an odd sense of cheerful companionship.

A week later at dinner, Judy, her head still bandaged, but less obtrusively than at first, made strange signs to attract Maeve's attention. Standing behind Miss O'Neill's chair she made such weird faces that a stranger might have supposed her to be going to fall in a fit. But Maeve knew Judy's ways, and understood that Judy wanted to speak to her privately.

She slipped out of the drawing-room later on, when she had ensconced Miss O'Neill in a comfortable chair with her Bible close by her. Of late Miss O'Neill had taken to reading her Bible, or at least the Gospel of St. John, which she never tired of reading. She had confessed to Maeve that she had thought very little of religion in her heyday, had indeed been more or less of a sceptic. But the old comfort had come back to her, and Maeve was very glad of it. The tired soul wanted a staff to lean upon in the shadows towards which it was travelling.

She found Judy waiting for her outside the drawing-room door. Judy looked odder than ever, a bandage having slipped out of place, a mysterious air of excitement about her.

"Corney's come back, miss," she said.

"Indeed. Does he think he's going to be allowed to remain?" asked Maeve, with her chin in the air. She was not at all certain of her power to keep Corney out, but she was determined to put a brave face on it.

"He's terrible sorry, miss," said Judy, humbly. "He didn't know what he was doin' wid the drink on him, an' I was terrible obstinate, so I was. Sure I

## The House of the Secret

tould ye I wouldn't tell; an' I wouldn't not if he was to murder me, an' that's what he went nigh doin'!"

Maeve started. She had not considered before the reason for Corney's attack on Judy, believing it to be simply due to the insanity of drink.

"What was it you wouldn't tell him, Judy?" she asked.

"Why, Miss Maeve, of course, about the 'torney that kem here that day, and the fine bit o' paper I put me name to. Whin he began axin' me I tould him lies as fast as a dog 'ud trot. May the Lord forgive me! I thought it was my duty. In the middle of it he hit out at me. He'd seen the gentleman drive away, an' drunk as he was he knew him. Corney's terrible cute, even when he has the drink taken."

"Ah!" Maeve was remembering the man she had seen in the wood the day of the lawyer's visit. So Corney had known and had resented the visit. "And you want Corney to come back, Judy. Don't you know that it's impossible, that you might as well have a dangerous wild beast in the house as that brother of yours? How you can think of it after his treatment of you?"

"You see, miss, poor Corney got the head of him cut open wid a fork flung from a hayrick whin he was no oulder thin Jerry without. A bit of the bone was dhruv into the brain, an' I often thought Corney wasn't right since. My poor ould mother thought the same. She used to say her bades that Corney mightn't kill her an' be hanged for it, the poor unfortunate boy. He's tired an' hungry an' the drink's dead in him. He says he'll keep from it an' take the pledge. He's that sort of unfortunate craythur that he'd destroy himself to spite

## Corney Returns

any wan when he's riz. If you was to turn him out maybe 'tis going straight to the polis he'd be."

Maeve felt the spirit which would have driven Corney from the door ooze slowly out of her. A vision floated into her mind of the quiet old figure beyond the closed doors, reading the Gospel of St. John, with the new tranquillity about it which at once touched and alarmed Maeve's loving heart.

She looked into Judy's poor half-closed eyes. They were as faithful as a dog's.

"Listen, Judy," she whispered. "Is the thing that Corney might tell a thing that threatens Miss O'Neill?"

"May the Lord avert it from her!" said Judy, piously. "I'd liefer myself the house 'ud fall an' bury her. An' she hasn't long to stay in it, Miss Maeve; she hasn't long to stay in it, the poor mistress. Corney won't hurt nor harm ye, Miss Maeve. Wouldn't I guard ye like your dog? Wouldn't poor Judy die for you or for her?"

"Very well, then," said Maeve, helplessly. "Let him come in. Only tell him to keep out of my way."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DREAM AND THE SLEEPER

CORNEY was very quiet after his return. He kept to the lower regions, and it was only very seldom that Maeve caught sight of him. He seemed to be on his good behaviour. The silver was polished, the glass and china bright and in order, as she had never seen it. In the early morning there was the sound of scrubbing and rubbing downstairs: and in the rooms they used the grates were polished, the floors beeswaxed till everything shone again. During these days Judy's face wore a look of subdued radiancy as of one who rejoices over the return of the prodigal.

"Keep Corney from the drink," she said to Maeve, "and he wouldn't hurt a fly."

The time was drawing near the equinox, but it was yet quiet, grey weather. The grey clouds hardly stirred in the grey sky. The pools on the bog had a leaden surface. One could hardly have believed it riotous March if it were not for the blackbirds and thrushes that sang early and late, and the leaves coming on all the trees, and the snow of the blackthorn on the hedges. Things had begun to come up in the cleared spaces of the long deserted garden. The briars and weeds being removed, clumps of wallflowers and daffodils, beds of violets, sheets of windflowers, and a thousand other sweet things were set free from prison.

## The Dream and the Sleeper

Towards the end of the month the weather changed in so far that towards night-fall the wind would get up, clap its wings, and, growing louder and louder, break into a storm that would set the trees swaying and creaking and fill the old house with eerie noises till it died away at dawn.

Whether it was the disturbance of the elements that affected Maeve, or that she was anxious about Godfrey, as she must be, seeing that he was engaged in one of the little wars with a treacherous and fierce tribe which are wont to exact more than their due toll of young life, she slept ill at nights. Her head had hardly touched the pillow before disturbed dreams had taken possession of her, making her toss and fret till morning. There were nights when she awoke sobbing and choking with tears for a grief too great to be borne.

One night she had a dream more vivid than usual, a consecutive and connected dream, unlike the feverish snatches which had troubled her nights.

She saw a dark field at the bottom of some hills, studded over with white bell tents. Overhead a magnificent white moon was shining, and the jagged snow-covered teeth of the mountains pierced high in a steely sky. The moonlight was whiter and clearer than anything she had ever known. There was a strange sound that filled the air, and made her tremble, the crying of wild beasts in the jungle.

She saw it all as though she hung suspended above it—the tents in the white moonlight, the deep velvet-black shadows they cast, the creeping beasts on the edge of the camp, the fires lit to frighten away the jungle animals. She saw the sentries pacing to and fro between the tents.

## The House of the Secret

Suddenly she was aware that in one of the tents Godfrey was sleeping. She could see him lying on his back, his arms flung out, the bed-clothes tossed away from him in disorder. She saw his dear face, leaner, less boyish than of old. He murmured a name in his sleep, "Maeve": he was dreaming of her, but his dreams were not happy ones. He frowned and tossed about on his pillow.

With the same curious sense of disembodiment she is once more outside the tent. She sees the sentry pacing to and fro stolidly, his musket on his shoulder. He goes away to the far end of the glistening row of tents; he disappears in the darkness, his ringing footsteps are swallowed up.

She is suddenly aware of something creeping in the deep shadow cast by the tents, something that wriggles along the ground like a snake, dragging its slimy body with it. She peers closer; it is not a snake, not a sinuous wild beast; it is a man. She can see his gleaming white teeth; even the whiteness of his eyes in the dark face. Something else catches her eye. It is the glistening steel of a long, deadly-looking knife.

The sentry returns and the dark figure lies quiet in its shadow. No one could discern it now in the intense blackness of the shade contrasted with the white of the moonlight and the gleaming canvas of the tents.

She watches while her heart stops, stops with a sudden jerk, only to go on beating again in great heavy thuds.

The sentry turns and comes back. He passes the black thing in the shadow and goes on his way. As he disappears in the distance the black thing begins to wriggle rapidly, more than ever like a great snake. It

## The Dream and the Sleeper

makes for the door of a tent—Godfrey's tent. Before the sentry can return it is over the threshold of the tent.

She has had time to see it when it wriggled across a stretch of white moonlight, a lithe, sinuous, brown-skinned man, naked but for a loin-cloth, the ha. of the deadly knife clutched in his right hand.

She follows into the tent. Over the threshold the man lies still, like a log, listening. The sleeper is sleeping quietly now. His regular breathing can be heard in the silence within the tent. He smiles in his sleep. The disturbance of the evil dream is over, and he is having a pleasant dream.

The man on the floor of the tent creeps nearer and nearer. Then lies still. The sentry is coming back. She hears his feet come closer and pass by. Still the man makes no movement. He is waiting for the sentry to re-pass. Between this first of the tents and the last perhaps five minutes is spent.

The sentry passes again. He is hardly gone when the man rises up by the side of the low bed and looks at the sleeping face. He stands upright. He clutches the haft of his knife. The brown body is tense as though for a spring.

But she is before him. She flies to the side of her lover. She is aware that the brown man has leapt back as though a sudden light had dazzled him.

"Waken! waken!" she cries; it is as though her heart cried, for she knows she is voiceless. But she has awakened the sleeper. Godfrey springs up, comes face to face with his enemy. The knife glitters in the air. Ah! Godfrey has caught the arm before it can descend. They are down. They are in grips, rolling over each other on the floor.

## The House of the Secret

For a second she recoils from what she sees. The two are fighting for life. Round and round they go; over and over; neither speaking: that is the horrible part of it, though the sound of hard breathing and panting fills the tent.

The naked man is as slippery as an eel. He has all the advantage of his enemy. If he can get his arm free! The panting becomes harder and fiercer. They are by the door of the tent now. Godfrey is trying to drag the brown man out into the moonlight. He fails in his purpose. They are back into the darkness of the tent. The feet of the sentry ring nearer and nearer.

Will he pass? The sobbing and straining of the two men in the deadly struggle might well pass for the nightmare of a sleeping man.

Ah! One of them is underneath. It is Godfrey. He has fallen over one of the tent-pegs. The other is kneeling on him, struggling to free his arm. He is pressing with his knee on Godfrey's chest. It is only a question of a second or two. And—the sentry *passes by*.

She sees him in the square of moonlight that is the tent door. He passes by, his head on his breast; his thoughts far away from the camp amid the hills. He has seen nothing, heard nothing.

He turns to come back. He will pass, and before he can return everything will be over.

The anguish and despair of it seems to let loose her imprisoned senses. She screams. The sentry stops and turns towards the door of the tent.

But the scream has wakened her. She is lying with a beating heart on her pillow in the familiar room lit by a wild moon.

## The Dream and the Sleeper

The dream had terrified her. So vivid had it been that she could scarcely believe it was not true. It was more like a vision than a dream; and the cold sweat was on her face, her heart was beating loudly in her ears. She knew she had screamed and the scream had awakened her. Oh! if she might have slept a little longer to see the end of her dream, beyond the scream and the sentry's turning towards the tent!

She tried to reason with herself that it was only a dream; but the depression and horror had so seized upon her that she could not fight against them. How was she to live the weeks through till she could hear? Of late Godfrey's letters had been erratic. He had warned her that he could not be sure when a letter would reach its destination or if it ever would. How was she going to possess her soul in patience?

She tried to comfort herself with prayers, placing her beloved under the protection of God; but while she seized on that strong comfort and clung to it her teeth chattered with fear. How was she going to endure the days and nights till she should know Godfrey was safe?

The sound of a door softly closing in the corridor beneath her brought her back sharply to the consideration of realities.

It must have been Miss O'Neill's door, yet Viper had not growled, so it was no enemy. While she listened she heard feet ascending the stairs. She sprang out of bed and ran to her door.

As she opened it she almost ran up against Miss O'Neill. She had almost spoken to her when it came to her with a sudden shock that she was asleep although her eyes were open. Plainly she did not see

## The House of the Secret

Maeve. She went on along the corridor, her hand on the rail of the balustrading, the moonlight full upon her. She was dressed completely, except that her hair hung about her in disorder.

Maeve did not dare to return for any wraps, so she followed her just as she was, saying to herself that she would take no harm since the night was so mild.

The house was built round a central staircase, the deep well of which went down to the marble-paved hall below. In places the rails were loose or had given way and no one thought of having them repaired.

She hovered closely behind Miss O'Neill. It would have been so easy for anyone to topple over. Up and up they went till they came to a door that led to the garret story, a place to which Maeve had never penetrated.

The door clanged behind them and they went up in the darkness, Maeve feeling her way with her hands and feet as she went. But Miss O'Neill walked on before her without hesitation, as though she could see in the dark.

She opened a door at the head of the stairs and a broad flood of moonlight poured out through the opening. There was one great attic-room lit by a skylight overhead, and in the moonlight it was as clear as by day. It was apparently used as a lumber-room, for it was filled with all manner of odds and ends of ancient furniture. Here were pictures standing against the wall, more or less dilapidated; there a tall cupboard; again, books were piled in a heap; bits of china, more or less injured, showed through the rubbish in the corners. There were many boxes of all sizes and





"SHE LIFTED THE LID OF AN OAK CHEST AND BEGAN PULLING OUT  
THE CONTENTS."

## The Dream and the Sleeper

shapes; heaps of newspapers and magazines; old letters; old pieces of finery; here a tall beaver hat, there a faded scarlet uniform.

Miss O'Neill moved in and out among the *débris* as though she were looking for something. She lifted the lid of a carved oak chest and began pulling out the contents one after another, and laying them in heaps on the floor. Maeve coming behind her saw that the chest contained household linen, curtains and such things.

After a while the sleeper desisted with a sigh, and having plunged her hands once or twice deep in the contents of the chest, she closed the lid sharply.

"I never can find them," she said—"the clothes for the little baby. They were so pretty and dainty, all soft muslin and delicate lace. But I never can find them, no matter how I look—the delicate garments for the little baby whose face I never saw."

She opened the door of the tall cupboard. Within it spectral dresses revealed themselves hanging like so many Blue-Beard's wives. She closed the door again with the impatient sigh, and went on turning over the rubbish in the room still with the air of seeking something.

At last she gave up with a heart-breaking sigh and turned towards the door, picking her way with a curious carefulness as though she could see what she was doing. But the stare of her wide-open eyes was unseeing. Perhaps so often she had looked for the pretty clothes of the little dead baby in this place that she knew her way even in the dark.

She went down the stairs with the same sure step, while Maeve followed her, trembling lest she should

## The House of the Secret

stumble. With the same curious deliberate certainty she entered her own room and lay down upon her bed.

Maeve stood and watched her, scarcely conscious that she herself was cold. She drew the blankets gently over her and left her.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LADY MARY

MAEVE'S midnight adventure resulted in a chill which kept her confined to the house for some days. She agreed readily to Miss O'Neill's suggestion that Dr. Hudson should be sent for; not that she desired his services for herself, but that she grew more and more anxious about her charge.

Dr. Hudson came, felt Maeve's pulse and took her temperature, and looked scrutinisingly into her eyes.

"Now," he said, "what's the matter? The cold would be nothing; you probably wouldn't have had a cold if something hadn't been fretting your nerves to fiddle-strings. I'm not surprised—a young thing like you in this lonely place, with such responsibilities. You haven't been sleeping, or eating properly. Come, own up!"

Maeve owned up. She had been miserable since the night of her dream. She confessed that something had frightened her.

"What?" asked Dr. Hudson, with kind, compelling eyes upon her face.

After the first shy hesitancy she was able to tell him. Once she had broken silence it did her good to pour out the story of the dream and her fear, watching his face eagerly to see what he would think of it. She wanted

## The House of the Secret

to be reassured, but she did not want her suffering and fear to be lightly treated.

The doctor looked at her when she had concluded with a face of kind concern.

"So you have been bottling up all this, keeping it a secret since it happened? No wonder your eyes are dilated. I confess it was alarming; but I should try to think of it as only a dream. Meanwhile I would suggest your telegraphing to the War Office. They will have the first news if there is any news. Let me do that for you at once."

"How good you are, I never thought of that. I did not know how I was going to endure the time of waiting for a letter."

"I'd better do it at once," the doctor said, looking at his watch. "There might be time for a reply to-day if I telegraph at once. I shall have to neglect one or two patients with minor ailments in your service, Miss Standish."

"Couldn't I send Jerry?" she asked.

He considered a moment.

"If we give Jerry minute instructions he will do as well as anyone. He has only to take the telegram to Mrs. Grady at the post-office, and prepay reply. I'd go myself if it made the smallest difference."

"To be sure you would," said Maeve, gratefully.

Dr. Hudson was writing the telegram in the window of the morning room, when something went by the window at a gallop. It was that very same equipage which had brought Maeve to Chapel House on her first arrival. Pat Cosgrove's passenger, whom they could see in the act of alighting at the hall-door, was a small lady with a wide feathered hat and a fur coat.

## Lady Mary

Maeve stared her bewilderment at the doctor, who knew as well as she did that no visitors but himself came to Chapel.

"There's a lady axin' for you, Miss Maeve," said Judy Rearden, preceding the little lady into the room. Dr. Hudson, going out, stood back to let her pass him.

"My dear," the little lady said, advancing to Maeve and throwing back her veil. "I am Godfrey Barron's mother. I have promised my boy that I would come to see you."

She took Maeve's hands and looked long into her eyes; then she sighed and smiled.

"No mother likes to be dispossessed of her favourite son," she said. "But—you look good, my dear, you look honest and trustworthy. My poor boy, you will always be good to him?"

Leaning forward she kissed Maeve softly on the cheek; then, still holding her hands, she drew her with her to the sunny window, in which already a few hyacinths were in bloom.

"I ought to have come before," she said. "You must forgive me for not having come before. But my boy did not make open confession. He asked me to be kind to you before he went out. Now he writes to me that he has been anxious about you. He begged me to come to see you. He wishes so much that you were with me at Deelish. The boy thinks there is no place like Deelish. He is such an affectionate boy."

She sat patting Maeve's hands and watching her with bright alert eyes.

"I should like to carry you back with me to Deelish," she said.

"Oh, but," responded Maeve, with a flush of pleasure,

## The House of the Secret

"that is impossible. It would be beautiful to go, of course: but I am on duty here. I really could not leave this place just at present. My godmother's health is so precarious."

"That is what Godfrey said, that you would stick to the post of duty. But the circumstances are very strange. He has told me something of them. You ought to have someone with you—some woman——"

"It is quite impossible. I said the same thing to Dr. Hudson, and he agreed. It would alarm Miss O'Neill if I were to bring in anyone. She is not in a state to be alarmed."

"My dear child, she might die in the night."

"I don't want to hasten her death. Be sure of one thing. I have one woman here absolutely devoted to me."

"That queer creature who showed me in?"

"Yes, poor Judy. My dog isn't more devoted. But won't you take off your coat? You must have some lunch. Let me send your horse and car round to the stables. We can feed the man. I am not sure that we can feed the horse unless we can do it with grass."

"Don't bother about that. The driver has brought a nosebag. He remarked to me as he came along that he didn't suppose he'd find a feed for the mare in Chapel House, although he'd heard tell there was a time when there were a dozen horses in the stable, and the house was a 'rale quality house'."

Lady Mary Barron had two dimples playing at hide-and-seek in her cheeks when she smiled, and soft brown eyes. Maeve had fallen in love with Godfrey's mother. She was so pretty and so young, yet at the same time so motherly.

## Lady Mary

The smile passed from Lady Mary's face, leaving it suddenly grave.

"I had something else to say to you," she began seriously. "Tell me, Maeve—I may call you Maeve, mayn't I? You do not see *The Times* at Chapel, I suppose?"

"I do not know when I have seen a newspaper." Maeve's heart suddenly sank. "I have been thinking that I must have one so as to know something of the things that are happening at Gilgit."

"I know. I have been taking the London *Times* for that very reason. It is a wilderness of a paper, my dear. Nothing surprises it, and even an earthquake gets tucked away in an out-of-the-way corner where no one would ever discover it. But—it has the news you and I want. Yesterday—it had news."

Maeve turned suddenly pale. There was something ominous in Lady Mary's tones. Only, could she have sat and talked as she did if the news were what Maeve dreaded?

"I know," she said, in a whisper. "The sentry did *not* come in time. The man stabbed him with the long Afghan knife. It was what I dreaded?"

"I don't know how you knew, Maeve," the mother said, hurriedly. "But it is true that he stabbed him. But not to kill him, not to kill him, Maeve. Unless something very untoward happens his life is not in danger. The thing is bad enough without that."

Maeve sighed as though the weight of the world were rolled away from her heart.

"What can be bad," she sighed, "since his life is not threatened?"

"That is how I felt—when the telegram came. *The*

## The House of the Secret

*Times* had given no details. I was in torture for hours. But it is bad enough. He was stabbed through the sword-arm before the sentry could interfere. The sentry had to shoot the man to save Godfrey's life. The knife went clean through the muscles of his right arm. He will never hold a sword again. My poor boy!"

She covered her face with her hands.

"Ah! that is very sad," said Maeve, wondering how anything could matter since Godfrey's precious life was safe. "That is very sad. He will feel it. He loved his sword. But there will be other things——"

"Godfrey will hate to be out of it," said Lady Mary, refusing to be comforted. "Besides, Maeve, it makes things so much harder for you and him. He has no profession now. There are many things for which he will be disqualified. Heaven knows when he will be able to marry, for we are as poor as church mice. There is not a penny at Deelish. Our forbears were too hospitable. Not but what we imitate them to the best of our ability. You will have to help Godfrey, child. I see all manner of difficulties ahead. Probably the first thing he will do when he comes home will be to set you free."

"And I shall refuse to be set free," said Maeve, happily. "I shall not care how long I have to wait. Why, we are both young. I could wait all my life for Godfrey."

Lady Mary shook her head with the wisdom of age and experience.

"I hope Fate may be kind," she said. "It is weary work waiting—after a time. I hope you and my boy may be spared it. But tell me, Maeve, how did you

## Lady Mary

know about the Afghan knife if you had not seen *The Times*? Indeed, even there it said nothing of an Afghan knife."

"I dreamt it," Maeve said; and related her dream to Lady Mary. "Now you can imagine," she said, when she had concluded, "how it is that the loss of his sword-arm seems to me little compared with what I have been fearing."

"You are sure, Maeve, it isn't nerves and imaginations? You will not be deceived? Why you look frightened out of your wits."

"I had just told the doctor, Dr. Hudson when you came. He left me to read a telegram to the War Office. We had just written it when you came, and he must have taken it away, for it is gone," Maeve said, looking at the blotting-pad on the table, upon which the telegram had been written.

"Not knowing that I was bringing the answer," said Lady Mary.

She produced the cuttings from *The Times*, as well as the telegram which had been sent to her from the War Office.

"Mr. Barron will be sent down country as soon as possible," the telegram said, "and will be invalided home as soon as he is able to travel."

Maeve's eyes shone so that she veiled them from Lady Mary lest she should see the happy shining in them. So he was going to be out of the death and danger. She wondered now how she could ever have had a happy or peaceful hour, ever closed her eyes in sleep while he was exposed to such things. The terror of the dream was going to abide with her all her life. She remembered stories she had heard whispered in her

## The House of the Secret

childhood of the cruelties practised upon their victims by some of the fierce and savage hill-tribes. So he was going to be out of it, thank God!—he was going to be out of it! God help those whose beloveds must be in that danger! God help them! God help them!

“You and my boy are going to have a long wait,” Lady Mary said, looking at the girl’s shining eyes. “Have you courage for that, Maeve? Why, you poor children, you will hardly have a penny piece between you.”

“We have love,” said Maeve, with a shy radiance, “and we shall make the pennies!”

“Ah! but how my dear, how? My poor boy! To have a useless arm is a sad handicap in life.”

“I am not afraid,” said Maeve, lifting her white chin in the air. “What is a useless arm, so long as he is living and coming home to us?”

There was a thin jangle of a bell from upstairs.

“Ah! that is my godmother,” said Maeve. “She must be downstairs. She stays in bed for breakfast in the morning now. When I came first, she would have been too restless to do it. Let me tell her you are here. I am sure she will wish to see you.”

She ran upstairs to tell Miss O’Neill that Lady Mary Barron had come and wished to see her.

The prospect of the visitor excited Miss O’Neill somewhat.

“I shall be very glad to see Mary Barron,” she said. “She was a sweetly pretty creature. I am afraid she will think me a sad old ghost.”

She glanced sideways at a mirror. It was a part of her new recollectedness. A little while ago she would not have realised her age or the passing of the years.

## Lady Mary

"How do I look, Maeve?" she asked, anxiously.

Maeve stooped to kiss her.

"You are very pretty," she said, "in that nice soft grey, with your collar of old lace. No one could be sweeter. It is ever so much prettier than the things you used to wear."

"You must have thought me a Mad Anne when you came, Maeve," the old lady said, anxiously. "I put on anything that came to my hand. You see I had no one to care. I used to live among mists and shadows. I am sure I had a cobweb on my brain. Now, bring up Mary Barron to me."

If Lady Mary saw the grievous change in Miss O'Neill she did not betray it. She made no allusion to the years that had passed, though she reproached Miss O'Neill affectionately for having withdrawn herself from her friends. She touched lightly on past scenes and past events.

"I remember the first time I saw you," she said; "it was at a St. Patrick's ball, and you were wearing emerald green silk with Limerick lace and emeralds. I thought you were like a goddess."

"And you were a little white thing among the débutantes," Miss O'Neill sighed. "But pretty as a rose—pretty as a rose. Why you are as pretty as a rose still, although you are the mother of a big boy."

"You were very kind to my boy," Lady Mary said, gratefully. "Do you know that he is to be invalided home? He has got hurt out in India, and I'm afraid his soldiering days are over."

"Dear me, I am sorry for that," said Miss O'Neill; "but you will be glad to have him home safe. Such a pleasant boy. It would be a thousand pities if harm

## The House of the Secret

were to befall him out there. Soldiering is a dangerous game after all. Why not make him a land agent—that is a nice, gentlemanly occupation and a healthy life.”

“It is sometimes as dangerous as soldiering, now-a-days,” Lady Mary said, with a quiet smile. “Not but that I believe Godfrey would get on with the people. He has a way with him. He would be one of the popular ones.”

“I didn’t think it mattered much to a gentleman whether he was popular or not,” Miss O’Neill remarked with an air of wonder.

Lady Mary did not trouble to explain. She guessed that twenty years or more, during which stirring things had been happening, had dropped out of Miss O’Neill’s life. Also she felt that the weary old brain was not able to receive many impressions at a time.

“Godfrey would always be popular,” she said; “he couldn’t help it. He’s no student, yet he has a profound interest in human nature. Every man is a man and a brother to Godfrey.”

“It was not so in my time,” Miss O’Neill remarked, with a half-shocked air. “At least, we left that sort of thing to the clergymen. We were very good to our own people, but we had none of those ideas of the French Revolution.”

“Nor has Godfrey, I am sure,” Lady Mary said, with a smile.

“Ah! your boy. It is a great thing to have a boy, Mary Barron. Is that what keeps you so young-looking, while I am so old? I looked at myself in the glass the other day, and it seemed to me that I had grown old in a single night.”

## Lady Mary

"But you have a dear daughter in this Maeve," Lady Mary said, touching Maeve's arm affectionately.

"And that reminds me. Will you let me have Maeve for a little while? I want to know Maeve better.

"No, no," Miss O'Neill said, almost with violence.

"You cannot have Maeve. What should I do without her? You will have plenty of time to have Maeve when I am dead."

"And, indeed, I would not go if you could spare me," said Maeve. "It is so kind of you, Lady Mary. But just at present I cannot leave my godmother."

"That's my Maeve," said Miss O'Neill. "That's my good Maeve! You can have Maeve, Lady Mary, when I am dead."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE CHILD'S GRAVE

A DAY or two after Lady Mary's visit Maeve, coming in from a brisk walk to the post for her afternoon letters, found Miss O'Neill in an agitated state.

"Rearden has been insolent again, Maeve," she said; "insolent and threatening. He came up and stood there—the other side of the table. He smelt of the stables." She held a little lace pocket-handkerchief to her nostrils. "He put his ugly hands on the edge of the table and leant across it. I smelt coarse spirits. He asked me violently what business Mr. Nugent had here the other day."

"How dared he!" cried Maeve, indignantly.

"That is what I said. He said it was his business. I hardly like to tell you how horrible he was, Maeve. He said it was his business, that he had not kept me out of the madhouse or the jail to see me doing what I liked with the money that was his. I ordered him out of the room. He refused to go. You see, I had not the dog, Maeve. He is afraid of Viper."

"And I had taken Viper with me," said Maeve, with deep contrition. "Rearden has been behaving himself so well of late, and I thought the dog wanted a run. I shall not leave you defenceless again."

"I felt very ill after Judy had come up and taken him away. Judy was quite frightened. My heart is not

## The Child's Grave

very strong. Tell me again, Maeve, that he was talking nonsense about the madhouse and the jail. I never hurt anyone. I was sinned against, not sinning. Rearden knows, and so does Judy. And I am not mad. I believe I was a little bit mad when you came; but you have been the angel who took away the cloud from my brain."

"How dared he say such things! Give me leave to dismiss him."

"No, no; not dismiss him!" The cloud of wavering and hesitancy fell again on the old face. "He and Judy have been so long in the place. And Judy is very fond of her brother, though you could hardly believe it. You must speak to him, Maeve. Tell him it is no business of his what there is between me and my lawyer."

"I shall speak to him," said Maeve, "and at once."

She spoke in the voice which indicated that her spirit was up. There was an angry light in her eyes, and the beautiful colour flamed in her cheeks. She went towards the door; but Miss O'Neill called her back.

"Tell me, Maeve dear," she said, "if I should leave my money to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, you would not resent it, would you, dear?"

"Of course not," said Maeve. "It is a most laudable object. Do you think because you gave me shelter when I came to you practically destitute—I did not know till lately *how* destitute—that I lay claim to anything you possess? No, indeed: I should think not."

## The House of the Secret

"You will have my jewels, Maeve, and the silver. There is a good deal of it somewhere. Also my lace and my collection of china. I should not like them to be scattered."

"They shall not be," said Maeve, not stopping to ask herself how a practically destitute young woman was going to keep together a collection of such luxuries. "And I am very glad the animals will benefit. They are not thought enough of in this country."

"You will keep Viper as long as he lives?"

"Of course. But you are not going to die. Why do you talk like this?"

"Tell me, Maeve, there is someone who will take care of you when I am gone?"

She looked wistfully into the girl's eyes, and Maeve's expression softened.

"Yes, dear; I have been meaning to tell you."

"It is young Barron?"

"Yes."

"And you have not told me because——"

"Because I was not going to leave you. I meant to tell you in time. Indeed, I had an idea you always knew."

"Ah, well; perhaps I guessed it. I am very glad. I can trust my girl with him. He won't need a fortune, having you."

"I don't think he has any thought of such a thing," said Maeve, honestly.

She was quite unconscious of the look of cunning in Miss O'Neill's half-closed eyes as she watched her. She had never thought about Miss O'Neill's money, or whether she possessed any, or whether the amount was little or great. Indeed, the impression the neglected

## The Child's Grave

house had made on her at her first coming was one of poverty, and it remained with her still.

She left her godmother, remembering that she had to speak to Rearden. She went down to the morning-room and rang the bell. Judy answered it, wearing a scared look.

"Send your brother to me," said Maeve.

"For the love of glory, what has he been doin' now, the unfortunate omadhaun?" said Judy wringing her hands. "I know he's been frightenin' the mistress, for she was all of a trimble whin I went to her."

"He shall not frighten her again," said Maeve, in ominously quiet tones. "Send him to me."

She looked so much the lady born to rule that Judy went away humbly, and in a few seconds Corney himself shambled into the room.

"Close the door, if you please," said Maeve.

Through the opening of the door she caught a glimpse of Judy hovering uneasily in the background.

Corney stood scowling at her from where he stood by the door, his hands turning a ragged and greasy hat about by the brim.

"You have frightened your mistress while I have been out," said Maeve. "Understand that if it occurs again you leave the house and do not return to it."

"Who's goin' to put me out of it?" he asked, snarling. "Not you! What right have you in it at all, at all?"

He advanced a step or two threateningly; but Maeve never quailed.

"D'ye think all the time I've buried meself in this hole looking after it that I wasn't lookin' after it for

## The House of the Secret

meself?" he went on. "D'ye think I'm goin' to let you collar the lot of it? I'd rather see it burnt to the ground before me eyes."

Maeve smiled faintly to herself. All this heat over something which would never belong to the poor creature before her! Some odd sentiment of pity made her speak as she could never have contemplated speaking.

"You have no concern with Miss O'Neill's property," she said. "Neither, for the matter of that, have I."

"You lie. You got Nugent here when my back was turned, and got her to make a will lavin' everything away from me. 'Tis all mine by rights. You come here to rob me."

"What would you do with the property if you had it?" asked Maeve, with her air of fine contempt. "It is not yours; it is not mine. It goes to a charity."

"It's tellin' me lies ye are. She promised it to me for keepin' her saycrits. They'd be quare saycrits if the light of day was to be let in on them." He smiled an unpleasant smile, which revealed his discoloured and broken teeth. "She said she'd do well by me. If it's wrongin' me she is I can make her pay for it."

"I should think any provision Miss O'Neill had kindly intended to make for you would depend entirely on your good behaviour," Maeve said coldly. "I must warn you that such conduct as you have shown yourself guilty of to-day makes it very doubtful. I have only to say that if it occurs again you will go. I shall send for the police to remove you if you give any trouble."

"Oh, you will, will you?" His eyes glared at her with a baleful fire in them. "Bedad, maybe if you do

## The Child's Grave

I'll pull down more than meself. I'm nearly tired houldin' me tongue. Many's the thing I've seen. I seen a young gentleman an' yourself talkin', not so long ago, in the middle of the night."

His leer turned Maeve sick. She looked at him with loathing, realising vaguely what her love might seem to so degraded a wretch as this.

"Go out of the room!" she said, pointing to the door.

"You'd better go out of it yourself," he replied. "Sorry such unlucky goin's on I ever knew as since ye came into it. We wor all comfortable together before ye ever showed yer face in it."

The door opened, and Judy came in.

"For the love of heaven forgive him, Miss," she said. "Sure it's the drink that's talkin', not poor Corney. Come on, ye unfortunate fellow. 'Tis destroyin' yourself ye'll be wan o' these days."

He went away, lurching as he walked, and muttering threats under his breath.

The threats did not affect Maeve very much. What did shock her and shame her was that he should have seen her parting with Godfrey and put his own foul interpretation on it. Her very innocence made her shrink with an intolerable horror from this sacrilege, this outrage on all that was so sweet and sacred to her. There were moments when she felt that even her love was smirched and defiled.

She bade Judy, coming with a tear in her eye to apologise for Corney, to keep the man out of her sight.

"You understand," she said, "that he is to keep downstairs. If he comes upstairs again I shall insist

## The House of the Secret

on Miss O'Neill's dismissing him. His behaviour has been unpardonable."

"I'm thinking," said Judy, plaintively, "that it is a great shame all the trouble that does be goin' on. Sure it'll be settled for us soon enough. Isn't herself witherin' away, God help her, like the snows before the sun?"

"You think so, Judy?" Maeve asked quickly. The thought gave her a pang. She had grown very fond of the woman who depended on her so entirely. "It is not so bad as that, Judy? I know she is looking thin and she eats so little. Still she is much better, so much less nervous than she was when I came. I hope she will stay with us a good while yet."

"She'll go out like the snuff of a candle, Miss Maeve; and then—why, then you'll be quit o' poor Corney, Miss Maeve. Wan way or another you'll be quit o' poor Corney. He has his mind set on the mistress lavin' him well off. Sure, what would he do wid it but drink himself to death if he had it? I'd put up wid Corney for the time that's in it, Miss Maeve, though I know its hard to put up wid the like of him; he's that ignorant an' impident. Listen here, Miss Maeve"—in her anxiety Judy approached Maeve and spoke in her ear. "I wouldn't be talkin' of sendin' Corney away. If he was dhruv to it there's no knowin' what he'd be doin', that maybe he'd be sorry for afterwards. When the drink's in his head he wouldn't know who he was hittin' at. Bear with him, bear with him, for the Lord's sake, Miss. Maybe 'tis destroyin' the mistress he'd be, as well as himself, th' unlucky craythur! You'd never forgive yourself if it was to be that ye seen her dragged off before your eyes."

## The Child's Grave

Maeve turned pale.

"What do you mean, Judy?" she asked in awe-stricken tones.

"'Twould be as well," said Judy, gloomily, "if some ould houses was burnt out of it. I'd do it meself, for the love of her, if it wasn't that I'm too great a coward. Och, God help her, sure 'tis she was the fine handsome lady; an' to think such misfortune should come upon her! Isn't it a quare thing, Miss Maeve, that them that has the world at their feet should go pickin' the worst after all?"

More than this Maeve could not get from her. She went off shaking her head and sighing dolefully to herself.

That afternoon Maeve missed Miss O'Neill from her accustomed place by the drawing-room fire. It was a cold, bright day of March, with the air clear and shining, as it is only in the most turbulent of months. The light came in strong and pure, searching out the faded and frayed places in the carpets and curtains, showing up every stain on the walls and furniture.

She had an unaccountable uneasiness when she found the room empty. She went upstairs to Miss O'Neill's bedroom and found that also empty. Remembering the night visit to the attic story, she climbed up there, only to find the place silent and empty. She rang the bell for Judy. Judy had not seen her mistress, and looked a bit scared at being asked about her.

"Sure, I heard the front door shut not twinty minutes ago," she said. "Wouldn't it be a quare thing if she took to wanderin'? It might be that it was the wanderin' before death was on her. It's always a sign.



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## The House of the Secret

Surely to goodness she isn't gone out in her thin slippers, and not a shawl about her this cowl'd day."

Maeve satisfied herself that Miss O'Neill was not in the house. During her search, in which she opened the door of many shuttered rooms, letting free a smell of must and mildew, she discovered that the dog, Viper, was also missing. Her own Codger was at her heels, but the old dog was nowhere to be found.

"If you was to try the ould Abbey you might find her, miss," Judy said at last with a furtive air. "I could only go slow meself, because I've a quare short leg. I'm thinkin' 'tis there you'll find her. I hope 'tisn't gettin' her ind she'll be, trapessin' the wet grass."

Maeve did not wait to ask why Judy suggested the Abbey, which she knew only as one beautiful gable, wrapped about with ivy, in a place of graves.

She picked up an old Indian shawl from the drawing-room floor, where it had evidently been dropped, and took it with her. It was not far to the Abbey—perhaps a quarter of a mile from the house, but the grass was long and rank, and the ground heavy with the winter rains. As she ran the long grass impeded her, and the soft earth made walking difficult.

Midway between the house and the Abbey she stopped. There was a scrap of fine filmy lace adhering to a briar. Looking closer she saw the print of tiny heels following each other in the soft earth.

If she had needed guidance the footprints would have given it. They turned out of the overgrown roadway into the narrow choked borean that led to the Abbey. People still buried their dead there by stealth, Maeve knew. On the afternoon in October, when she had

## The Child's Grave

discovered the Abbey for herself, she had been frightened nearly out of her wits by the *caoine*, the lament for the dead, rising and falling, and looking to see what the terrible sound meant, she had seen a coffin borne round outside the place of graves, the widow keeping at the head of the mourners.

She had not far to seek. Just under the gable, where the grass grew rankest and tallest, where the dead nettles rose to the fine tracery of the window, her god-mother knelt, weeping and wringing her hands. There was a tiny, cleared space amid the nettles and the long grass. There was a little mound on which the grass had begun to grow long. A briar had flung itself across it, as though claiming the little grave for Nature, who, little by little, unless we watch incessantly, takes back all we have taken from her.

The tears were running down the old face of the woman who knelt at the head of the little grave. The sight smote Maeve's heart with tender pity. Her god-mother looked so frail and old as she knelt there, weeping and wringing her hands.

Maeve made a step or two to her side, and wrapped the soft, warm shawl about the thinly-clad shoulders.

"Ah! come home!" she said, with a little moan of compassion. "Why, you are wet through almost. And see, you are kneeling on the wet ground. Come home with me, dear."

Miss O'Neill turned and looked at her without surprise.

"Isn't it sad, Maeve," she said, "that he should lie here unchristened? A little nobody's child that belongs only to his mother."

"And to the Good Shepherd," said Maeve, throwing

## The House of the Secret

her arms about her. "Can't you leave him to the Good Shepherd? Dear, come home. You will die of a chill if you do not come home."

Miss O'Neill stood up obediently, and without a glance at the little grave, went the way Maeve led her.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FIRE

LITTLE by little Maeve was coming to the knowledge of some part, at least, of the mystery which lay over Chapel and had ruined her godmother's life. Two things were clear to her: there had been an unhappy marriage, and there had been a child born of it who had not lived. For the rest she had a fine delicate sense of honour. She would not surprise her godmother's secrets. The knowledge she had had come to her by accident. One thing she was sure of, and that was that Miss O'Neill had been, as she said herself, more sinned against than sinning. There was nothing from which an innocent-minded girl, whose love had made her only the more shrinkingly virginal, need recoil.

She watched her godmother singing to her harp in the odd moments when she went back to it, moments when the impending fate seemed postponed for a little while in the doomed woman's forgetfulness of it. She always sang romantic ditties,

My peace of mind ruined,  
My heart is forlorn.  
Hark, Philomel is singing  
With his breast to a thorn.

Or,

Oh waly, waly, up the bank!  
And waly, waly, down the brae!  
And waly, waly, yon burn-side  
Where I and my Luve were wont to stray

## The House of the Secret

Oh, had I wist before I kist  
That Luve had been sae ill to win,  
I had locked my heart in a case o' gold,  
And pinned it with a silver pin.

She sang with an exaggerated sentiment which never made Maeve smile, although her sense of humour was keen. The contrast between the old-fashioned befrilled dress, the hair in a chignon and ringlets, and the sad old face with the shadows growing deeper on it day by day, did not appeal to Maeve's laughter, but rather to her tears. Looking at and listening to the singer, whose voice was much more cracked and husky since she had taken a heavy cold the day of her visit to the Abbey, Maeve had a sense she could hardly explain of youth and innocence about the woman whose earthly temple was soon to be left empty. She said to herself in sudden passion that no matter what testimony there was against it, her godmother was sinned against, not sinning. She might have had her share of human frailties, of course, but God had set His sign upon her that she was no gross sinner.

Letters passed constantly between Maeve and Lady Mary Barron. All news that reached Deelish was passed on at once to Chapel. Godfrey was to have been sent down-country at the very first moment he was able to bear the journey. It was not likely to be delayed, seeing that the hill-tribes were incessantly harrying the little force in the Sirang Valley, and that every hour of every day there were sorties and sallies to drive the Pathans back to their fastnesses.

When he was safely on the road home Maeve would feel happy. As it was, she commended her beloved day and night to the keeping of God.

## The Fire

A letter had reached her, despatched before the events of that night when Godfrey Barron had been put out of action. Oddly enough, he had been anxious about her. His dreams of her had been troubled. He had dreamt of her as in the midst of dangers. Yet she had told him nothing of the things that might alarm him, as much to spare him as out of fear that he might urge on her to leave Chapel.

He was no skilled penman, yet his letter, simple and manly, breathing love and devotion, thrilled her as though he wrote like any angel.

"I wish I could guard you with my arm and my sword," he wrote (plainly he was not yet so used to the possession of his sword as to have lost his boyish pride in it). "I wish I could guard you, my lovely love, with my arm and my sword, from all dangers that can threaten you. For heaven's sake take care of yourself. What would the world be without you?"

She read the lover's raptures over and over again; and always they were sweet, even though he spelt "goddess" with a single "d," and the homage which he felt for all women with two "m's." Godfrey was one of the active ones of the world, not one of those who worked with the mind. He knew his deficiencies, and was humble and simple about them, wondering many times in his letters why Maeve should have stooped to a dull-witted fellow like him. "My sword is my brains," he had written with a sudden flash of inspiration. And his sword was gone! Her poor boy, how was she going to comfort him for the loss of that bright sword, which seemed to her emblematic of his clear, bright spirit?

She wrote tender letters, which in all probability he

## The House of the Secret

might never receive, comforting him with all the art she was mistress of. Her boy! What a delicious phrase it was, so full of the sense of love and youth! Her boy! The thought of him was with her even while she slept, wearied out by having stayed up for some nights with Miss O'Neill, when her cold was at its worst and the fire needed to be kept going all night.

She was dreaming that she heard Godfrey's voice calling her, sharp and insistent, when she started, awake, her throat burning, her eyes smarting with smoke. There was a night-light in her room, and against it she saw the thin smoke-wreaths blowing to and fro. The smoke was coming in under the door. Starting up with a suffocated feeling, she heard the crackling of wood, and the whining of Codger at her door. Almost at the same moment a hand shook it roughly, and she heard Judy's voice: "For the love of God, Miss Maeve, wake up," it said. "The house is afire."

She jumped out of her bed, thrust her feet in her slippers, and slipped her dressing-gown about her. When she opened the door a great mass of smoke came in her face, driving her back and almost choking her with its acrid fumes. Judy was gone. Only the dog licked at her feet and whined in a panic-stricken terror.

She had a thought of the old house. What a rat-trap it was, and how easily she might be suffocated like a rat in a trap! Her bedroom was down a long corridor. Would she reach the head of the staircase only to meet with a wall of flame? A staircase with a well. She had heard of such as certain to suck up the flames in a fierce draught which would consume everything.

She had stooped to pick up the dog, who fawned

## The Fire

about her, impeding her progress. The stair was yet free from the fire, but as she went down it through the darkness of the smoke, she was sensible of another odour that pierced through it, the smell of paraffin oil. Below her in the next corridor she saw the smoke flecked with fire. She heard the swishing of water. The smoke cleared a little on the staircase. She saw now that it was belching out from the corridor below that on which she slept.

"It's nothing at all, miss," said Judy, coming out through the smoke with something smouldering in her arms, which she pushed through the corridor window into the space beneath. "It's only one room. Them's the curtains. Me and Jerry has got it under. Glory be to goodness herself slep' through it. Wasn't it the blessin' of heaven I'd brought up the ould tub an' filled it with water for your bath, to save my lazy legs carrying it every time?"

The smoke was becoming thinner and clearer. The dawn had broken now, and a cold light came through the smoke from the skylight overhead. Jerry came out of the burning room, dragging a rug with him which followed the curtains through the window; then, picking up a pail of water, he dashed back into the room.

In a little while the fire was practically out. Daylight grew while the three stood talking in the corridor of what a chance it was that the whole house had not been burnt.

"'Twas that the things were that wet wid the damp they could do no more thin smoulder," said Judy, black as a sweep, showing only the whites of her eyes in the expanse of blackness. "I never seen such smoke. Now and agin it flared; but mostly it did nothin' but smoke."

## The House of the Secret

" 'Twas swimmin' in paraffin it was," remarked Jerry. 'Sure, if it had took proper we couldn't ha' put it out. I never seen a woman work like Miss Rearden. Rowling up ould carpets and curtains she was, an' they nothin' but cinders, an' puttin' out the fire wid her hands. 'Tis badly burnt she must be."

"What talk have you about paraffin?" Judy asked, in sharp resentment.

"The place does certainly smell of paraffin," Maeve said, sniffing about. Then she had another thought.

"Where is Rearden?" she asked, turning suddenly to Judy, "that he has not been helping to extinguish the fire?"

"Is it Corney?" said Judy, stammering. "'Sure, Miss Maeve, he's away these couple o' days. Sorra a word he said whin he was goin'—it was the night before last—except to be makin' a kick at the cat as he wint out. I never seen him since."

"He tould me the same evenin' to mind me own business, or he'd break every bone in me body, an' me only axin' him civil if he was lavin' for good," said Jerry. "I towld him we'd light a bonfire if he was never comin' back, an' he made a skelp after me an' fell in the celery trench."

"Ye're a bould, impident boy to go spakin' to my brother like that," said Judy, with an air of offence. "You'll never get along in a place if you have thim bould impident ways."

Maeve had no mind to go back to bed. She went and dressed herself, and, having thanked God fervently for preserving them all from the fire, she went to her godmother's room and found her fast asleep, happily unconscious of the disturbance.

## The Fire

Judy worked like a Titan to get rid of all traces of the fire, and in a short time there was no more evidence of it than in the smoked and blackened ceilings and walls, the partly burnt floor and furniture of a room never used and but seldom visited. There were many such rooms at Chapel, dark behind their closed shutters, smelling mouldily, with a deal of fine, old-fashioned furniture, pictures, and other things all spoiling in the damp.

But how had the fire broken out in an unoccupied room? That was the question which puzzled Maeve. The room was directly below her own, but she scarcely considered that fact as having any bearing on the matter, even while she thanked God for her escape. The smell of paraffin in the burnt-out room, although Judy had been so quick in removing all traces of the fire, still fought with the smoke for mastery. How did the room come to smell of paraffin?

She resolved that her godmother should not be made anxious by hearing of the fire; and to keep it from her knowledge was easy enough, since now she only travelled between her bedroom and the drawing-room.

"Did you hear Viper in the night, Maeve?" she asked the next morning, when Maeve had settled her comfortably in her big chair by the drawing-room fire. "The wind was very high at the time, so you may not have heard him. He growled a deal—in his sleep, perhaps, poor dog. You will take care of Viper when I am gone, Maeve? He is a dog few people would like. I fell asleep while he was growling; but he awakened me a little while afterwards barking."

Maeve remembered now. To be sure, Viper had barked furiously before the fire had broken out. So had

## The House of the Secret

Codger for the matter of that. She had heard the dogs, and forgotten it afterwards in the excitement of the fire.

"I was nearly sure I heard someone stumble in the corridor when Viper growled," Miss O'Neill went on. "You didn't happen to be about, Maeve, did you?"

"Viper wouldn't have growled at me if I had. But I was not about."

These things made Maeve feel uneasy. She stopped Judy a little later when she overtook her in the orridor.

"Glory be to goodness Miss Maeve," Judy said, with a jump. "I didn't know you was comin' behind me at all, at all. It's a mercy I didn't drop the dishes."

"What's come over you, Judy? You used not to be so nervous," Maeve said.

"Indeed, I've had enough to make me narvous, in this house, if I didn't know my p'lace better thin to be copyin' quality ways. What 'd a poor girl like me do with narves?"

"Tell me, Judy," said Maeve, fixing Judy with a steady eye, "how did the paraffin come in the room where the fire was?"

Judy looked about her as though for a rat-hole to run into. Apparently finding no way of escape, her eye came back and rested waveringly a moment on Maeve's face. There was paric in its expression.

"I seen no signs of paraffin myself," she said, sullenly. "It was that imp of a boy said he smelt it. The li'es of him says more thin their prayers. What 'd paraffin be doin' in it?"

"I smelt it," said Maeve quietly.

"Sure, if you did." Again her scared glance went from right to left.

## The Fire

"Why should the fire have broken out in an unoccupied room?" Maeve went on. "I think I'll send over for the police to the village. There's something needs looking into in this matter. We can't run the risk of being burnt in our beds."

Judy's rubicund hues had changed to the leaden blue which takes the place of pallor in persons of her complexion.

"For the love of God don't be bringing them lads in, Miss Maeve," she said. "An' as for bein' burnt in your bed, that'll never be as long as poor Judy's alive to save and protect you."

Maeve found something oddly touching in the speech.

"But you must be protected, too, Judy," she said kindly. "And I should like to find out for myself who lit the fire in the empty room, having first sprinkled the things with paraffin."

Judy opened her mouth once or twice as though to speak. Then, apparently having found no explanation to offer, she said: "True for you, Miss Maeve"—that convenient "True for you," which in the mouth of the Irish peasant covers so many disagreements with your opinions—and hurried on her way.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE NORTH ROOM

JUDY kept out of Maeve's way all day. It was not till the next day that she presented herself at the breakfast-table with a triumphant air.

"See what I found, Miss Maeve!" she said, holding for her inspection something twisted and burnt, which had apparently once been a brass lamp. "Here's the whole discovery found out. 'Tis the mistress's little hand-lamp. I missed it from her room. I found it rowled away under the bed in the Blue Room. Sorra much blue about it now if it wasn't blue flames. 'Twas herself made the fire."

Maeve looked thoughtfully at the burnt lamp. She had an idea that she had seen the hand-lamp in Miss O'Neill's room since the fire, but she could not be sure.

"I did not know this was missing," she said.

"'Deed, an' it was then," said Judy, with the fluency which is a suspicious sign to those who know the Irish peasant's ways. "'Deed, an' it was. I didn't bother herself about it whin I missed it, but brought up another lamp from downstairs. She's terrible fond of her little lamp, but she never seemed to notice the differ. I'm thinkin' it would be safer, miss, if you was to persuade her to have a candle. Lamps is terrible dangerous with a shaky ould lady like the mistress."

## The North Room

"But what could have brought her to the Blue Room?" Maeve asked.

"The dear knows. Sure she walks, Miss Maeve, she walks; an' them that walks 'll go anywhere the fancy takes them. Often I've met her wanderin' about lookin' for somethin' or other she wanted an' brought her back to her warm bed, God help her! Never spake to her if you was to meet her, Miss Maeve. You might frighten the life out of her. Just you put your hand on her arm quiet an' she'll go wid you like a child. The poor mistress, 'tis a sad thing she can't be restin' in her bed!"

Yet Maeve was not satisfied, though Judy went about with a relieved air. She was almost certain she had seen the little hand-lamp in Miss O'Neill's room since the fire; and indeed it was not long before Miss O'Neill complained of its absence.

"I wish you'd ask Judy, Maeve," she said, "to put my own little lamp back in its place. I don't like that smelly thing she has given me. Besides, I am frightened of knocking it over. It didn't matter with my own little lamp. If that was knocked over it went out of itself."

"Did it?" Maeve asked with interest. "I did not know that."

"Yes, indeed. It is a very clever patent. I had several of them in the old days, but they seem to have disappeared one by one. This little lamp is the last. I should not like it to disappear."

"What is it called?"

"It is the Eclipse Safety. The name is painted on it. I couldn't forget it, could I, seeing that it has been staring me in the face night and morning for so many years?"

## The House of the Secret

Maeve wrote off to Dublin for a new safety lamp. She said no more to Judy. A memory of some words of Judy's had recurred to her.

"'Twould be as well if some ould houses wid their saycrets was burnt to the ground."

Was it possible that Judy herself could have set the room on fire?

The suspicion involved no doubt of Judy's devotion towards herself. Had she not worked like ten men to put out the fire and succeeded? Were not her poor hands in bandages, her face more ugly and grotesque than ever from the scorching and the singed hair and eye-brows? But Judy, like her brother, belonged to a very low order of intelligence. Maeve said to herself that it was not easy to set the dividing line between responsibility and irresponsibility in such people. Had Judy set the room on fire on some half-insane impulse, and then devoted all her energies to putting it out again? Judy's evasions, the incident of the lamp, pointed to some such solution.

She resolved to be very careful and on her guard. She felt more isolated than ever while she waited, watching Miss O'Neill fading before her eyes. Her doubts of Judy left her with only the dogs to depend on. Her safety was dear to herself since she was so dear to someone else; and he was coming home to her, bringing his maimed life to be comforted and made strong.

In those March days when the sap was stirring in the boughs and the daffodils were out in the woods, while the branches were growing purple and thick with the buds of the leafage, she felt the joy of living lift her heart and set her pulses beating. What though Death

## The North Room

was coming quietly nearer and nearer the old soul she had learnt to love; what though the house was haunted with ghosts and secrets; what though the human beings who housed with her—for Corney had come back, creeping like an ill-omened shadow about the place—were almost below the level of the beasts, yet she was glad. She was young, she was loved, her lover was coming back to her out of blood and fire; her heart was uplifted to the life-work to which she solemnly dedicated herself, of making up to Godfrey for the hopes and the ambitions he had lost. The thought of his helplessness, the poor arm which would have wielded the sword in her defence useless, the power gone from it, made her tenderness well over when she thought of him. Her boy! She was going to comfort and take care of her boy; and what happier fate could be hers? Between them they would find a foothold in the slippery world where one needs all the equipments in order to keep one's place. She would be his helpmeet; they would stand shoulder to shoulder. What he lacked by cruelty of circumstances she must supply. She never stopped to ask herself how it was to be done. That was a question for the future.

Meanwhile—for Godfrey's sake, who could not do without her—she was dear to herself. The incident of the fire had made her fearful of harm to herself. She must be careful and watchful. She did not dare to tell the kind doctor or his comfortable wife, who brought all the alleviations they could think of to her solitary lot; she was too frightened of the secrets of the house to bring any help in from outside.

"Anyhow, my wife will come to you whenever you want her," Dr. Hudson said, one of these days, after he

## The House of the Secret

had seen Miss O'Neill. "I won't conceal from you that Miss O'Neill's condition is very precarious. She might die in her sleep. My wife will come any hour you send for her."

It was an early Easter, but before Easter had come Miss O'Neill had taken to her bed altogether. She lay small and shrivelled on her pillow, very silent for the most part, sleeping a good deal, and only now and again suffering pain.

Dr. Hudson suggested a nurse ; but Maeve would not hear of it. She had learnt to be as much afraid of the stranger's eyes on the secrets of the house as though she were involved in them. She would nurse her godmother herself with Judy's help. There could be extra help in the kitchen. The redoubtable Jane Kelly, who had come to be quite good friends with Judy, while keeping up her attitude of hostility towards Corney Rearden, might come in every day so that Judy would have more time.

"I am going to sleep in my godmother's room for the present, Judy," she said, after the doctor's visit. "Perhaps you and Mrs. Kelly could put me up a bed there. If there is not a small bed which you can move easily, I can sleep on a sofa. She must not be left. I shall want only a bed, for I can still keep the North Room as my own."

She was looking at Judy as she spoke. She often looked at Judy now ; and she was surprised by something she saw in Judy's face. Was it possible that Judy was highly pleased because she was going to sleep in her godmother's room ?

Perhaps Judy had been anxious about Miss O'Neill. Maeve had heard once or twice feet shuffling along the

## The North Room

corridor in the dead waste and middle of the night. Doubtless Judy was anxious. Her attachment to her mistress was as evident as her devotion to Maeve herself.

"Sure, it'll be great company for the poor mistress," she said. "I'll put up a bed for you, and see that it's well-aired before night comes."

"Be sure that Mrs. Kelly helps you. I don't want your brother to come upstairs."

"Is it Corney? Poor Corney only comes into the kitchen an odd time now. He sleeps in the loft above the stable, Miss Maeve.

"I don't mind where he sleeps as long as I see nothing of him," Maeve said; and reproached herself afterwards because she had hurt poor Judy, who had crept away as though she herself had suffered a rebuke.

She came in in the late afternoon, glowing with exercise, and found a little French bedstead set up for her in the corner of Miss O'Neill's room. There was a bright fire burning; the window was set wide open; some daffodils in a lustre jug were on the table by the sick woman's bed. They were from the old orchard beneath the window, where thousands of daffodils were coming in flower.

She rang for Judy to bring up the tea.

Judy brought the tea, but having brought it delayed to go.

"When you've poured out the tay, Miss Maeve," she said, "maybe you'd be steppin' outside. I've a bit of a surprise for you."

She was grinning like a benevolent ogre.

Maeve got up and went with her, Judy opening the door to allow her to pass, and then following her. Out

## The House of the Secret

in the corridor Judy turned to the room next to Miss O'Neill's and opened the door with a flourish.

The room was a very pleasant one. Maeve had never seen it before except in a shrouded darkness. Now the oriel window was open, and the room was filled with the fresh wind. The smell of soap and water came out in her face. There had evidently been a great scrubbing, for the uncarpeted floor was still wet. A fire burnt in the grate. The four-poster mahogany bedstead had been polished. The bed was made up and covered with a silk and lace counterpane, rather faded, but not much the worse for that.

She glanced about the room. There were her brushes on the Sheraton table. Her dressing-gown hung behind the door. Even her slippers were in a chair. There was a pretty old, tall writing-desk open against the wall, and her own blotter was laid upon it.

"I thought you'd be more comfortable thin in that ould North Room upstairs. Sure the sun niver pinitrates it, to say nothin' of the tree," said Judy. "An' it'll be handy for you, poppin' in an' out to herself."

"It will, indeed, Judy," said Maeve, warmly. "It was so kind to think of it. It is a charming room, ever so much brighter and prettier than my room upstairs. And I am glad it has no tree. The tree has often wakened me with its branches tapping against the window this wild spring."

"That tree ought to ha' been took down long ago," said Judy. "Well miss, I'm glad you like your new room. It was my notion; but that woman, Jane Kelly, helped me to clane up. I will say for her she's a good an' a willin' worker. You wouldn't believe the dust and

## The North Room

dirt was in it. It will be all ready for you by night. There's your feather-bed from your own bed upstairs upon it."

"It is so much nicer to have a southward-looking room," Maeve said, going to the window and looking out over the tangled orchard where the cherry and plum were bursting into bloom, and the daffodils spreading a golden sheet. The orchard came quite up to the side of the house. It was much better than having the wood. Over the low gnarled branches one saw the bog for miles, brown inset with silver and sapphire, where the pools caught the reflections of the heavens.

"There is so much more air," she said, "and it was so kind of you to think of it, Judy. I love my bright new room."

"Sure you're kindly welcome, Miss Maeve," Judy said, going off smiling.

After tea, when she had settled her invalid down for a sleep, Maeve fetched her various belongings which Judy had left behind from the room upstairs. The new room had a beautiful range of wardrobes. Maeve enjoyed setting out her simple garments in them. They would have housed a Duchess's wardrobe comfortably.

She was some little time transferring her belongings. At last it was done. She peeped into Miss O'Neill's room, saw that she was asleep, and stole out again. She had one association with the bedroom upstairs which made her sorry to leave it. She said to herself that she would not like the tree to be cut down, since it had brought her lover to her for that declaration of love which was also a farewell.

## The House of the Secret

She leant out of the window, and lived over with shut eyes the things Godfrey had said to her, the feel of his cheek against hers, the warmth of his kisses. Nothing so sweet could happen to her in her pretty south room ; but he was coming home to her. She would have him again ; she would look in his eyes and hear the ardour of his words.

She closed her eyes and leant out a little way. She kindled like Juliet upon her balcony. Then something made her open her eyes and draw back quickly, with a sudden sharp shock of aversion.

Someone had been watching her from the wood. Judy had told her that Rearden had gone to a distant sheep-fair and was not to return for a day or two.

But it was Rearden who was skulking among the tree-trunks, too slender to hide his bulky mis-shapeness. Rearden had looked on at her innocent and passionate moment of self-revelation. She hid her face with an intolerable sense of outrage and shame, after she had watched him from behind the curtain go his way into the stable-yard.

## CHAPTER XX

### A SOUND IN THE NIGHT

THE end of March brought a boisterous north-east wind with sharp frosts. Maeve slept every night in her godmother's room, refusing to share the watch with Judy. She had the wholesome sleepiness of youth, yet her anxious love made her start awake at the first sound in the room. Did the sick woman stir, did a coal fall from the grate, did a mouse run behind the wainscot, she started awake. Once the fire had gone to embers when she awoke and the room was cold. The dying woman complained of the chill, and Maeve's tender conscience was troubled so that she slept lightly, waking every hour or so, fearful that the fire had gone out.

Even in her sleep she seemed to hear the lightest sounds. Once she had gone asleep to the persistent ticking of the creature the Irish call the death-watch, which is to be heard in every wall of an old house. It got on her nerves. She was not superstitious. She would have said that she believed in God too implicitly to be superstitious, but she had not her Celtic blood for nothing; the sound heard at such a time depressed her.

During her sleep it seemed that the sound increased—grew louder. It was the death-watch: no, it was not the death-watch. It was someone digging—

## The House of the Secret

digging a grave, perhaps. Why should anyone be digging else? And for whom was the grave? Who should it be for except for the weary old body lying over there in the bed draped with faded blue silk, the body that already ached for the rest of the grave?

It was some time before the sound resolved itself out of her dreams to something really heard. She came slowly to waking consciousness. The constant disturbance of her healthy young sleep had begun to tell on her. She yawned sleepily as she came awake and saw the high window filled with moonlight.

Her first thought was for the fire. She sprang up and looked at it. It had fallen to white ash, and the frost was in the air. It nipped keenly as she slipped out of bed in her thin night-clothes.

Not waiting to put on anything warmer, she knelt down and puffed at the embers. A cloud of ash rose in her face, but there was no rosy glow. The fire was quite gone out.

She felt for the wood and the paper which Judy left her every night against such emergencies. To her horror she could find nothing. Even matches she could not find. How had it come that she had omitted to search for them before she went to bed? She remembered now that she had been so sleepy, and that she herself had hurried Judy away when she had brought her the tray for the night. Between them they had forgotten the precious essential fire.

She knew where the wood and the paper for kindling and the coal were kept: in the cellars that faced the barred kitchen windows of the underground storey. She thought of waking Judy, but dismissed the thought. Judy slept heavily. Her snoring filled the upper

## A Sound in the Night

stories of the house at night. The last time that she had had occasion to waken Judy it had taken a quarter of an hour to do it, for which poor faithful Judy had objurgated herself when at last she was awake.

"The kindest thing you can do, Miss Maeve," she had said, "would be to pull the bed-clothes off me and pour a jug of cold water over my head. 'Tis the only way, if so be you were in a hurry to wake me, jewel."

But Maeve was not prepared for such heroic measures.

She stood up shivering, and put on her warm dressing-gown. As she did so, she was suddenly aware that the sound of the spade in the earth which she had heard in her dreams was a real, actual thing. Someone was digging not far from the house.

She glanced hurriedly through the window. Below her the old orchard spread its gnarled boughs, as yet without a leaf, although the blossoms were thickening the branches of the pear and the plum. But the daffodils braved the wintry cold, magnificent golden creatures which came up year after year and never needed to be renewed. Narcissi were just opening, and presently there would be the white and scarlet windflowers. The orchard spread a carpet of the hardy spring blossoms. Between the daffodils the last snowdrops hung their delicate bells. It was a charming place, the old orchard, but much of it a tangled wilderness of thorns and briars.

It seemed as though the sound of the digging came from the orchard, but she could see nothing; she could only hear the sharp ring of the spade as it struck against a stone. There were so many dark corners in the orchard that might conceal a man, and it spread

## The House of the Secret

away quite out of sight. Even while she looked the digging stopped, and it was so silent that she might still have been dreaming she heard it.

The thought of the pilgrimage down through the silent house had terrors for her. The sound of the digging had struck a chill to her heart. What if they were digging a grave, not for the poor soul lying so quietly there under the blue curtains, but for someone away at the ends of the earth—young, beloved, loving! If they were digging his grave, would she not know it, even with the width of the world between them?

She pushed away the shadowy terrors from her. They were in the hands of God—in the hands of God, she and her beloved. She could trust him to God. And now that the sound of the digging had ceased, the silence of the night was so profound that she could hear a dead leaf drop outside the window.

Perhaps that moment of paralysing fear had had power to drive common everyday fears from her mind. They might come back again, but she would not give them a chance of unnerving her. It was morning. She heard the crowing of the first cock, and the twigs outside the pane crackled in the frost.

She seized the coal-scuttle bravely and turned the key in the locked door. The moonlight was waning in the corridor, and through the great arched window she could see the trouble of the sky that heralds the approach of dawn. The good day was coming, the day that banishes fears and phantoms. Already the east was grey; soon it would break up into long, pale lines, and the bright day would come. But as yet the house was dull of deep shadows.

She went down the wide, stone staircase, her gown

## A Sound in the Night

lapping behind her from step to step, as though some one followed her. The shadows lurked in every corner, fled before her candle, waited for her in window-embrasures and hidden nooks. A tall escritoire on the staircase, with a carved top, flung on the ceiling a shadow like a man's arm, sinister, threatening. There was a whole pack of shadows behind her creeping on her footsteps. And below there were the vast echoing, empty kitchens and winding underground passages; there were the areas outside full of all manner of discarded rubbish; beyond them the dark coal-cellars with their roofs lifted on arches like so many catacombs. She had peeped into them with Judy one day, and had seen beyond the coal all manner of ancient broken furniture piled higgledy-piggledy together. And there was an enormous barrel reaching to the ceiling about which Judy had been ominous.

"The mistress said it was for French wine in the great ould days, Miss Maeve," she had said. "I'm not for sayin' it wasn't; I'd never like to look in it myself for fear o' what I might see in it."

Fear was taking possession of her, but she was determined to fight it, to keep it away till she was safely back in the sick-room with the necessary materials for the fire. She braced herself up with a thought of the chilly room and the helpless invalid in whom vitality was already so low that the cold might quench it altogether.

She was at the head of the wide flight of stairs going down to the hall, when she was aware that someone was going down the stairs before her. With the first shock of the discovery the candle fell from her hand and was extinguished. The figure was so shadowy and

## The House of the Secret

elusive that it might have been a thin shaft of moonlight slipping from one step to another. But there was no moonlight, only the faint greyness before the dawn, so obscure that the figure going down the stairs seemed to reveal itself by some light that proceeded from itself.

It was a lady in some sort of a laced nightgown. Maeve could see the very pattern of the lace and note that the cambric was of fine quality by that strange moony light that seemed to come from the figure. All of a sudden she seemed to have lost her fear. She did not think of kindling her candle, but left it where it had fallen.

The figure went on before her down the kitchen staircase, never turning its head. She had a vague wonder as to where it would lead her. At the foot of the staircase she was conscious of a strong wind blowing in her face. Some door or window must have been left open.

The figure did not enter the kitchens, but turned aside and went down the passage that led to the area outside. Maeve followed still. As she passed one of the kitchens she was aware that a light was burning in it, and wondered even at that moment that Judy should be so careless.

The light shone out into the dark area. It revealed the open door of the coal-cellar, one of a long line of cellars that faced the kitchen windows and reminded Maeve of the rows of vaults in a town cemetery.

The open door, revealing the blackness beyond, seemed to bring her to her senses with a sudden shock. She looked along the passage and had an idea that at the foot of the steps which ascended from the area to the orchard the figure of the lady waited for her.

## A Sound in the Night

She had the strangest inclination to follow her and discover what it might mean; but she turned aside resolutely. The thought of the fireless room growing colder and colder in the grey dawn steadied her with the force of a shock.

Within the coal-cellar was "impenetrable blackness, except for the little ray of light from the lit kitchen window, by which she could see the coal and the kindling wood. She hastily filled her scuttle. Something within her was bidding her, "Hurry! hurry!"

Now she had all she wanted. She was about to return when she stopped short, her heart beating with great suffocating throbs. She had heard a sound—the sound of heavy footsteps: someone was coming down the area steps.

She groped her way into the obscurity and felt the rounded surface of the great barrel. She crept around it till it was between her and the door. Then she crouched listening; peering around the barrel she was able to see the square of the doorway against the lit window.

The heavy footsteps came on, She had very little doubt as to whose they were. For the first time she realised that the dogs were not with her. She remembered that they had crept in when she opened the door, licking her bare feet and rubbing themselves insinuatingly against her. She must have shut them in when she closed the door of the room behind her. How had she come to do it—to cut herself off from her faithful friends? She had a strange implicit conviction that if Rearden came upon her now she might expect little mercy from him.

The steps came nearer and nearer. Then Rearden's

## The House of the Secret

distorted shape showed itself clearly against the lit window. He was carrying something on his shoulder—a spade or some such implement. He was going on. No; he was coming in.

Maeve crouched low against the wall, sick with fear lest he should find her, despite the covering darkness. Fortunately he did not strike a light. He knocked his foot against the coal-scuttle and swore to himself. Then there was a rattle and a clang. He had flung down the spade. The handle of it almost struck her in her hidden corner.

He went out, stumbling over the coal and muttering to himself. She heard him go into the house, his footsteps stealthily heavy along the flagged passage. He entered the lit kitchen. She could see beyond the bars what he was doing.

He produced a bottle and glass from a cupboard in the wall. He sat down in a chair at the end of the table, and filling the glass, drained it at a single gulp.

She crept stealthily nearer the window. How was she going to pass him? To travel the interminable length of the long passage, past the lit door through which she would be plainly visible. Her heart quailed at the prospect. And yet it must be done. The frost was in the bedroom upstairs by this time. If her god-mother died through her remissness she would never forgive herself.

She watched him in a fascinated terror drink one glass after another from the bottle. The thought came to her that presently he would be insensible; but she dared not wait for that.

She had forgotten in her absorption how the daylight was growing about her. It had crept down, cold and

## A Sound in the Night

grey, even into the narrow passage where she was standing. And suddenly the man looked up and saw her.

He shouted; and the shout was like that of a wild beast. She stood as though turned to stone, quite incapable even of taking flight. She half closed her eyes, expecting nothing but that he would rush out upon her and kill her. A second, two seconds, three seconds passed. Since nothing happened, at last she found courage to open her eyes.

Rearden was standing with his back to the wall of the kitchen. The light striking upward cast his ugly features into grotesque light and shadow. He was a picture of fear.

The truth flashed upon her. He took her for a ghost. Well, she must not give him time to recover from his delusion. She had come to herself sharply. The sight of his cowardice seemed to have banished her own fear.

She turned around, picked up the scuttle of coal and went along the passage till she came to the door leading into the house. The door was still open. She passed down the long corridor from which the grey dawn was routing the shadows. She had to pass the door of the kitchen where Rearden was. She went on in a still quietness, thanking heaven for the obscurity of the grey dawn. Everything depended on the man's not having yet recovered from his delusion.

As she passed the kitchen door she saw him still standing, rigid with terror. He uttered a strange sound as he saw her. She began to ascend the stairs, trembling from head to foot. A coal dropped from the scuttle she was carrying and rolled from one step to

## The House of the Secret

another, and her heart stopped beating. Would not the sound reveal to him the fact that she was not a visitant from the other world?

She heard him make a movement and gave herself up for lost. But it was only to put the barrier of the stout kitchen door between him and the ghost. She heard the door clang to, and for greater security some heavy piece of furniture pushed against it. She was safe!

She locked the door at the head of the staircase and breathed freely. The fright she had had put the ghostly lady out of her mind. As she passed through the hall the clock struck six, and a warm glow began to fill the chilly atmosphere. The sun was about to rise.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE WELL IN THE ORCHARD

MISS O'NEILL was no worse for the night's mishap. Indeed, the morning found her a little brighter. But Maeve was shaken by her terrors of the dawn. She had had so much to bear that she felt nervous and unhinged. It would never do if she was going to have a nervous breakdown, at a time, too, when her godmother had so much need of her.

She spoke almost sharply to Judy about her omission of the night before; and was contrite when Judy pointed out to her the filled scuttle outside the bedroom door, reminding her how she, Maeve, had told her to fill it the last thing at night, and leave it outside the door so as not to disturb the mistress by coming in.

"I beg your pardon, Judy," she said; "I am growing forgetful. I am really very sorry."

"The likes of you shouldn't be beggin' the pardon of the likes of me," said Judy, blinking at her affectionately. "And, indeed, jewel dear, sure 'tis only natural you'd forget, bein' robbed of your sleep the way ye are. You should let me stay up o' nights, miss, instead of you."

"You work hard, Judy, and you want your sleep," Maeve said, gently.

They were in the corridor outside Miss O'Neill's room, and Maeve had turned the door handle to re-enter the room, when she had a sudden thought.

## The House of the Secret

"I want to speak to you, Judy," she said. "Come in here with me."

She opened the door of her own pretty room, and led the way in. A sweet smell of spring flowers came out to meet them. Many vases were filled with the daffodils and snowdrops from the orchard beneath the window, which Maeve had gathered before the frost. Judy stared about her, and her eyes fell on the flowers.

"You've been pickin' bokays from th' ould orchard, Miss Maeve," she said.

"Yes. Aren't they lovely, Judy? Won't it be a sight from my window?—thousands and thousands of them when the frost breaks up. I'm so glad you put me here."

"I'm not sayin' that they're not pretty, Miss Maeve. Not that I'd go the len'th o' quality. Quality's very quare about flowers an' scenery, an' animals, an' such-like. Still I wouldn't make too free wid th' ould orchard, Miss Maeve. Don't be gettin' into them over-grown places. Your foot might slip, or somethin'. They say there's a well somewhere in it. An ould well, that goes down deep. I never seen it myself. It's always been a wilderness as long as I remember it."

"I shall take care, Judy. Now, tell me, did you hear a sound in the night of someone digging?"

Judy stared at her with a scared look.

"God bless us and save us, no, Miss Maeve! I heard nothin' of the sort. The poor mistress! Don't be talkin' of anything so unlucky. Sure it's the worst of ill-luck wid anywan lyin' sick in the house."

Maeve made a movement of impatience.

"It wasn't anything like that, Judy. It was, as a matter of fact, your brother digging somewhere. I

## The Well in the Orchard

thought it was understood that he was not to come into the house. He was in the house last night."

Judy's jaw dropped as she stared at Maeve with a greater blankness than before.

"Is it Corney diggin', Miss? Glory be to goodness, what would Corney be diggin' for in the middle of the night? It'll be that you wor dramin', mi's."

"I was not dreaming, Judy. When I went down to the cellar for the coal I saw him come in by way of the area steps with a spade on his shoulder. There was a candle lighting in the kitchen. I left him there when I came upstairs."

Some puzzlement or bewilderment cleared off Judy's face.

"So 'twas you he seen," she said.

"He saw me, and he showed a very lively terror of me."

"He took ye for the drowned lady, the poor, unfortunate fellow. Hasn't he been on about it all the mornin'? 'Twas the fear of her druv him into the house."

"The drowned lady!"

"Her that was drowned in the well in the orchard. Sure 'tis a quare ould story. They say she dropped a bracelet in the well the day before her weddin' day, and stoopin' to look after it tumbled in herself. The well was covered after that. Myself, I never seen sign nor token of it. If 'tis there 'tis well hidden."

"You believe in this—ghost, Judy?" Maeve asked, watching Judy's face.

"I wouldn't care to be up and down after dark myself. I've seen nothin'; but I've heard her go by.

## The House of the Secret

Haven't you heard the dogs howl? They see more than we see."

"They bayed the moon," Maeve said, but there was no conviction in her voice.

"I wonder at you, Miss Maeve," Judy said, in a distressed voice. "The world knows that a dog'll howl for a spirit goin' by, or death or trouble comin'."

"Or a full moon," Maeve repeated. She was not minded to tell her story to Judy Rearden. How did she know what blind panic might seize on Judy?

"Anyhow," she went on, "I don't see what harm the poor lady could do us, supposing she did walk about. And why should she? Isn't she too happy in heaven to be walkin' about the earth?"

"There might be somethin' she had to do pinance for," said Judy, and then shifting her point of view with amazing rapidity, "Isn't it true for you, Miss Maeve? Sure what my ould father used to say, them that's in hell can't get out, an' them that's in heaven wouldn't lave it, if they could. Sure, the poor harmless crathur, wasn't it hard enough on her to be drowned widout walkin' the world till this time o' day? It might ha' been herself I've heerd up and down the stairs. Herself was always terrible onaisy o' nights whin the moon was at the full. 'Twas what I was sayin' to Corney. 'If she walks itself, Corney Rearden,' says I, 'what grudge would she have agin you? You're bad enough to the rest o' the world and yourself worst of all; but you never did anythin' on her. Morebetok n 'twas the gentle crathur she was, so they say.'"

"I won't have him in the house at night," said Maeve.

"I shall see that the doors are locked and bolted every night, and that I myself have the keys."

## The Well in the Orchard

"Aye, do, miss. I tould him he shouldn't ha' come in, but he kep' on whimperin' an' saying how lonesome it was in th' ould hay-loft above the empty stables. There used to be a couple o' hunters in them an' a lady's hack and four carriage horses. Aye, indeed, there was. Times are changed sure enough."

"He wouldn't be frightened," said Maeve with young righteousness, "if he didn't take drink. He has himself to blame for his terrors. Anyhow, he is not to come into the house again. I cannot forbid him the stables, or I would."

She said to herself that if only the sick woman upstairs were beyond the menace of the man's hatred and calumny she could defy him herself, and show him the door. She had forgotten the dumb terror with which she had quailed behind the great barrel in the coal-cellar. It is so much easier to be brave in the full noontide than in the grey hours of the dawn.

A couple of days passed by quietly. Miss O'Neill was much the same, slept a good deal, woke and dozed again.

The only event was that for the first time for many years the rector of the parish had called and been admitted. Rather to Maeve's surprise, Miss O'Neill had been willing to see him. More; she had listened to him when he talked about the state of her soul. She had not demurred when he had offered to read the Bible to her, and she had listened with edifying interest to the chapters he read to her. When he had closed the book she repeated some of the verses over to herself. "The bruised reed He shall not break, and the smoking flax He shall not quench."

"Ah! yes," she said, "the bruised reed and the

## The House of the Secret

smoking flax. That was said for such as me. His mercy is for such as me, more sinned against than sinning. Whatever you hear in the time to come, Mr. Lesmond, remember that, that I was a woman more sinned against than sinning."

The rector, who was newly appointed and young, was rather excited about his visit.

"My predecessor told me," he said to Maeve, "that it was no use for me to come. He said that Miss O'Neill was very worldly in her youth. She thought of nothing but amusement, of dancing and hunting, and card-playing, and all manner of worldly gaieties; and that after she came back here he was refused admission when he called. I confess that I should have tried again. Miss O'Neill seems a charming old lady."

"I hope you will come again," said Maeve. "I know that Mr. Wilkinson, unfortunately, offended my god-mother by a letter which he wrote to her, in which he suggested that she was no longer young, and ought to be thinking of the next world. It was about the worst thing he could have done. Before this illness my god-mother was very sensitive to any suggestion that her youth and beauty were over."

Mr. Lesmond had the good sense not to smile nor to show surprise, by which he won Maeve's inward commendation.

The frost was gone now, and every day the flowers in the orchard came out in greater profusion. There were still some patches of snow lying in the shrubberies neighbouring the snowdrops, which were all but over. But the wind was April's, and when the window of the sick room was opened, many tender sounds came in, the singing of the birds, the bleating of the little lambs

## The Well in the Orchard

on the green hillocks, the soft singing of streams, the murmur of the wind in the yet leafless trees.

Maeve had proved so efficient a nurse that Dr. Hudson had not again urged on her that she should have a professional nurse. His eyes rested with approval on the clean brightness of the sick-room, where the flowers from the orchard stood in stacks and were constantly renewed.

He had paid his afternoon visit one day, and had been somewhat distracted. The precious only baby had not been well, and he was plainly a prey to a thousand terrors. Maeve helped him to cut the visit short, and went to the gate leading into the wood with him.

"I shall send Jerry for the medicine," she said. "And you will give him word for me of how the baby is. You know that if it was someone else's baby you would be sure it was all right."

"By Jove, how you understand!" he said, looking down at her where she stood by the side of his horse. "Not many young girls would understand like you, Miss Standish. I know I am unnecessarily anxious. But when people have waited fourteen years——"

"And, to be sure, being a doctor, you know all the things that may happen."

"That is just it," he assented, eagerly.

"But you also know that they don't happen," she said, looking up into the kind, haggard face.

"To be sure they don't," he assented more eagerly than before. "You've cheered me, Miss Standish. You've really cheered me. If you could send over Jerry in a couple of hours I should have the medicine

## The House of the Secret

ready. Give her a dose as soon as it arrives. It will ensure her having a good night."

Jerry came back about five o'clock with the medicine. There was a cheerful message from Dr. Hudson. "The little beggar had frightened them for nothing. He seemed quite all right again."

Maeve was in her godmother's room when the message arrived. Miss O'Neill had been suffering pain and uneasiness more or less all day. Maeve was very glad to have the medicine. She administered it at once to the patient, and had the satisfaction, after a while, of seeing her sink into a quiet sleep.

Meanwhile Jerry was unfolding a tale of trouble to Judy.

"The two dogs is lost," he said. "Sorra a bit of them but would follow me. They kep' close to me heels till I was crossin' through Scatterry Woods on me way back, an' I missed them of a suddent. I whistled for all I was worth, though it might ha' brought them gamekeepers a-top o' me. But no sign o' the dogs. 'Tis huntin' they wor, the young wan ladin' th' ould wan astray. He should have more sense at his age. Whatever did they want to folly me for at all—at all?"

"'Deed, I don't know," said Judy. "A bit of an impident weazel like you. Howsomedever you put the comether on th' owld dog, him that always kep' himself to himself, I don't know. An' now you've gone an' lost him, an' Miss Maeve's own dog as weil, an' she'll be wild. Let alone Herself. I wouldn't answer for it if Herself was to know."

"I thought they'd be at home before me," wailed Jerry. "But I'll tell you what, I'll skelp back as hard

## The Well in the Orchard

as ever I can and look for them. They can't ha' go far; and Viper'd never pass unnoticed. He's too ugly for that. Whin I takes him through the village the childer bawls melia murder, and the mothers comes an' whips 'em in an' bangs the door in our faces. 'Tis no use bawlin' at them that he's a harmless poor crathur."

"He's harmless enough to them he likes," said Judy, grimly. "Corney's life isn't safe with him. Be off, now, an' look for thim. Not that you'll find thim. 'Tis lyin' dead somewhere they are, or they'd be at home long ago. Get out, now, you hank of impidence, and don't be dirtyin' the place wid your feet. Bring word of thim dogs, whether they're dead or alive. If 'tis dead they are you'll have to tell Miss Maeve yourself, for I won't do it, so I won't. She thinks the world an' all o' them bastes."

Jerry slunk off with a scared air. He adored Maeve; and the thought of her displeasure was something intolerable to him. He said to himself that he wouldn't come back without the dogs. He turned back to implore Judy not to tell Miss Maeve the dogs were missing till he should have found them.

"Is it me?" said Judy. "Indeed 'tis tellin' your own misfornit stories you may be. Isn't it trouble of me own I'm havin' wid Corney gone again, an' as like as not drinkin' himself mad somewhere or other? If you'd kep' him company in the stable-loft it needn't have happened; but ye would go shuttin' yourself up in a box-stall like a gintleman instead of keepin' poor Corney company."

"'Twas the terrible yellin' an' shoutin', aye, an' the language he used to have out of him when I could sleep wid him frightened me out of it," Jerry said, apologeti-

## The House of the Secret

cally. "I never seen a man as ha'nted, judgin' by the drames he had."

"Get out o' this with your ha'ntin'," said Judy, stooping for a broomstick, "or I'll make ye. Yerself an' yer ha'ntin'." "'Tis what comes o' too much schoolin'. Go an' find thim ould tormints of dogs."

Jerry dodged the broom-handle flung at him and escaped up the area steps; while Judy considered within herself what evasive answer she should give Miss Maeve if so unchancy a thing happened as that the dogs should be asked for.

The afternoon sun was still on the orchard outside when Maeve stood in the window of the sick-room overlooking it. She had been indoors all day, and she felt an irresistible desire to get out of doors. She looked out at the sunshiny orchard, conjecturing that there would be a fine sunset. This side of the house was in gloom during the afternoon and evening. The growing beauty outside called her to come out.

She glanced over her shoulder at the bed. Miss O'Neill was sleeping quietly. She would sleep quietly for hours, all night probably. The fire had just been replenished, and was burning brightly. There was no reason why she should not run out for a breath of air.

She turned into the dining-room, and rang the bell for Judy; but no Judy came. As a matter of fact Judy was keeping out of the way till the dogs should be found. She waited for a few minutes, then decided to wait no longer, and went out-of-doors.

She had never yet explored the orchard, which ran away from the house for quite a long distance till it was ended by a luxuriant hedge, beyond which lay the fields, and the bog, and the distant hill.

## The Well in the Orchard

Nothing could have been lovelier than the orchard that eve of April. The low sun flooded the glades of flowers under the roof of gnarled boughs. Blackbirds were singing deliciously; the ground underfoot was starred below the taller flowers with a million little starry blossoms. It was softer and deeper than the richest carpet. The paths had become covered with moss in the course of time, and were soft and springy underfoot.

She wandered on, picking flowers as she went, till her arms were full of them. The mossy paths under the gnarled boughs wound in and out. Presently she was out of sight of the balustrading which edged the terrace this side of the house. It was broken in many places, and was lying on its side. The steps by which she had descended into the orchard were broken also, and might be dangerous to a careless walker. Beyond the low balustrading the house loomed darkly; but now she had descended yet another grassy terrace by grassy steps, and was in the lower orchard out of sight of the house.

This was somewhere she had not penetrated before. She wandered about it in a quiet delight. Tall trees stood up around it. In one of them a wood-dove was crooning. The sky beyond the dark network of boughs was beginning to be flecked by long lines of rose, filmy petals, tossed hither and thither, as though they were making a rose-harvest in heaven, as we make our hay in the fields of earth.

Suddenly she uttered a sound almost of pain. Here the daffodils grew most gloriously, splendid single trumpets of magnificent strength and beauty, shining like so many lamps of the sun between the beautiful green swords of their grasses.

## The House of the Secret

The flowers had been broken as though by the passage of some devastating beast. Something, or someone, had pushed carelessly through them, not caring that they set clumsy feet on the golden lilies. She could see the track of that destruction where it swept away through a fairy-like glade to the farthest corner of the orchard by the edge of yew.

She picked up the broken and dying daffodils as she went. Beyond the clear space where they grew there was dense undergrowth. Nature had been taking back the orchard to itself this many a year. Here and there through the undergrowth a daffodil had pushed its head.

Suddenly her foot knocked against something hard. She put down her hand and felt under the grass something like a stone kerb. Was it the well, she wondered, the well that had been filled up? And why should the feet that trampled the daffodils have made a track to the well?

There was nothing now but grass at her feet, green grass covered with low thorn-trees. The sun had sunk suddenly down behind the forest trees, and save for the daffodils the orchard was in cold shadow. If there had been light to see she would have seen that the ground had a disturbed air, that there were new sods under the briars, and that the briars themselves were newly put into the clay.

She moved a little, felt with her foot for the kerb, and found nothing. The path wound round by the briars. She took a step or two the way it went. Then the solid earth sank beneath her feet. She was falling. She caught at earth that crumbled between her fingers. Down and down she went, her hands vainly clutching.

## The Well in the Orchard

They closed over something hard and cold, a chain that tore through her hands with a rattle, and she fell further and further. The chain ceased to slip through her fingers. Something struck her forehead. She saw the flashing of a thousands lights. Then—silence and darkness.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LONG NIGHT

MAEVE seemed to awaken to a sense of extreme cold. She was not dead or drowned. She was kneeling on something that supported her; her forehead was pressed against the chain. She was sick and shaken by her fall. Her hands grasped an iron chain, although they felt numb with cold. She had the instinct, although she was half unconscious, not to move, to keep in her crouching position against the wall of stone, to hold on still like grim death to the chain against which her face rested.

For a time she felt stunned and unable to realise where she was. She was all in darkness, huddled on something that felt like a narrow shelf of stone. The realisation of what had happened came to her by slow degrees. She remembered the orchard, the evening light, the daffodils. The scent of the bruised flowers rose in her nostrils. Some of them must have fallen with her. She was kneeling upon them.

She was very cramped and numb. While one hand clutched the chain, she felt about the wall with the other. The surface was wet and slimy, covered with a growth of damp mosses and fungi. She was in the old well. Somehow she must have fallen through the opening. And not at the bottom of it—not by any manner of means at the bottom of it. Her first move-

## The Long Night

ment had sent a pebble rolling from the stone shelf on which she leant. It seemed quite a long time before it struck the water.

She felt for the edges of her narrow resting-place. It was very narrow. She drew herself up in a standing position after a time; she was unbearably cramped as she had been. The shelf was so slippery that she had to be very careful in her movements. Only the chain to which she clung gave her confidence to rise.

By the help of the chain she presently turned herself about. It made her giddy to feel how near the edge her feet were, but the position was more tolerable.

Clinging to the chain she leant her head back against the wall and looked upward. She must have been unconscious for some time, for it was night in the world above—night and moonlight. Far, far overhead there was a space of silver. She thought that she might perhaps see it reflected as far below if only she dared look down the abyss; but she dared not.

She wondered what time of night it could be. There was nothing in the circle of moonlight to tell, nor how many hours she must wait before the dawn. Fortunately the dawn came early, or at least comparatively early. The sun would rise about half-past five or a little later. How many endless minutes must pass before then?

It was deadly cold and full of fear down here in the long-disused well. She wondered if Rearden had had anything to do with her accident, whether it was a cunningly-laid trap into which her feet had fallen. Why had she not taken warning by the kerb and fled the spot? Judy had said that the well had been covered in. Long as she had lived at Chapel she had

## The House of the Secret

never seen it, had indeed only half-believed in its existence. Was it possible that Rearden, seeing her walk in the old orchard, had uncovered the well, and then lightly re-covered it with sods and bushes so that she should fall into it? She remembered the spade and the sound of the digging. It seemed only too likely. And his terror of herself when he had taken her for an apparition. Did he believe that the drowned lady had come to punish him for the evil use he had made of her well?

Perhaps if she dared look over the crumbling verge of her place of refuge, she might see at the bottom of the well the bones of the woman who had been drowned in it. She shivered with sudden terror, and fell to hurried praying against the panic which, if it should master her, would surely be her destruction. She remembered something her father was fond of repeating:

God's in His Heaven ;  
All's right with the world.

It stilled the fast beating of her heart like a spell, made her suddenly recover herself from the sick faintness which had seized upon her.

God's in His Heaven ;  
All's right with the world.

God who had preserved her unhurt, who had made her feet to fall on this little ledge, scarce wide enough for anything but a sea-bird, would keep her in safety through the night. Why, everything was His—ghosts, if there were such things; everything was His, except sin and the sinner, in which He had no part.

After a time she grew drowsy and pinched with cold

## The Long Night

and fatigue. Though she dared not sleep and kept reminding herself of it, calling on God with a voiceless hurry and urgency that He would keep her awake, yet she must have dozed somewhat as the hours passed.

Once she had been nodding, and came suddenly awake with the knowledge that some dark body had obscured the moonlight overhead. She did not dare look up lest her white face should be visible to the one who was looking down. Her teeth chattered in her head as she crouched as closely as possible to the wall, longing that there might be some cranny or nook that would receive her.

A stone came dropping by her face, and she almost shrieked aloud. It fell on to her ledge and, rebounding, dropped into the space below.

Her heart stood still with fear. Supposing that the man above there wanted to make sure of his victim. Supposing that—one terror after another took possession of her mind—supposing that he were to complete his work by covering over the well, the existence of which apparently no one but himself remembered! Supposing she were left to die in the dark like a rat in a trap! How long would it be before the end would come—thirst, hunger, drowning? What would the end be? She closed her eyes in the grasp of a wild fear. Many things passed through her mind in a brief space of time. Godfrey—poor Godfrey—what would he think when he came home and heard how she had disappeared? Perhaps no one would ever know. At the bottom of the well she would be safely hidden, and the sods above would keep the secret of her murder. Ah, and she would have company down there; there had been someone drowned before her. She thought

## The House of the Secret

that she screamed; but the scream strangled in her throat.

But what was the sound that came to her from a distance—a hoarse cry like a wild beast in the grip of terror. She heard heavy feet running, a curse, a groan. She looked up. The circle of moonlight was clear except for some white mist that lay between her and it like a light veil.

And suddenly a conviction of God's care and protection took possession of her and soothed her terrors.

God's in His Heaven;  
All's right with the world.

Something had sent the man who would have been her murderer flying away from the spot in breathless haste. She knew how superstition has power to daunt the brutal and the ignorant. Something had sent Corney Rearden, stumbling and cursing, in a panic-stricken flight from the mouth of the well. Something which could be only there by the permission and mercy of God.

She was no longer afraid. Oh, thank God, she was no longer afraid. She trusted in Him and realised what that trust meant to the long line of saints and martyrs.

And surely some change was taking place in the sky overhead. The moonlight was waning. Some stronger growing light was pushing it out of its place. The day was coming. The dark night with all its terrors was over. In the new day search would be made for her and she would be found. She could trust Judy's faithfulness as she would a dog's. Judy would call in help. And the dogs would find her. Where were the

## The Long Night

dogs that they had not found her? Was it likely she would be overlooked, that they would not search for her and find her within a few hundred yards of the house? It was not likely. And:

God's in His Heaven;  
All's right with the world.

God would not leave her to the nightmare horrors of another night in the darkness.

Up somewhere about the mouth of the well a bird called. It sounded immeasurably far-off. And as though all the choir of birds had been waiting for the call, there was immediately a full chorus. The light brightened. It was going to be a bright day. Down here the cold was numbing. Her hands seemed to freeze upon the chain by which she supported herself. But the sun was rising. Even down here would not the influence of the good sun be felt.

Suddenly she heard a sound that brought her heart into her mouth. There was a fall of earth from the mouth of the well that came rattling down about her head and shoulders. Was Rearden coming back, bold in the new day, to complete his work?

But no, it was not Rearden. The eager, quick whining of dogs told her who it was. She remembered now that Viper and Codger had not been with her yesterday. They had gone hunting, not for the first time. Now they had come back and had found her.

Looking up she could see the two heads against the sky. The dogs were sniffing and whining in a frenzy of joyful excitement. She called to them, and they answered her by scratching at the earth about the mouth of the well, sending down fresh showers upon

## The House of the Secret

her. She had a new terror. Supposing they were to leap down upon her. If they did that they would drag her off her shelf, and they would all go together to the bottom of the well.

But after a few more such demonstrations old Viper did something wiser than that. He lay down on the edge of the well and began to bark furiously, and Codger echoed him shrilly. Then, as she judged, the dogs ran a little way towards the house, barked there, and returned to the well. Trust the old dog for wisdom! He was taking the surest means of saving her.

She listened as though she could hear what was passing in the world overhead. How long would it be before the dogs brought her help? Now that it was surely coming she realised that not much longer could her numbed hands have held the chain.

So long the dogs kept running to and fro, barking incessantly, that she had almost time to give up hope. She was full of aches and pains. The sun shining in the world above seemed to have thawed her somewhat, and she ached with the intolerable ache of thawing. How earthy the place smelt! Like a grave! Yes, like a grave. Would no one ever come? The tears froze in her eyes while her lips tried to repeat:—

God's in His Heaven ;  
All's right with the world.

If she could only move! The cramping on her narrow foothold was terrible. Then a voice came down to her.

“Miss Maeve, for the love of God, are you there?”

She called back as loudly as she could, but felt that her voice sounded no more than a whisper.

## The Long Night

"Don't be frightened, jewel, darlin'," called Judy again. "The doctor's here. There's a rope comin' down to you. Can you slip it over your head and under your arms?"

The rope swung by her face. It had a running noose on it. Dr. Hudson had not been a doctor in the Navy for nothing. New strength seemed to come to her. She slipped her head through the noose, and her shoulders. It tightened its hold on her. She was swung off her ledge. She was in mid air. She closed her eyes. Now she was scraping against the walls of the well, now swinging from side to side. She put out her hands to shield her face. Her face must not be spoilt for Godfrey. Her hands tore against the stones, but she hardly felt the pain of it. And now she was over the threshold of the well. Dr. Hudson had his arm about her to support her. He was very pale. Judy was crying and kissing her hands. The dogs were fawning on her feet. There was a man she knew as the doctor's gardener. He was lifting the rope from about her shoulders. And the sun, how heavenly it was!

\* \* \* \* \*

She awoke in her own bed. The sun was not on the window, by which she judged that it was late in the afternoon. She still felt full of aches and pains, but she was conscious of a grateful warmth. She moved in bed, and someone who had been crouching by the fire stood up and came to her bedside—Judy.

"Glory be to goodness, you're doin' finely, Miss Maeve. And how do you feel yourself at all? The doctor said you were to have some hot soup the minit you wakened. I've been watchin' it here by the fire. It's a lovely drop."

## The House of the Secret

"How is my godmother?" Maeve asked, anxiously. "Did she know I was missing?"

"The sorra a thing at all she knew about it. Sure, I wasn't an omadhaun to tell her the like. She slep' well into the morning, and thin I tould her you was gone out be the doctor's ordhers to get a breath of air. 'Maybe 'tis havin' her lunch wid Mrs. Hudson she'll be,' says I. 'Isn't she worn out wid the nursin'?' Indeed, I tould lies as fast as a dog 'ud trot. Anyhow, she seemed very contint, and now she's sleepin' like a babby. Sure I can't think of her for thinking o' you. The ould dogs, too. I'm ashamed o' myself whin I think of how I used to hate that crathur Viper. Wasn't it knowledgeable they was? An' how at all did you come to fall in the well?"

"I believe, Judy," Maeve said, slowly, "that someone laid a trap for me. I stepped on to what I thought was grass, and I went down, down. Is it likely it could have been like that and no one ever to discover it before?"

"It isn't poor Corney you're thinkin' of, Miss Maeve," said Judy, in a trembling voice. She had been very pale from the time she had come to Maeve's bedside, and Maeve had had an idea that Judy was talking to postpone the subject that must be spoken of between them. "Sure, bad and all as he was, he wouldn't go to do that, to murder ye, Miss Maeve!"

There was something so stricken in Judy's face that Maeve looked away from it.

"I believe he meant to murder me," she said. "You remember the digging I told you I heard, and how I saw him come in from the orchard with a spade? He must have uncovered the well and then sodded it over

## The Long Night

for my destruction. He knew I used to walk in the orchard and pick the flowers there."

"Indeed, then, I don't think he'd go next or nigh the place," said Judy. "He tould me she walked there, that he'd seen her. 'Glory be to goodness, ye poor omadhaun,' said I, 'twas Miss Maeve you seen. She come down the stairs for coal for the mistress's room,' 'Her!' says he, an' I thought he'd have a fit. 'Is it likely he'd meddle with what belonged to *her*? He wasn't in the place at all last night; but Jerry says he seen him runnin' as if the divil was after him in the grey dawn o' the mornin'. That boy Jerry, that says more nor his prayers, said he frightened him. He had a look about him as if he'd seen a ghost. 'Tisn't likely he'd go meddlin' with *her* well."

Maeve said nothing; it was no use burdening Judy with all she knew and all she suspected.

"I'm going to get up now," she said.

"The doctor said you wasn't to stir till he gave you lave."

"I can sleep in my godmother's room as well as here," Maeve said, lifting herself up with some difficulty; "better indeed. I could have no sleep for thinking of her. The dogs will protect us. I shall take care that they don't leave me for the future."

"Th' ould dog has a crushed paw," Judy said, helping her to rise. "He must have caught it in wan o' them rabbit traps somewhere. It was the mercy of God he got it loose in time."

She handled Maeve as tenderly as though she were a darling child. Indeed, it was amazing to see how love and devotion had taught Judy a certain deftness. While she helped her Maeve felt Judy's eyes fixed on

## The House of the Secret

her with a dumb devotion and an anguished appeal in them.

"You're not goin' to bring in the polis, Miss Maeve?" she said, as she knelt to put on Maeve's shoes. "Not that I'd say a word, if 'twas to be your life or his. But your poor Judy'll guard you faithfuller nor your dog; an' if he comes again I'll tell him 'tis all found out, an' the polis lookin' for him. Sure, I'd give my life for you a thousand times over."

"I'm not going to call in the police," Maeve said.

"Sure, it might be the ruin and destruction of Herself," Judy said, eagerly, "an' she dyin' so quietly. 'Tis quit of us all you'll soon be, Miss Maeve. Why would you be bringin' in the polis?"

"God's in His Heaven;  
All's right with the world,"

Maeve said to herself. God had taken care of her, and would take care of her. He was stronger than her enemy.

She did not know that that night, and for some nights after, Judy Rearden lay outside her door, where a foot must fall on her before anyone could cross the threshold.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE LOCKED WING

AFTERWARDS came a week or two of quietness. Rearden seemed to have removed his ill-omened shadow from Chapel, and the house was the brighter and happier without him. The days had the clear shining of spring, and the large rooms were flooded with clear sun and air and light.

"How different it all is now spring has come!" Maeve said, speaking the thought that was in her mind. She was sitting by the open window of the sick-room; the wind blew from the south, and the orchard was more glorious than ever. She had got over her first feeling of horror about the orchard. The well was filled in now to the brink. Never again need anyone fear its hidden treacherousness. She was too young and strong and healthy for anything to remain of that night of terror, except a profound thankfulness, first, and above all, to the Giver of all protection and safety; secondly, to those builders of the well who had constructed that platform half-way down for the bucket to rest on.

Miss O'Neill smiled at her. The old delusions and strangeness were all gone. She was propped up on her pillows, and, with the old lace upon her hair and about the neck of her wrapper, she looked almost beautiful.

## The House of the Secret

"I am glad, Maeve," she said, "that you have come to like Chapel after all."

"I have come to love it," said Maeve, eagerly. "I did not think I should, but I do. It is so lofty and spacious; such a noble house. It is a thousand pities it should ever have been neglected."

"I should like to think that one day, after I am gone, the house would be set in order from garret to basement, that it would be a home, what it was built for. I should like to think of married love here and children running about the house. When you have little children, Maeve, you must tell them about me; not the unhappy part, but the good part; of my great days when I could dance all night and hunt all day; when I had only to appear in Dublin streets for everyone to stare at me. Do you know what a quite common man said to me once as I stepped out of my carriage at a Dublin shop? 'Wisha,' said he, 'I could light my pipe at the fire of your eye, my beauty.' Wasn't it pretty, Maeve?"

She laughed, and the laughter had a strange piteous sound to Maeve.

"It was very pretty," she assented, coming over and smoothing the sick woman's pillows, and shaking some eau de Cologne upon her handkerchief as some outlet for the tenderness she could not express.

Miss O'Neill lay silent for a few moments. The long speech had somewhat exhausted her; but while she lay with closed eyes she smiled.

"I should love to think of you here, Maeve," she said, opening her eyes after a time; "you and your husband and children in this old house that has borne more than its share of tragedies."

## The Locked Wing

"Yes, dear," Maeve said again. It seemed a contingency very little likely to come true. Even if by an unbelievable chance Chapel House were to be hers, she was going to marry a poor man, with only his sword for a profession—only his sword; and, perhaps, not even that. If Chapel was hers they would have to let it, and live in a little cottage, like an old soldier and his wife who had settled in the neighbourhood recently, because there was sport to be had and the cost of living was reduced to a minimum. But Godfrey was one of more fiery stuff than old Captain Cleeve, and he was in the flower of his youth. To Maeve the country cottage with Godfrey might be idyllic; to him, too, till inaction began to fret him and he sighed for one crowded hour of glorious life. She prayed night and day that Godfrey might not have such injuries as would debar him from his profession, little guessing if that were so what momentous issues it would involve for her. But at the happiest they were little likely ever to inhabit Chapel.

One night she was awakened from a sweet sleep by an uneasy movement of her godmother. It was somewhere about the grey hour of the morning.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, sitting up wide-awake.

"I am so sorry to have disturbed you, Maeve," Miss O'Neill said, with contrition. "You were sleeping so sweetly, poor child. Judy has been chopping wood, and it has kept me awake. And poor Viper has been disturbed, too; he has been groaning and growling this long time past outside the door."

"He grows old," said Maeve, leaning towards the night-light to consult her watch. "I expect he was

## The House of the Secret

doing it in his sleep. Or, perhaps, his poor crushed paw was giving him pain. Half-past four. What on earth is Judy chopping wood for at half-past four? I shall speak to her about it."

She got up and attended to the fire, and gave Miss O'Neill her medicine. The sound of chopping wood had stopped by this time, and though Maeve lay awake till the dawn was in the room, she heard no recurrence of it.

She forgot to mention the matter to Judy for a day or two, till some other occasion arose to warn Judy that Miss O'Neill's fitful sleeps were light and easily broken.

"You dropped something as you were going down the stairs this morning, and she awoke with a start," Maeve said. "I don't know how long she lay awake afterwards, staring at the ceiling, poor soul."

Judy's contrition was immense.

"I'd be ready to kill myself," she said, "if it was the clumsiness of me 'ud keep the poor mistress from her rest."

"That reminds me," said Maeve. "What were you chopping wood for at half-past four in the morning?"

"Me? Is it me to chop wood at half-past four in the mornin', Miss Maeve? Is it to be takin' lave of my seven sinses I'd be?"

"Someone was chopping wood, and Miss O'Neill was disturbed by it," said Maeve, turning away. "See that it doesn't happen again, Judy."

She looked back again quickly. Something odd in Judy's expression had attracted her attention.

"It isn't a sign or an omen, Judy," she said, somewhat sharply. She had a young intolerance for superstition, and a wholesome hatred of it. "You remember

## The Locked Wing

the sound of digging I heard. Well, that wasn't a sign or a portent, though you thought it was."

"Wasn't it a sign of the greatest trouble to you, miss?" said Judy, unbelievably.

"You know what it was a sign of," Maeve said, severely. "It was quite evident, when we examined it, that the stones had been removed from the mouth of the well and a few sods laid over branches in their place."

"I can't credit that he'd do the like, Miss Maeve," Judy said, with an air of heartbroken obstinacy. "Wasn't my poor mother always prayin' for him? 'Judy,' she said to me many a time, 'Judy, take care o' Corney. There'll be nayther love nor likin' for Corney in the world, an' that's the more reason why you'll have to stand by him.' 'Twas true for her. Poor Corney's a bad egg; but murder is what I can't believe of him. If I could I'd wash me hands of him, though he's all poor Judy has in the world, barrin' yourself an' the poor misthress, axin' your pardon, Miss Maeve. He wasn't always cursin' an' batin' me. You wouldn't believe it, miss, but poor Corney's fond o' me. I'm all he has in the world."

A sudden thought struck Maeve.

"Has he been here again, Judy?" she asked, sternly.

Judy quailed before her eye.

"Ye never saw such a misery as he was, Miss Maeve," she said. "Sure, there's no wan in the world to do a hand's turn for him except Judy. He's not in it now, Miss Maeve, at all. Indeed, ye needn't be frettin' that he is. He's took a horr o' the place. He says villages is pleasanter compan. You never heard such talk as he had out of him about the ghost—the lady

## The House of the Secret

that was drowned in the well. He says it would be a mercy the place was pulled down so she couldn't walk."

"If you can't be separated from him, Judy, you must go to see him. He is not to come here."

"Indeed, I was frightened out of me seven sines when I looked up and see him standin' on the floor, an' him looking no better nor an ould bundle of rags. 'Give me something to ate, Judy,' he says, 'for I'm fit to drop. An' I've a ravin' thirst on me.' 'What brings ye in it at all, Corney Rearden?' says I. 'Hold your wish, woman,' says he, 'or I'll be givin' you somethin' to talk about. I'll be out of it,' says he, 'as soon as ever I've broke me fast. I wouldn't live in it not if you was to pay me, an' ould gashly place,' says he, 'wid a ghost at every hand's turn.' I lit the fire as fast as I could and gev him his breakfast. An' he was off like a redshank; and sign nor token of him I haven't seen from that hour to this."

"It is not to occur again, Judy," said Maeve firmly. "If you want to see your brother you must see him elsewhere."

"You wouldn't be sending me off?" asked Judy, suddenly scared. "Sure I know I'm not fit for the likes o' ye; but none o' them wid the capstrings 'ud have the faithfulness o' poor ould Judy. Sure I couldn't live away from you."

Maeve reassured her, feeling oddly touched by the disproportionate affection she had excited in the poor uncouth creature's heart.

But the nights did not resume their old quietness. She was awakened that very night by the low, angry growling of the old dog, and going out in the corridor

## The Locked Wing

found Viper bristling and creeping stealthily down the corridor towards the door which opened on to another corridor, beyond which lay the wing of the house which was supposed to be so unsafe that it had been locked up at an earlier date.

She had never tried to investigate the locked wing. Chapel House was so enormous, with so many great darkened rooms, full of sheeted shapes of furniture and a dusty mouldering smell, that it would have needed time and leisure to explore it all. She had glanced curiously at the low, arched door, with its locks and hinges of iron, when she had found herself in the inner corridor, saying to herself that when the spring came and the long days of full light she would ask her godmother's permission to investigate those secrets.

She had discovered that the door was locked, and that Judy could tell her nothing of the whereabouts of the key. Judy had suggested that Corney might know something about it, but Corney had disowned any knowledge of it. He had scowled at Maeve when she asked.

"Better be lavin' locked doors alone," he had said. "There's no knowing what you might find inside that wouldn't be fit for a young lady like you to see."

And Maeve, upon whom the secrets of the house had begun to weigh heavily, much as she distrusted Rearden, could not but feel that there might be some truth in his words.

There was a full moon, eclipsed now and again by scurrying clouds, that shed a fitful light down the long inner corridor into which Maeve passed, the green baize-covered door closing noiselessly behind her. The

## The House of the Secret

old dog preceded her, sidling along by the wall with an uncanny sleuth-hound air, the bristles of his back erect, his nose to the ground.

She went along the corridor to the door sunk deep in the wall, the shadows of the flying clouds wrapping her now in darkness, again, passing, revealing her in a flood of white light. She hardly knew what she intended to do when she should have come to the locked door. She never doubted that it was locked. Beyond it neither she nor the dog could penetrate; and the corridor stretched empty before her. Beyond it must be whatever had excited the dog's anger and aversion.

She went on to the door of the locked wing, the dog pushing eagerly before her. She turned the great handle with no expectation of finding it anything but locked. To her amazement it yielded to her touch.

Something, she knew not what, prevented her from opening it fully. As Rearden had said, how did she know what secrets lay beyond that her eyes dare not meet? While she stood with her hand on the door, suddenly the clock of a distant church tower chimed three o'clock, and while she counted the strokes there arose within the locked wing, as it seemed to her, the most terrifying babel of sounds.

She described it afterwards to Godfrey Barron as being something like the tumult there might be if giants should drag forest-trees over mountains. Something fell with a terrific noise. Perhaps it was exaggerated to her terrified imagination. A frantic apprehension came to her of what might lie beyond the door, the handle of which she held in her grasp. For a second or two so terrified was she that she could not even take to

## The Locked Wing

flight. She stood as though turned to stone. If she were to hear the noise again she felt as though it must unhinge her reason.

But all was silence: silence deep as the grave. Though she listened with the ears of a hare she could hear nothing but the thud-thudding of her own pulses in her ears. The dog, as though he shared in her terror, crouched against her with low, ominous growling.

And all of a sudden she realised that she was alone in this end of the house, cut off even from what human companionship there was in the presence of a dying woman and the nearness of poor Judy.

She thought something stirred, close at hand, the other side of the door; and suddenly she fled along the corridor to the other door. How interminably long it seemed! And the baize door, when she had reached it, resisted her for a second, in which she suffered all the tortures of fear. She felt, or fancied she felt, a breath on her neck, a hand in her hair.

She was through at last. Another instant of wild flight and she was in her godmother's room, the door safely locked and bolted behind her.

The familiar aspect of the room, with its shaded light and bright fire reassured her. Despite her terror, she had held the door open for the dog to come in. He seemed as glad of the sanctuary as herself. She sat down by the fire to wait for daylight. She was afraid that if she slept the terror would come back to her in a dream.

Even when the sun was risen and all the birds were singing, she did not dare to pass the green-baize door. Only when Judy came, with dustpan and brush,

## The House of the Secret

to set the room to rights, did she seem to recover her wonted courage.

"Did you hear a noise in the night?" she asked, when she had beckoned Judy out into the corridor.

"Is it me?" said Judy. "Sorra a sound I heard. I never shook a leg till th' old alarm went off at me ear."

"The locked wing was open in the night. There was the most dreadful noise in it. It nearly frightened me out of my wits."

Judy looked at her compassionately.

"'Tis too much for you. 'Tis a pity you couldn't have a young lady like yourself to stay with you. Or that the bonny young gentleman isn't here to look after you. 'Tisn't many frights you'd be having if he was."

Maeve blushed.

"I see you think I fancy things, Judy," she began.

"Is it me, miss? I hope I know my place better."

"Come and see for yourself. The door of the locked wing is open."

All her courage had come back now. Perhaps it would fly again with the night; but who would be afraid, even of the locked wing, with the birds singing and the cheerfulness of the morning about?

With a thrilled expectancy she turned the handle of the locked wing. The door resisted her. She pushed it and it still resisted her.

"It is locked again," she said, turning to Judy, with a crestfallen expression.

Judy approached her eye to it.

"Sure, the rust's on the lock," she said; "and more betoken there's a spider's web across the key-hole."

## The Locked Wing

"It was open last night," said Maeve, with a vexed air.

"Maybe so, miss; maybe so," said Judy, as though she soothed a child; "but it isn't open now, anyway."

And there was the cobweb across the keyhole, with its mute evidence that no key had turned in the lock for many a day.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE STORM

THE equinox had come late, scattering the golden promise of the spring. Day after day the wild weather continued. Every evening the storm sprang up about sundown and died away at daybreak.

The wind crying along the corridors made the old house erier. It rattled the doors and windows, wailed through the keyholes, soughed in the chimneys; at night the house seemed full of stealing footsteps and whispering voices; the wind lifted the old carpets on the floors till they billowed like the waves of the sea.

There came an evening after a day of absolute, ominous stillness when the wind rising increased in force, momentarily as it seemed. Miss O'Neill was disturbed by it, dozed fitfully, only to be awakened by its gathering violence. For days now she had been lying in a light sleep which any noise seemed to disturb. Her breathing had grown more and more difficult. It was plain that the end could not be far off. The house had been still all day. The birds had scarcely sung. The grey country lay under that curious quietness as in a trance. The sheep hardly bleated; no dogs barked; plover and curlew were quiet over the bog. The heavy and laboured breathing of the sick woman seemed the only sound within the house.

## The Storm

By ten o'clock it was blowing a gale. Judy had been in to replenish the fire and leave a tray containing the things which Maeve might require for the night. The room in bright fire and lamplight was cosier for the storm outside.

There was a strange, shrieking sound in the wind which Maeve had never heard before. It seemed to presage a greater violence of the storm. Miss O'Neill had wakened, and lay, her eyes very large and dark in her white face, staring at Maeve.

"It sounds—like the end of the world, Maeve," she said, speaking with difficulty.

"It is only an equinoctial storm," Maeve answered, with a cheerfulness she did not feel. "We have to expect such at this time of the year. The wind always makes queer noises, and sounds much greater than it really is in an old house like this."

"It sounds to me—more like what I have read of—a tornado," Miss O'Neill, said dreamily, "than such storms—as we are accustomed to. Are you going to bed, Maeve?"

"I could not sleep in the storm. Suppose I make a cup of tea! That is always cheerful. Then I shall sit down beside you, and I can read to you or talk while the storm continues."

She put the kettle on to boil for the cup of tea—that woman's unfailing solace. She got into her dressing-gown, and let her hair down, brushing it for the night while she talked to Miss O'Neill. Every second the wind seemed to increase in violence; died away only to gain strength for a greater effort, and to return clapping and screaming about the house, shaking the doors and windows as though a giant were trying to get in, driving

## The House of the Secret

against the panes a rain of fine sand, of dust and pebbles and dead leaves.

Maeve had closed and shuttered the windows to keep it out, but it seemed to come in at every interstice.

She went and sat by the bed, talking in a steady, level voice, as though she talked against a hurly-burly of noises.

"The house is very strong," she said; "it does not even tremble."

"It is—well-built," Miss O'Neill said. "My mother was here—when the great storm—of 1837 laid half the—country in ruins. She said—the same thing—that the house never shook."

The kettle was boiling by this time. Maeve made the tea and lifted the invalid in bed, propping her about with pillows, while she sipped it slowly.

"Shall I read to you?" she asked, when she had laid her down again.

"If you please, Maeve.—Read slowly."

"What shall it be?"

"Will you—read me—the Gospel of St. John? I should like that—I used to think—very little about God—in the old days—but I was never a bad woman—although I was gay and worldly—and careless—of Him who made me.—But—I have thought a good deal—of Him of late years.—Long before you came—when I was able to think.—Sometimes I did not seem to be able to think."

Maeve read over to her the most wonderful book that ever was written, the words of the very tenderness of Christ; and when she had finished, she and the sick woman were silent for a while. In the wild night, with the shadow of approaching death in the room, the

## The Storm

divine tenderness seemed more upholding, more appealing.

“‘Fear not, little flock,’” Maeve said, unsteadily, breaking the silence. “That is something to think of on a night like this: ‘Fear not, little flock.’”

Her godmother lay silent so long that Maeve looked at her once or twice to make sure she was not asleep; but no, she was broad awake, staring out before her with a strange absorbed gaze, her difficult breathing plain above the noise of the wind.

“Child,” she said, turning her head and looking at Maeve suddenly, “could you lift me up—a bit? I will relieve me—and I want to talk to you.—Prop me—with the pillows—I shall be easier that way.”

Maeve did as she desired, then sat by her holding her hand, her head resting against the pillows.

“Give me my medicine, Maeve. There are—things I want to tell you—and I feel that the time grows short.—I shall be better able—to talk—when I have had the drops.”

Maeve gave her the medicine, and after a while the laboured breathing seemed to become easier.

“Now I can talk. Put down your cheek just as it was. I want you—to hear my story from myself—before I am called away. Other—people—might tell you things that—were wrong. I always—said—that I was more sinned against than sinning.”

Maeve had to hold her ear close for the hurly-burly of the storm and the driving, sharp and pattering, of the sand against the windows.

“I know, dear,” she said. “My father brought me up to love you. I should never believe ill of you, no

## The House of the Secret

matter what anyone said. Don't trouble to tell me unless you feel that it will comfort you."

"Yes—it will comfort me.—Walter Standish's little daughter.—Why—if I had—married young enough—you might have been my grandchild, Maeve.—You could not have been—more dear. Your father's father—he was a charming fellow—I had troops of lovers—Maeve. I—I—chose the worst in the end. When a woman—passes forty unmarried—and—then—takes a fancy for someone—it is very bad. She will go through—fire and water—to have him—even though—she knows. That was—how it was—with me and Michael—Fitzgerald. I knew he was—not good—but—I took—the bit—between my teeth.—He swore that—his love—for me had changed him—and I—thought—I believed him."

Her breath failed her, and she lay panting for a few minutes. There was a chill sweat on her face. Maeve wiped it away with a pocket-handkerchief, brought some eau de Cologne and bathed her forehead with it.

"Don't tell me any more," she pleaded. "Wait till it is easier to talk."

"It will never be—easier.—I must tell you—while I am able.—I married him secretly.—It was by his desire—I knew all my world would—have cried out against me—he had such a black record—but—poor fool that I was, I would have gloried—in the ill opinion of my world—for his sake. These two—Rearden and Judy—knew. We were here—after the marriage. Then—I found out—there was another woman—I was not his wife at all.—And I was going to be—the mother of his child—and I had been always so proud. He meant—to have sucked me dry and left me—but she betrayed—

## The Storm

him. We were—in Dublin—at the time. I had gone up to see—my man of business—he was draining me of money. When he knew that I knew—he laughed. My God, Maeve—he laughed! I used to hear—the sound of that laugh—before you came. It was always about me. No wonder I was mad! He laughed and mocked at my love for him—as the infatuation of an old woman—for a man—young enough to be her son. — He was—terrible—his worst enemy did not know the depths—of his wickedness.—He sat there—mocking me—insulting me—the mother—of his child.”

Again she had to pause for breath, while Maeve implored her to tell no more; but she pushed away the protests with her trembling hands.

“You shall hear—all—to-night,” she went on; “tomorrow—to-morrow may be too late. He said—I could never tell you what he said—he was too dreadful—this creature I had loved. Then—I felt my eyes full of blood. I knew I flung something. After that—I remember no more. When—I came back—to my senses—five months were gone over. I was—here—in this house—the child was—born here. The old doctor—he was very old—who was here before your friend the new doctor, helped me. No one knew any—thing about—it. I never saw its face—but they—buried it—in holy ground. As much as that I owe Corney and Judy. They kept—my secret. Do you—wonder that I was mad, Maeve?”

“And he?” Maeve asked, in a breathless whisper.

“He? He—disappeared.—I suppose he went back—to her—and the children. There is a key somewhere—I have never given it to anyone—of that house

## The House of the Secret

—where such things happened. The lawyers wrote to me—that they had put in—caretakers—in the basement. That was open. Someone locked up the house—and locked the door between the basement and the rest of the house. I—I know I hid the keys somewhere. — Perhaps — if I think — I shall be able to remember.”

She lay quiet for a while, and Maeve sat by her, caressing her hand, thinking of what papa had told her of the fine, splendid, generous woman Miss O'Neill had been, remembering the Diana in the riding habit with the magnificent red hair, considering the pity of it, the pity of it, that she should have been marked out for such tragedy.

She had hardly noticed, so absorbed was she in the story, how the wind had increased to a hurricane, how the night was full of the screaming noise of it, so that all lesser sounds were drowned. But presently she became aware of it, the terror of this quite extraordinary happening piercing even through her absorption. It was not like wind now, not the unseen, clean, pure wind as she knew it, but some terrible elemental force of Nature let loose to ravage and destroy.

“You are not afraid, dear?” she said, stooping to her godmother's ear. “You are not afraid! There must soon be a lull. I believe the worst of it is over.”

Miss O'Neill answered her drowsily that she was not afraid. She seemed to be sinking back into the comatose state in which she had been for days. The effort to tell her story, the painful emotions it had awakened, had evidently exhausted her. She lay

## The Storm

back on her pillows with closed eyes, oblivious of the storm.

"I am glad there are no trees this side of the house," Maeve said to herself, grateful for the orchard, the humility of which was its protection. "There will be many trees down in the wood," she thought. "I should not care to be sleeping in the North Room with the elm-tree so close.

She sat with a quaking heart, watching the sick woman's face while the storm rose and fell, fell and rose again. Now and again she turned to the consolations of the Book that lay in her lap, comforting herself with reading of how our Lord stayed the waves and bade the storm to be still. He had not less power to-night. He was no further from them than He was from His disciples. He was Master of this storm as He was of that. It was His creature, ready to obey His lightest word, to fall to gentlest whisperings at His command.

She went and made up the fire, becoming aware with some wonder that the floor of the room was carpeted with fine sand driven in, despite the panes and the shutters through the interstices of the panes.

"I pray," she muttered to herself, "that the elm-tree may not fall on the North Room, or it will bring down the chimney-stack. Fortunately there is no one sleeping there to-night."

Turning round to the bed she was aware that Miss O'Neill was sitting up and looking at her.

"I have remembered about the keys, Maeve," she said. "They are in my old desk in the drawing-room. You remember the little door in the middle, with the inlaid huntsman upon it. Open the door. Put your

## The House of the Secret

hand far back, and you will find a spring. The panel by the side of the door will come out. There you will find the keys. Bring them to me."

The distress of her breathing seemed to have passed by. She spoke now with little difficulty.

"Hurry, Maeve," she said. "Hurry! Bring me the keys. I want to know that you have them. Hurry, there is no time to be lost!"

Maeve felt herself obliged to obey the imperative command. She lit the candle in one of the tall silver candle-sticks, and went out of the room and down the stairs. The wind was in the house somewhere. There was a whirl of dust as though it blew in an arid March street. She heard a tearing and ripping noise above the screaming of the hurricane. It was stripping the slates off the house and the stables and scattering them in all directions.

She wondered that Judy had not come to her; wondered if she could be sleeping through such a night. Her feet pattered unheard down the staircase. Now she was at the drawing-room door. She pushed it open. There was a light in the room.

She advanced beyond the tall screen of Spanish leather and stood, holding the candle above her head, staring at the man who was in the room before her.

He was engaged in ransacking the old bureau. Drawers and papers, flung helter-skelter, littered the floor. He was fumbling in the depths of the desk with a furious impatience.

Suddenly there was a little click audible even through the storm. The man uttered a hoarse cry of triumph, and bent low over what he had discovered.

## The Storm

He turned round, a couple of large keys tied together held between his fingers and saw her.

"You!" he said, with an oath. "I thought you were in your bed."

"What are you doing here?" Maeve asked, sternly. "How dare you meddle with your mistress's desk? Give me those keys."

"Och, go back to your bed," he said. "What business at all have you always meddlin' with what doesn't concern you? The kays belong to me. I've the best right to them. Why didn't you stay asleep? You were fast enough when I looked in at you half-an-hour ago."

"I have been sitting up with Miss O'Neill. She is very ill. Give me the keys."

She did not in the least understand what Rearden was talking about, but she saw his expression change.

"That—Judy!" he said. "I'll break every bone in her body. I'll do murder on her. It 'ud sarve her right if——"

Above the screaming of the storm there came a tremendous crashing noise. Something had happened. The room filled slowly with a cloud of dust. Maeve stood as though turned to stone. Something had happened to the house—what? But the thing that frightened her was the expression on Rearden's face. For an instant he stood an image of terror, his eyes bloodshot and glaring. The keys dropped from his hold with a clang. With a spring like a wild beast he fled past Maeve, and she heard him stumbling down the stairs heavily.

Hardly knowing what she did, she stooped and picked up the keys. She felt deafened and stunned,

## The House of the Secret

half-blinded, too. It was mere instinct made her stoop for the keys. As she turned to go, her foot knocked against something hard. She groped on the floor and found another key, a heavy key of a curious pattern. She was too dazed to feel curiosity concerning it; but she carried it with the others as she went up the stairs.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A DISCOVERY

MAEVE recovered herself. She picked up the keys. The great house-door clanged through the noises of the storm. Whatever had happened, Corney Rearden preferred the storm to the house this awful night. Well, whatever had happened, the house was the better of his absence.

She went upstairs quickly. All was quiet on the second floor, but the air was full of the dust and the smell of the ruin above. She glanced into Miss O'Neill's room as she passed, and saw that she was sleeping quietly. Then she went on to the upper storey.

She had an intuition of what had happened. The elm-tree that grew by the house had fallen and brought down part of the North Room with it; the attics, too, and the chimney-stack it might be. Thank God she had not been sleeping in the North Room to-night. The ruin of bricks and mortar was easy to bear so long as no precious human life had suffered.

She opened the door of the North Room with difficulty because of the wind and something that was behind the door. The dust came out in her face in a blinding, smothering cloud before which she had to retire. Her candle had blown out. No light could live in such a wind. She could see nothing; but as she

## The House of the Secret

stood there holding the door, she heard plainly through the hurly-burly of the storm a low moan.

Her heart was in her mouth. She listened again; and again came the stifled moaning, as though she heard it from a great distance.

She forced her way into the room and the door clanged behind her. There was a dim light in the room from the wild sky. Looking up she saw it open above her. The tree had fallen: had crashed through the wall and window, bringing down part of the roof and chimney-stack with it. There was a noise of rubble falling. A further fall might happen at any moment. The head of the tree lay partly across the bed amid a wreckage of bricks and slates and mortar.

Not thinking of her own danger, Maeve approached the bed. She had to feel the way with her feet and hands, for the *débris* of the roof and chimney was all over the room. Momentarily the greyness in the room brightened. Daylight was coming, and with the daylight the fury of the storm seemed to diminish. It had begun to rain, too; great sheets of rain that beat in Maeve's face and drenched her hair.

The fallen tree was jammed fast in what had been the window-space. Its branches were across the bed, not fallen upon it, but leaning on one side and pointing upward. The bed was covered with the *débris*, but the branches of the tree had saved it from being buried under the fallen chimney-stack.

She had to go on all fours to avoid the branches of the tree. At any moment a further fall might happen. If there was anyone under the rubbish it was time they were out of it; every second was precious. There was

## A Discovery

no time to call for help. Anything that was done must be done at once.

With her two hands she began to sweep the rubbish off the bed. She felt the coverlet and dragged it towards her, bringing down with it a mass of bricks and mortar. She felt about her blindly for the face of the one who was sleeping in the bed, and presently her hands touched someone's hair. She peered down in the grey dusk and saw that it was Judy.

"Come," she said, "come! You must make an effort to free yourself. At any moment there may be a further fall, and it will kill both of us. Help me to free you."

"My leg's pinned, Miss Maeve, by a branch of the ould tree," Judy said, faintly. "I can't move it for the pain in it."

"Try, Judy, try; our lives depend on it."

Some bricks fell with a crash, and Judy, uttering a cry of terror, began to drag herself from under the load that was holding her down. She groaned like one in mortal agony as she made the effort. At last she was out on the floor, but she could not stand up. Indeed, as Maeve tried to help her she felt her collapse, a dead weight, in her arms.

She felt as though superhuman strength had been given to her. She pushed and dragged and pulled with the strength of ten at Judy's dead weight. Little by little she got her towards the door. As she dragged her over the threshold there was a rattle and roar behind them; another portion of the chimney had collapsed within the room.

She got Judy a little way along the corridor till, as she judged, she was out of reach of the danger. Then

## The House of the Secret

she laid her on the floor and ran for restoratives. Again on her way she glanced into Miss O'Neill's room. The fire was burning brightly. The sleeper had not stirred. Ah! that was well. She did not want to give her godmother a shock by appearing before her as she was.

She had not realised, before catching a glimpse of herself in the long mirror, what an image of disorder and confusion she presented. Her face and hands were grimed, and her pretty dressing-gown ruined beyond help. Dust and mortar were thick on her hair and eyelashes.

"Dear soul!" she said to herself, with a glance towards the bed. "If she were to awake now she might not know me. I hope she will sleep till the storm is over."

The wind was certainly decreasing in fury: the cold, white light of the drenched day came between the shutters.

She ran back again to Judy. It had not yet occurred to her to wonder how Judy came to be sleeping in the North Room. She found her as she had left her, and kneeling down beside her she lifted the unconscious head on her arm. After one or two efforts she succeeded in making her swallow some of the brandy she had brought, and a few minutes later Judy opened her eyes.

"I'm in terrible sufferin', Miss Maeve," she whispered. "I think I must be dyin'. But I'm glad 'twas myself was in it and not you."

"I am very sorry it was you, though," said Maeve. "I am sure you are not dying, Judy. Very little else but mortar has fallen on your bed. The branches of the tree saved you. I should not be surprised at all,

## A Discovery

though, if your leg was broken. As soon as I can leave you I'll run down and send Jerry for Dr. Hudson."

"Am I safe to be left, miss—where I am?"

"You are quite safe. Do you think I would leave you else, Judy? I had to be cruel to you to get you out of the crumpling room. Poor Judy, you did the best possible thing for yourself when you fainted, but you were extraordinarily brave. I thought I should never get you out of the house for Viper. He has been so frightened by the storm. Codger has been sleeping through it."

The old dog came creeping up, and laid himself down with a heavy sigh in the corner. He moaned and shivered. Then, suddenly pulling himself upright, he began to howl dismally.

"'Tis for a death, Miss Maeve," said Judy.

"They always know where there is trouble," said Maeve. "Indeed, the storm was enough to frighten any creature. Thank God, it is dying away."

Again the dog uttered his melancholy howl.

"He sees more than we see," said Judy, clinging to Maeve. "Look at the hair of him standing up! An' isn't that the young dog answerin' him below. 'Tis for a death, Miss Maeve. 'Tis surely for a death. I wonder where that unfortunate Corney is this terrible night."

Maeve was about to say that he had been in the house and had gone out, but something kept her silent.

"Go down to the mistress," said Judy. "I'm well enough where I am. 'Twould be enough to frighten the life out of her to hear them unlucky dogs. Hadn't we enough to put up with this night?"

Viper had lain down now, his long melancholy nose

## The House of the Secret

upon his paws, his eyes looking straight before him. As Maeve got up to go downstairs he rose too and followed her.

Outside Miss O'Neill's door once again he lifted his head and uttered the boding cry. Despite herself Maeve felt the blood run cold in her veins. A curious hesitation came over her as she stood with her hand on the door-handle. She paused a second, then passed within, the dog cowering at her heels.

The first thing that struck her in the silence which seemed strange after the lulling of the storm was that the difficult breathing which she had seemed to hear all over the house for the last few days had suddenly ceased. She had the sensation as of one listening to a clock ticking when the pendulum ceases to swing: the silence could be felt. And all at once the excitement which had been in her veins seemed to go out like a light: she felt still and cold.

She went to the window and unbarred the shutter. The iron bar fell with a clang, but she did not start and look at the sleeper. She turned back the shutter and the cold light poured into the room. Outside the rain lashed the windows, and the expiring storm blew in sudden gusts and died away again.

Once more the dog howled. As she turned about, he was standing with his paws on the side of the bed, his head flung upwards. She took him by the collar and led him outside the door. Then she returned to the bed, expecting what she was to see.

Miss O'Neill was lying quietly with closed eyes. Between the lids a glitter of something, dull-grey, caught the cold light from the window. The dark shadows had gone from the face. She had been dead

## A Discovery

for some little time; for when Maeve laid her hand on the forehead it was quite cold.

She ran down for Jerry Sweeney to fetch the doctor, although she knew it was too late. Fortunately Jerry was on the premises. She found him already up and lighting the kitchen fire.

"Glory be to God, miss, we're all alive!" Jerry said, turning on her the cheerful, freckled face, which at the moment in its humanity she found oddly comforting. "Wasn't it a terrible night? Judy's not down yet, so I'm lightin' the fire for her."

"Judy has been hurt in the storm," Maeve said. "The big elm-tree fell at the other side of the house, and brought down part of the roof and the chimney-stack with it. I want you to run for Dr. Hudson. The mistress is dead, Jerry."

"Glory be to goodness; it never rains but it pours. I heard the dogs howlin', and guessed it wasn't for nothin'. I'll run every step of the way to the doctor's."

"Not by the woods, Jerry. The trees will be down in every direction. You must take the road."

"Aye, sure, I'll skelp along it like a red-shank. I'll have the doctor here in no time."

The morning had risen calm and gentle, as though Nature, after her anger, had taken on a benignant mood. There was nothing to be done for the living or the dead till help should arrive.

She went out of doors to survey the ruin and devastation of the night. Everywhere the trees in their young fresh greenery were lying torn up by the roots. The wood was strewn with fallen trees, many of them supported by trees still upstanding. Here a huge

## The House of the Secret

bough had been torn from a gigantic elm, and where the gash was there was a hive of wild bees flying about in great consternation and anger because their store of honey was laid bare. The place was littered with fallen slates. The sheds and the buildings of the stable-yard showed their naked rafters. There were great gaps in the wood, beyond which you could see houses and fields and hills hidden yesterday. The walnut-tree had brought down the garden-wall in its fall. Across the beds, which had been reclaimed through the winter, half-a-dozen great trees had fallen with all their nests. The birds were flying about in an agitated way, and Maeve, leaning to look, saw the little blue eggs among the wreckage. There would be fewer song-birds to sing in the summer.

Someone spoke at her side. It was Jerry, and he was still panting from his run.

"The doctor'll be here in no time," he said. "He's got to walk, for the roads are all stopped by the trees. And Jane Kelly and another woman is widin. They'll do what they can for you, miss. I stopped as I went by to tell them of the trouble."

"Ah, kind boy, Jerry."

"Sure everyone's sorry for you, miss. Isn't there great ruin and desolation entirely? You'd hardly know the face of the country. There's many a one hurt, and there's some dead widin their cabins, and there's a dale o' cattle killed, and hayricks blown out to sea or into the bog. There's many a wan'll remember last night."

"And your garden is in ruins, Jerry,"

"It is so, Miss Maeve, but whisht! It was too shut in. The walls is nearly all down, and so are the trees. I'll make a smilin' little place of it before the summer's

## A Discovery

over. I was heart-broke trying to get things to grow before, with no sun at all, at all."

"It's so sad for all the poor people," said Maeve. "And yet—perhaps, the storm has let in the sun on many a dark place. Maybe it will all be smilin' before the summer is over."

"God send it!" said Jerry piously.

The sun glittered on the wet ground and the wet leaves; and the ivy that covered the house reflected the sun in its myriad of polished surfaces. The air was warm and sweet and full of a thousand delicious odours. "'Tis great growin' weather," said Jerry. "The young things'll be coming on finely. Sure God's good, and the world's good to live in, and the birds are beginnin' to sing again."

They went round the corner of the house where the elm-tree had fallen. It still lay, caught in the window-space, and for a moment they stood looking at it.

"It was a blessin' no one was sleepin' there, miss," said Jerry.

"Ah! but there was, Jerry. Judy was there. Only the tree saved her from being under the fallen roof. She had a wonderful escape."

"You don't tell me so! I thought she slep' in the basemint. I know she did till a night or two ago. Why, look here, miss."

Jerry's voice rose to a shout.

"It wasn't the storm that done this, miss. It wasn't the storm. Look at it; the tree was half cut through, or more than that before ever it fell. Who could have done the like?"

They stared in each other in stupefaction. Who was it that had laid the axe to the tree, and with what motive?

## The House of the Secret

"It was sawn, an' thin it was axed," said Jerry, in growing excitement.

"We needn't talk about it. Perhaps it will be better not to, just yet."

"Indeed, aye, miss. 'Tis no use talkin'. We might be lavin' it on the wrong person, so we migh'."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### POOR JUDY

DR. HUDSON had come and gone. He had seen Miss O'Neill and handed her over to the women for the last offices.

"There need be no inquest," he said to Maeve. "She died in her sleep. I have been expecting it for some time. Be happy that she died painlessly."

He had set Judy's broken leg and had treated her bruises and wounds. He could find no trace of internal injuries, and hoped there were none. Then he went off to telegraph for a nurse, and for Lady Mary Barron to come to Maeve.

"My wife would come gladly," he said, "but she could not stay: there is the youngest one to be considered. He wants his mother. And Lady Mary is the right person to be with you."

"Well, it did not matter now. Anyone might come now. The secret of the house seemed to have fled away and left it free with the revelation of the storm upon it. All the windows were open; even the shuttered rooms had been laid bare to the wind and the sun. The sweetest April wind walked in those long-silent, long-darkened places unchecked. And Henrietta O'Neill, with the shadow lifted from her face, lay in a great peace, primroses at her head, primroses at her feet.

The house was extraordinarily still that day after the

## The House of the Secret

storm. Jane Kelly and her friend worked and wrangled out of sight ; and there was not a sound in the great house upstairs but the songs of the birds, the sighing of the old dog as he lay on the mat at his mistress's door, and the murmur of the south wind in the trees outside.

Maeve sat by Judy's bed. Judy, bandaged about the head, with strips of sticking-plaster on her face and hands, the splints in which her leg was set revealing themselves beneath the coverlet, lay in a soft white bed and watched Maeve, who was moving about the room doing something or other for her, with eyes of dog-like fidelity and gratitude.

"I'm more comfortable nor I deserve to be, Miss Maeve," she said. "Sure fine linen sheets and blankets is not for the like o' me! Let alone I ought to have spoke."

Maeve came over and sat down beside her. The unbandaged eye looked up at her fondly.

"I ought to have spoke," Judy repeated. "Corney was up to some mischief, Miss Maeve. I knew he was stalin' an' creepin' around the house at night whin others were sleepin'. But I never thought he'd go to break open the mistress's desk."

"What do you suppose he wanted, Judy?"

"It might be the kays o' the Dublin house. He was always wonderin' where herself put them to. I know he wint up wance, but he couldn't get in ; an' the ould people that was in charge o' the kitchens wouldn't let him burst the door. He was always talkin' about the value that was lyin' in it up there, the goo'd and di'monds and silver plate, and all the fine things. It was Corney's fault to be covetous. I used to tell him

## Poor Judy

it was none of his affair. Sure he was mad, th' unfortunate fellow. He used to say he'd be a rich man whin herself wint. He used to frighten the poor ould lady bringin' up agin her things she let fall whin she was mad. Many's the time I comforted her before you came, an' did me best to keep Corney from her, although 'tis many the kick an' the blow he gave me for it."

Maeve shuddered.

"You ought to have saved yourself and my god-mother from him, Judy," she said.

"If it was, miss, that he was your brother," said Judy coaxingly, "an' that th' ould mother of ye bid ye always take care o' Corney? She was terrible fond of Corney, though he was the bad son to her, and she never thought anythin' o' me. She used to say she didn't know where I got my ugly face from, though the dear knows we wor as like as two pays. But she thought Corney anyone's match. An' there was nothin' she wouldn't give him. Small blame to her! If she hadn't he'd ha' tuk it. I grew up in the way o' takin' care o' Corney. 'Tis hard to break yourself off the habit."

"I've an idea, Judy," Maeve said quietly, "that Corney's gone for good."

"Why would you be thinkin' that, miss?"

There was alarm, not unmixed with relief, in Judy's voice.

"Would you mind very much, Judy, if he were not to come back?"

"Wance I was broke of the habit of it," Judy said, with a certain hesitation.

"Tell me, Judy, why did you sleep in the North Room?" Maeve asked suddenly.

## The House of the Secret

"'Twas makin' very bould o' me, Miss Maeve, but——"

"I know. You thought Corney might do me some hurt or harm."

"I don't know how you knew it, Miss Maeve, but it's true. If Corney comes back you won't make him suffer for it?"

"I don't think he will come back. Indeed, I am sure of it. He had money, plenty of money with him. Miss O'Neill had two hundred pounds in gold in that desk. I don't know why she should have kept so large a sum in the house. It is there no longer."

"And you think that villain took it?"

"It is gone."

"See where covetousness lades you!" Judy said, bitterly. "We come of honest stock. An' I know why the poor ould lady kep' so much money in the house. That villain terrified her so that she thought she might have to run any day from the polis or the keepers. I knew she had it, but I kep' the saycret from him. I don't know at all how he discovered it."

"I hope it will carry him far away from us, Judy."

"I hope it will, wance he tuk it," Judy said, with great bitterness. "The Reardens was never robbers."

"But why," Maeve asked, "why, Judy, should your sleeping in the North Room avert hurt or harm from me?"

"Because, miss, if Corney had the drink taken, and if he looked for you there an' didn't find you, maybe 'tis lookin' for you he'd be where you wor. Sure I've been in terror for you ever since you wor in it. I couldn't tell you the nights I wint stalin' around your dure to

## Poor Judy

see you wor all right. Corney'd ha' poisoned the dogs, only for me. I watched him the way the cat watches the mouse. I knew he wouldn't pass the dogs. 'Twas all the aise I had."

"Ah!"—a light was breaking on Maeve's mind—"and you thought that if he tried to harm me in my sleep it would be you he harmed instead."

"That was it, miss. I used to think of him stickin' a knife in you, maybe. Why every night I slep' there I heard the dure open in the middle of the night an' knew it was Corney. I wondered at all why it was he didn't do the villainy that was in his mind."

Maeve stopped and kissed the poor discoloured cheek with tears in her eyes.

"So you were willing to die instead of me, if some-one had to die?" she said.

"If wan of us had to die," said Judy apologetically, "it stud to raison it ought to be me. Still I couldn't know he was up to all that mischief. It might only ha' been that he was pryin' an' prowlin' after the poor mistress's saycrets, and wanted to know that you were fast asleep first. Still you couldn't be sure."

"I can never thank you enough, Judy," Maeve said, with emotion.

"For what?" Judy asked, with one moist eye. "Sure miss, dear, if my misfortunate brother wanted to do you a harm, hadn't I the right to be the wan to bear the harm instead?"

"So apparently you thought, Judy," Maeve said, between laughing and crying.

She considered for a moment; then decided to tell Judy the discovery she had made. Apparently Judy could not learn much more about her brother's moral

## The House of the Secret

obliquity. To know all might enable her to put him completely out of her mind.

"I know why Corney prowled about satisfying himself that I was in bed and asleep," she said, quietly. "He had sawn and hewed nearly through the elm-tree that fell last night. He knew it would come down one of these nights, and he counted on its falling upon me in my sleep."

Judy's exposed eye was eloquent of horrified amazement.

"You're sure, Miss Maeve?" she gasped.

"You shall see for yourself, Judy. The tree was all but cut through."

"The villain! the murderer!" Judy gasped, hoarsely, shaking her fist at an imaginary Corney. "To think my mother's son should ever have thought o' the like! I'm done wid him; I'm clane done wid him. He needn't come crawlin' to me whin he wants a bit to keep him alive again."

"I've an idea we shall never see him again, Judy. You see he heard the tree fall and crash through the roof. And, all of a sudden, he realised that it was you he had killed and not me. He did not contemplate that at all events. Wretched sinner as he is, I believe he was overwhelmed with horror and dismay. It drove him out into that terrible storm."

"'Tis the plottin' an' in cold blood I can't get over," said Judy, with an unrelenting eye. "I remember now I seen him wid the saw an' the hatchet. I thought he might ha' done it wid the drink in him; but he was worse thin I thought."

"Let us forgive him and forget him," Maeve said.

But Judy shook her head. She had not yet come to

## Poor Judy

the point of forgiving Corney the deliberation of his attempt at murder.

With a lift of her shoulders, as though she put away Corney and his misdeeds, Maeve turned to another subject.

"My godmother told me last night," she said, "something of the sad story of her life. I think she told me everything as she knew it."

"The poor sowl!" said Judy, compassionately. "I'll never forget the evenin' she came wanderin' in here, in all her beautiful clothes, and she wet through an' draggled wid the rain an' the mud. She'd been wanderin' about the bog all day. It was the great wonder entirely she didn't fall in a bog-hole an' get drowned. I opened the door to her meself. I can see now the rain outside an' the shadows of the wet summer evenin' on everythin'. And no sooner had I opened the hall-door thin in she came an' the rain an' the wind wid her; and down she wint in a dead faint at my feet. I got her up somehow. Corney helped me, for she was a fine big lady at that time; and I got the wet clothes off her an' got her into her bed; and we sent for the doctor, and before mornin' the little babby was born dead. It was a good many days before we thought she'd live, an' when she began to pick up, it was plain her mind wasn't what it had been. None of us had heard of her being married, but I never doubted it. I knew the mistress too well for that. An' so I told the doctor when he axed me where the husband was. 'Tis none o' my business to say,' I says to him; 'but he's somewhere. I'd take my oath o' that, no matter what misfortune's brought her here widout him.' The doctor niver said another word. He was terrible fond of the



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## The House of the Secret

mistress. Sure every wan was that knew her. A gayer, pleasanter, more open-handed lady you wouldn't meet with in the length and breadth of Ireland. 'The child's dead,' says he, 'an' no one need be the wiser. An' you can bury it in consecrated ground,' he says, 'there's the Abbey.' An' we did. Sometime she let a word drop about the husband afterwards whin she was ravin', but I didn't listen to it. It wasn't my place to be spyin' after her. Wasn't it she brought me in for kitchenmaid, because I was that ugly the unmannerly childher used to shout after me? Could I forget it to her? She never looked at me like as if I was ugly. No more do you, Miss Maeve. I thought a dale o' the mistress. Many's the time I kep' Corney's tongue off her."

"There was nothing at all in the threats then, with which he used to frighten her," Maeve said, with an air of relief.

"Unless 'twas the babby, miss," Judy replied. "Sure I believe it was enough to get us all into trouble. Not a bit the doctor cared whin it was to save the mistress. Anyone that loved the mistress in those days wouldn't think much o' themselves when it was to save her they wor doin' a thing."

"Ah! to be true, it was the baby," Maeve said; and the relief in her voice was deeper than before.

"You'll be takin' me wid you, miss?" Judy said, looking up at her, with the one imploring eye. "You won't be lavin' me behind you whin you go?"

"I am sure Miss O'Neill has made provision for you," Maeve began. She felt the appeal of the imploring eye keenly. "I am sure she has left you comfortable, Judy, for the rest of your life."

## Poor Judy

"'Twasn't about comfort I was thinkin', Miss Maeve," —there was mingled anguish and reproach in Judy's eye. "What comfort would there be to me in it if I hadn't you between me an' the world? The mistress is gone, an' Corney's gone, an' a good riddance, too! An' you're not goin' to lave me after makin' me fond of you? Are you now, Miss Maeve?"

"I shall have to go and earn my bread, Judy. I have no money, or I would not leave you behind. Except for some personal bequests I believe all Miss O'Neill's property goes to charities."

"If you wor to earn your bread all the same, couldn't I get somewhere near you? I might make a little home for you where you could come whin you got tired o' strangers. I've a bit saved, an' if the mistress has left me a few pounds——"

"Oh! you kind creature!" Maeve said, in real distress. "Why should you care for me, Judy? Indeed, if I could keep you with me, I would never let you go. But I'm afraid it will not be possible."

"If it isn't then," said Judy, turning her face to the wall, "sorra a bit o' good is in anything the mistress has done for me, or in anything else in the world."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE WILL

LADY MARY had arrived, bringing with her a warm feeling of companionship and comfort. She brought good news, too. Godfrey was already on his way down-country, travelling by slow stages. The wound was doing well, and the doctors looked to the sea voyage and home to help it to do better. A friend had written for him.

Lady Mary told her news, but, oddly enough—it was an omission Maeve felt keenly—did not offer to show the letter. As a matter of fact Maeve's name did not occur in it, and the mother guessed at how the girl would regard that. She said nothing either of a letter from a friend which accompanied that written at Godfrey's dictation.

"He is frightfully down on his luck," he wrote. "Of course, it is awfully hard, but it might have been worse—if he'd never gone home, for example. You can't imagine what it is like here. We are stifling, waiting for the rainy season. Nothing but dust above, beneath and around you. It makes you sicken for green fields."

Lady Mary kept these things to herself. She guessed at Godfrey's reason for being down on his luck, apart from the loss of his profession. What had he to offer the girl, who might be a very considerable heiress at this moment, but a maimed existence? She guessed from her know-

## The Will

ledge of Godfrey that Maeve would have to plead her own cause with him. Well, she knew Maeve, and she trusted her. If Maeve had inherited money from her godmother all would be well; if not, the young couple could only wait and hope, like many another couple before them! She glanced at Maeve's face, beautiful beyond its exquisite colouring by reason of the spirit and fire in it. The girl was much older than her years. What other girl under twenty except Maeve Standish could have led the strange life Maeve had been leading these many months back? Yes, certainly, the mother said to herself, she could trust Maeve.

By the same train as Lady Mary came Mr. Drummond of the Dublin firm of solicitors who for years had transacted Miss O'Neill's business.

"Wonderful woman!" he said. "It was a thousand pities she should have shut herself away from the world as she has done for so many years. Why, she refused even to see *me*; insisted on doing all her business by correspondence. By the way, there was a secret in our friend's life which will have to come to light now. I was always against the secrecy. She was not Henrietta O'Neill, but Henrietta Fitzgerald. She married many years ago, secretly. I'm afraid the man was a bad lot. He left her; and that was the cause of our poor friend's retirement from the world. By the way, the will gives him everything absolutely. I have written to her several times urging on her to make a new will, but she has not answered my letters. He will come in for a nice thing if he is still in the land of the living, which I doubt. He disappeared entirely. But then, of course, those bad eggs have a way of turning up when least expected. I'm afraid her god-daughter is out of it."

## The House of the Secret

Lady Mary looked down at the rosy-cheeked, grey-whiskered gentleman, who appeared to be enjoying his lunch so thoroughly.

"Maeve is out of it according to herself," she said. "Quixotic child, she seems to resent any suggestion that she should be in it." A little sigh followed the words. "She tells me that her godmother has left her property mainly to charities. There is another will."

The lawyer leaped to his feet with an indignant exclamation.

"It is not possible our client went behind our backs in such a matter," he said.

"You don't know," Lady Mary said, "or you would have patience. The poor soul seems to have been under the domination of her servant here, a man named Rearden. Doubtless she did not dare send for you. In Rearden's absence she sent for a country solicitor and made the will, which I suppose will stand. Let us be thankful that you have not to search for the representatives of the late Mr. Fitzgerald."

It was some time before she could soothe Mr. Drummond's wounded feelings, but at last he succumbed to her pleasantness and tact, helped perhaps by the remembrance that though the will might be drawn up by a country solicitor, yet the title-deeds of the estate and all else that concerned the property were in the hands of his firm. He was even civil, if patronising, when Mr. Nugent presented himself later on; and though the will which reposed in Mr. Nugent's black bag was a bitter pill to Mr. Drummond, he dissembled his wounded feelings, and accepted Lady Mary's suggestion that he should stay and hear the will read.

On the third morning the funeral took place. Maeve

## The Will

had suggested the spot for the grave, not in the O'Neill vault in the old Abbey graveyard, but under the shadow of the gable close by a little unnamed, unmarked mound. No one questioned her right to choose. There did not seem to be a relative of the dead woman left alive to come forward and claim any interest in her at the last.

The two lawyers hobnobbed together after their meals, walked out between them, talked innumerable legal cases, drank their port wine together after dinner, played their decorous game of cards with Lady Mary as the third player, while the mistress of the house lay unburied. They were apparently very friendly, but it was an armed friendliness. Mr. Nugent, with his little acute peasant face, never referred to the late Miss O'Neill's property or her disposal of it. Mr. Drummond resented the professional secrecy, while he would have been the last to encourage the other man to break it. However, Mr. Drummond, who was an enthusiastic collector, presently consulted his humbler brother about possible treasures to be discovered in the farm-houses of the district; and Mr. Nugent's offer of a pewter dish of an unheard-of antiquity, which had been rescued from ignoble uses in a village public-house, to the collector, about the third morning, appeared to make relations between them almost cordial.

The third day had come. Quietly and almost secretly Henrietta O'Neill was laid in her grave, so close to the little unnamed grave that there was but a thin partition of clay between. Dr. Hudson, the two lawyers, Maeve and Lady Mary made up the small funeral train.

## The House of the Secret

It was a delicious late April day, with primroses springing star-like over all the banks, and the trees and hedges in their first exquisiteness of delicate green. There were violets under their leaves on the little grave. Everywhere daisies were springing, innocent life waking and rejoicing even in the place of human graves. The birds were singing their rapturous love-songs; the bleating of lambs came from the distant pastures; every little stream was singing over its bed of golden pebbles.

When they returned to the house they found it no longer darkened and gloomy. Someone had pulled up all the blinds and opened the doors, and the April wind walked down the long corridors and through the long, silent rooms, scattering delicious scents as he went.

They were gathered into the library, sitting round the old mahogany table, the busts of the great dead looking down upon them from the tops of the brass-latticed bookcases. Facing Maeve where she sat was the portrait of Henrietta O'Neill as a child, standing by her pony, a little, bright, alert figure, with masses of golden-red curls falling from under the black velvet cap. The portrait moved Maeve to an intense compassion. What things lay between that radiant child and the worn-out body they had just laid to rest! It set the girl's compassionate heart to grieving.

She looked away from the portrait and there were tears in her eyes.

Mr. Nugent had taken a long legal document from his bag and was unfolding it with an air of importance.

"Miss O'Neill sent for me last February to make her will," he said, with an apologetic glance at Mr. Drummond. "Perhaps her own lawyers were too far away, and my client was anxious this important

## The Will

matter should be set right at once. There is very little here for me to read. My client struck me as a singularly clear-sighted woman, who knew exactly what she meant to do. The will is very simple. There are a few legacies to charities—one of five thousand pounds to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; five hundred pounds apiece to each of her servants, Cornelius and Julia Rearden. All the rest of the estate she dies possessed of she wills absolutely to her dear god-daughter and child, Maeve Standish. I believe I have to congratulate you on being a very considerable heiress, Miss Standish. Our friend Mr. Drummond knows more about my late client's property than I do, but apparently Miss O'Neill was a rich woman, and for years she has not spent a tithe of her income——”

“May I look at the will?” Mr. Drummond asked, stretching out his hand for it.

He read over the first lines of the will half-aloud, pursing his lips over the reading.

“I, Henrietta O'Neill, sometimes called Henrietta Fitzgerald, but having no right to that title——”

“I told her it was quite unusual,” said Mr. Nugent, “but she was determined to have it so.”

Maeve looked up from her stupefaction. The will had come upon her with a shock of amazement.

“He deceived her by a mock marriage,” she said. “He had a wife living. She told me the night before she died. But—you are sure about the will, Mr. Nugent? She told me she would leave everything, except one or two small bequests, to charities, chiefly to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. She wanted me to have her personal effects. I was quite satisfied. I do not feel that I have any claim to all this money.”

## The House of the Secret

"Take it and be thankful," Mr. Drummond said, looking at her over his spectacles. "No one has as good a right as you. In the absence of a will the property would have gone to the Crown. Miss O'Neill has left no relatives."

Both men shook hands solemnly with Maeve.

"There will be a deal to be done, both here and in Dublin," Mr. Drummond said. "This place has all to be set in order—the damage done by the storm made right, and the whole house thoroughly overhauled and renovated from top to bottom. The Dublin house—we shall talk about that. As a matter of fact, I have an offer for it—a very excellent offer, which I should advise any client of mine to accept. It would be pulled down and the site merged in that of a larger house. I am glad Lady Mary is taking you away while this place is being set to rights. Mr. Nugent will perhaps see to this work."

He turned to the country solicitor with an air of graciousness.

"We have long wanted someone to represent us in Kildrum," he said. "If you would undertake the work, Mr. Nugent, I should be pleased. I find my hands very full just at present; and my partner talks of resigning. A young, energetic man to look after our business in this part of the country—Miss Standish's business, if she desires to follow Miss O'Neill in entrusting us with it—would be a very desirable thing for us."

Mr. Nugent blushed and beamed.

"I should be very glad to undertake the work, Mr. Drummond," he said. "I shall be proud to represent so old and good a firm."

## The Will

They looked at Maeve as though they were waiting for her to speak.

"If the property is really mine," she said—and the two lawyers smiled—"I shall be very glad indeed for Mr. Drummond to continue to do for me what he did for my godmother. And I am very glad Mr. Nugent will see to matters here. I think I should like to keep Chapel—as it ought to be kept—and the other house can go. It looked so dismal when I saw it last October."

"Our client would not allow anything to be done with it," Mr. Drummond said. "As it was more than twenty years ago when she left it, so it is now. The doors have never been unlocked. She took away the keys with her."

"I know where the keys are," Maeve said.

"The house ought to be opened as soon as possible. My memory of it is that it was full of beautiful and valuable things. It is a thousand pities to think of them mouldering away in the dust and damp."

Maeve had a sudden thought.

"I think, Mr. Drummond," she said, "that I would like to be with you when you visit the house for the first time. Lady Mary and I are travelling up to town with you. We can stay a day or two, as long as will be necessary. I have a fancy to see the house for myself before we let the whole world into it."

"Very well. Of course, you must see what the house contains. Anything you do not wish to keep had better be auctioned off. As you say, considering the manner of our poor friend's leaving the house, we had better see it before strangers are admitted."

"Yes," Maeve said, simply. "We ought to guard

## The House of the Secret

her secrets, if the house holds them, as it probably does."

"You are quite right," Mr. Drummond said, warmly. "And please allow me to say, Miss Standish, that Miss O'Neill showed great wisdom in the disposition of her property. I am very glad to feel that she had by her side during the last months of her life a young lady such as you."

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE SECRET OF THE LOCKED WING

It took Maeve some little time to get accustomed to the strange fact that she was Miss O'Neill's heiress, and that her heiress-ship involved a good deal. Indeed, the lawyer's investigations brought to light every day some increment of Maeve's wealth. Now it was shares in some company or undertaking which had gone up immensely in value; again it was the title deeds of land which not even Mr. Drummond had known as belonging to his late client.

"She was a woman of great business faculty," he would say; "a thousand thousand pities such a fate should have befallen her. During the twenty years or more in which she has vegetated here nearly all her property has gone up immensely in value. Her house in the square, now—I have wanted to tell you more about that. Lord Kylemore wants to buy it to knock it down so that he may build a new ballroom on its site. It is a terrible eyesore to him. There it is in the midst of Kylemore House, which has extended to either side of it. Mrs. Burke, the tenant of the next house, is willing to sell; but her house is no good to his lordship without the house that is now yours. I have written many letters to my late client about it, but she would never answer me. His lordship will give a very extravagant price, a very extravagant price

## The House of the <sup>Book 8</sup> Secret

indeed. You know he has married a copper mine. No? Well, then, he has, and he will give us our price, no matter how stiff it is."

Maeve sighed a little. She was not sure that she did not find her wealth something of a burden as yet. There was absolutely no one to share it with. All this talk of property of one kind or another made her feel a little dizzy. She had been brought up to simple ideas. What did one want with more than enough to clothe and feed one and a surplus to give away? There would have to be a good deal of giving away, she foresaw. Well, she must only look to Godfrey to help her, and not worry too much about it till he was at her side.

Lady Mary stayed on with her. There seemed to be a good deal of business to be got through before they were free to leave Chapel House behind them for a time. Maeve was always being called into consultation with the lawyers. Every day Mr. Drummond looked more pleased, rubbed his hands a little more cheerfully together. The country solicitor seemed to reflect at a respectful distance this mood of his great brother in the law.

"This young lady becomes more and more of a responsibility—really more and more of a responsibility, Lady Mary," Mr. Drummond said one day at lunch, beaming upon his client. It was a very good lunch. There was a new cook down from Dublin to take Judy's place temporarily. "We shan't be able to hide her light under a bushel, eh, Lady Mary? Under a bushel, hey? And we shall have to take care of her, for every needy title in the country will be after her, as well as the other sort. We shall have to guard her

## The Secret of the Locked Wing

carefully, or some rascal without a penny to bless himself with will be picking up our heiress."

Maeve who was the most candid of creatures, opened her lips to speak. Then something kept her silent. She glanced at Lady Mary, who had suddenly turned a deep, painful red. She blushed hotly herself, she hardly knew why, for a chilly feeling of apprehension of something painful or unpleasant had laid hold on her. But Mr. Drummond was too engrossed with his sweetbread and mushrooms to notice the effect he had created.

Chapel House was a perpetual delight to Mr. Drummond, who forgot the business awaiting him up in Dublin for the discoveries he made. For the first few days he had refrained from examining the treasures the house contained, but now that business matters were smoothing themselves out satisfactorily, he allowed himself a little alleviation. He was for examining the house from garret to basement, Mr. Nugent following him assiduously up and down, helping him to shift furniture, to open doors long swollen by damp, to carry down this or that precious piece of furniture or carving, this or that family portrait, long missing from the walls, into the light of day.

Poor Mr. Nugent would much rather have been trout-fishing. The trout were rising beautifully just now; but he was obliged to conform pleasantly to Mr. Drummond's will. Mr. Drummond had dealt very handsomely with him in ceding to him the management of the Chapel property.

The two men would arrive downstairs covered with mildew, cobwebs and dust. Mr. Nugent, who was a spick and-span little man by nature, often looked so

## The House of the Secret

unhappy as to excite the humorous sense in the two ladies. He was so evidently impatient, behind the spoken, delighted acquiescence, of Mr. Drummond's tastes.

"I wouldn't have believed it of him; I wouldn't have believed it of him," he said to Maeve and Lady Mary one day. "He thinks more of a few dirty old plates he found under the kitchen sink yesterday than he could of the finest law-suit there ever was. He didn't even know that *Evans v. Glyde* had gone in favour of the defendant till I told him."

"The plates were pewter," Maeve said, with a quiet smile. "Very old pewter, and beautifully chased."

"Indeed, I wondered when I heard you making him a present of them, and he so delighted," Mr. Nugent said, simply. "I wouldn't have taken them for a present myself."

"Ah, then, we shall have to find you something else," Maeve said, laughing; "something that Mrs. Nugent will like as well as you."

That afternoon Maeve had the first indication that her heiress-ship might threaten her happiness. The two lawyers were busy, as usual, rooting amid the accumulation of rubbish the house contained for treasures. Only the day before Mr. Drummond had turned out of the coal-house, where Maeve had hidden behind the great cask that night for fear of Corney Rearden, a set of chairs, frightfully dilapidated as to their upholstering, which he declared to be Hepplewhite.

Maeve and Lady Mary walked in the orchard, where now the daffodils were withered, and the primroses and violets were out in their stead. It was a beautiful

## The Secret of the Locked Wing

afternoon, with the freshness of youth and hope in it. Lambs were playing in the pastures, a fresh south wind was tossing the budding boughs; already the cuckoo had come, and the swallows were rising and falling in the wind?

They sat down on the marble kerb of the well in the sunshine, looking across at the old house, where now all the windows stood open as though the secrets were free to go with the soul that had escaped.

She was thinking of the one who would soon be coming homeward across the sea, and she knew that his mother was thinking of him; but there was silence between them for a few minutes. It was Lady Mary who broke it.

"You heard what Mr. Drummond said at lunch, Maeve," she began, "about your being such an heiress?"

"Yes, I heard," Maeve answered, feeling again the vague apprehension chilling her heart.

"It has been on my mind to speak to you of the matter," Lady Mary went on, plaiting the grass-blades she had picked between her fingers. "Has it never occurred to you that my boy's position as the obscure, poor lover of an heiress may be an invidious one?"

"He would never think of that. I was not an heiress when he fell in love with me. Everything will be his once we are married."

Yet, though she spoke so bravely, she was far from feeling the thing she spoke. Her own knowledge of Godfrey's nature told her that he was so proud, so sensitive, so quixotic that her new inheritance might indeed be a barrier between them.

## The House of the Secret

"If he is going to take it that way," she added, quickly, "I shall give it all way to the first one who will have it. Oh, I know it seems a silly thing to say. Yet must one give up all one holds dear, all one's happiness in life, for this money which one never wanted? My godmother thought of us here together. She loved Godfrey. I believe the money was left to him as much as to me. She said when she was dying that she thought of us here together. He will never be cruel enough to give me up for that?"

"My dear," said Lady Mary, gently, "you must plead your own cause with Godfrey. He will not be the easier to win over, because it will also be his cause. He will steel himself against you the more for that. Time was I would have felt with him. We have always been very proud, as proud as we are poor. But—I have come to an age when I see that all money, all such temporal gifts, are only lent to us. Life is so fleeting. Love is the only thing that matters. I shall be on your side, but I can do nothing. You will have all my prayers. The boy's happiness is the thing I care for most in the world. If you win, people may say that we are designing fortune-hunters"; she made a wry face as she said it. "What matter? They will grow tired of saying it after a while. While they say it you will not hear them—if you win. You will be too happy—you and my boy—to have ears for what they are saying."

"If you win." The words lay like a cold shadow on Maeve's heart. But she was going to win. She would not let Godfrey thrust her out of his life. If the money stood between them she would dispossess herself, dis-

## The Secret of the Locked Wing

inherit herself, get rid of it somehow so she might keep his love.

Mr. Drummond suddenly appeared through an opening in the apple-trees, very hot and grimy and apparently very much excited.

"Where is the key of that locked wing?" he asked, panting from the haste with which he had come.

"I do not know," Maeve answered. "It is supposed to have been locked ever since I came here, and I have never seen any sign of the key. Yet one night a few weeks ago I found the door open."

"Ah, you found the door open, did you? I want to see what is inside there. I have been discovering, Miss Standish, that a good deal of your property has disappeared. I missed many things. Time was I could have told you everything the reception rooms at Chapel contained. They were as familiar to me as my own rooms. Twenty years have made a difference—yet there are some things I could not forget. There was a Chinese cabinet, three hundred years old if it was a day. There was a piece of Vernis Martin. There was a Raeburn—a picture of Lady Diana O'Neill—the young woman who was supposed to be drowned in a well here. Raeburns have suddenly leaped to a fabulous value. Heaven knows what else is gone. I have been discovering that the bedrooms are almost bare of furniture. When I used to come here every room held its treasures. I want to know what is behind the door of the locked wing."

"I should like to know also," said Maeve. "It would clear up a mystery for me. I do not want Chapel House to have any ghosts if I can expel them."

## The House of the Secret

"We'd better get someone to cut through the door. It's a thousand pities." Mr. Drummond never could subordinate the man to the collector. "It's a beautiful door. Did you notice the workmanship of the lock and the handle?"

Maeve had a sudden thought. The key she had picked up on the night of Corney Rearden's flight. She had put it aside, not associating him with its possession. Supposing it were the key of the locked wing!

"I have a key that may fit it," she said, jumping up. "I am not sure. The house is full of old keys. I remember that the keyhole was covered with a cobweb when Judy and I examined the place. Oh, I didn't tell you about it. I heard a great noise in the locked wing which nearly frightened me to death. The door was open then. When I brought Judy to look at it the next day it was locked, and she drew my attention to the cobweb across the keyhole. Judy thought I only dreamt that the door was open."

"It was inconclusive proof, that cobweb. It might have grown in the night, or the person who had unlocked the door might very easily have found a cobweb that would cling to the opening."

They hurried back to the house, borne along by Mr. Drummond's excitement. Maeve began to share his desire for a peep within the locked wing. She put away from her the consideration of what Lady Mary had been saying. It was enough that Godfrey loved her. He would not be able to hold out against her and against the traitor within the gates.

She found the key after some little search. When it was discovered at last it was not rusty—evidently a

## The Secret of the Locked Wing

key which had been used and carried about by someone.

They went upstairs and along the main corridor of the house, through the green baize doors to the door of the locked wing.

"Ah," said Mr. Drummond, stooping to examine the keyhole. "Your cobweb has shrunk to a mere black shred. See, it was not spun across the keyhole. It was only placed there. I expect it was done whenever the door had been opened. The criminal had some good reason for covering up his traces."

He put the key in the keyhole. It turned quite easily; he pushed the door open, and they were in the locked wing.

"This was the ball-room," Mr. Drummond said, leading the way. "I remember a great ball here in the sixties. There were not less than two hundred guests. My late client—ah!"

He stared about him in stupefaction. The ball-room took up the whole of this part of the house. A shutter had fallen from a window, and a dim light came through grimy panes. There was a long row of windows down all one side, reaching up as high as the gilt and painted ceiling. They were draped in scarlet damask, and had heavy gilt decorations at the head of each. A magnificent chandelier was suspended from the ceiling midway of the room. Between the windows were long mirrors, which were repeated the other side of the room. At the far end there was a sort of stage or platform draped with the scarlet damask, which also hung the wall behind it.

So much Maeve took in at a glance. Her eyes came back to rest on the contents of the room, which Mr.

## The House of the Secret

Drummond was gazing at with an air of having found some precious thing long lost. The great room was full of all manner of things, pieces of furniture, pictures, plate, china, even a grand piano. They were heaped higgledy-piggledy. There was the cupboard of Vernis Martin; there was the suite of French furniture in gold and blue brocade; there was the dressing-table of tortoise-shell inlaid with ivory. There were tall, slender Chippendale bookcases. There were pieces of inlaid Sheraton. There were pieces of Sèvres and Dresden and Rose du Barri—wonderful enamels, carved ivories, silk curtains, rugs, carpets—a thousand and one beautiful things lying hidden away in the dust and darkness.

"A collector has been at work here, evidently," said Mr. Drummond, smiling, "and, by Jove, he has not collected altogether at random."

Maeve's eyes were resting on a huge chest that stood well away from the other articles of furniture, which were mostly heaped upon each other. It had evidently been dragged from beneath some other things which were lying about it and partly over it in confusion. Chairs face downward, a huge grandfather clock in similar case, a Chippendale wine sarcophagus on its side, a beautiful French mirror flung anyhow, with some of its delicate stalactites of gilding broken off and lying at a distance upon the floor.

"The wretch!" groaned Mr. Drummond. "I am not a hanging man, but I would cheerfully hang the scoundrel with my own hands. Such treatment! Such misuse! Such mishandling!"

But Maeve's eyes were fixed on the chest. So that was the noise she had heard and exaggerated in her

## The Secret of the Locked Wing

terrors of the lonely night. She wondered, looking at the chest, hinged and clamped with iron, how one man unaided could have moved it; then she remembered the enormous strength shown by Rearden's squat, mis-shapen body and long arms.

She opened the chest. Within it were lying jewel-cases, pieces of silk, fine pieces of silver, Indian shawls, fine, lovely old lace, all heaped together in confusion.

"It is like the treasure-cave of Haroun-al-Raschid," Mr. Drummond said, peering over her shoulder. "It must have taken a good many years and efforts to accumulate all this in this place. To be sure, the scoundrel had a free hand while my late client was so ill. I wonder if he contemplated removing some of his booty, and how?"

The ball-room had given up its secret. Under the scarlet hangings at the back of the stage was a door, which led by a little flight of steps down to an overgrown place at the back of the stables. The thicket of undergrowth and overgrowth hid the door and the steps from the passer-by, but a passage had been cleared, winding in and out the thicket, by which one could approach the door. The key stood in the little door. So Rearden had his way of entering and leaving the house when it was supposed to be bolted and barred against him!

"I wonder if he was able to take anything away?" Mr. Drummond said, looking about him.

"I am inclined to think he took nothing," said Maeve. "I don't think we shall be troubled with him any more."

"I am glad we have saved so much. Miss Standish, you shall wear this lace on your presentation gown."

## The House of the Secret

Lady Mary Barron had come nearer, and was fingering the exquisite dingy lace with reverential fingers.

"I shall wear it on my wedding-gown," said Maeve, and blushed hotly.

"That later, of course," Mr. Drummond said, looking rather surprised; "but we must wait till the Prince turns up, eh? We must wait till the Prince turns up."

Maeve was about to speak. Then a sudden thought came to her that perhaps the Prince would disown her because she had come into a big fortune. An eclipse fell on the brightness of her expressive face, and she made no answer.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE HOUSE GIVES UP ITS SECRET

IN the beautiful May morning the banned and shuttered house in the square showed as dreary, perhaps even more dreary, than it had done in the sad October day. The square opposite was out in all its spring verdure; the beds were gay with hyacinths and tulips. There were window-boxes to many of the houses. The sky was deep blue overhead, dappled by masses of shining white cloud. The May sun and wind seemed to leave no spot unexplored.

It was an amazement for the few passers-by when two ladies in mourning and a gentleman stopped at the haunted house and ascended the steps.

"There's no wan lives there but ghosts, nor hasn't this many a day," volunteered a butcher's boy, resting his tray on the area railings.

"You'll pull till you're dead," said another obliging errand boy, from the chemist's this time; he had put down his basket of bottles preparatory to having a game of marbles with the butcher's boy. "It's broke, and, besides, the ould couple below is stone deaf, let alone th' ould man's gone to hospital, an' perhaps th' ould woman's away seein' him."

Mr. Drummond fitted the key into the lock. It was rusty, and for a time it refused to move. At last he had the assistance of the same burly policeman Maeve

## The House of the Secret

remembered, who had been attracted by the little crowd to the spot, and had been inclined to treat them as housebreakers till he recognised first Mr. Drummond and then Maeve, when his hostility was changed to beaming friendliness.

"Let me do it for you, sir," he said, giving the key a twist that sent it round immediately.

"Here, be off wid ye," he said, turning his attention to the crowd. "Be off wid ye about your business, that is, if ye have any, ye pack of idle stravaigers, or I'll run the whole o' yez in to College Street."

The threat had the effect of dissolving the crowd like magic, for the moment at least, and after waiting to see the last urchin depart, sending back longing looks, the policeman resumed his leisurely patrol of that side of the square.

It was very like the experience of that October morning, between which and this so much strange and eventful lay. The three explorers entered the house and shut the door behind them. They were in a large lofty hall, festooned from end to end with cobwebs that hung from the stucco gods and goddesses of the ceiling. Facing them was a flight of stairs, at the top of which there was a great arched window, dim with the dust of a score years.

There was a fireplace in the hall, with a fine marble mantelpiece inlaid with decorations in coloured marbles. A screen shut off the main hall. There was a great chair by the fireplace, a bench against the wall, a table on which stood a large china bowl. Coming from the sweet sunshine outside the hall seemed dimmer and dingier by contrast. There was a drift of dust under their feet ; dust and cobwebs lay on everything.

## The House Gives up its Secret

But they hardly noticed the dust and disorder for the strange stifling smell of the house. It was acrid ; it rose suffocatingly in the nostrils ; it seemed as palpable as the dust itself.

"Dry-rot," said Mr. Drummond, shortly. "I have smelt it before in a house long shut up."

It was stifling. They turned pale after a second's inhalation of it.

"We shall have to let the world in after all," Mr. Drummond said, opening the door which he had closed against them.

The friendly policeman stood outside, and he beckoned him to approach.

"The atmosphere of the house is dreadful," he said. "Help me to open some windows. Afterwards, keep idlers from following us in here."

"Right you are, sir," said the policeman, cheerfully.

Mr. Drummond and he, between them, opened the great lobby window, and the air poured in. Going further upstairs they opened other windows—on the staircase only. The policeman cast curious eyes at the doors as they passed by the rooms, but some instinct prevented the lawyer from asking his assistance beyond those closed doors.

"'Tis gas, sir," the guardian of the peace said, sniffing the peculiar odour of the place. Under their feet was something like dusty rags that dissolved in powder as they trod on it, and seemed to rise in acrid particles to the nostrils.

"Dry-rot," Mr. Drummond said again, "and an exceptionally bad case. There won't be much worth saving in this house. *That* was once stair-carpet."

## The House of the Secret

"You don't say so, sir," the policeman said, in an awed voice. "Indeed, it is a quare uncanny sort of smell. I don't like to be smellin' it at all."

"We shan't smother now, anyhow," said Mr. Drummond, and a coin passed rapidly from hand to hand. "There is a clear draught through the house. You might ask the ladies to come up as you go out, comfortable. And please see that no one comes into the house while the door stands open."

"The first wan that looks crooked at it I'll run in for ye," the policeman said, fervently.

Mr. Drummond was standing at the door of the drawing-room on the second floor of the house.

"I am going in here," he said, his hand on the door-handle, as Maeve and Lady Mary came up the stairs. "Stay here while I open a window."

He struggled a moment or two with the fastenings of a shutter before he got it undone and flung up a window. He came out of the room deadly pale.

"We shall have to wait a bit," he said, "before going in there. It is as bad as coal-gas. In a second I should have dropped, yet I'm not the fainting sort."

They waited for a few minutes to let the air pass through the room. Then they went in. It was a stately room, or rather a pair of rooms, for it was divided by folding doors. The air of it was even yet almost intolerable. They gazed about the room, furnished with the substantiality of the Early Victorian period, with a mixture of French style, and here and there a bit of Chippendale or Sheraton. There was a huge chandelier of a thousand drops, dim now with dust and neglect. But they had no eye for the furniture. The strange and, as it seemed to them, terrible thing

## The House Gives up its Secret

was that there was a foul life in the room, thriving, and poisoning the atmosphere. From the carpet had sprung a crop of loathsome fungi. They were in all the corners, a miniature forest of them, coarse, yellow, evil-smelling things that had an uncanny suggestion of life.

Hastily they closed the door and went out. In the purer air of the staircase they stood and looked at each other.

"Better postpone the examination of the house till another day," Mr. Drummond suggested. "It ought to be thoroughly ventilated before anyone comes into it."

He looked at Maeve. Lady Mary looked at her. Plainly, she was the one to decide.

"Did you notice," she said, with an awe-stricken voice, "that the ashes of the fire of twenty years ago were still in the grate? Did you notice how two chairs were drawn near the fire? On the table there was a work-basket, with a dingy thing lying in it in which was stuck a rusted needle? I think we had better find out the secrets of the house for ourselves and not bring the world in."

They were all a little pale as they looked at each other.

"I am sure you are quite right," Mr. Drummond said, heartily. "Only you must let me go before you and open the windows. And if I judge it best that you should not enter a room, you must listen to me. It seems to me the house is thoroughly poisoned. I am glad it is to be razed to the ground."

A storey higher the air seemed less impure. The windows were unshuttered and had been broken by stones, so that the air had found a way to enter.

The next room they went into was the principal bed-

## The House of the Secret

room of the house. There was a great four-poster bed of fine old dark mahogany, with twisted and carved pillars, occupying the centre of the room; it was hung with blue and silver damask; an immense wardrobe took up one side. There was a long gilt pier glass between the windows, and a dressing-table and washstand occupied the end nearest the door.

They stood and looked about them. Maeve was the first to speak.

"The whole place whispers of flight," she said, in a low, awed voice, "of flight, with some blind terror following at someone's heels. See the bed has not been made. The water of twenty years ago has dried in the basin. Look at the fine damask towels flung down as someone flung them in terrified haste twenty years ago. See the disorder everywhere!"

She put out her finger and touched a nightdress that lay on the bed, a delicate and dainty thing, be-laced and be-ribboned. It was the mere ghost and simulacrum of a garment; as she touched it it shrivelled under her fingers.

"Everything is rotten here," Mr. Drummond said, "that is, everything that is perishable. Even the substantial furniture will, I think, prove to have been undermined. Only the imperishable things escape. This jewellery, for instance."

He picked up a handful of brooches and rings lying on the dressing-table.

"We had better take possession of the valuables," he said, "in your interests, Miss Standish. I expect there are a good many valuable things here."

Maeve said nothing. She was gazing sadly at a little pair of satin slippers with buckles of paste that stood

## The House Gives up its Secret

half underneath the bed. She had an idea that they would drop to pieces if she touched them, all except the little paste buckles, which would outlast many a precious human life. She touched the blue and silver damask, and it withered beneath her touch like autumn leaves.

She went forward and opened a wardrobe door. In the dim recesses splendid gowns and mantles were hanging like Blue Beard's wives in the closet.

She felt the thing nearest to her. It was purple silk, a thing of many flounces. The flounces were purple and white, the colours dappled into each other. While she looked at the garments they were already dropping to pieces as the air reached them.

"I never believed such things possible," she said, turning to Mr. Drummond. She felt stifling to get away from the ill-omened house into God's clean air, but she was determined to go through with it, to examine the house from garret to basement rather than let the world come in to look with cold eyes on the evidences of flight, on the uncanny ruin that had befallen the whole substantial place.

"There are a million million tiny insects boring and tunnelling through everything here," Mr. Drummond said. "There will be very little worth saving. Down in the dining-room and the library at the back of it there is, or was, a valuable collection of books and pictures. I fear they are all past praying for. Ah, what is this?"

He had picked up from the floor a queer sarcophagus-shaped box, studded with little brass nails. The material with which it had been covered had all but disappeared.

## The House of the Secret

"I remember this," he said. "It was a pretty thing of gilt and tooled scarlet leather. Miss O'Neill used to keep her lace in it. There is metal underneath the leather. Perhaps it has kept the contents intact. I hope so for your sake, Miss Standish, for Miss O'Neill possessed some very beautiful and valuable lace."

He put the box down on the table, and turned the little key. The lace was still there, exquisite lace, which must have delighted any woman, but at the moment it did not delight Maeve.

"It seems quite all right," Mr. Drummond said, lifting out a filmy flounce of the most exquisite beauty. "I congratulate you, Miss Standish. Not many ladies will possess finer lace than yours."

He gloated over it with the eye of a connoisseur.

"But what is this?" he said, running his hand under the lace in the box, and bringing out a square leather case such as was used in those days for miniatures. He opened it and held it for their inspection.

The portrait was that of a dark, olive-skinned young man, with a touch of the sun in his cheeks. Sleek dark hair fell over his forehead. He had regular features, and magnificent eyes, and his red lips smiled, showing white teeth. The cruelty of the smile struck Maeve more than the beauty of the rest of the face.

"Beauty Fitzgerald," Mr. Drummond said. "That is how he looked when all the rest of us were wearing Dundrearies. The women were wild after him. He had a deluding tongue to beguile even a clever, straight woman such as I remember Henrietta O'Neill. Many a woman had cause to hate him."

"I hate him—with that smile," said Maeve. She had a sudden vision of the man sitting there smiling

## The House Gives up its Secret

and mocking at the woman he had wronged beyond endurance.

She flung down the picture as though it had been a viper and had stung her. Then she set her heel on the face and crushed it into fragments.

"I am sorry you did that," Mr. Drummond said. "It was beautifully painted. You might have let me have it."

He had the shocked air of the connoisseur who sees a beautiful thing destroyed.

"I couldn't bear," she said, half-ashamed, "to have him go on smiling like that, even in a picture."

Mr. Drummond replaced the lace in its box, locked it, and handed the key to Maeve.

"Better take this away with you," he said, "and there will be other things. I should not be at all surprised if we were to find a quantity of jewellery. My late client was very careless. I never could prevail on her to keep her jewellery in a safe."

The shelves of the wardrobe, indeed, yielded up a quantity of beautiful jewellery, lying in their cases and out of them, scattered here and there among all manner of odds and ends.

Maeve looked on while he collected it, with no sense of pleasure that it was all to be hers. Lady Mary, indeed, admired for her; uttering little cries of delight in a hushed voice, as though the dead woman the things had belonged to lay on the bed.

But Maeve was thinking of the flight, the flight from the shame and the disgrace, from the mockery of that evil-smiling mouth. She was glad she had destroyed the miniature, that Beauty Fitzgerald no longer smiled even in a miniature.

## The House of the Secret

She was trying to picture to herself the flight. Had it happened in the morning or the evening? The unmade bed pointed to the morning hours. How had her godmother learnt that she was no wife, that the child that was to be born to her was a nameless child? How had she dismissed her servants, got rid of the man himself before locking the door of the house that should not be re-opened again while she lived?

These things troubled her persistently while they explored the upper storeys of the house, where the same confusion, the same ruin were over all.

She was very silent while she went down the stairs and waited in the hall till Mr. Drummond should have opened the windows of the lower rooms. The policeman was still patrolling up and down, but in spite of the terrors of the law there was a group of spectators across the roadway, by the railings of the square; the passers-by stopped and stared curiously. Everyone knew the haunted house, and it was a wonder to see it open at last.

The air of the hall and staircase was now quite clear, so at the policeman's suggestion the hall-door was closed. But a second later Mr. Drummond had occasion to call for his services again. The dining-room door was locked, and there was no key.

"Shall I burst it in for you, sir?" asked the burly young policeman.

"Please do."

The door yielded with a crash to the policeman's shoulder. A more stifling odour than they had experienced before floated out into the hall. There was something particularly sickly and dreadful about it.

## The House Gives up its Secret

Mr. Drummond went a step or two into the room, then came back again. He was looking very white and shocked.

"I am afraid," he said, "that, after all, we shall not be able to keep the secret of the house."

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE RETURN HOME

IN a chair at the foot of the dining-table, when the light and the air had been let into the long-closed room, there was revealed, sitting, the skeleton of a man.

The clothes still held the bones together, but with the admission of the air they fell apart and crumbled in a heap.

Lady Mary and Maeve were spared that dreadful sight. Mr. Drummond had huddled them away out of the house; had put them on an outside car, and bidden the driver take them for a long drive by the sea and the mountains, so that the poisons of the house might be washed from their minds as well as their garments by the soft winds and the beauty of benignant Nature.

After all, the world had to be let into the secrets of the house. There had to be an inquest, and paragraphs in the papers, and finally a putting-away of the crumbling bones decently. The inquest resulted in an open verdict. After the lapse of time it was impossible for the doctors to discover the cause of death. All they could find was that the skeleton revealed no injury which could cause death. No one could say even that the body was that of Beauty Fitzgerald. The story of the secret marriage came to light, and an ancient crony

## The Return Home

or Fitzgerald's turned up at the inquest to testify that he had suffered from attacks of heart-failure. Most probably, the coroner thought, he had died suddenly while seated at the breakfast-table, and his death had been sufficient to unhinge the mind of the poor lady who had been his wife.

Then someone was discovered who had been a servant in the house at the time, and could tell how the mistress had called them together one hot summer morning and dismissed them all, paying them far over and beyond their wages. There had been words at the breakfast-table, and the opinion of the servants, who knew Mr. Fitzgerald better than "the poor mistress," had been that the mistress had found him out, and had sent him packing.

The manner of his death was something which would not be revealed till the Judgment Day. But there was one, at least, who would never believe anything but that he died by the judgment of God, stricken suddenly while he sat mocking the woman he had betrayed and dishonoured. Maeve would never have anything in her thoughts of the dead woman who had loved her and been her friend except love and profound pity.

Many a one was ready to seek out and make much of Maeve the heiress, but Maeve turned away from the friendly world. By-and-by she would be ready for it, but not now, not yet. She still wore her mourning, mourning for a double grief. She was not ready yet to rejoice with the world.

She had no desire to enter again that house of dreadful associations. Mr. Drummond had taken it off her hands, to see that it was razed to the ground cut

## The House of the Secret

of sight and memory, and the things disposed of that had resisted the foul disease of the house other than the personal belongings, the jewels and lace and plate, which were set aside for the young heiress. She wanted to be done with the house. She was so glad that it could disappear and in time be forgotten.

To be sure she must have another Dublin house; and Mr. Drummond was ready to find her one, suggesting exquisite places between the mountains and the sea, hidden away in their gardens, dream-houses built for nests of love.

But Maeve shook her head. She was not yet ready to choose.

"She will be married before we know where we are," Mr. Drummond said, half-regretfully. "I shall be sorry when our young queen takes a king, and abdicates her power to him. She is a glorious creature! I have fallen in love with her myself. You and I, Lady Mary, must watch over her very carefully lest she choose the wrong man. It is just such generous creatures as she is that go astray."

Lady Mary smiled and sighed. She had an idea that Maeve might find Godfrey more difficult as a great heiress than if she had still been a portionless girl.

He knew nothing yet of the change in Maeve's fortunes. His mother had left the telling to the girl herself. Since he had written no word to her, Maeve was reluctant to meet him at his landing—reluctant at first, but she yielded before his mother's pleading.

"Take him by storm, Maeve," she said, "by sudden surprise, and he will yield. He is so proud, my poor boy, and so hurt, hurt almost to death, because, as he

## The Return Home

says, he is out of life. Make him feel that he is not. If you are cold and shy at the first meeting, God knows but a barrier may rise up between you that it will be hard to break down."

"I dare not be at the boat," Maeve said. "Let me meet him suddenly; let us plan nothing, and I am sure all will come right. I shall try not to think of it, not to imagine it, not to make up what I shall say. Oh! after all, three days is an eternity!"

They had to wait three days at Southampton for the boat, days which seemed endless to look forward to, although they sped fast enough.

Lady Mary was at the docks to meet the *Indus*. She could have cried out with pain when she saw her son. Was this haggard, sallow young man with his arm in a sling, lean, unsmiling, her bright boy? He seemed to have put on ten years to his age, ten sickly years. His lips were closed in a stern determination which smote Lady Mary with terror. Supposing Godfrey would not listen to Maeve!

She was holding his hand in hers amid the press of the hurrying and scurrying crowds while she looked in his face. His fellow-passengers were very kind. One was seeing to his luggage, another was finding a cab for them. One after another came up to say good-bye and utter their good wishes. Plainly Godfrey had won sympathy and friendship on the homeward voyage.

One or two pretty girls were among those who came to say good-bye and were introduced to Lady Mary. Their farewells had a certain amount of *empressement* about them which made Lady Mary look at her son. Godfrey had always been plain, plain and wholesome

## The House of the Secret

and manly. She supposed it was the interest of his wound. But no; this Godfrey was somehow different from the lad who had left her. There was a distinction, almost an elegance, about this Godfrey which the other one had lacked. Well, Lady Mary would sacrifice that to see the old happiness come back to his face, the old health fill out his cheeks and smooth the lines from about his lips and eyes.

They were in the cab by this time, rattling through the intricacies of the docks. Lady Mary sat holding her boy's hand. They had never been demonstrative people to each other, and even so much demonstration made her feel a little shy. They were silent because of the noise the cab made as it rattled over the paving-stones; but presently they were among quiet squares and terraces where they could hear each other's voices.

"I chose a quiet hotel on the very outskirts of the town, Godfrey," the mother said. "I thought you might like to rest for a few days before going on, and we can quite easily get into the open country from there. I was almost tempted to take rooms in a farmhouse where the little orchard was in bloom, and the place smelt deliciously of white pinks and wallflowers, but I thought that perhaps it was hardly worth while for a few days."

"I have abundant leisure," Godfrey said, with a little bitterness. "God knows I shall have too much!"

"Are you sure the arm is beyond help?"

"Beyond help," he answered. "I have no money to go to specialists, nor to try expensive methods, and you have none; if you had I would not let you

## The Return Home

spend it on the chance. I am going to look out for some post suitable for a one-armed man. I grant you they are not many, but one may be found. I have good friends. By the way—you have seen Miss Standish?"

"I have seen her."

"And—her godmother is dead?"

"Yes, poor soul, she is dead."

"I want to tell you, mother. She was in the tent that night—when that brute stabbed me—she or her beautiful spirit. Oh, I know she wasn't there in the flesh, of course. She was thousands of miles away. But I saw her. You know how she stands upright as a flame, so rosy and white and golden. She made a light in the place. The brute would have stabbed me in my sleep if she had not wakened me. Do you know I was horribly afraid, at first, that she might be dead, that she had come from heaven to guard me. When you spoke of her in your first letter I began to live and mend."

"You say you saw her in your tent?"

"No wonder you are amazed! Yes, I saw her, when I was wide awake and struggling for my life. She stood there in the tent—she or her spirit. I saw her wring her hands. She awoke me only in time. The sentry, too, saw something white in the doorway of the tent, something that beckoned him to come. He thought it was the moonlight, a delusion of his senses. I knew it was she. I tell you, mother, I was wide awake, not asleep, not dreaming. She was there."

"My dear boy, I do not disbelieve you. I may tell you she saw the struggle, in a dream, in a vision, what you will. Am I a Celt for nothing? Can't

## The House of the Secret

"I believe that things I do not understand may happen?"

He turned away his head.

"Thank you for believing me, mother," he said, with a weary air. "I thought I would tell you. It was a strange thing to happen. Stranger still that she should know of it. I was sure she was there. How did she take it?"

"She was terribly anxious till news came. But she kept a high heart. You know what courage she has!"

He sighed heavily as the cab rolled under the *portecochère* of the hotel, and Lady Mary understood what was in his mind.

They went upstairs to the long, low room on the second floor of the hotel which overlooked the garden and was pleasant with its balconies outside the deep windows. The ascent of the wide, broad staircase seemed to tire Godfrey. He stopped once or twice almost imperceptibly to rest. The action, and the shadow on the young haggard face, smote his mother's heart. This was something in which she must trust to the girl she had bidden wait for them in the room there behind the closed doors. Would love conquer his pride? Her heart prayed voicelessly that the victory might be on Maeve's side.

She opened the door and led the way into the room. It was empty except for the May wind that came in at the three open windows, bringing a delicious scent of flowers.

Godfrey dropped heavily into a chair and rested his head upon his hand. His mother went out again, closing the door behind her. A canary which was

## The Return Home

hanging in a cage on the balcony outside burst in a shrill song; but for the rest the room was quiet.

Then someone came between the curtains of one of the long windows and stood looking at him where he had flung his head back against the chair with closed eyes and an air of utter fatigue.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### JOY COMES TO CHAPEL

SHE caught the reflection of herself in one of the long, old-fashioned mirrors, and for the moment she resented her superabundant health and beauty.

His weakness, his helplessness, after all, were of service at this moment. If he had been stronger, more self-sufficing, and he had put barriers between them, what could she have done?

He opened his eyes and saw her standing there, and a sudden colour came to his thin cheeks. Before he could speak she had knelt down beside him and drawn his head to her breast.

"Godfrey!" she said. "Godfrey! Oh! my Godfrey! how pale you are. But you have come home to me; and it is enough to have you safe."

His eyes flamed as he drew her to him with the uninjured arm, and held her for a few minutes in a close embrace, his lips upon hers. Then he put her away from him gently.

"You took me by surprise," he said, looking away from her. "I did not know you were here. My mother should have told me. Maeve, Maeve, don't you know that all must be at an end between us?"

She only came closer to him, looking up in his face with no shyness, but eyes as passionate as his own."

"You cannot put me away from you now," she said,

## Joy Comes to Chapel

"after taking me into your life. Because I refuse to go. I belong to you, and you belong to me. You cannot say you do not love me. That is the only thing which could send me away from you."

"No," he said, with a catch of his breath. "I cannot say that. You know that would not be true. I love you, but I must give you up. I wish you had not come, Maeve. It makes it a thousand times harder for me. How could I tie your beauty, and youth and health to a maimed man like myself?"

"Oh!" she said, laying her cheek against his hand. "I am glad I have beauty since I am yours. I am glad I have youth and health for you. But as for giving you up, my dear and dearest, you cannot make me do that. You lost the right to give me up when you told me you loved me."

"I was a passionate young fool," he said, with a groan. "I ought never to have rushed down to you in that mad way. But then, at least, I had my sword: I had my profession. Maeve, Maeve, you must not tempt me! I dare not look at you, you are so beautiful and so dear. You must let me go, Maeve."

"Ah!" she said, in a thrilling voice, "I did not save you for that. God did not let me go out of my body to warn you against the Pathan's knife for that. My dear, don't you know that God has appointed it?"

"I know you were there," he said in an awed whisper, "because I saw you. But for you the Pathan would have stabbed me in the dark; but for you he would have got me under in the struggle; it was so hard to grip a naked brute like him, and he was all sinew and muscle; but for you the sentry would not have come in time."

## The House of the Secret

"Don't you see," she said, joyfully, "that God wills it? God wills it!"

It was the one argument to reach his simple and proud mind. He was not consciously religious, but religion was deep down in his heart; he could not have spoken of such things to save his life, but in his innermost heart he believed, he loved, he trusted.

"Why," he said, in an awed voice, "it was, indeed, the intervention of heaven."

\* \* \*

"If my soul had not gone walking out of my body, leaving it tenantless," Maeve said a little later, "you would still have held out against me."

"I should still have held out against you. I have unsounded depths of obstinacy, though you will not believe it. I yielded because you persuaded me that God willed it. I am only troubled because it means the difference between heaven and the other place for me to yield to you. Yet I would have hardened my will against you, my beautiful Maeve, if you had not persuaded me that your will was also God's will. Who can resist that?"

She laughed triumphantly.

"Now we need never leave each other any more till God wills it," she said, "so that my soul need not go travelling to you in the sleep of the body."

"Since we shall be always together," he said, reverently, "here, and please God, hereafter. And now, tell me, Maeve, how am I going to support my wife?"

She had to tell him then that she was an heiress, and he heard it with a wry face, being a foolish and chivalrous boy.

## Joy Comes to Chapel

"Don't I sweeten the pill?" she asked, laughing at him, and her laughter was bewitching.

"It was fortunate you did not tell me at first that you were an heiress," he said, grimly. "Now, I suppose, it is too late to plead that you got me to agree with you under false pretences."

\* \* \*

There was no reason for delaying the marriage, and there was every reason for hastening it, seeing that two young people were head-over-ears in love with each other, and that the Quixotic pride of the lover yet stood between him and what his beloved would do for him.

Once married, Godfrey Barron accepted his wife's will, and allowed all that surgical skill could do for him to be called to his aid. He had to endure great suffering and the pain of many unrealised hopes before the bunch of distorted and twisted muscles of his right arm began to be pulled into place and to have sensation in it. He said himself that the agony he had to endure was sweet, since it proved that there was yet life in the injured muscles. In time they regained much of their former usefulness, too late indeed for him to take up the sword again; but, perhaps, he did not grieve greatly for that, since he had chosen the ploughshare rather than the sword. His son must go a-soldiering like his father before him, and make up for his father's failure; and it was enough for him now that he could lift the child with his right arm and set him on his shoulder, while he and Maeve walked side by side.

All trace of the haunted house has disappeared in the ball-room of a stately Dublin house. Only now and again one remembers to have passed it in the dark of a winter afternoon, or the darkness of night, dreading

## The House of the Secret

its sinister aspect, yet never guessing at the dreadful secret behind its barred lower-storey windows.

Godfrey Barron and his Maeve made Chapel blossom like the rose. They had not very much occasion for a town-house, so they spent their wealth and their love on the old house that had belonged to the O'Neills for many generations, in which Henrietta O'Neill had been young and glad, and had suffered greatly and died. Lying amid its rose-gardens and orchards, Nature and art alike contributing to make it beautiful, the great square house with the wings, revealing itself through an opening in the woodlands, is one of the most striking objects to the traveller by train between Dublin and Galway as he rushes through the bog at its wildest part. Beyond the house, amid its gardens and woods, stretch great golden tracts of cornfields, dappled with the emerald of rich pastures and the grey-green of meadows. Chapel has begun to draw to itself riches from the bog, acres of reclaimed land, fertile beyond the stable land, worth its weight in gold, say the conquerors of the bog.

Many a one has cause to bless the prosperity of the Barrons, because the poor neighbours are not forgotten in it, but the labourer shares in his master's well-being. And as Maeve Barron has said, pointing to Godfrey's sword unsheathed for many a day, was it not at least as glorious a thing and of immeasurably greater worth to humanity to conquer with the ploughshare and make dry land fruitful where quaking land had been?

A day may come when in the reclamation of the bog a dead man may be found who wandered into the bog in a night of great storm and was dragged down against all his efforts to save himself by the weight of the gold

## Joy Comes to Chapel

he carried. Judy Rearden has always believed that Corney was drowned in the bog. "Sure, he hadn't time for proper repentance, the poor unfortunate sinner," she says, "but may be He that took him sudden gave him time for a sudden repentance. Anyway th' ould mother's prayers won't be wasted. Poor Corney, he was sorry at the last whin he thought he'd kilt me. Sure it was the sorrow, for it druv him out in the wild night to his destruction; and maybe the Lord'll forgive him because he was sorry for killin' poor ould Judy."

The thought seems to give her much consolation, and hearing her expand on it, Maeve Barron has often said over to herself that couplet which contains the whole mercy of God:

Betwixt the saddle and the ground  
Was mercy sought, and mercy found:

and has a thought of pity to spare for Corney of the distorted mind and hideous body, whom, in the compassion of God, two women found worthy of love.

Viper is dead long since, after a peaceful and honourable old age, in which children in their fearlessness disproved the legend of his fierceness. The children could do anything with Viper, whose devotion they shared equally with their father and mother. But Codger yet lives, a rough yellow dog, with a muzzle fast turning white. Fortunately when he goes he will leave behind him descendants who inherit his indomitable spirit and his wild gaiety.

And so once more Chapel is the centre of quiet domestic happiness. Maeve Barron, once Maeve Standish, an orphan and almost friendless, is the centre of the house to an adoring husband, and children

## The House of the Secret

as beautiful as she, as chivalrous and loving as their father. Troops of friends come to Chapel; the poor are not turned away from its doors; the beneficence and the kindness which are its spirit radiate far beyond the house itself and make happiness for a wider circle than its own.

And so let us leave them.

