

**DUCHESS**

ROSSMOYNE

Duchess  
**Rossmoyne**

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Rossmoyne / Duchess — «Public Domain»,

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# Duchess Rossmoyne

## CHAPTER I

How a Dove-cot was fluttered in Rossmoyne.

The old-fashioned clock is ticking loudly, ponderously, as though determined to betray the flight of fickle time and impress upon the happy, careless ones that the end of all things is at hand. The roses knock their fragrant buds against the window-panes, calling attention to their dainty sweetness. The pigeons coo amorously upon the sills outside, and even thrust their pretty heads into the breakfast-room, demanding plaintively their daily crumbs; but no one heeds.

A deadly silence has fallen upon this room at Moyne, albeit life is fully represented here, and two eyes, in which the light of youth is quenched, are looking anxiously into the two other eyes that have also seen the best and the sweetest of their days.

Hopelessly the golden roses scatter their petals. In vain the white and tawny birds entreat backsheesh. To no purpose does the elderly clock count out its numbers. The urn is hissing angrily, the two cups of tea so carefully prepared are growing cold. So are the crisp little hot cakes, so is the —

No! by the bye, it isn't! Honey can't. What a chance I was near giving the reviewers!

One bird, growing annoyed at the prolonged quiet, flies from the open window to the back of Miss Penelope's chair, and settles there with an indignant flutter and a suppressed but angry note. This small suggestion of a living world destroys the spell that for the last few minutes has been connecting the brain with a dead one.

Miss Penelope, raising her head, gives words to her thoughts.

"Poor, poor Katherine!" she says, gently smoothing out the letter that lies upon her knee. "How her happiness was wrecked and what a sad ending there has been to everything! Her children coming home to us, fatherless – motherless! Dear child! what a life hers has been! It is quite twenty years ago now, and yet it all seems to me as fresh as yesterday."

"She shouldn't have taken things so easily; she should have asserted herself at the *time*," says Miss Priscilla, whose voice is always a note sharper than her sister's.

"It requires a great deal of thought and – and a great deal of moral courage to assert one's self when a man has behaved abominably to one, – has, in fact, *jilted* one!" says Miss Penelope, bringing out the awful word with a little shudder and a shake of her gentle head, that sets two pale lavender ribbons on her cap swaying mildly to and fro.

"Why was she so fatally silent about everything, except the one bare fact of his refusal, at the last moment, to marry her, without assigning any cause for his base desertion? Why didn't she open her whole heart to me? I wasn't afraid of the man!" says Miss Priscilla, with such terrible energy and such a warlike front as might well have daunted "*the man*," or indeed any man, could he have seen her. "She should have unburdened her poor bruised spirit to me, who – if my mother was not hers, and if I was many years her senior – had at least a sister's love for her."

"A true love," says Miss Penelope, with another sigh.

"Instead of which," regretfully, "she hid all her sorrows in her own bosom, and no doubt wept and pined for the miscreant in secret."

"Poor soul!" says Miss Penelope, profoundly affected by this dismal picture. Tears born of tenderness spring to her eyes. "Do you remember, Priscilla, how she refused to show his letter, wishing, I suppose, even *then* to spare him?"

"I forget nothing!" with some acerbity. "Often, when saying my prayers, I have wished I could forget him, but I can't, so I have to go on being uncharitable and in sin, – if indeed sin it be to harden one's heart against a bad man."

"Do you remember, too, my dear Priscilla, how she refused to go to church the Sunday after she received his cold-blooded missive telling her he wished his engagement at an end? I often wonder in what language he could have couched such a scandalous desire; but she tore the letter up. Dear! dear! it might have happened to-day, it is all so clear to me."

"Too clear," says Miss Priscilla.

"I recollect, too," says Miss Penelope, leaning her elbows on the table, pushing her untasted tea from her, and warming to the dismal memory, "how she would not come down to dinner on that eventful evening, though we had the red-currant tart she was so fond of, and how I took some up myself and knocked at her door and entreated her to open to me and to eat some of it. There was whipped cream on it; and she was very fond of cream, too."

"And she refused to open the door?" asks Miss Priscilla, with the satisfied air of one who has often heard the thrilling recital before, yet was never tired of it.

"Absolutely! so I laid the plate on a little table outside her door. Some hours afterwards, going up to bed, I saw the plate was gone and her door slightly ajar. Stealing into her room on tiptoe, I saw she was sleeping peacefully, and that she had eaten the red-currant tart. I felt so happy then. Poor dear child! how fond she was of that tart."

"She liked everything that had sugar in it," says Miss Priscilla, mournfully.

"It was only natural. 'Sweets to the sweet,'" says Miss Penelope, letting one little white jewelled hand fall slowly, sadly upon the other.

There is a lengthened pause.

Presently, stooping slightly towards her sister, Miss Penelope says in a mysterious whisper, — "I wonder, my dear Priscilla, *why* she married James Beresford a month afterwards."

"Who can read the human heart? Perhaps it was pride drove her into that marriage, – a desire to show George Desmond how lightly she treated his desertion of her. And James was a handsome young fellow, whereas George was –"

"Ugly," says Miss Penelope, with quite an amazing amount of vicious satisfaction for her.

"Strikingly so," says Miss Priscilla, acquiescing most agreeably. "But then the Desmond estates mean half the county; and we *used* to think he was the soul of honor."

"It was our father's expressed desire upon his deathbed that Katherine should marry him."

"Yes, yes; a desire to be held sacred. And Katherine gave her promise to our dying parent. Nothing," says Miss Priscilla, in a solemn tone, "should induce any one to break such an oath. I have often said so to the dear child. But she appeared not only willing, but anxious, to marry George Desmond. *His* was the traitorous mind."

"I daresay he has had his own punishment," says Miss Penelope, mildly.

"I hope so," says Miss Priscilla, sternly. Then, with a return to sadness, "Twenty years ago it is, and now she has been a twelvemonth dead and in her quiet grave."

"Oh, *don't*, my dear Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, in a broken voice, burying her face in her pocket-handkerchief.

"Ah! well, well, we had better look to the future; the past has no charms for us," says Miss Priscilla, with a ghastly attempt at cheerfulness. "Let me see," referring through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles to the letter in her hand: "That the dear children have landed we know, and – h'm – yes, this very – yes, plainly, *very* respectable person, the captain, writes to say they will be with us to-morrow."

"*To-morrow!* and that was written yesterday," says Miss Penelope, putting down her handkerchief and starting once more into life. "Why, at that rate, my dear Priscilla, they will be here *to-day!*"

"Bless me! you don't mean it!" exclaims Miss Priscilla, again applying her glasses to the letter. "Monday, and this is Tuesday: yes, sure enough you are right. What a head you have, my dear Penelope!"

"Oh, not at all," says Miss Penelope, flushing with pleasure at this tribute to her intellect.

"To-day, – in a few hours. Now, what is to be done about the beds?"

"But surely they are aired?"

"Aired? – yes. They have been aired every day regularly for the past two months, ever since I first heard the children were likely to come to us. But still I am uncertain about them. I know they will want hot jars; and then the rooms, they will want flowers and many things – and – "

"Can't I help you?" demands Miss Penelope, eagerly.

"My dear girl, not at all," says Miss Priscilla, with a calmly superior air, arising from the fact that she is quite eighteen months her senior. "You can assist me with your valuable counsel, but I would not have you disturb yourself for worlds. You must be cool and collected, and hold yourself in readiness to receive them when they come. They will be shy, no doubt, coming here all the way from Palestine, and it must be your part to make them feel quite at home."

This to Miss Penelope, who is afraid of strangers in any guise, appears such a fearful mission that she pales, and says, tremblingly, —

"But you too will be present at our first meeting? I must indeed *beg* you to be present, my dear Priscilla."

"Of course, of course," says Miss Priscilla, encouragingly. Then, doubtfully, "I hope the boy won't take a dislike to us."

"I wonder how we shall get on with children," says Miss Penelope. She is evidently growing extremely nervous. "It seems so strange they should be coming here to the old house."

"Monica cannot be a child now. She must be at least eighteen," says Miss Priscilla, thoughtfully. "It was in 1863 that – "

"1864, I think," interrupts Miss Penelope.

"1863," persists Miss Priscilla.

"You may be right, my dear," says Miss Penelope, mildly but firmly, "you often are, – but I know it was in '64 that – "

"What?" asks Miss Priscilla, sharply.

"The Desmond jilted our Katherine."

"You are wrong, Penelope, utterly wrong. It was in '63."

"I am nearly always wrong," says Miss Penelope, meekly, yet with a latent sense of suppressed power. "But I cannot forget that in the year George Desmond behaved so shamefully to our sweet Katherine, Madam O'Connor's cow had two calves, and *that*," triumphantly, "was in '64."

"You are right – quite right," says Miss Priscilla, vanquished, but not cast down. "So it was. What a memory you have, my dear Penelope!"

"Nothing when compared with *yours*," says Miss Penelope, smiling.

At this moment the door opens and an old man enters the room. He is clad in the garb of a servant, though such wonderful habiliments as those in which he has arrayed himself would be difficult to purchase nowadays: whether there are more wrinkles in his forehead or in his trousers is a nice question that could not readily be decided at a moment's notice.

He is quite ten years older than either of his mistresses; and, indeed, both he and his garments belong to a by-gone generation. His knees are bent, so is his back; his face is like a Ribston pippin, his coat is a marvel both in cut and in texture, but his linen is irreproachable, and what hair nature has still left him is most carefully brushed. There is, too, in his small gray Irish eyes a mischievous twinkle, and a fund of honest good humor that goes far to defy the ravages of time. In spite of his seventy years and his quaint attire, he still at times can hold his own with many a younger man.

"Well, Timothy," says Miss Priscilla, looking up as he approaches the table, "we have had news of Miss Katherine's – I mean Mrs. Beresford's – children."

"Rest her sowl!" says Timothy, in a reverential tone, alluding to that part of the late Mrs. Beresford.

"It seems they have landed and will be with us to-day."

"The day, miss?" growing brisk at this unexpected announcement.

"Yes, they have reached England in safety, and are now in Dublin. What a long, long journey it has been for them," with another dreamy glance at the letter, "all the way from Palestine!"

"An' so it has, miss, poor little crathurs!" says Timothy, who knows as much about the whereabouts of Palestine as he does about the man in the moon.

"You mustn't think they are very young, Timothy," says Miss Penelope, hastily. "Miss Priscilla and I have been talking it over, and we believe Miss Beresford must be now seventeen, Master Terence sixteen, and Miss Kate fourteen."

"And so of course they must be, miss. Thru for ye, ma'am. Dear, dear, though only to think now; it seems only the other day the dear young lady was married to Mister Beresford. But you aren't eating a bit, miss," anxiously; "you haven't tasted a morsel, ma'am. What can I get ye now?"

"Nothing, Timothy. The fact is – "

"There's an iligant ham downstairs, ma'am," says the old man, now really concerned for the mistresses, who still always appear to him as "the young ladies: " "let me bring it up to you."

"No, thank you, Timothy: we are just a little upset by this sudden news. We cannot help wondering how the old house will be with children in it, after all these years of calm and quiet."

"Sure an' a grand change it will be for us all, miss; 'twill indeed, ma'am," says Timothy, cheerfully, though his mind misgives him. "There's nothing like children, when all's told: sure's there's music in every sound of their footsteps."

"I hope they will be good," says Miss Penelope, with a doubtful sigh.

"Faix, what else would they be, miss?" says the old man, with assumed reproach. "'Tis well I mind of poor Miss Katherine herself, – the soft tongue she had in her head, an' never a cross word out of her, save to Nelly Doolin – an' she was the divil herself, savin' your presence, miss, and enough to provoke all the saints – glory be – "

"I trust they will be happy here," goes on Miss Penelope, still wistful.

"An' why not, miss? Sure the counthry is the finest place at all for the young; and where's a finer counthry than ould Ireland?"

"Much can't be said for it of late, Timothy," says Miss Priscilla, sadly: "all it can boast of now is rebellion, sedition, and bloodshed."

"Sure every one must have a kick up sometimes, miss," says Timothy, with youthful lightness; "an', afther all, isn't the ould place only doin' what she can for herself, more power to her?"

"Ryan," says Miss Priscilla, sternly, addressing her butler by his surname, – a thing that is never done except in dire cases, – and fixing upon him an icy glance beneath which he quails, "I regret you should so far forget yourself as to utter such treasonable sentiments in our presence. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"So I am miss. I humbly ask yer pardon, ma'am," says Mr. Ryan, promptly. "But all the different opinions one hears addles the brain. 'Twas only last night the Murphys had a meeting, and they do say, miss," lowering his voice confidentially, "that the Squire down there," pointing apparently through the breakfast-room wall, "is in a bad way with the League boys."

"The Desmond?"

"Yes, miss. He's been evictin' again, ma'am, an' there's queer talk about him. But," with a relapse into former thought, "if he's a bad landlord, what can he expect?"

"No, no, Timothy. He is not a bad landlord," says Miss Priscilla, hastily, though this allowance of grace to her enemy causes her a bitter pang. "He has been most patient for years. That I *know*."

"Well, maybe so, miss," says Ryan, deferentially, but with a reservation in his manner that speaks volumes. "It isn't for the likes of me ma'am, to contradict the likes of you. But did ye hear, miss, that Misther Desmond's nephew has come to stay with him?"

"At Coole?"

"At the Castle. Yes, miss. Faix 'twas meself was surprised to hear it. But there he is, safe enough, an' another gentleman with him; an' they do say that the old masther is as proud as Punch of him. But his blood's bad, I'll no doubt."

"No doubt," says Priscilla, severely.

Miss Penelope sighs.

## CHAPTER II

How two Old Maids are made acquainted with a very Young One.

Already we have reached the afternoon. In these warm June days, when all the earth is languorous and glad with its own beauty, time slips from us unannounced, and the minutes from morn to eventide, and from the gloaming till nightfall, melt into one another, until all seem one sweet, lengthened hour.

Just now the hot sun is pouring down upon garden and gravelled walks at Moyne; except the hum of the industrious bees, not a sound can be heard; even the streamlet at the end of the long lawn is running sleepily, making sweet music as it goes, indeed, but so drowsily, so heavily, that it hardly reaches the ear; and so, too, with the lap-lapping of the waves upon the shore below, as the tide comes and goes.

Not a breath of air comes to disturb the languid grandeur of the huge elms that stand staring up to heaven just opposite the hall door. The crows swinging in their branches up above are all subdued; hardly have they energy enough to flap their great, broad wings.

Little stationary clouds lie like flecks of silver upon the pale-blue sky; far far away, in the woods of Coole, a cuckoo may be heard at long and yet longer intervals, – last remnant of a vanished spring; but all the other birds have succumbed to the power of the great god of light, and are wrapped in silence.

Certain stray little sunbeams, half wild with glee, rushing hither and thither through the roses, discover Miss Penelope Blake sitting in the drawing-room at Moyne. She is dressed in her very best lavender silk, that would stand alone, and be glad to do it if it was let, but unabashed by her splendor Apollo's saucy babies dance down upon her, and, seizing on her knitting-needles, play hide and seek among them, until the poor lady's eyes are fairly dazzled.

Fortunately, at this instant Miss Priscilla, entering the room, draws down the blind and restores order: after which she seats herself almost directly opposite her sister.

The Misses Blake are not pretty old ladies at all. I don't want to deceive you in this matter. They are, in fact, quite ugly old ladies. Their noses are all wrong, their cheeks are as wrinkled as Timothy's forehead, and their mouths out of all drawing.

Miss Priscilla's eyes are brown, – a deep startling brown, that seems to look you through and through and compels the truth. Her hair is brown, too, and soft, and silky, and pretty, though thickly sprinkled with gray. She has a great deal of this hair, and is secretly very proud of it.

Miss Penelope's eyes are pale blue, – with very little blue, – and but for her long lashes (sole remnants of goodlier days) would be oppressive. Her hair is pale, too, and sandy, and is braided back from her forehead in severe lines.

There is a pensive air about Miss Penelope that might suggest to the casual observer an early and disastrous love-affair. But all such imaginings on his part would be vain. No winged cupid ever hid in Miss Penelope's ear, or played bo-peep in her virgin bosom, or nestled in her sandy locks: she is free from all taint of such wild frivolisms.

"All is ready now," says Miss Priscilla, – who is the Martha at Moyne, while we may regard Miss Penelope as the Mary. "The rooms are prepared, nothing is wanting, and the flowers smell so sweet. I have sent the carriage to meet them, though I know the train cannot be here for quite an hour yet; but I think it wise always to be in time."

"There is nothing like it," says Miss Penelope, placidly.

"Now I shall rest here with you a little while," goes on the elder maiden, complacently, "and think of all that is likely to happen."

"Really," says Miss Penelope, lowering her work and glancing restlessly at her sister, "I feel more nervous than I can say, when I think of their coming. What on earth should we do, dear Priscilla, if they took a dislike to us?"

"I have thought of that myself," says Miss Priscilla, in an awe-struck tone. "We are not attractive, Penelope: beyond a few – a *very* few – insignificant touches," with an inward glance at her fine hair, "we are absolutely outside the pale of beauty. I wonder if Monica will be like her mother, or if – "

Here something happens that puts a final stop to all conversation. The door is opened, quickly, impetuously; there is a sound as of many footsteps on the threshold without.

The old ladies start in their seats, and sit upright, trembling excessively. What can have happened? Has the sedate Ryan come to loggerheads with Mrs. Reilly the cook? (a state of things often threatened); and are they now standing on the mat meditating further bloodshed?

A moment surcharged with thrilling suspense goes by, and then, not Ryan or the cook, but a much more perplexing vision comes slowly into the room.

It is a very radiant vision, though it is clothed in mourning garments, full of grace and beauty. Very shy, with parted lips, and brilliant frightened eyes, but perfect as an opening flower.

Is it a child or a woman? is the first question that strikes Miss Penelope. As for Miss Priscilla, she is too surprised for thought of any kind, too lost in admiration of the little, gracious uncertain, figure, with its deep-blue eyes glancing up at her with a half-terrified yet trusting expression, to give way to speech of any kind.

She is slight, and slim as a hazel wand. Her hair is nut-brown, with a red gold tinge running through it. Her nose is adorable, if slightly tilted; her mouth is a red, red rose, sad but sweet, and full of purpose. Her eyes are large and expressive, but touched, like her lips, with a suspicion of melancholy that renders them only a degree more sweet and earnest.

There is a spirituality about her, a calm, a peace that shines out of these dark Irish eyes, and rests upon her perfect lips, as it were a lingering breath of the heaven from whence she came.

She stands now, hesitating a little, with her hands loosely clasped, – brown little hands, but beautifully shaped. Indeed, all her skin owes more of its coloring to Phœbus Apollo than nature intended. She draws her breath somewhat quickly, and then, as though anxious to get through the troublous task assigned her, says, nervously, in a low, sweet voice, —

"I am Monica."

As she says this, she glances entreatingly from one old lady to the other, with some trouble in her great eyes, and some tears. Then all at once her lips tremble to a smile, and a soft light breaks upon her face.

"*You* are Aunt Priscilla," she says, turning to Miss Blake; "I know you by your dark eyes, and by your *pretty* hair!"

At the sound of her voice the two old ladies wake from their abstraction.

"Yes, yes, it is your aunt Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, eagerly, with a sudden pleased smile. Had the compliment been made to herself she could not possibly have appeared more delighted, and certainly would not have betrayed her satisfaction so openly. "Her hair," she says, "was always beautiful."

As for Miss Priscilla, she is smiling too, but in a shamefaced fashion, and is blushing a warm pretty crimson, such as a girl of seventeen might be guilty of, listening to a first word of love.

She takes Monica's right hand in hers and pats it softly; and Miss Penelope takes her left; and then the two old ladies stoop forward, and, one after the other, kiss the pale, girlish cheek, and with the kiss take her at once and forever into their very hearts.

"But surely, dear child, you did not come alone?" says Miss Priscilla, presently, calling to remembrance the fact that there ought to be two other Beresfords somewhere.

"No; Terence and Katherine are with me."

"But where, my dear?"

"Well, I *think* they are standing on the mat, just outside the door," says Monica, blushing and laughing; and then she says, rather louder, "Terry and Kit, you may come in now. It is all right."

As to what was evidently supposed not to be "all right" up to this, the Misses Blake have no time to decide upon before a fresh nephew and niece present themselves to their view. They come in quite gayly, – reassured, no doubt, by Monica's tone: Terence, a tall slim lad of about sixteen, and a little girl somewhat like Monica, but more restless in features, and even a degree more pallid.

"My dear children, why didn't you come in before?" said Miss Priscilla, aghast at the inhospitable thought that they had been shivering with needless nervousness in the hall for the last five minutes.

"They said they wouldn't come in until I paved the way for them," says Monica, with a slight shrug of her shoulders that is a trick of hers. "They always put everything upon my shoulders: a little shabby of them *I* call it."

"I am afraid you must have pictured us as ogres," says Miss Priscilla, which idea strikes the old ladies as such a delicious flight of fancy that they laugh outright, and look at each other with intense enjoyment of their little joke.

"Well, of course we couldn't tell what you would be like," says Monica, gravely. "You might have been people likely to impress one with awe; but, as *it is*– This is Terry," laying her hand upon her brother's arm; "and this is Kit. She is really Katherine, you know, but no one ever calls her by so long a name. She isn't worth it."

At this the three Beresfords laugh among themselves, as children will, at time-worn fun, knowing no fatigue; after which Katherine and Terence are embraced and made much of by their new-found relatives, and freely commented upon.

But ever and anon the eyes of both old ladies wander thoughtfully, admiringly, to where the lissome Monica stands, like a pale, pensive lily.

"But how have you managed to be here so soon?" asks Miss Priscilla, when the impromptu luncheon, improvised by the startled Timothy, has come to an end. The children were all hungry, and have eaten a great deal, and have talked more. Indeed, though Miss Priscilla has been dying to ask this question for a long time, it has been impossible for her to do so, as there has not been so much as a comma in the conversation for the last hour.

The Beresfords are like so many clocks wound up, and bound to go for a certain time whether they like it or not; and, apparently, they do like it. Now they have run down a little, Terence being exhausted after his last laughing attack, and Kit wrapped in contemplation of an old-fashioned hair brooch that is fastening an equally old-fashioned piece of priceless lace that adorns Miss Penelope's throat.

"Well, I can't think how they do it!" she says, lost in admiration of a little slim hair lady bending over a miniature hair urn in the most lachrymose attitude conceivable. "But they have put her eye in wrongly: she looks as if she is dying with laughter."

Here Miss Priscilla edges in her question, as to how they have contrived to be at Moyne at so early an hour.

"We came by the wrong train," says Terry. "We generally do. Ever since we left the South of France – where we were staying with the Bohuns, you know, on our way here – we have been missing our trains right and left, and turning up at all sorts of unexpected places. Haven't we, Kit?"

"*You* have," says Kit, with suspicious emphasis. "You have such a pretty trick of rushing into the first train you see, without ever asking any one where it is going. No wonder we always turned up at the wrong end."

"*You've* a pretty trick of putting everything down on other people's shoulders," says Terence, with open disgust. "Whose fault was it we were always so late at the stations that we hadn't time to make inquiries, I'd like to know? Could you," with fine irony, "tell us?"

"Certainly; it was nurse," replies Kit, with dignity.

"Dear me! and where is your nurse now?" asks Miss Priscilla, anxiously. The query is a fortunate one, in that it turns the conversation into a different channel, and checks the eloquence of Kit and Terry, who are plainly on the brink of an open war.

"When last *I* saw her," says Terence, "she was sitting on the top of our biggest box, with everything else strewn around her, and her feet resting on two brown-paper parcels. – I wonder," says Mr. Beresford, addressing Monica, "what on earth she had in those brown paper parcels. She has been hugging them night and day ever since she left Jerusalem."

"Dynamite," suggested Monica, lightly; whereupon the two Misses Blake turn pale.

"At that rate, Aunt Priscilla, we needn't trouble about her," says Terence, pleasantly, "as she *must* be blown up by this. None of those clock-work affairs could be arranged to go on much longer. Poor thing! when in the flesh she wasn't half bad. I forgive her everything, – even her undying hatred to myself."

"If she is in fragments, so are our things," says Kit. "I think she *needn't* have elected to sit on them at the supreme moment."

"You don't really think," says Miss Penelope, in a somewhat troubled tone, remembering how an innocent baker in Rossmoyne had had some of the explosive matter in question thrown into his kitchen the night before last, – "you don't really think that these parcels you speak of contain infernal machines? – Yes, that is what they call them, my dear Priscilla," turning to her sister, as though anxious to apologize for having used a word calculated to lead the mind to the lower regions.

By this time both Kit and Terence are convulsed with delight at the sensation they have created, and would probably have gone on to declare the innocent Mrs. Mitchell an advanced Nihilist of the most dangerous type, but for Monica's coming to the rescue and explaining matters satisfactorily.

"Still, I cannot understand how you got up here so quickly," says Miss Penelope. "You know Moyne – home I hope you will call it for the future, my dears – " with a little fond pat on Monica's hand, "is quite three miles from the station."

"We should have thought nothing of that," says Terence, "but for Kit; she has had a fever, you know," pointing to the child's closely-cropped, dark little head; "so we said we would just stroll on a little and see what the country was like."

"And lovely it is," puts in Kit, enthusiastically. "We got up on a high hill, and saw the sea lying like a great quiet lake beneath us. There was scarcely a ripple on it, and only a soft sound like a sob." Her eyes, that are almost too big for her small face, glow brilliantly.

"And then there came by a man with a cart filled with hay, and he nodded to us and said, 'Good-morning, sir;' and so I nodded back, and said, 'How d'ye do?' to him and asked him was it far to Moyne House. 'A good step,' he said; 'three miles at the very least.'"

"He didn't; he said *laste*," says Kit, who is plainly in a litigious mood.

"At that," says Monica, breaking in eagerly, feeling, no doubt, she has been left too long out in the cold, and that it is time her voice were heard, "I suppose I looked rather forlorn, because he said, quite nicely 'Maybe ye'd not be too proud, miss, to get into me cart, an I'll dhrive the lot of ye up to the House, where as luck has it, I'm goin' meself.'" She mimicks the soft Southern brogue very prettily.

"So up we got," says Kit, gayly, "and away we went in the nice sweet hay, jog trot, jog trot, and *so* comfortable."

The Misses Blake by this time are filled with dismay. In Rossmoyne, where families are few and far between, and indecent scandal unknown, the smallest trifles are seized upon with avidity and manufactured into mountains. "A good appearance," Miss Penelope was taught at school, "is the first step in life," and here have these children been making *their* appearance for the first time in a common hay-cart.

What will Madam O'Connor say? Madam O'Connor's father having always laid claim to being a direct descendant of one of the old kings of Munster, Madam's veins of course are filled with blood

royal, and as such are to be held in reverence. What *won't* this terrible old woman say, when she hears of the Beresfords' escapade?

The Misses Blake sit shivering, blinking their eyelids, and afraid to say anything.

"We got on splendidly," Terence is saying, "and might indeed have finished our journey respectably, but for Monica. *She* laid our reputation in the dust."

Monica turns upon him an appealing glance from her large soft eyes that would have melted any heart but that of a brother's.

"Aunt Priscilla," says the adamant youth, "what is the name of the house with a big gate, about a half a mile from this?"

"Coole Castle," replies she, stiffly, the very fact of having to mention the residence of the detested Desmond making her heart beat violently. But Terry is a person blind to speaking glances and deaf to worded hints. In effect, Terry and tact are two; so he goes on, unheeding his aunt's evident disrelish for the subject, —

"Well, just as we got to Coole, I saw a fellow standing inside the entrance-gate, smoking a cigar. I fancied he looked amused, but would have thought nothing of that, only I heard him laugh aloud, and saw he was staring over my head — I was driving — to where Monica and Kit were, on the top of the hay. It occurred to me then to see what the girls were doing, so I stood up on the shaft, and looked, and — "

Here he pauses, as though slightly overcome.

"What, my dear?" asks Miss Priscilla, anxiously.

"There was Monica lying in an æsthetic attitude, — *very* æsthetic, — with her chin in her hands, and her eyes on the horse's ears, and her thoughts I presume in heaven, or wherever young ladies keep them, and with her heels — "

"It isn't *truth!* — it *isn't!*" interrupts Monica, blushing furiously, and speaking with much indignation. "I don't believe a single word of it!"

"And with her heels — "

"*Terence!*"

"In mid-air. She was kicking them up and down with delight," says Terence, fairly bubbling over with joy at the recollection. "It was the most humiliating sight for a modest brother. I shall never forgive her for it. Besides, the strange young man was — "

"If you say another word," says Monica, white with wrath and tears in her eyes, "I shall never speak to you again, or help you out of any trouble."

This awful threat has the desired effect of reducing Mr. Beresford to subjection. He goes down before the foe, and truckles to her meanly.

"You needn't take it so much to heart," he says soothingly: "there wasn't much in it, after all; and your shoes are very pretty, and so are your feet."

The compliment works wonders; Monica quite brightens up again, but the two old ladies are hopelessly scandalized.

"I feel assured, Terence," says Miss Priscilla, with much dignity, "that under *no* circumstances could a niece of mine show too much of her — her — "

Here Miss Priscilla blushes, and breaks down.

"Legs?" suggests Terry, politely.

"But who was the strange young man?" asks Miss Penelope, curiously.

"Our friend of the hay-cart said his name was Desmond, and that he was nephew to the master of the house behind the big gates," returns Kit, fluently.

"Desmond!" says Miss Priscilla, greatly agitated. "Let me never hear you mention that name again! It has been our bane! Forget you have ever been so unfortunate as to encounter this young man; and if ill luck should ever drive him across your path again, remember you do not — you never *can*— know him."

"But I'm certain he will know Monica if he sees her again," says Kit. "He stared at her as if she had seven heads."

"No wonder, considering her equivocal position. And as to knowing Monica, I'm not certain of that, of course, but I'm utterly positive he could swear to her *shoes* in a crowd," says Terence, with unholy delight. "He was enchanted with them, and with the clocks on her stockings: I think he was taking the pattern of them."

"He was *not*," says Monica, almost weeping. "He couldn't see them. I was too high up."

"What will you bet he doesn't know the color of them?" asks her tormentor, with a fresh burst of appreciation of the undignified scene. "When I see him again I'll ask him."

"Terence," says Miss Priscilla, growing very pale, "you must never see him again, or, at all events, you must never speak to him. Understand, once for all, that intimacy between us and the inhabitants of Coole is impossible. This feud I hint at touches you even more closely than it touches us, but you cannot feel it more than we do, – perhaps not as much. The honor of our family has suffered at the hands of the Master of Coole. He is the enemy of our house!"

"Priscilla!" murmurs Miss Penelope, in a low and trembling tone.

"Do not try to check me, Penelope. I *will* speak," says Miss Priscilla, sternly. "This man, years ago, offered one near and dear to us an indignity not to be lightly borne. The world is wide," turning to the astonished children, "you can make friends where you choose; but I would have you recollect that *never* can a Beresford and a Desmond have aught in common."

"But what have the Desmonds done to us, Aunt Priscilla?" asks Monica, a good deal awed by the old lady's solemnity.

"Some other time you shall know all," says Miss Priscilla in the low tone one might adopt if speaking of the last appalling murder.

"Yes, some other time," echoes Miss Penelope, gently.

## CHAPTER III

How Monica studies the landscape.

"Is it thrue, ma'am, what I hear, that ye'll be wantin' a maid for Miss Monica?" asks Mrs. Reilly, the cook at Moyne, dropping a respectful courtesy just inside the drawing-room door. "Ryan let dhrop a word to me about it, so I made so bould, ma'am, as to come upstairs an' tell ye I think I know a girl as will come in handy to ye."

"And who is she, Reilly?" asks Miss Priscilla anxiously.

"She's a very good girl, ma'am, an' smart, an' nate, an' I think ye'll like her," replies cook, who, like all Irish people, finds a difficulty in giving a direct answer to a direct question. Perhaps, too, there is a little wiliness in her determination not to name the new servant's parentage just at present.

"I daresay; I place great reliance upon your opinion, Reilly. But who is she? Does she come from the village, or from one of the farms? I should prefer the farms."

"She's as tidy as she can be," says Mrs. Reilly, amiably but still evasively, "an' a bit of a scholard into the bargain, an' a very civil tongue in her head. She's seventeen all out, ma'am, and never yet gave her mother a saucy word."

"That is as it should be," says Miss Priscilla, commendingly. "You feel a great interest in this girl, I can see. You know her well?"

"Yes, miss. She is me uncle's wife's sither's child, an' as good a girl as ever stepped in shoe leather."

"She is then?" asks Miss Priscilla, faintly, puzzled by this startling relationship.

"She's that girl of the Cantys', ma'am, and as likely a colleen as ever ye met, though I say it as shouldn't, she being kin-like," says Mrs. Reilly, boldly, seeing her time is come.

"What! that pretty, blue-eyed child that called to see you yesterday? She *is* from the village, then?" with manifest distaste.

"An' what's the matther wid the village, ma'am?" By this time Mrs. Reilly has her arms akimbo, and has an evident thirst for knowledge full upon her.

"But I fear she is flighty and wild, and not at all domesticated in any way."

"An' who has the face to say that, ma'am? Give me the names of her dethractors," says Mrs. Reilly, in an awful tone, that seemed to demand the blood of the "dethractors."

"I feel sure, Reilly," says Miss Priscilla, slowly, "that you are not aware of the position your arms have taken. It is most unbecoming." Mrs. Reilly's arms dropped to her sides. "And as for this girl you speak of, I hear she is, as I say, very flighty."

"Don't believe a word of it, ma'am," says cook, with virtuous indignation. "Just because she holds up her head a bit, an' likes a ribbon or two, there's no holdin' the gossips down below," indicating the village by a backward jerk of her thumb. "She's as dacent a little sowl as you'd wish to see, an' has as nate a foot as there is in the county. The Cantys has all a character for purty feet."

"Pretty feet are all very well in their way," says Miss Priscilla, nodding her head. "But can she sew? and is she quiet and tractable, and –"

"Divil a thing she can't do, ma'am, axin' yer pardon," says Mrs. Reilly, rather losing herself in the excitement of the moment. "Just thry her, ma'am, an' if ye don't like her, an' if Miss Monica finds even one fault in her, just send her back to her mother. I can't say fairer nor that."

"No, indeed. Very well, Reilly, let her come up to me to-morrow; and see that her inside clothes are all right, and let her know she must *never* be out after dark."

"Yes, ma'am," says the triumphant Reilly, beating a hasty retreat.

Half an hour afterwards she encounters Monica upon the avenue.

"Why, where are you going, Mrs. Reilly?" asks Monica, seeing that cook is got up in all her war-paint, regardless of expense.

"To mass first, miss," says Mrs. Reilly.

"Where's that?" asks Monica, with foreign ignorance.

"Law! to the chapel, miss," says Reilly, with an amused smile.

"But it isn't Sunday?"

"No, miss. It's a saint's day – may they be good to us!" crossing herself. "It's different with you, miss, you see; but we poor folks, we must say our prayers when we can, or the Virgin will dhrop us out of her mind."

"Is your chapel pretty?" asks Monica, who has now been a week in the country, and through very weariness feels a mad desire to talk to somebody or anybody.

"Faix, it's lovely, miss, since Father Jerry took it in hand! There's the finest pictures ye ever saw on the walls, an' an altar it 'ud do ye good to look at."

"Would it? Then I'll go some day to see it," says Monica, smiling, not knowing that her aunts would as soon let her enter a pandemonium as a Roman Catholic chapel.

Dear old ladies! frightened by shadows, they have been bred in the belief that the Evil One dwells beneath the shade of the Romish Church, and will therefore surely die in it.

"Do, then, agra!" said Mrs. Reilly, who has, of course, like all the other servants, gone down before Monica: "it's proud we'd be to see ye there."

There is no thought of conversion in the woman's mind, you must remember, – merely a hospitable desire to let her know she will be welcome anywhere.

"By the same token, Miss Monica," says she, "there's something I was near forgettin' to tell ye."

"Yes!" says Monica.

"Ye're goin' to have me uncle's wife's niece for yer own maid, miss."

"Am I? I'm glad of that," says Monica, with a native courtesy. "Is she" – with some hesitation and a faint blush – "is she pretty, Reilly?"

"She's the purtiest girl ye ever set eyes on," says Mrs. Reilly, with enthusiasm.

"I'm glad of *that*; I can't bear ugly people," says Monica.

"Faix, then, there's a bad time before ye wid the ould ladies," mutters Mrs. Reilly, *sotto voce*, gathering up her cloak and stepping onwards. She is a remarkably handsome woman herself, and so may safely deplore the want of beauty in her betters.

Monica, turning aside, steps on a high bank and looks down towards the village. Through the trees she can see the spire of the old cathedral rising heavenwards. Though Rossmoyne is but a village, it still can boast its cathedral, an ancient edifice, uncouth and unlovely, but yet one of the oldest places of worship in Ireland.

Most of my readers would no doubt laugh it to scorn, but we who belong to it reverence it, and point out with pride to passers by the few quaint marks and tokens that link it to a bygone age.

There is a nave, broad and deep, comprising more than a third of the whole building, with its old broken stone pavement, and high up, carven upon one of its walls the head of St. Faughnan, its patron saint, – a hideous saint, indeed, if he resembled that ancient carving. How often have I gazed upon his unlovely visage, and wondered in my childish fashion why the grace that comes from so divine an origin had not the power to render his servant's face more beautiful!

In these later years they have improved (?) and modernized the old structure. A stone pulpit, huge and clumsy, erected by subscription to the memory of some elderly inhabitant, stands like a misshapen blot before the altar rails; a window, too broad for its length, and generally out of proportion, throws too much light upon the dinginess within; the general character of the ugly old place has lost something, but assuredly gained nothing, by these innovations. It is hard to put "a piece of new cloth on an old garment" successfully.

The village itself stands upon a high hill; the ocean lies at its feet. From Moyne House one can see the shimmer of the great Atlantic as it dances beneath the sunbeams or lashes itself into furious foam under the touch of the north wind. The coastguard station, too, stands out, brilliant in its whitewash, a gleaming spot upon the landscape.

To the left of the station lies Ounahincha, – a long, deep line of sea-beach that would make its fortune as a bathing place under happier auspices and in some more appreciated clime.

Monica, looking down from her height, takes in all the beauties of the landscape that surround her, and lets the music of the melancholy ocean sink into her very soul.

Then she lets her eyes wander to the right, and rest with pardonable curiosity upon Coole Castle, where dwells the ogre of her house. Above Coole, and about two miles farther on, lies Aghyohillbeg, the residence of Madam O'Connor, that terrible descendant of one of Ireland's kings; whilst below, nestling among its firs and beeches, is Kilmore, where the Halfords – a merry tangle of boys and girls – may be seen at all hours.

Then there is the vicarage, where the rector lives with his family, which is large; and nearer to the village, the house that holds the curate and his family, which, of course, is larger. Besides which, Monica can just see from her vantage-ground the wooded slopes of Durrusbeg that have lately called young Ronayne master, – a distant cousin having died most unexpectedly and left him all his property.

Six months ago, Ulic Ronayne was spoken of by anxious matrons as a wild lad, with nothing to recommend him save his handsome face and some naughty stories attached to his name. Now he is pronounced charming, and the naughty stories, which indeed never had any foundation, are discovered to have been disgraceful fabrications. Marriageable daughters are kinder to him than words can say, and are allowed by the most cautious mothers to dance with him as often as they choose, and even to sit unlimited hours with him in secluded corners of conservatories unrebuked.

Truly, O Plutus! thou art a god indeed. Thou hast outlived thy greater brethren. Thy shrine is honored as of old!

After a last lingering glance at the distant ocean and the swelling woods that now in Merry June are making their grandest show, Monica jumps down from her bank again and goes slowly – singing as she goes – towards the river that runs at the end of Moyne.

Down by its banks Moyne actually touches the hated lands of Cooles, a slight boundary fence being all that divides one place from the other. The river rushes eagerly past both, on its way to the sea, murmuring merrily on its happy voyage, as though mocking at human weals and woes and petty quarrels.

Through the waving meadows, over the little brook, past the stile, Monica makes her way, plucking here and there the scarlet poppies, and the blue cornflowers and daisies, "those pearly Arcturi of the earth, the constellated flower that never sets."

The sun is tinting all things with its yellow haze, and is burning to brightest gold the reddish tinge in the girl's hair as she moves with dallying steps through the green fields. She is dressed in a white gown, decked with ribbons of sombre tint, and wears upon her head a huge poky bonnet, from which her face peeps out, half earnest, half coquettish, wholly pure.

Her hands are bare and shapely, but a little brown; some old-fashioned rings glisten on them. She has the tail of her gown thrown negligently over her arm, and with her happy lips parted in song, and her eyes serene as early dawn, she looks like that fair thing of Chaucer's, whose

"Berthe was of the womb of morning dew,  
And her conception of the joyous prime."

And now the sparkling river comes in sight. Near its brink an old boat-house may be seen fast crumbling to decay; and on the river itself lies, swaying to and fro, a small punt in the very last stages

of decline. It is a very terrible little boat, quite at death's door, and might have had those lines of Dante's painted upon it without libel:

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

But Monica, in happy ignorance of rotting timbers, thinks only of the joy she felt last evening when the discovery of this demoralized treasure was made. In the mouldering boat-house she had found it, and so had claimed it for her own.

She had told no one of her secret, not even Kit, who is, as a rule, her prime minister, her confidante, and her shadow. She has, indeed, had great difficulty in escaping from "her shadow" just now, but after much diplomatic toil had managed it. To find herself upon the calm and gentle river, to dream there her own sweet thoughts beneath the kindly shade of the pollard willows, to glide with the stream and bask in the sunlight *all alone*, has been her desire since yester-eve.

To-morrow, if to-day proves successful and her rowing does not fail her, of which she has had some practice during the last two years of her life, she will tell Kit and Terry all about it, and let them share her pleasure. But to-day is her own.

The boat is connected with the shore by a rope tied round the stump of a tree by most unskilful hands. Flinging her flowers into the punt, she strives diligently to undo the knot that she herself had made the night before, but strives in vain. The hard rope wounds her tender hands and vexes her gentle soul.

She is still struggling with it, and already a little pained frown has made a wrinkle on her smooth brow, when another boat shoots from under the willows and gains the little landing-place, with its pebbly beach, that belongs equally to Coole Castle and to Moyne.

This new boat is a tremendous improvement on our heroine's. It is the smartest little affair possible, and as safe as a church, – safer, indeed, as times go now. Not that there is anything very elaborate about it, but it is freshly painted, and there are cushions in it, and all over it a suppressed air of luxury.

Besides the cushions, there is something else in it, too, – a young man of about six and twenty, who steps lightly on to the bank, though it is a miracle he doesn't lose his footing and come ignominiously to the ground, so bent is his gaze on the gracious little figure at the other side of the boundary-fence struggling with the refractory rope.

It doesn't take any time to cross the boundary.

"Will you allow me to do that for you?" says the strange young man, raising his hat politely, and taking the rope out of Monica's hand without waiting for permission.

## CHAPTER IV

How Monica makes a most important discovery and, changing suddenly from "lively to severe," is reprehensibly cruel to a most unoffending young man.

"You are very kind," says Monica slowly, feeling not so much embarrassment as surprise at this sudden advent.

Then the young man looses the rope, and, having done so, casts a cursory glance at the boat to which it is attached. As he does so, he lifts his brows.

"Surely you are not dreaming of going on the river in *that!*" he says, indicating the wretched punt by a contemptuous wave of his hand.

"Yes. Why not?" returns she.

"There isn't a sound bit of timber in her. What *can* your people be thinking of, to let you trust yourself in such a miserable affair?"

"My people have nothing to do with it," says Monica, somewhat grandly. "I am *my own mistress.*"

She has picked up her flowers again out of the despised punt, and now stands before him with her hands filled with the June blossoms, blue, and white, and red. They show bravely against the pallor of her gown, and seem, indeed, to harmonize altogether with her excessive fairness, for her lips are as red as her poppies, and her cornflowers as blue as her eyes, and her skin puts her drooping daisies all to shame.

"As you *are* your own mistress," says the young man, with a suspicion of a smile, as he takes in the baby sweetness of her mouth, and each detail of her slight girlish figure, that bespeaks the child rather than the woman, "I entreat you to have mercy upon *yourself.*"

"But what is the matter with it?" asks Monica, peering into the boat. "It *looks* all right; I can't see a hole in it."

"It's nothing *but* holes, in my opinion," says the strange young man, peering in his turn. "It's a regular *coffin.* You will be committing nothing less than suicide if you put your foot in it."

"Dear me," says Monica, blankly, feeling impressed in spite of herself, "I do think I am the most unfortunate person alive. Do you know," lifting her eyes to his, "I didn't sleep a wink last night, thinking of this row on the river to-day, and now it comes to nothing! That is just like my luck always. I was so bent on it; I wanted to get round that corner over there," pointing to it, "to see what was at the other side, and now I can't do it." It seems to the young man looking at her, as though her glance is reproachful, and as if she connects him, innocent as he is, with her disappointment.

"There is no reason why you shouldn't," he is beginning, anxiously, when she contradicts him.

"After all," she says, doubtfully, bending over to look into the clear bed of the river, "I don't believe, if things came to the worst, and I *did* get swamped, I should be drowned."

"Certainly not, if you could swim, or if there was any one watching over your welfare from the banks that could."

"Well, I can't," confesses Monica, with a sigh; "and unless *you,*" with an irrepressible laugh that shows all her white and even teeth, "will promise to run along the banks of the river all the afternoon to watch over me, I don't think there is much chance of my escaping death."

"I shouldn't mind in the least being on guard in such a cause," says the stranger, politely, with the same carefully suppressed smile upon his lips (which are very handsome) as had moved them a while ago. "Command me if you will; but I would have you remember that, even though I should come to the rescue, it would not save you an unpleasant ducking, and – and your pretty gown," with a glance that is almost affectionate at the white Indian cotton, "would be completely ruined."

"Even that dire idea doesn't daunt me," says Monica, gayly: "you forgot that the more limp I am the more æsthetic I shall look. Well," with a sudden relapse into melancholy, "I suppose I must give it up, and not go round the corner to-day."

"But *why* not?" exclaims he, eagerly. "My boat is at your service. *Do* take it. I have quite done with it, I have indeed, and it is lighter than it looks."

"Too heavy for me, I am afraid," says Monica with a sigh.

"Is it? Then," with desperate boldness, "let *me* row you."

"Oh, *no!*" returns she, blushing warmly. "You forget," with a swift glance at him, "you are quite a stranger to me."

Yet he is not quite such a stranger as she thinks. She is not such a stranger to him at least, because her face, seen for a minute about a week ago, has haunted him persistently ever since.

"As we live in the same neighborhood, we cannot long continue strangers," he says, gently; "and, in the mean time, why lose this lovely afternoon, and that corner you were speaking of? The view of the sea, when you get round it, is really worth seeing."

"Yes, yes, I daresay," reluctantly turning to leave him. "I shall see it some day."

"Look here," says the young man, very earnestly, following her as she moves. "If you will come with me you will see it *now*. I will only be your oarsman; I won't say a word to you unless you wish it; I won't even *look* at you. Think of me as a common boatman you have hired by the hour; or, better still, don't think of me at all. With a little care you might bring yourself to imagine I wasn't there."

"But if we met any one?" says Miss Beresford, visibly relenting.

"Impossible! There is never a soul on this stream save myself. I have been here now every day for ten days, and never yet came upon even the ghost of anything human."

"Very well," says Monica, though still with palpable hesitation. "Now, remember, you have pledged yourself not to speak to me, or to look at me." At this he fixes on her so prolonged a gaze that one may readily understand he means it to be a last one for some time.

Then he turns aside, and, having brought his boat to her side of the fence, holds out to her his hand. As he does this he keeps his eyes bent upon the ground, as though determined to let her know his penance has already begun.

"I am not in the boat yet," says Monica, with a quaint little smile, laying her palm on his. Whereupon he looks at her again; and then, as their eyes meet, they both laugh joyously, as youth will when it meets youth.

Lightly she steps into his boat, and slowly, lazily, he rows her down the little river, – flower-clad on either bank, – letting the boat drift almost at its own sweet will.

The willows, drooping towards the water's edge, woo them as they pass; the foolish weeds would hold them in embrace; the broad flag-flowers would fain entwine them. But they, though loving them, go by them, thinking their own thoughts, and wondering vaguely at the beauty of the

"Starry river-buds among the sedge,  
And floating water-lilies broad and bright,\*\*\*\*\*  
And bulrushes, and reeds of such deep green  
As soothes the dazzled eye with sober sheen."

So far silence has been scrupulously kept. Not a word has been spoken since they left the bank, not a look exchanged. Monica is letting her little slender fingers trail through the water and the flat leaves of the lilies. He, with his coat off, is pretending to row, but in reality is letting his body grow subservient to his mind. He has even adhered honorably to his promise not to look at her, and is still mentally ambitious about being true to his word in this respect, when an exclamation from her puts an end to all things.

"Oh! look at *that* lily!" she says, excitedly. "Was there ever such a beauty? If you will row a little more to the right, I am sure I shall be able to get it."

"Don't stir. I'll get it," returns he, grateful to the lily for this break in their programme; and presently the floating prize is secured, and he lays it, wet and dripping, in her outstretched hands.

"After all, you see, you broke your promise," she says, a moment later, most ungratefully, glancing up at him coquettishly from under her long lashes.

"But who made me do it?" asks he, reproachfully, whereupon she laughs and reddens.

"I never confess," she says, shaking her pretty head; "and after all – do you know? – I am rather glad you spoke to me, because, though I like being quite by myself at times, still I *hate* silence when any one is with me."

"So do I," says her companion, with the utmost cheerfulness.

"I think," leaning towards him with a friendly smile, "I cannot do better than begin our acquaintance by telling you my name. It is Monica Beresford."

"Monica," lingering over it lovingly; "a beautiful name, I think. I think, too, it suits you. Mine is not to be compared to yours; but, such as it is, I give it you!"

He throws a card into her lap.

"I hope it isn't John Smith," says Monica, smiling and picking up the card. But, as she reads what is printed thereon, the smile fades, and an expression of utter dismay overspreads her face.

"'Desmond' – Oh! *not* Desmond!" she says, imploringly, her lips growing quite pale.

"Yes, it *is* Desmond," says the young man, half amused, half puzzled. "You really think it ugly, then! Do you know I rather fancy my surname, although my Chris –"

"You are not – you cannot be *the* Desmond," interrupts she, hastily.

"No; that's my uncle," says the young man, innocently.

"Oh! then you acknowledge the crime?" in deep distress.

"I didn't know that an old Irish title must necessarily be connected with guilt," says her companion, fairly puzzled.

"Eh?" says Monica, puzzled in her turn. "I don't understand you: I only want to know if you are one of the *particular* Desmonds?"

"I suppose not," he replies, now openly amused, "because I regret to say we have never yet done anything worthy of note, or likely to distinguish us from all the other Desmonds, whose name is legion."

"If you are going to tell me you live at Coole," says Miss Beresford, in a tone that is almost tragic, "I warn you it will be the last straw, and that I shan't be able to bear it."

"I am not going to tell you anything," protests he.

"But you must," declares she, illogically. "I may as well hear the worst at once. Go on," heroically; "tell me the truth. *Do* you live there?"

"I'm awfully afraid I do," says Mr. Desmond, feeling somehow, without knowing why, distinctly ashamed of his name and residence.

"I knew it! I *felt* it!" says Monica, with the calmness of despair. "Take me back to the bank at once, – this very instant, please. Oh, what a *row* I should get into if they only knew!"

Very justly offended at the turn affairs have taken, Mr. Desmond rows her in silence to the landing-place, in silence gives her his hand to alight, in silence makes his boat safe, without so much as a glance at her, although he *knows* she is standing a little way from him, irresolute, remorseful, and uncertain.

He might, perhaps, have maintained this dignified indifference to the end, but that, unfortunately lifting his eyes, he catches sight of her in this repentant attitude, with her head bent down, and her slim fingers toying nervously with the lilies of his own gathering.

This picture flings dignity to the winds. Going up to her, he says, in a would-be careless but unmistakably offended voice, "May I ask what I have done, that 'they,' whoever they are, should consider you had disgraced yourself by being with me for half an hour?"

"*You* have done nothing," says Monica, faintly. "It was your uncle."

"My *uncle!*— George Desmond! Why, what on earth can *he* have done?" demands he, bewildered.

"I don't know." Feeling this is indeed a lame answer to a most natural question, she goes on hurriedly, "It all happened twenty years ago, and —"

"But what happened?" asks he, with pardonable impatience.

"Something dreadfully wicked," says Monica, solemnly. "Something really very, *very* bad, because Aunt Priscilla can't hear you spoken of with common patience."

"*Me!*"

"Not so much you, perhaps, as your name. She hates the very sound of it. There isn't a doubt about *that*; because, though I have not heard the exact story yet, I know both my aunts grow actually faint with horror when your uncle's name is mentioned."

"Good gracious!" says the horrified nephew of this apparently disreputable old man. He is staring at Monica, but in reality he does not even see her. Before his mind's eye is a picture of a stout old gentleman, irascible, but kindly, with a countenance innocent of guile. Yet how can he doubt this girl's story? Twenty years ago, as it seems, George Desmond had done something too bad to be discussed. After all, how impossible it is to trust to appearances! As a rule, the most seemingly harmless people are those who are guilty of the vilest misdemeanors. And, yet, what on earth *could* George have done twenty years ago? Visions of forgery, murder, homicide, rise up before him, but, try as he will, he cannot connect Mr. Desmond's face with any of them.

"You don't exactly know yourself what the crime is with which he is charged?" he asks her, with growing diffidence.

"No. But I shall find out, and tell — But that will be impossible!" — with a glance full of liveliest regret. "I *cannot* tell you, because after to-day I shall never see or speak to you again."

"That is the most insane nonsense I ever heard in my life," says Mr. Desmond.

The girl shakes her head sadly.

"If you won't speak to me I shall speak to you, whether you like it or not," says Desmond, with decision.

"That will be out of your power, as you will never see me."

"Do you mean to tell me I may not call at Moyne?"

"Certainly I do. They wouldn't hear of it. They wouldn't, in fact, receive you."

"But why must they visit my uncle's sins upon my shoulders? I have heard of a father's sins being entailed upon his heir, but never an uncle's."

"It is your name," says Monica. Then she laughs a little, in spite of herself, and quotes, in a low tone, "Oh! Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?"

But he takes no heed of this frivolous quotation.

"You mean me to understand, then, that I am never to speak to you again?"

"I do, indeed."

"What! Do you know we are to be close neighbors for the future, you and I? This is to be your home. Coole is to be mine. At the most, only a mile of road lies between us, and *here* not quite a yard. And yet you calmly tell me I am from this day forth to be only a common stranger to you."

"You look as if you were angry with *me*," says Monica, with sudden tears in her eyes at his injustice. "It isn't my fault; I haven't done anything wicked. Blame your uncle for it all."

"The whole thing is simply absurd," says the young man, taking now the superior tone that is meant to crush the situation by holding it up to ridicule. "You forget, perhaps, that we shall *have* to meet sometimes. I suppose the people down here give balls occasionally, and tennis-parties, and that;

and when I meet you at them, is it your wish that I shall pretend never to have seen you before, – never to have known you?"

"Yes," says Monica, with as much hesitation as lets him know how she hates saying it. "When next you meet me, you are to look right over my head, and pass on!"

"I couldn't do it," returns he, gazing at her steadily. "I couldn't indeed. In fact, I feel it is just the last thing in the world I *could* do."

"But you must," says Monica, imperiously, terrified to death as she conjures up before her Aunt Priscilla's face as it will surely be if this Philistine dares to address her: "I tell you my aunts would never forgive me if they knew I had interchanged even one syllable with you. From this moment you must forget me. There will really be no difficulty about it, as our acquaintance is but of an hour's growth. You have seen me for the first time to-day, and a chance meeting such as this is easily driven from the mind."

"That is your opinion," says the young man, moodily. "It is not mine. I dare say *you* will find it very easy to forget. I shan't! And this isn't the first time I have seen you, either. It seems to me as if years have rolled by since last I looked upon your face. I was standing at the gate of Coole, and saw you pass by, the day of your arrival in Rossmoyne. So, you see, we are – in spite of you – almost old friends."

A bombshell flung at her feet could hardly have produced a greater sensation than this apparently harmless speech. All at once there rushes back upon her the recollection of that fatal day when she lay upon a cart-load of hay and (according to Terence) kicked up her heels in the exuberance of her joy. Oh, horror! she grows crimson from her soft throat to her forehead! even her little ears do not escape the tint, but turn a warm and guilty pink.

Never until this unlucky instant did it occur to her that this strange young man must be the detested one who had stood in the gateway and laughed at her undignified position and taken the clocks of her stockings into careful remembrance.

The one absorbing thought that he was nephew to Aunt Priscilla's bugbear has swallowed up all others; but now, as he himself reveals this other truth to her, she feels that her cup is indeed full.

Deeper and deeper grows the crimson tint that dyes her pale, shy face, until her cheeks are all aflame. Something like anger, too, is rendering her sweet eyes brilliant beyond their wont. Delicately but haughtily she gathers up the train of her white gown and casts one expressive glance upon the way she came. This glance says much. Somehow it tells him as distinctly as though she said it aloud that she is sorry she ever came down to this river, and that her sorrow arises from the fact that it was here she encountered him.

While he is still sore perplexed by her sudden change of demeanor, she turns away from him. Then, pausing, she turns again, and bestows upon him so indignant a look as completely finishes this ill used young man.

"I object to hasty friendships," she says, icily. "And," pausing as if to make the effect greater, "if I were *you*, I think I should seek some better employment than standing *idling all day long* at your uncle's gate."

With this parting shaft, and before he can recover from his consternation, she goes swiftly away from him, up through the meadows, home.

## CHAPTER V

How Monica is put in possession of a dreadful secret – And how Kit protests against the injustice of the world.

"An invitation from Madam O'Connor," says Miss Priscilla in a pleased tone, glancing at them all, over the top of her spectacles. She has the card in her hand, and slowly reads aloud the information printed upon it, to the effect that Madam O'Connor will be at home on Friday the 15th, from four to six o'clock, etc.

"I am very glad she has asked Terence and Monica," says Miss Penelope. "Excessively attentive I call it."

"Will you go, Aunt Priscilla?" asks Monica, in a sneaky sort of tone. Her young soul hankers after the world, and will not be subdued. Upon Miss Priscilla's "yes" or "no" she waits with an anxiety that surprises even herself.

"Certainly, my dear," says Miss Blake, drawing herself up. "I shall feel it my duty to take you to all such places as will enable you to mix with people in your own rank of life. I am not one of those who think it well for young girls to lead the life of nuns. No, indeed!"

"I quite agree with you, my dear Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, who is an echo of her elder sister. "Yes, we will rouse ourselves, and once more seek the world."

"But I would not have you make yourselves unhappy," says Monica, falteringly.

"Nay, my dear, it will be a pleasure, for *your* sake."

Not for worlds, even to themselves, would these two old ladies acknowledge that they are right glad of the chance that has come to them of introducing so beautiful a niece to the gay world around them, and of mingling, even in a subdued and decorous fashion, with the amusements that for the last five years they have (most unwillingly, be it said, but on the score of age) declined.

"I wonder who will be there," says Monica, in a fresher tone, striving vainly to drown the hope that is taking possession of her, a hope that connects itself with a certain blue-eyed, dark-haired young man, last seen in boating flannels.

"Everybody," says Miss Priscilla, – "the entire country. Madam O'Connor may not be – is not – there may be certain points about her – that" – floundering hopelessly – "I mean" – with a rush – "there are a few who object to her *manner* but her birth is undeniable, and she has a large fortune; you must know, my dear, her father was a direct descendant of King O'Toole, and her husband the head of one of the oldest families in Ireland."

"Is that the old woman who called here the day before yesterday?" asked Terence, irreverently. They are all sitting in the drawing-room, Terence being rather on the balcony perhaps.

"Yes – I regret you were not in to receive her. I should have liked you to make her acquaintance, Monica, before going to Aghyohillbeg."

"Oh I saw her," says Terence, contemptuously, "she's got an eye like a lance, and a man's figure. She drove herself, and held the reins like this," throwing himself into position.

"If you are going out, Terence, you may as well go at once," says Miss Priscilla, with dignity, pretending neither to hear nor see him. Whereupon Terence gladly departs.

"Go on, auntie," says Monica, slipping down on a footstool close to Aunt Penelope, and leaning both her arms across the old lady's knee. "Who else will be there?"

"Yes, tell her everything, Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, smoothing the girl's hair softly, and feeling a strange thrill of pleasure in her heart as she notices the little confident gesture with which the girl nestles close to her.

"Well, there will be her own guests, of course, I mean those staying with her, for she always has her house full," says Miss Priscilla, after a slight pause, being still somewhat ruffled by Terry's

remarks. "The Fitzgeralds will be there, of course. Bella is considered a very handsome girl, but I don't think you will like her much."

"No, no, she is not at all our Monica's style," says Miss Penelope, stroking the pretty cheek near her with her mittened hand. "Yet she has a fine skin."

"Ay, and a fine temper under it, or I'm a Dutchman," says Miss Priscilla. "And she is more peculiar than handsome; but men admire her, so *we* say nothing."

"Is she tall?" asks Monica, anxiously, who is a little thing herself, and looks even smaller than she really is because of her slender, girlish figure. She wonders in a vague, uncomfortable fashion whether – whether most men like tall women best.

"Tall? yes, and large in proportion; and as for her *manners*," says Miss Priscilla, in her severest tone, "in my opinion they are simply unbearable. Modesty in my days was a virtue, nowadays it is as *naught*. Bella Fitzgerald is never content unless she has every man in the room at her side, and goodness alone knows what it is she says to them. The way she sets her cap at that poor boy Ronayne, just because he has fallen in for that property, is quite revolting."

"And a mere lad, too," says Miss Penelope.

Monica draws a breath of relief. Perhaps if Miss Fitzgerald likes Mr. Ronayne she will not care to practise her fascinations upon – any other man.

"How old is she?" she asks, feeling deeply interested in the conversation.

"She *says* she is twenty-four," says Miss Priscilla, with an eloquent sniff. "There is nothing easier to say than that. I *won't* be uncharitable, my dear Penelope, – you needn't look at me like that, – but this I must say, she looks every hour of eight and twenty."

"Her mother ought to know," says Miss Penelope.

"She ought, indeed," grimly. "But, as from the way she dresses we may reasonably conclude she thinks *herself* nineteen, I suppose she has lost her memory on all points."

"Her father, Otho Fitzgerald, was the same," says Miss Penelope, reflectively. "He never could bear the idea of age. He was one who saw nothing honorable in it. Gray hairs with him were a crime."

"So he used to dye them," says Miss Priscilla, maliciously; "and when he got warm the dye used to melt, and (unknown to him) run all down his cheek."

"Oh, Priscilla, how you remember things? Dear, dear, I think I see him now," says Miss Penelope. And here the two old ladies, overcome by this comical recollection, laugh until the tears run down their faces. Monica joins in from sheer sympathy; but Kit, who is sitting in the embrasure of a distant window and who had been strangely silent ever since the invitation came from Aghyohillbeg, maintains a stern gravity.

"Poor man," says Miss Penelope, wiping her eyes, "I shall never forget the night your sweet mother, my dear Monica, most unintentionally offended him about the diamond – you recollect, Priscilla? Tell Monica of it."

"He always wore a huge diamond ring upon his little finger," says Miss Priscilla, addressing Monica, "of which he was very proud. He was at this time about fifty-three, but used to pose as a man of thirty-nine. One evening showing the ring to your mother, then quite a girl, he said to her, in his stilted way, 'This jewel has been in our family for fifty years.' 'Ah! did you buy it, Mr. Fitzgerald?' asks your mother, in her sweet innocent way. Ha, ha, ha!" laughs Miss Priscilla, "you should have seen his face. It was a picture! and just when he was trying to make himself agreeable to your poor mother, and acting as if he was a youthful beau of twenty-five, or at least as young as the best of us."

"That was so like mother," says Monica, in a low tone. "She always knew where to *touch* people."

"Oh, no, my dear, not at all like her," says Miss Penelope, hastily. "She didn't *mean* it, you must understand; she was the very soul of sweetness, and would not willingly affront any one for the world."

For just an instant Monica lifts her eyes and gazes earnestly at her aunt; but the old face is so earnest and sincere that with a faint sigh she lowers her eyes again, and makes no further remark.

"After that he married his cousin's wife, a widow with one child, this girl, Bella," says Miss Priscilla, still full of reminiscences, as old people will be. "A most unpleasant person I thought her, though she was considered quite a belle in those days."

"She always appeared to me such a silly woman," says Miss Penelope.

"She is worse than that now," says Miss Priscilla, who seems specially hard on the Fitzgeralds. "She is a shocking old woman, with a nose like a flower-pot. I won't say she drinks, my dear Penelope, because I know you would object to it; but I *hear* she does, and certainly her nose is her betrayer."

"Do you remember," says Miss Penelope, "how anxious she once was to marry George Desmond?" This she says in a very low tone.

"Yes, I remember." The bare mention of her enemy's name has sent a flush of crimson into Miss Priscilla's cheeks. "But he never bestowed a thought upon *her*."

"Oh, no, never," says Miss Penelope, after which both the Misses Blake grow silent and seem to be slowly sinking into the land of reverie.

But Monica, having heard the "enemy's name" mentioned, becomes filled with a determination to sift the mystery connected with him, now, to the end.

"Aunt Priscilla," she says, softly, looking at her with grave eyes across Miss Penelope's knees, "tell me, now, why Mr. Desmond is our enemy."

"Oh, not *now*," says Miss Penelope, nervously.

"Yes, now, please," says Monica, with ever-increasing gravity.

"It may all be said in a few words, Monica," says Miss Priscilla, slowly. "And what I have to say affects you, my dear, even more than us."

"*Me?*"

"Yes, in that it affects your mother. Twenty years ago George Desmond was her affianced husband. Twenty years ago, wilfully and without cause, he deliberately broke with her his plighted troth."

"He threw her over?" exclaims Monica, aghast at this revelation.

"Well, I never heard be used actual violence to her, my dear," says Miss Penelope, in a distressed tone; "but he certainly broke off his engagement with her, and behaved as no man of honor could possibly behave."

"And mother must have been quite beautiful at that time, must she not?" says Monica, rising to her knees in her excitement, and staring with widely-opened eyes of purest amazement from one aunt to the other.

"Beautiful as the blushing morn,'" says Miss Priscilla, quoting from some ancient birthday-book. "But, you see, even her beauty was powerless to save her from insult. From what we could learn, he absolutely refused to fulfil his marriage-contract with her. He was false to the oath he had sworn over our father's dying bed."

Nothing can exceed the scorn and solemnity of Miss Priscilla's manner as she says all this.

"And what did mother do?" asks Monica, curiously.

"What *could* she do, poor child? I have no doubt it went nigh to breaking her heart."

"Her heart?" says Monica.

"She suffered acutely. That we could see, or rather we had to guess it, as for days she kept her own chamber and would see no one, going out only when it was quite dusk for a solitary ramble. Ah! when sorrow afflicts the soul, there is no balm so great as solitude. Your poor mother took the whole affair dreadfully to heart."

"You mean that she really *fretted*?" asks Monica, still in the same curious way, with her eyes fixed on her aunt. There is, indeed, so much unstudied surprise in her whole manner as might have produced a corresponding amount in the Misses Blake, had they noticed it.

"Yes, my dear, of course. Dear, dear, dear! what a sad thing it all was! Well, now you understand all that it is needful you should, Monica," says Miss Penelope, with a glance at her sister, who really

seems quite overcome. "So we will say no more about it. Only you can see for yourself how impossible it is for any of our blood to be on friendly terms with a Desmond."

"They may not all be like *that* Mr. Desmond," says Monica, timidly, coloring to her brow.

"Yes, yes. Like father, like son; you know the old adage; and a nephew is as close a relation almost. We can know no one at Coole."

"I would almost rather see you dead than intimate with one of the name," says Miss Priscilla, with sudden harshness.

"I don't think we told Monica about the other guests at Aghyohillbeg," says Miss Penelope, hastily, with the kindly intention of changing the conversation. "A very pretty young woman came there about a week before your arrival, child, and is to remain, I believe, for some time. She is a widow, and young, and – by the bye, I wonder if she can be any relation to your friends in the South of France."

"Why?"

"Her name is Bohun, and – "

"Not *Olga* Bohun?" says Monica, springing to her feet. "A widow, you say, and young. Oh! auntie, if she only *might* be Olga!"

"Well, certainly she has a heathenish – I mean, a Russian – name like that," says Miss Priscilla. "She is a very little woman, with merry eyes, and she laughs always, and she has the prettiest, the most courteous manners. Quite a relief I found her, after the inanities of Bella Fitzgerald."

"She is even smaller than I am. Yes, and her eyes do laugh!" says Monica, delight making her cheeks warm. "She is the prettiest thing. Ah! how happy I shall be if I may see her sometimes!"

"You shall see her just as often as ever you and she wish," say the two old maids in a breath, glad in the thought that they can make her home at Moyne happy to her.

"I hope *you* like her," says Monica, glancing from one to the other of them.

"Yes. I thought her quite fascinating," says Miss Penelope. "Some people say she is rather – rather *fast*, I believe is the word they use nowadays," getting the word out with difficulty, as though afraid it may go off and do somebody an injury. "But for my part I don't believe a word of it. She is quite natural, and most pleasing in manner, *especially* to those who are older than herself. A great charm in these times, my dear, when age is despised."

Plainly, the little widow at Aghyohillbeg has been playing off her sweetest graces upon the two Misses Blake.

"I dare say Monica will like young Ronayne," says Miss Priscilla. "He is quite nice, that lad. But I hope, Monica, that, even if circumstances should throw you together, you will take no notice of young Mr. Desmond. I myself would not exchange a word with him if a queen's diadem were offered me as a bribe."

"You might speak to him without knowing him," says Monica, blushing again that nervous crimson of a while ago.

"Impossible, my dear. Instinct, sharpened by hatred, would tell me when one of the race was near me."

"Well, as it is your first party here, dear child, I hope you will enjoy it," says Miss Penelope, quickly, as though again anxious to throw oil on the waters by changing the conversation. "It is a charming place, and its mistress, if a little rough, is at least kindly."

At this moment Kit, emerging from the curtains that have hidden her for the past hour, comes slowly to the front. Her face, her very attitude, is martial. She is plainly in battle-array. Pausing before Miss Priscilla, she directs her first fire upon her.

"Am I not asked at all?" she says, in a terrible tone, that contrasts painfully with the ominous silence she has maintained ever since the invitation was brought by Mrs. O'Connor's groom.

"My dear child, you must remember you are only fourteen," says Miss Priscilla, who is sincerely sorry the child has not been included in the invitation, and, in fact, thinks it rather unkind she has been left out.

"I *know* that, thank you," says the youngest Miss Beresford, uncompromisingly, fixing her aunt with a stony glare. "I know my birthday as well as most people. And so, just because I am a child, I am to be slighted, am I? I call it unfair! I call it beastly *mean*, that every one here is to be invited out to enjoy themselves except *me*."

"Young people are seldom asked to grown-up parties," says Miss Priscilla, in her best conciliatory manner. "When you are as old as Monica, of course you will go everywhere. In the meantime you are only a child."

"I am old enough to conduct myself properly, at all events," says Kit, unmoved. "I suppose at *fourteen*" – as if this is an age replete with wisdom – "I am not likely to do anything *very* extraordinary, or make myself unpleasant, or be in anybody's way."

"That is not the question, at all: it is merely one of age," says Miss Priscilla.

"Is it? And yet people say a great deal about childhood being the happiest time of one's life," says Kit, almost choking with scornful rage. "I should just like to see the fellow who first said that. Maybe I wouldn't enlighten him, and tell him what a hypocrite he was. Whoever said it, it is a decided untruth, and I know I wish to goodness I was grown up, because then," with withering emphasis, "I should not be trampled upon and insulted!"

This is dreadful. The two old ladies, unaccustomed in their quiet lives to tornadoes and volcanoes of any kind, are almost speechless with fright.

"Dearest," says Monica, going up to her, "how *can* you look at it in such a light?"

"It's all very well for you," says the indignant Kit: "*you're* going, you know. I'm to stay at home, like that wretched Cinderella!"

"Katherine, I am sure you are quite unaware of the injustice of your remarks," says Miss Priscilla, at last finding her voice. She is bent on delivering a calm rebuke; but inwardly (as any one can see) she is quaking. "And I have frequently told you before that the expression 'I wish to goodness,' which you used just now, is anything but ladylike. It is not nice; it is not proper."

"I don't care what is proper or improper, when I am treated as I now am," says the rebel, with flashing eyes and undaunted front.

"There is really *nothing* to complain of," says Miss Priscilla, earnestly, seeing censure has no effect. "Madam O'Connor would not willingly offend any one; she is a very kind woman, and –"

"She is a regular old wretch!" says the youngest Miss Beresford, with considerable spirit.

"My *dear* Katherine!"

"And it's my belief she has done it *on purpose!*" with increasing rage.

"Katherine, I must insist –"

"You may insist as you like, but I'll be even with her yet," persists Kit, after which, being quite overcome with wrath, she breaks down, and bursts into a violent fit of weeping.

"My dear child, don't do that," says Miss Penelope, rising precipitately, and going over to the weeping fury. "Priscilla," in a trembling tone, "I fear it is selfish. I think, my dear, I shall stay at home, too, the day you all go to Madam O'Connor's."

This kills the storm at once.

"No, no, indeed, Aunt Penny, you shan't." Kit cries, subdued, but still in tears. She is overcome with remorse, and blames herself cruelly in that her ill temper should have led to this proposal of self-sacrifice. To give in to Kit is the surest and quickest method of gaining your own point. She throws her arms, as she speaks, around Miss Penelope's neck, and nearly strangles that dear old lady in her remorseful agitation, to say nothing of the deadly havoc she makes of her frills and laces.

"But indeed, my Kitten, it will be no privation to me to stay at home with you, and we will be quite happy together, and we will have our tea out in the orchard," says Miss Penelope, soothing

her with sweet words; while Miss Priscilla, who is thoroughly frightened by the sobbing, pats the refractory child on the back, with a view to allaying all fear of convulsions.

"You shan't stay at home, Aunt Penny, – you shan't indeed," cries the inconsistent Kitten. "I like being alone, I *love* it; if you don't go to that place with the long name, and enjoy yourself very much, I shall be miserable all my life, though I love you very, very, *very* much for wishing to keep me from being lonely. Tell her I mean it, Monica."

"Yes, I am sure she means it," says Monica, earnestly, whereupon peace is once more restored to the breasts of the terrified aunts.

## CHAPTER VI

How Monica goes to Aghyohillbeg, and meets there an old friend and a very new one.

Time flies, and no man can reach his hand to stay it. A very good thing, too, thinks Monica, as she stands before her looking-glass putting the last pretty touches to her white toilet.

It is Friday. Madam O'Connor's garden-party lies before her, and, probably, other things. Here she blushes at herself, as she sees that pretty soul in the glass, though, indeed, she has no cause to do so; but possibly the vague thought of those "other things" has something to do with it, and perhaps it is for their sake too that she places with such care the heavy, blood-colored rose beneath her chin.

This is the only suspicion of color about her. Her gown is white; her hat is white; long white silk gloves run up her rounded arms as though bent on joining her sleeves far above the elbow. A white Surat sash is tied round her dainty waist. She is looking "as fair as the moon, as lovely as a rose," and altogether distinctly dangerous.

Perhaps she half recognizes this fact, because she smiles at her own reflection, and – vain little girl that she is – stoops forward and kisses herself in the happy glass that holds her even for so brief a minute; after which she summons her maid from her dressing-room beyond.

"Canty," she says, as the "uncle's wife's sister's child" enters, "I am dressed now; and – "

"Shure, so you are, miss; and lovely ye look, more power to ye."

"Make my room very tidy," says Monica, giving her her directions before starting. "And, Canty, I shall want my blue dress for dinner. You can put it out."

"Yes, miss," whereupon Monica prepares to leave the room; but the new maid stops her.

"If ye please, Miss Monica," she says, hesitating, and applying her apron to her lips.

"Yes, Canty?"

"I'd be very thankful to ye, miss, if ye wouldn't call me that."

"Call you what?"

"Canty, miss."

"But," astonished, "isn't it your name?"

"No, miss; me name is Bridget."

"But surely Canty is your name, too?"

"Well, it's me father's name, miss, no doubt; but faix I feel just like a boy when ye call me by it, an' ye wouldn't like me to feel like a boy, miss, would ye?" says the village beauty casting an anxious glance at Monica from her dark Irish eyes, and blushing deeply.

"Certainly not," says Monica, laughing a little. "Very well, Bridget; I shall try to forget you ever had a surname."

"Thank ye, miss," says Bridget, with a sigh of profound relief.

Then Monica runs downstairs, where she finds her aunts in the drawing-room, dressed in their very best silk gowns, waiting for the carriage to come round. There is a little delay, which wasted time the two old ladies spend in endeavoring to drill Terence into shape. Something of this sort is going on as Monica enters.

"When I introduce you to Madam O'Connor or Lady Rossmoyne, my dear boy, be sure you make a very low bow. Nothing distinguishes a gentleman so much from the common herd as the manner of his salute. Now make me a bow, that I may judge of your style." Thus Miss Priscilla.

"I couldn't make one to order like that," says Terence; yet he sulkily complies, making a very short, stiff, and uncompromising nod that makes both aunts lift their hands in dismay.

"Oh, no, my dear! – that won't do *at all!* Most ungraceful, and totally devoid of the dignity that should inspire it. Now look at me. It should be something like *this*," making him a reverence that might well have created admiration in the court of Queen Anne.

"Ah, yes! that is something like what it should be," chimes in Miss Penelope, paying a tribute to the talent of her sister. "Priscilla has caught the true tone. I wish, Terence, we could see you more like your dear grandfather; *he* was a man to bow."

Terence, calling to mind the portrait of his "dear grandfather," as represented in the elaborate gilt frame in the dining-room, in a court suit and a periwig, and with an abominable simper, most devoutly thanks his gods that he is *not* like unto him. He is, indeed (feeling goaded to the last degree), about to break into unseemly language, when, fortunately, the arrival of the ancient equipage that has done duty at Moyne as state carriage for generations is announced.

The coachman, who is considerably older than Timothy, draws up the old horses before the door with a careful manner that impresses the beholder with the belief that he thinks they would run away in a minute if he relaxed a muscle on the reins; and a small boy who acts as footman and looks decidedly depressed, lets down the rickety steps.

Miss Priscilla Blake then enters the carriage. She is followed with much ceremony by Miss Penelope. After which Monica, who is impressed by the proceedings, and Terence, who is consumed with secret mirth, step in and seat themselves. Then the coachman says, "Gee up!" in exactly the tone he has employed for forty years; and the gloomy boy settling down beside him, they are all presently on the fair road to Aghyohillbeg.

The drive is a very pleasant one, though filled with injunctions of the most obsolete from the Misses Blake as to their behavior, etc. The fact is, that the two old maids are so puffed out with pride at the thought that they will presently introduce to the county the handsome lad and beautiful girl opposite them that they have grown fidgety and over-anxious about the niceties of their presentation.

"Surely," say the Misses Blake to themselves and to each other, "not half so pretty a pair could be produced by any family in the south!"

Which is saying a great deal, as in the south of Ireland a pretty face is more the rule than the exception.

Over the dusty road they go, calmly, carefully, the old horses being unaccustomed to fast ways of any sort; slowly, with much care they pick their aged steps, never stumbling, never swerving, but as certainly never giving way to frivolous haste.

Then, all at once, as it seems to Monica, the hillside seems to break in twain, and a great iron gate appears, into which they turn to drive in their solemn fashion down a dark avenue shaded by swaying elms.

It is a perfect place, old as the hills that surround it, and wild in its loveliness. To right and left great trees, gnarled and moss-grown, and dipping tangles of blackberry and fern; patches of sunlight, amidst the gloom, that rests lovingly upon a glowing wilderness of late bluebells, and, beyond all these broad glimpses of the glorious, restless ocean, as it sleeps in its bay below.

Gazing at all this natural beauty, Monica's soft eyes and heart expand, and, —

"Joy rises in her like a summer morn."

And then she sees an old house, low, broad, picturesque, with balconies and terraces, and beyond the house slanting lawns, and at one side tennis-courts, where many gayly-clad figures are moving to and fro. There is a sound of subdued laughter and the perfume of many flowers, and a general air of gayety; it is as though to-day care has utterly forgotten this one favored corner of the earth.

Then they all descend from the time honored chariot, and cross the lawn to where they can see their hostess standing, tall and erect and handsome, in spite of her sixty years.

"Your niece?" says Madam O'Connor, staring hard at Monica's pure little face, the girl looking straight back at her with a certain amount of curiosity in her eyes. – "Well, I wish you no greater fortune than your face, my dear," says the old Irishwoman. "It ought to be a rich one, I'm thinking. You're like your mother, too; but your eyes are honester than hers. You must know I knew Kitty Blake very well at one time."

"I have heard my mother speak of you," says Monica.

"Ay – so? Yet I fear there wasn't much love lost between us."

Then she turns a little aside to greet some one else, and Monica lets her eyes roam round the grounds. Suddenly she starts, and says out loud, —

"Ah! there is Olga?"

"You know Mrs. Bohun, then?" says her hostess, attracted by her exclamation and her pretty vivacious expression.

"So very, very well," says Monica. She has flushed warmly, and her eyes are brilliant. "I want to speak to her; I want to go to her, *please*."

"Bless me! what a shame to waste that lovely blush on a mere woman!" says Madam O'Connor, with a merry laugh. "Here, Fred," turning to a young man standing close to her with a very discontented expression, "I am going to give you a mission after your own heart. You are to take Miss Beresford over there, to where Mrs. Bohun is dealing death to all those boys. – This is Lord Rossmoyne, Miss Beresford: he will see you safely over your rubicon."

"Oh, thank you!" says Monica, gratefully smiling at her.

"Tut, child! thank me when I have done something for you. It is Fred's turn to thank me now," says Madam O'Connor, with a merry twinkle in her gray eyes.

She is a large woman close on sixty, with an eagle eye and a hawk's nose. As Monica leaves her she continues her gossip with the half dozen young men round her, who are all laughing at some joke. Presently she herself is laughing louder than any of them (being partial to boys and their "fun," as she calls it). Bestowing now a smart blow with her fan upon the youngest and probably therefore most flippant of her attendants, she stalks away from them across the lawn, to where two ladies are sitting together.

One is elderly, but most ridiculously dressed in juvenile attire, that might have well suited the daughter sitting beside her. This latter is a tall girl, and large in every way, with curious eyes and a rather harsh voice; she is laughing now at some remark made by a man lounging at the back of her chair, and the laugh is both affected and discordant.

"Have you seen that girl of Kitty Beresford's, Edith?" asks Madam O'Connor of the elder lady.

"That little washed-out-looking girl who came with those two old Miss Blakes?" asks the youthful old woman, with a profoundly juvenile lisp.

"Faith, I don't know about her being washed out," says Madam O'Connor, bluntly. "I think she is the prettiest creature I've seen this many a day."

"You are so impulsive, my dear Theresa!" says her friend, with a simper: "all your geese are swans."

"And other people's swans my geese, I suppose," says Madam, with a glance at the tall girl, which somehow brings the conversation to a full stop.

Meantime, Monica is crossing the soft turf, with the moody man called Rossmoyne beside her. She can see her goal in the distance, and finds comfort in the thought that soon she must be there, as she cannot bring herself to be agreeable to her new acquaintance; and certainly he is feeling no desire just at present to be agreeable to her or to anybody.

As Monica comes nearer to her friend, she gazes anxiously at her, as though to see if time has worked a change in her.

She is quite a little woman about five and twenty, but looking at least four years younger than that. Her eyes are large, dark, and mischievous. Her hair is so fair as to be almost silvery; naturally

wavy, it is cut upon the forehead in the prevailing fashion, but not curled. Her mouth is small, mutinous, and full of laughter; her nose distinctly retroussé. Altogether she is distractingly pretty, and, what goes for more nowadays, very peculiar in style, and out of the common.

She is exquisitely dressed in a costume that suggests Paris. She is a harmony in black and white, as Lord Rossmoyne told her an hour ago, when he was *not* wearing his discontented expression. Seated beside her is a tall pallid woman with a cold face, but very velvety eyes and a smile rare but handsome. Every now and then this smile betrays itself, as her companion says anything that chances to amuse her. She is a Mrs. Herrick, a cousin of Olga Bohun's, and is now on a visit with her at Aghyohillbeg.

There are several men grouped round Mrs. Bohun, all in various standing positions. One man is lying at her feet. He is a tall slight young fellow, of about twenty-three, with a lean face, dark hair, and beautiful teeth. He has, too, beautiful eyes, and a most lovable expression, half boyish, but intensely earnest and very sensitive.

Just now he appears happy and careless, and altogether as if he and the world are friends indeed, and that he is filled with the belief that every one likes him; and, in truth, he is right in so believing, for every one does like him, and a great many are fond of him, and some love him.

He is looking up at Mrs. Bohun, and is talking rapidly, as Monica and Lord Rossmoyne come up behind them.

"What! another bit of scandal?" exclaims Mrs. Bohun, lifting her brows in pleased anticipation. "The air seemed full of it. An hour ago I heard of the dire discomfiture of two of my dearest friends, and just now I listened to a legend of Belgravia that was distinctly *fifi* and had a good deal to do with a marchioness. It is really quite too much happiness for *one day*."

"My tale does not emanate from such an aristocratic region as Belgravia," says Ulic Ronayne, the man at her feet: "it is, I blush to say, from the city."

"Ah!" in a regretful tone; "then it will of course be decenter. Don't trouble to expend color on it, as I daresay there isn't a blush in the whole of it. Well," resignedly, "go on."

In the usual quick manner habitual to him, and with the slight but eloquent amount of gesture common to Irish people, Ronayne tells his news, which is received with low laughter by those around.

"I've heard better stories," says Mrs. Bohun, discontentedly; "and it isn't a bit like what Lord Tommy would do. It is more in Rossmoyne's line. I don't think I believe it. And the roundabout way in which you told it reminds one of a three-volume novel: the first leads up to the point, the third winds up the point, the second *is* the point. I confess I like the second volume best. When I grow funny over my friends I'm *all second*."

"Then don't be funny about me, please," says Ronayne, lazily.

"*Are you my friend?*" asks she, glancing at him. Lifting his eyes to hers, he pauses, and then says slowly, the smile dying from his face, —

"Well, perhaps *not*."

Then he lowers his eyes again, and goes back to his idle occupation of decorating with daisies some of the fantastic loops upon her gown.

At this moment Lord Rossmoyne, coming forward, says, sullenly, "May I hear the story that just now reminded you of me? But first — " He pauses, and glances at Monica. Mrs. Bohun, following his glance, rises hurriedly from her seat, and going up to the girl, embraces her warmly.

"Ah! my *pretty* Monica! my little saint!" she cries, in her sweet, gay voice, "what happy breeze has blown you hither?"

"I am living here, — at Moyne, — with my aunts," in a happy, breathless way. "Some days ago they described you to me, and I knew it must be you. I was right. And to-day I have found you."

"I'm always found out, as a rule," says Mrs. Bohun, with a light laugh. "That is my standing grievance. You know Hermia, don't you?" indicating the tall, cold-looking woman near her, who so far unbends as to take Monica's hand kindly and bestow upon her one of her handsome smiles. "She has come here to look after me and see that I don't get into a scrape or make myself unhappy."

"Could you be unhappy?" says Rossmoyne, from behind her chair, in so disagreeable a tone that every one looks at him. "Decidedly," thinks Monica to herself, "he has either neuralgia or an execrable temper."

"Miserably so," says the pretty widow, airily. "Though, after all," reflectively, "I believe I have even a greater talent for making others so. That, however, is my misfortune, not my fault. I was 'born so,' like that poor man with the twisted neck."

"Well, this is not one of your miserably unhappy hours, at all events," says Hermia Herrick. "You have been in magnificent spirits ever since you came to Aghyohillbeg."

"You've learned it?" says Olga, staring at her with pretended surprise. "The name, I mean. Well, you *are* clever. It takes most people four long weeks. Oh, yes, I am blissfully happy here. I *ought* to be. It would be the grossest ingratitude if I were otherwise, as all the men have been good enough to fall in love with me, and that, of course, is the principal thing."

At this the young man at her feet smiles openly and presses his face unperceived against her gown; but Rossmoyne throws up his head and glances with a coldly displeased expression into the vague distance.

"Have you been here long?" asks Monica, turning to her friend.

"*Very* long," pettishly. Something – perhaps Rossmoyne – has annoyed the capricious beauty.

"Only a fortnight," says Mrs. Herrick, briefly. "You *must* know that."

"I don't judge time by days and weeks; it *seems* long," says Mrs. Bohun, "years, – an eternity almost!"

A sudden gloom appears to have fallen upon the group. Rossmoyne's dark face grows darker still; the smile fades from Ronayne's face, a shadow falls athwart his eyes.

"I think I like the country," says Monica, suddenly. "It is so calm, so quiet, and there are moments when the very beauty of it brings tears to my eyes."

"I love it too," says Ronayne, quickly, addressing her pointedly in a friendly tone, although no introduction has been gone through between them. "I wonder how any one who has once tasted the sweetness of it can ever again long for the heat and turmoil of the town."

"Yes, for a time it is charming, all-sufficing," says Mrs. Bohun, "but for what a *little* time! Perhaps, – I am not sure, – but *perhaps* I should like to live for three months of every year in the country. After that, I know I should begin to pine again for the smoke and smuts of my town."

"If you are already wearied, I wonder you stay here," says Lord Rossmoyne, sullenly.

"And I wonder what has happened to-day to your usually so charming temper," returns she, laughingly uplifting her face to his, and letting her eyes rest on him with almost insolent inquiry.

"Desmond says good temper is a mere matter of digestion," says some one at this moment. Monica starts more at the name mentioned than at the exceedingly worn-out words uttered. She glances at the speaker, and sees he is a very ugly young man, with a nice face, and a remarkably dismal expression. He is looking at Rossmoyne. "Sit down, dear boy," he says, *sotto voce* and very sadly. "There's too much of you; you should never stand. You appear to so much better advantage when doubled in two. It don't *sound* well, does it? but –"

"But really, when you come to think of it," Mrs. Bohun is saying, feelingly, "there is very little in the country."

"There is at least the fascinating tulip and lily," says the sad man who mentioned Desmond's name. "Don't put yourself beyond the pale of art by saying you had forgotten those æsthetic flowers, – blossoms, I mean. Don't you yearn when you think of them? *I* do."

"So glad you are awake at last, Owen!" says Mrs. Bohun.

"That silly craze about tulips," says Mrs. Herrick, contemptuously, "I have always treated it with scorn. Why could not the art idiots have chosen some better flower for their lunatic ravings? What can *any* one see in a tulip?"

"Sometimes earwigs," says the man called Owen.

"Nonsense! I don't believe even earwigs would care for it. Foolish, gaudy thing, uplifting its lanky neck as though to outdo its fellows! There is really nothing in it."

"Like the country," says Owen, meekly, "according to Mrs. Bohun."

"And like Bella Fitzgerald," says that graceless person, with a little grimace.

"My *dear* Olga," says Mrs. Herrick, glancing quickly to right and left. "Do you never *think*?"

"As seldom as ever I can. But why be nervous, Hermia? If any one were to compare *me* with a tulip, I should die of – no, not chagrin — *joy*, I mean, of course. Monica, what are you saying to Owen?"

"I don't think I know who Owen is," says Monica, with a glance at the gentleman in question, that is half shy, half friendly.

"That argues yourself unknown," says Olga. "He is Master Owen Kelly, of Kelly's Grove, county Antrim, and the bright and shining light of the junior bar. They all swear by him in Dublin, – all, that is except the judges, and they swear *at* him."

Monica looks at Master Owen Kelly in a faintly puzzled fashion.

"It is all quite true," says that young man, modestly, in a reassuring tone.

"Now tell us what you were saying to each other," says Olga.

"It was nothing," returns Monica. "We were only talking about this Egyptian war. But I don't really," nervously, "understand anything about it."

"You needn't blush for your ignorance on that score," says Mr. Kelly. "You're in the general swim: nobody knows."

"It is the most senseless proceeding altogether," says Hermia Herrick, in her decided way. "Gladstone's wars are toys. He has had three of them now, dear little fellow, to amuse himself with, and he ought to be proud of his victories."

"According to Erasmus, war is the 'malady of princes,'" says Lord Rossmoyne, sententiously.

"Rossmoyne isn't well," says Mr. Kelly, softly. "He is calling the wood-cutter a prince. It reminds one of Hans Andersen's fairy-tale: all hewers of wood and drawers of water were blood-royal then."

"Yet Gladstone has intellect," says Mrs. Herrick, in oh, *such* a tone: would that the master of Hewarden could have heard her!

"Some!" said Mr. Kelly. "He is indeed 'a thing apart.' I know nothing like him. 'Once, in the flight of ages past, there lived a *man*.' In ages to come they will say that of our modern immortal William. They will probably add that no *real* man has ever lived since."

"How silly you can be at times!" says Olga.

"It isn't mine; it's Montgomery's nonsense," says Mr. Kelly, sadly. "Blame him, not me."

"I don't want to blame any one," says Olga, with a skillfully-suppressed yawn; "but, taking your view of the case, I think it will be an awful age when there *doesn't* live a man."

"Your 'occupation will be o'er,' indeed," says Rossmoyne, with an accentuated bitterness, "when that time comes."

("He must be very much in love with her," thinks Monica, with a touch of inspiration, "he is so excessively rude to her!")

"Lord Rossmoyne," says Mrs. Bohun, turning to him with ineffable sweetness, "will you do something for me?"

The transition from coldness to tender appeal is too much for Rossmoyne: his face brightens.

"You know there is nothing I would not do for you," he says, gravely but eagerly.

"Then," promptly, "please take that ugly frown off your forehead and put it in your pocket; or – no, throw it away altogether; if you kept it near you, you might be tempted to put it on again."

"I did not know I was frowning."

"You were," sweetly. "You are all right again now, and so shall be rewarded. You can't think how unbecoming frowns are, and how much better you look when you are all 'sweetness and light'

as now for example. Come," rising, "you shall take me for a nice long walk through these delightful old gardens."

As she moves she sees the daisies still clinging to her gown that Ulic Ronayne has been amusing himself with during the past half-hour. More than this, she sees, too, the imploring gaze of his dark eyes upturned to hers.

"Silly boy!" she says, stooping to shake away the daisies with her hand; but her words have a double meaning. Involuntarily, unseen by all the others – except Monica – his hand closes upon hers.

"Do not go with him," he says, with deep entreaty.

"I must – now."

"Then let me come too?"

"No." Then she raises herself, and says, gayly, "You shall stay and make love to Miss Beresford – Monica, I have desired Mr. Ronayne to stay here and amuse you."

She moves across the lawn with Rossmoyne beside her. Mrs. Herrick and Mr. Kelly are strolling lazily in another direction. Monica and Ulic are alone.

"Is there anything I can take you to see?" asks he, gently.

"No, thank you. I am quite happy here."

Then, noticing the extreme sadness on his beautiful face, she says, slowly, "But you are not, I am afraid."

"I *should* be, with so fair a companion." He smiles as he says this, but his smile is without mirth, and she does not return it. Suddenly leaning forward, she says to him, very tenderly, —

"You love Olga, do you not?"

She never afterwards thinks of this speech without blushing deeply and wondering why she said it. It was an impulse too strong to be conquered, and it overpowers her. His face changes, and he colors perceptibly; he hesitates too, and regards her inquiringly. Something, perhaps, in her expression reassures him, because presently he says, bravely, —

"Yes, I do. I love her with all my heart and soul; as I never have loved, as I never shall love again. *This* thought is my happiness: my sorrow lies in the fear that she will never love *me*. Forgive my saying all this to you: she told me to amuse you," with a faint smile, "and I have woefully neglected her commands."

"You must forgive me," says Monica. "I should not have asked you the question."

"Do not be sorry for that: it has done me good, I think. I am glad I have said it *out loud* to somebody at last. It is odd though, – isn't it? – I should have made my confession to you, of all people, whom I never saw until ten minutes ago!"

Then Monica remembers that this is the second young man she has found herself on friendly terms with since her arrival at Moyne, without the smallest introduction having been gone through on any side. It all sounds rather dreamy, and certainly very irregular.

"Ah! there is Madam O'Connor beckoning to me," says Ronayne, rising lazily to his feet. "I suppose she wants me for a moment. Will you mind my leaving you for a little, or will you come with me? I shan't be any time."

"I shall stay here," says Monica. "There, go: she seems quite in a hurry. Come back when you can."

He runs across the grass to his hostess; and Monica, leaning back in her chair, gives herself up to thought. Everything is strange, and she is feeling a little lonely, a little *distracte*, and (but this she will not allow even to herself) distinctly disappointed. She is trying very hard to prevent her mind from dwelling upon a certain face that should be naught to her, when she suddenly becomes conscious of the fact that some one has come to a standstill close beside her chair. She turns.

## CHAPTER VII

How Monica listens to strange words and suffers herself to be led away. –  
How Cupid plants a shaft in Mars, and how Miss Priscilla finds herself face to face  
with the enemy.

"You see I failed," says Brian Desmond.

A quick warm blush has dyed Monica's cheeks crimson.

"Ah! it is you," she said. "I thought you had not come."

This betrays the fact that she has been thinking of him, but he is far too wise a young man in his own generation to take count of it.

"Yes, I came. Three days ago I thought I should have been in London now, and then I heard *you* were to be here to-day."

"In what have you failed?" asks she, abruptly, alluding to his opening sentence.

"Can't you guess? Have you forgotten the last cruel injunction you laid upon me? 'When next we meet,' you said, 'you are to look straight over my head and pass on.' Will you believe that twice to-day I obeyed that mandate? The third time was the charm: it conquered me; I broke my sword in two and came to you."

"I wish you hadn't," says Monica, sincerely, if impolitely. "I wish you would go away now, and promise me never to speak to me again. You *know* I am afraid of you," looking nervously around.

"I don't, indeed; I can't conceive such a situation. You do me a great injustice, I think. I verily believe if I tried my very hardest I couldn't instil terror into the smallest child in the village."

"You know what I mean. Of course," scornfully, "I should never be afraid of a *man*: it is Aunt Priscilla I am afraid of. And see, see *there!*" in an agony, "she is standing quite close to us, talking to somebody."

"If that is your aunt Priscilla, she is safe for an hour at least. The old lady with her is Lady Rossmoyne, and she never lets any one (unfortunate enough to get into her clutches) go free under a generous sixty minutes. She is great on manures, and stock, and turnips, and so forth. And your aunt, I hear, is a kindred spirit."

"But then there is Aunt Penelope," says Monica, timidly.

"She, too, is arranged. Half an hour ago I met her so deep in a disgraceful flirtation with the vicar that I felt it my duty to look the other way. Depend upon it, she is not thinking of you."

"But some one may tell them I have been talking to you."

"I always thought I had a proper amount of pride until I met you," says Mr. Desmond. "You have dispelled the belief of years. 'Is thy servant a dog,' that you should be ostracized for speaking to him? Never mind; I submit even to that thought if it gives me five minutes more of your society. But listen to me. No one can tell tales of us, because we are both strangers in the land. No one knows me from Adam, and just as few know you from – let us say *Eve*, for euphony's sake."

She laughs. Encouraged by her merriment to believe that at least she bears him no ill will, Brian says, hurriedly, —

"Come with me to the rose-garden. It is stupid sitting here alone, and the garden is beyond praise. Do come."

"Why?" lifting her heavy lashes.

"For one thing, we shall be free from observation, and you know you dislike being seen with me. For another – " He pauses.

"Well?" rather nervously.

"It is just this, that I *must* speak to you," says the young man, his gay manner changing to one of extreme earnestness. "You were unkind to me that day we parted. I want you to tell me why. I

understand quite that I have no right to demand even the smallest favor of you, yet I do entreat you to come with me."

For another moment she hesitates, then —

"Yes, I will come with you," she says, raising her soft eyes to his. In her whole manner, voice, and bearing there is something so sweet and childish and trusting as to render Desmond her slave upon the spot.

The path to the rose-garden leads away from Miss Priscilla, so they avoid detection as they go.

But they are singularly silent and grave; when the garden is reached they pass between the rows of growing blossoms mute, if rich in thought. At last, when silence is becoming too eloquent to be borne, her companion turns to her.

"It wasn't *true* what you said to me that last day, was it?" he asks, with far more anxiety than the occasion seems to demand. "Not *really*, I mean. You said it for fun, perhaps – or – It has been with me ever since. I can't forget it. You said you disliked sudden friendships, and the way you said it made me think you disliked *me*. Tell me I thought wrong."

"Quite wrong," in a low tone. She is plucking a rose to pieces, and keeps her eyes downcast. "When I said that, I was angry about something."

"About something I *said*?"

"No. Nothing you said."

"Something I did, then?" growing more and more anxious.

"Ye-es."

"What was it?"

"It doesn't matter now; not in the least now; and I can not tell you, *indeed*."

"But I wish very much you would. Perhaps, being in wretched ignorance, I shall be so unhappy as to do it again some day, and so make you hate me a second time."

"I didn't *hate* you."

"No? Yet there was a look in your eyes I wouldn't like to see there again. Do tell me, lest I once more fall into error."

"Oh, no," coloring deeply, as though at some unpleasant recollection. "That would be impossible. It could never happen again. I shall take care of that. I shall never as long as I live get into a – that is – I mean – I – Really I have forgiven it all now, so let us forget it too."

Though still greatly mystified, Mr. Desmond wisely forbears to press the point, something in her pretty distressed face and heightened color forbidding him.

"Very good," he says, pleasantly. "But there is another thing I have not forgotten. Have you ever cleared up that mystery about my uncle and your aunts?"

"Oh! *that*. It cannot be cleared, I am afraid it is too muddy a tale for any help; but I have at least found out all about it."

"Would it be indiscreet if I said I would give anything to be as wise as you on this subject? In other words, will you divulge the secret?"

"It is a story that doesn't redound to the honor and glory of *your* house," says Miss Beresford, stepping back from him with a gay little laugh, and glancing at him mischievously from under her big "Patience" hat. "If I were you I should shrink from hearing it."

"I decline to shrink," with unparalleled bravery. "I prefer to rush upon my fate. Life has no longer any flavor for me until I hear what the old reprobate at Coole has done."

"Well, if you *will* insist upon the sorry tale, 'tis this. Once there lived a wicked knight, who wooed a maiden fair. But when that her heart was all his own, his love grew cold, and, turning from her, he refused to fulfil his plighted troth and lead her to the hymeneal altar. In fact, he loved and he rode away, leaving her as dismally disconsolate as the original maid forlorn."

"Alas for the golden age of chivalrie!" says Mr. Desmond.

"Alas, indeed! That wicked knight was your uncle; the maid forlorn my mother!"

"You have been giving me a summary of a fairytale, haven't you?" asks he, in an unbelieving tone.

"No, indeed; it is all quite true. From what I have heard, your uncle must have treated my mother very badly. Now, aren't you thoroughly ashamed of yourself and your family?"

"One swallow makes no summer," says Mr. Desmond, hardily. "Because my uncle refused to succor a distressed damosel is no reason why I should so far forget myself. Besides, the whole thing seems incredible. Report says, and," with an expressive glance at her, "I can well believe it, your mother was the most beautiful woman of her time in all the countryside; while my uncle, bless him, is one of the very ugliest men I ever met in my life. He might take a prize in that line. Just fancy the Beast refusing to wed with Beauty!"

"To be ugly, so far as a *man* is concerned, is nothing," says Monica with a knowledge beyond her years. "Many singularly plain men have been much beloved. Though" – with an unconscious study of her companion's features, who is decidedly well favored – "I confess I should myself prefer a man whose nose was straight, and whose eyes were – had no inclination to look round the corner, I mean."

"A straight nose is to be preferred, of course," says Mr. Desmond, absently stroking his own, which is all that can be desired. "But I never since I was born heard such an extraordinary story as yours. I give you my word," – earnestly, – "my uncle is just the sort of man who, if *any* girl, no matter how hideous, were to walk up to him and say, 'I consent to marry you,' ought to be devoutly grateful to her. Why, talking of noses, you should just see his: it's – it's *anyhow*," with growing excitement. "It's all up hill and down dale. I never before or since saw such a nose; and I'd back his mouth to *beat that!*"

"He must be a very distinguished-looking person," says Miss Beresford, demurely.

"I know very little about him, of course, having been always so much abroad; but he *looks* like a man who could be painfully faithful to an attachment of that kind."

"He was not faithful to her, at all events. I daresay he fell in love with some other girl about that time, and slighted my mother for her."

"Well," says Mr. Desmond, drawing a deep breath, "he *is* 'a grand man!'"

"I think he must be a very *horrid* old man," replies Monica, severely.

"You have proofs of his iniquity, of course," says Brian, presently, who evidently finds a difficulty in believing in his uncle's guilt.

"Yes. He wrote her a letter, stating in distinct terms that" – and here she alters her voice until it is highly suggestive of Miss Blake's fine contralto – "'he deemed it expedient for both parties that the present engagement existing between them should be annulled.' Those are Aunt Priscilla's words; what he really meant, I suppose, was that he was tired of her."

"Your mother, I should imagine, was hardly a woman to be tired of readily."

"That is a matter of opinion. We – that is, Terry and Kit and I – thought her a very tiresome woman indeed," says Miss Beresford, calmly. She does not look at him as she makes this startling speech, but looks beyond him into, possibly, a past where the "tiresome woman" held a part.

Brian Desmond, gazing at her pale, pure, spiritual face, sustains a faint shock, as the meaning of her words reaches him. Is she heartless, emotionless? Could not even a mother's love touch her and wake her into life and feeling?

"You weren't very fond of your mother, then?" he asks, gently. The bare memory of his own mother is adored by him.

"Fond?" says Monica, as though the idea is a new one to her. "Fond? Yes, I suppose so; but we were all much fonder of my father. Not that either he or mamma took very much notice of us."

"Were they so much wrapt up in each other, then?"

"No, certainly not," quickly. Then with an amount of bitterness in her tone that contrasts strangely with its usual softness, "I wonder why I called my mother 'mamma' to you just now. I never dared do so to *her*. Once when she was going away somewhere I threw my arms around her and called her by that pet name; but she put me from her, and told me I was not to make a noise like a sheep."

She seems more annoyed than distressed as she says this. Desmond is silent. Perhaps his silence frightens her, because she turns to him with a rather pale, nervous face.

"I suppose I should not say such things as these to you," she says, unsteadily. "I forgot, it did not occur to me, that we are only strangers."

"Say what you will to me," says Desmond, slowly, "and be sure of this, that what you *do* say will be heard by you and me alone."

"I believe you," she answers, with a little sigh.

"And, besides, we are not altogether strangers," he goes on, lightly; "that day on the river is a link between us, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, the river," she says, smiling.

"*Our* river. I have brought myself to believe it is our joint property: no one else seems to know anything about it."

"I have never been near it since," says Monica.

"I *know that*," returns he, meaningly.

"How?" is almost framed upon her lips; but a single glance at him renders her dumb. Something in his expression suggests the possibility that he has spent pretty nearly all his time since last they met, and *certainly* all his afternoons, upon that shady river just below the pollard willows, in the vain hope of seeing her arrive.

She blushes deeply, and then, in spite of herself, laughs out loud, a low but ringing laugh, full of music and mischief.

This most uncalled-for burst of merriment has the effect of making Mr. Desmond preternaturally grave.

"May I ask what you are laughing at?" he says, with painful politeness; whereupon Miss Beresford checks her mirth abruptly, and has the grace to blush again even harder than before. Her confusion is, indeed, the prettiest thing possible.

"I don't know," she says, in an evasive tone.

"People generally *do* know what they are laughing at," contends he, seriously.

"Well, *I* don't," returns she, with great spirit.

"Of course not, if you *say* so; but," with suppressed wrath, "I don't myself think there is anything provocative of mirth in the thought of a fellow wasting hour after hour upon a lonely stream in the insane but honest hope of seeing somebody who *wouldn't* come. Of course in your eyes the fellow was a fool to do it; but – but if I were the girl I wouldn't laugh at him for it."

Silence.

Monica's eyes are bent upon the ground; her face is averted; but there is something about her attitude that compels Mr. Desmond to believe she is sorry for her untimely laughter; and thinking this breeds hatred towards himself for having caused this sorrow and makes him accuse himself of basest ill temper.

"I beg your pardon!" he says, in a contrite tone; "I shouldn't have spoken to you like that. I lost my temper most absurdly and must apologize to you for it now. It was ridiculous of me to suppose you would ever come again to the river; but one hopes against hope. Yet, as Feltham tells us, 'he that hopes too much shall deceive himself at last:' that was my fate, you see. And you never once thought of coming, did you? You were quite right."

"No, I was quite wrong; but – but —*you* are quite wrong too in *one* way," still with her eyes downturned.

"By what right did I expect you? I was a presumptuous fool and got just what I deserved."

"You were not a fool," exclaims she, quickly; and then, with a little impulsive gesture, she draws herself up and looks him fair in the eyes. "If I had known you were there," she says, bravely, though evidently frightened at her own temerity, "I – I – am almost sure *I* should have been there too!"

"No! would you really?" says Desmond, eagerly.

Then follows a rather prolonged silence. Not an awkward one, but certainly a silence fraught with danger to both. There is no greater friend to Cupid than an unsought silence such as this. At last it is broken.

"What lovely roses there are in this garden!" says Desmond, pointing to a bush of glowing beauty near him.

"Are there not?" She has taken off a long white glove, so that one hand and arm are bare. The hand is particularly small and finely shaped, the nails on it are a picture in themselves; the arm is slight and childish, but rounded and very fair.

Breaking a rose from the tree indicated, she examines it lovingly, and then, lifting it to his face, as though desirous of sympathy, says, —

"Is it not sweet?"

"It is indeed!" He is staring at her. Very gently he takes the little hand that holds the flower and keeps it in his own. He detains it so lightly that she might withdraw it if she pleases, but she does not. Perhaps she doesn't please, or perhaps she sees nothing remarkable in his action. At all events, she, who is so prone to blush on all occasions, does not change color now, but chatters to him gayly, in an unconcerned manner, about the scented blossoms round her, and afterwards about the people yonder, behind the tall flowering shrubs that surround the tennis-ground.

And still her little slender fingers lie passively in his. Glancing at them, he strokes them lightly with his other hand, and counts her rings.

"Four – five," he says; "quite a burden for such a little hand to carry."

"I like them," says Monica: "brooches and earrings and bracelets I don't care for, but rings I love. I never really feel dressed until they are on. To slip them on my fingers is the last thing I do every morning before running downstairs. At least nearly the last."

"And what is the last?"

"I say my prayers," says Monica, smiling. "That is what every one does, isn't it?"

"I don't know," says Mr. Desmond, not looking at her. It seems to him a long, long time now since last he said *his* prayers. And then he suddenly decides within himself that he will say them tomorrow morning, "the last thing before going downstairs," he cannot have quite forgotten *yet*.

He is examining her rings as he thinks all this, and now a little pale turquoise thing attracts his notice.

"Who gave you that?" he asks, suddenly. It is to a jealous eye rather a lovable little ring.

"Papa, when I was fourteen," says Monica. "It is very pretty, isn't it? I have felt quite grown up ever since he gave me that."

"Monica," says Brian Desmond suddenly, tightening his hold on her hand, "had you ever a lover before?"

"Before?"

"Yes," slowly, and as if determined to make his meaning clear, and yet, too, with a certain surprise at his own question. "Had you?"

"Before?" as if bewildered, she repeats the word again. "Why, I never had a lover *at all!*"

"Do not say that again," says Brian, moving a step nearer to her and growing pale: "I am your lover now – and *forever!*"

"Oh! no, *no*," says Monica, shrinking from him. "Do not say that."

"I won't, if you forbid me, but," quietly, "I am, and shall be, all the same. I think my very soul – belongs to you."

A crunching of gravel, a sound of coming footsteps, the murmur of approaching voices.

Monica, pallid as an early snowdrop, looks up to see her Aunt Priscilla coming towards her, accompanied by a young man, a very tall and very stout young man, with a rather drilled air.

"Ah! here is Aunt Priscilla," says Monica, breathlessly. "Who is that with her?"

"Ryde, one of the marines stationed at Clonbree," says Mr. Desmond, cursing the marine most honestly in his heart of hearts. Clonbree is a small town about seven miles from Rossmoyne, where a company of marines has been sent to quell the Land League disturbances.

Miss Priscilla is looking quite pleased with herself, and greets Monica with a fond smile.

"I knew I should find you here," she says; "flowers have such a fascination for you. You will let me introduce you to Mr. Ryde, dear child!"

And then the introduction is gone through, and Monica says something unworthy of note to this big young man, who is staring at her in a more earnest manner than is strictly within the rules of etiquette. Somehow, too, she presently discovers she has fallen into line with her new friend, and is moving towards the lawn again with Aunt Priscilla following in her train with *Mr. Desmond*.

Quaking inwardly, Monica at first cannot take her mind off the twain behind her, and all the consequences that must ensue if Miss Priscilla once discovers a Desmond is being addressed by her with common civility.

She is, therefore, but poor company for the tall marine, who seems, however, quite satisfied with the portion allotted him and maunders on inanely about the surroundings generally. When the weather and the landscape have been exhausted, it must be confessed, however, that he comes to a standstill.

Miss Priscilla, pleased with her day and the satisfactory knowledge that every one has been raving about Monica, is making herself specially agreeable to her companion, who, nothing loath, draws her out and grows almost sycophantic in his attentions. She becomes genial with him, not knowing who he is, while he becomes even more than genial with her, knowing right well who she is. Indeed, so merrily does he make the time fly that Miss Priscilla is fain to confess to herself that seldom has she passed so pleasant a five minutes.

In the meantime, Monica, strolling on in front with Mr. Ryde, is feeling both nervous and depressed. This chance meeting between her aunt and Mr. Desmond, and the memory of all the strange exciting things the latter has said to her, renders her mute and unequal to conversation, and her present companion is not one likely to enchain her attention by any brilliant flashes of intellect.

He is, in truth, a very ordinary young man, of the heavy, stupid type too often met with to require either introduction or description. He had arrived in Queenstown about a fortnight before, with nothing much to guide his conduct in a strange country beyond the belief that Hibernia, as he elects to call it, is like Africa, a "land benighted," fit only to furnish food for jests. He has a fatal idea that he himself can supply these jests at times, and that, in fact, there are moments when he can be irresistibly funny over the Paddies: like many others devoid of brain, and without the power to create wholesome converse, he mistakes impertinence for wit, and of late has become rude at the expense of Ireland whenever he found anybody kind enough, or (as in Monica's case now) obliged, to listen to him.

Just now, there being a distinct and rather embarrassing pause, he says amiably, —

"Awfully jolly gown you've got on!"

"So glad you like it!" says Monica, absently.

"Got it from town, I suppose?"

"From Dublin — yes."

"Oh! by Jove, you call Dublin town, do you?" says Mr. Ryde, with a heavy laugh that suggests danger of choking, he being slightly plethoric by nature.

"Yes: what do you call it?" says Monica, regarding him steadily. She has hardly looked at him till now, and tells herself instantly that young men with fat faces are not in *her* line.

"Always thought it was a village, or something of that sort, you know," replies he, with a continuation of the suicidal merriment.

Monica stares, and her color rises, ever so little, but unmistakably.

"You ought to read something, papers and articles on Ireland, now and then," she says, deep but suspicious pity for him in her tone. "Considering what education costs nowadays, it is shameful the way yours has been neglected. Your college, or wherever you were, ought to be ashamed of itself. Why, I don't believe you know what a capital means."

"A capital? – in writing, do you mean?" asks he, puzzled.

"N – o; I wasn't thinking of that. You can write, I suppose," with malicious hesitation that betrays doubt. "I was speaking of the capitals of Europe. Dublin is one of them."

Unable to grasp the fact that she is mildly snubbing him, Mr. Ryde smiles gayly, and says, "Oh, really?" with an amused air that incenses her still more highly. "Was there ever," she asks herself, angrily, "so hateful a man, or so long a gravel walk!"

Having racked his brain to find something further wherewith to beguile the monotony of the way, and finding it barren, Mr. Ryde falls back upon the original subject.

"I like a white gown on a woman better than any," he says. "And so they really *can* make gowns in Ireland? I've been awfully disappointed, do you know? – reg'lar sold. I came over here in the full hope of seeing everybody going about in goatskins and with beads round their necks – and – er – that."

"And why are you disappointed?" asks Monica, mildly, with a provoking want of appreciation of this brilliant sally. "Are you fond of goatskins and beads? Do *you* wear them when 'your foot is on your native heath'?"

"Eh? – Oh, you don't understand," says this dense young man, fatally bent on explanation. "I meant to imply that the general belief with us over there" – pointing to the horizon, which would have led him to America rather than to England – "is that everybody here is half savage – d'ye see – eh?"

"Oh, yes, it's quite plain," says Miss Beresford, her eyes immovably fixed on the horizon. "'Over *there*' must be a most enlightened spot."

"So of course I thought the goatskins, etc., would be the order of the day," goes on Mr. Ryde, with another chuckle.

"You do think sometimes, then?" says Monica, innocently.

"I have been thinking of *you* ever since I first saw you this afternoon," returns he, promptly, if unwisely.

There is an almost imperceptible pause, and then —

"Don't trouble yourself to do that again," says Monica *very* sweetly, but with a telltale flash in her blue eyes; "I am sure it must fatigue you dreadfully. Remember what a warm day it is. Another thing: don't for the future, please, say rude things about Ireland, because I don't like that *either*."

The "*either*" is the cruellest cut of all: it distinctly forbids him even to think of her.

"I am afraid I have been unlucky enough to offend you," says young Mars, stiffly, awaking at last to a sense of the situation, and glancing down uneasily at the demure little figure marching beside him with her pretty head erect. "I didn't mean it, I assure you. What I said was said in fun."

"Are you always like that when you are funny?" asks she, looking straight before her. "Then I think, if I were you, I wouldn't do it."

Then she is a little ashamed of her severity, and, changing her tone, makes herself so charming to him that he quite recovers his spirits before they come up with all the others on the lawn.

Yet perhaps her smiles have wrought him more harm than her frowns.

Madam O'Connor, going up to Miss Priscilla, engages her in some discussion, so that presently Monica finds Brian beside her again.

"You will let me see you again soon," he says, in a low tone, seeing Ryde is talking to Miss Fitzgerald.

"But how can I?"

"You can if you will. Meet me somewhere, as I may not call; bring your brother, your sister, *any one*, with you; only meet me."

"If I did that, how could I look at Aunt Priscilla afterwards?" says Monica, growing greatly distressed. "It would be shameful; I should feel like a traitor. I feel like it already."

"Then do nothing. Take a passive part, if you will, and leave all to me," says Desmond, with a sudden determination in his eyes. "I would not have you vexed or made unhappy in any way. But that I shall see you again – and *soon* – be sure."

"But – "

"I will listen to no 'buts:' it is too late for them. Though all the world, though even you yourself, should forbid me your presence, I should still contrive to meet you."

Here somebody addresses him, and he is obliged to turn and smile, and put off his face the touch of earnest passion that has just illumined it; while Monica stands silent, spellbound, trying to understand it all.

"Is it thus that all my countrymen make love?" she asks herself, bewildered. At the very second meeting (she always, even to herself, ignores that ignominious first) to declare in this masterful manner that he *must* and *will* see her again!

It is rapid, rather violent wooing; but I do not think the girl altogether dislikes it. She is a little frightened, perhaps, and uncertain, but there is a sense of power about him that fascinates her and tells her vaguely that faith and trust in him will never be misplaced. She feels strangely nervous, yet she lifts her eyes to his, and gazes at him long and bravely, and then the very faintest glimmer of a smile, that is surely full of friendliness and confidence, if nothing more, lights up her eyes and plays around her pensive mouth. A moment, and the smile has vanished, but the remembrance of it lives with him forever.

Yes, the wooing is rapid, and she is not won; but "she likes me," thinks Desmond, with a touch of rapture he has never known before. "Certainly, she *likes* me; and – there are always time and hope."

"My dear Monica, it grows late," says Miss Priscilla at this moment. "Say good-by to Madame O'Connor, and let us go."

"Oh, not a bit of it, now," says Madam O'Connor, hospitably in her rich, broad brogue, inherited in all its purity, no doubt, from her kingly ancestor. "You mustn't take her away yet: sure the day is young. Mr. Ryde, why don't you get Miss Beresford to play a game with you? In my time, a young fellow like you wouldn't wait to be told to make himself agreeable to a pretty girl. There, go now, do! Have you brought your own racket with you?"

"I left it at home," says Mr. Ryde. "Fact is," affectedly, "I didn't think tennis was known over here. Didn't fancy you had a court in the land."

This speech fires the blood of the O'Toole's last descendant.

Madam O'Connor uprears a haughty crest, and fixes the luckless lieutenant with an eagle eye, beneath which he quails.

"There is no doubt we lack much," she says, taking his measure with lofty scorn; "but we have at least our *manners*."

With this she turns her back upon him, and commences a most affable discussion with Miss Penelope, leaving her victim speechless with fright.

"Have a brandy-and-soda, Ryde?" says Mr. Kelly, who is always everywhere, regarding the wretched marine through his eyeglass with a gaze of ineffable sadness. "Nothing like it, after an engagement of this sort."

"I thought Ireland was the land for jokes," says the injured Ryde, indignantly, – "stock in trade sort of thing over here; and yet when I give 'em one of mine they turn upon me as if I was the worst in the world. I don't believe any one understands 'em over here."

"You see, your jokes are too fine for us," says Mr. Kelly, mournfully. "We miss the point of them."

"You are all the most uncomfortable people I ever met," says the wrathful marine.

"We are, we are," acquiesces Kelly. "We are really a very stupid people. Anything, delicate or refined is lost upon us, or is met in an unfriendly spirit. I give you my word, I have known a fellow's head smashed for less than half what you said to Madam O'Connor just now. Prejudice runs high in this land. You have, perhaps," in a friendly tone, "heard of a shillelagh?"

"No, I haven't," sulkily.

"No? *really*? It is quite an institution here. It's a sort of a big stick, a very unpleasant stick, and is used freely upon the smallest difference of opinion. You'll meet them round every corner when you get more used to us: you'd like to see them, wouldn't you?"

"No, I shouldn't," still more sulkily.

"Oh, but you ought, you know. If you are going to live for any time in the country, you should study its institutions. The best way to see *this* one is to make cutting remarks about Ireland in a loud voice when two or three of the peasants are near you. They don't like cutting remarks, they are so stupid, and jokes such as yours annoy them fearfully. Still, you mustn't mind that; you must smother your natural kindliness of disposition and annoy them, if you want to see the shillelagh."

"I said nothing to annoy Mrs. O'Connor, at any rate," says Mr. Ryde. "She needn't have taken a simple word or two like that."

"You see, we are all so terribly thin-skinned," says Mr. Kelly, regretfully, "I quite blush for my country-people. Of course there are noble exceptions to every rule. I am the noble exception here. I don't feel in the least annoyed with you. Now do try some brandy, my dear fellow: it will do you all the good in the world."

"I don't know this moment whether *you* are laughing at me or not," says the marine, eying him doubtfully.

"I *never* laugh," says Mr. Kelly, reproachfully. "I thought *even you* could see that. Well, will you have that B. and S.?"

But Mars is huffed, and declines to accept consolation in any shape. He strolls away with an injured air to where his brother officer, Captain Cobbett, is standing near the hall door, and pours his griefs into his ears. Captain Cobbett being a very spare little man, with a half starved appearance and a dismal expression, it is doubtful whether poor Ryde receives from him the amount of sympathy required.

"Well," says Madam O'Connor, turning round as she sees him disappear, and addressing the three or four people round her generally, "'pon me conscience, that's the silliest young man I ever met in my life!" When disturbed, elated, or distressed, Madam O'Connor always says, "'Pon me conscience!"

"Don't be hard upon him," says Mr. Kelly, kindly. "Though very mad, he is *quite* harmless!"

"He plays tennis very well," says Miss Fitzgerald, the tall girl. "So nice, isn't it? to have these ancient games reproduced!" This with the learned air of one who could say more if she would.

"*Ancient*?" says Madam O'Connor. "Faith, I thought it was a game of yesterday."

"Oh, dear, no!" says the erudite Bella, with a lenient smile. "Tennis was first brought from France to England in the reign of Charles the Second."

"There now, Miss Beresford, don't forget that," says Madam O'Connor, turning to Monica with an amused smile: "it is essential you should remember it, as it is part of one's education." After which she moves away towards some other guests, having said all she has to say to those near her.

"May I see you to your carriage, Miss Blake?" says Desmond, finding she and Miss Penelope are bent on going; and Aunt Priscilla, who has taken quite a fancy to this strange young man, gives her gracious permission that he shall accompany them to the fossilized chariot awaiting them.

"Who is he, my dear Priscilla?" asks Miss Penelope, in a stage whisper, as they go.

"Don't know, my dear, but a vastly agreeable young man, very superior to those of his own age of the present day. He is marvellously polite, and has, I think, quite a superior air."

"Quite," says Penelope, "and a very sweet expression besides, – so open, so ingenuous. I wish *all* were like him." This with a sigh, Terence having proved himself open to suspicion with regard to plain dealing during the past few days.

Now, it so happens that at this instant they turn a corner leading from the shrubbery walk on to the gravel sweep before the hall door; as they turn this corner, so does some one else, only *he* is coming from the gravel sweep to the walk, so that consequently he is face to face with the Misses Blake without any hope of retreat.

The walk is narrow at the entrance to it, and as the newcomer essays to pass hurriedly by Miss Priscilla he finds himself fatally entangled with her, she having gone to the right as he went to the left, and afterwards having gone to the left as he went to the right, and so on.

Finally a passage is cleared, and the stranger – who is an amazingly ugly old man, with a rather benign though choleric countenance – speeds past the Misses Blake like a flash of lightning, and with a haste creditable to his years, but suggestive rather of fear than elasticity.

"My uncle?" says Brian Desmond, in an awestruck tone, to Monica, who literally goes down before the terrible annunciation, and trembles visibly.

It is a *rencontre* fraught with mortal horror to the Misses Blake. For years they have not so much as looked upon their enemy's face, and now their skirts have actually brushed him as he passed.

"Come, come quickly, Monica," says Miss Penelope, on this occasion being the one to take the initiative. "Do not linger, child. Do you not see? It was *our enemy* that passed by."

If she had said "it was the arch fiend," her voice could not have been more tragic.

"I am coming, Aunt Penny," says Monica, nervously.

Now, it is at this inauspicious moment that Mr. Kelly (who, as I have said before, is always everywhere) chooses to rush up to Brian Desmond and address him in a loud tone.

"My dear boy, you are not going yet, are you?" he says reproachfully. "I say, Desmond, you can't, you know, because Miss Fitzgerald says you promised to play in the next match with her."

The fatal name had been uttered clearly and distinctly. As though petrified the two old ladies, stand quite still and stare at Brian; then Miss Priscilla, with a stately movement, gets between him and Monica, and, in tones that tremble perceptibly, says to him, —

"I thank you for the courtesy already received sir; but we will no longer trouble you for your escort: we prefer to seek our carriage *alone*."

She sweeps him a terribly stiff little salute, and sails off, still trembling and very pale, Miss Penelope, scarcely less pale, following in her wake.

Desmond has barely time to grasp Monica's hand, and whisper, "Remember," in as mysterious a tone as the hapless Stuart, when she too is swept away, and carried from his sight.

Not until the gates of Aghyohillbeg are well behind them do the Misses Blake sufficiently recover themselves for speech. Terence, who has been a silent witness of the whole transaction, creating a diversion by making some remark about the day generally, breaks the spell that binds them. His remark is passed over in silence, but still the spell is broken.

"Whoever introduced you to that young man," begins Miss Priscilla, solemnly, "did a wrong thing. Let us hope it was done in ignorance."

At this Monica shivers inwardly and turns cold, as she remembers that no introduction has ever been gone through between her and "that young man." What if her Aunt Priscilla persists, and asks the name of the offending medium? Fortunately, Miss Blake loses sight of this idea, being so much engrossed with a greater.

"For the future you must forget you ever spoke to this Mr. Desmond," she says, her face very stern. "Happily he is an utter stranger to you, so there will be no difficulty about it. You will remember this, Monica?"

"Yes, I will remember," says the girl, slowly, and with a visible effort.

Then Moyne is reached in solemn silence so far as the Misses Blake are concerned; in solemn silence, too, the two old ladies mount the oaken staircase that leads to their rooms. Outside, on the corridor, they pause and contemplate each other for a moment earnestly.

"He – he is very good-looking," says Miss Penelope at last, as though compelled to make the admission even against her will.

"He is abominably handsome," says Miss Priscilla fiercely: after which she darts into her room and closes the door with a subdued bang behind her.

## CHAPTER VIII

How Brian, having instituted inquiries, condemns his Uncle secretly – How Terry throws light upon a dark subject, and how, for the third time, Love "finds out his way."

It is the evening of the next day, and dinner at Coole has just come to an end. Mr. Kelly, who has been Brian's guest for the last fortnight, and who is to remain as long as suits him or as long after the grouse-shooting in August as he wills, has taken himself into the garden to smoke a cigar. This he does at a hint from Brian.

Now, finding himself alone with his uncle, Brian says, in the casual tone of one making an indifferent remark, —

"By the bye, I can see you are not on good terms with those old ladies at Moyne."

As he speaks he helps himself leisurely to some strawberries, and so refrains from looking at his uncle.

"No," says The Desmond, shortly.

"Some old quarrel I have been given to understand."

"I should prefer not speaking about it," says the squire.

"Twinges of conscience even at this remote period," thinks Brian, and is rather tickled at the idea, as he lifts his head to regard his uncle in a new light, – that is, as a regular Don Juan.

"Well, of course, I dare say I should not have mentioned the subject," he says, apologetically; "but I had no idea it was a sore point. It was not so much bad taste on my part as ignorance. I beg your pardon!"

"It was a very unhappy affair altogether," says Don Juan.

"Very unfortunate indeed, from what I have heard."

"*More* than unfortunate! – right down disgraceful!" says the squire, with such unlooked-for energy as raises astonishment in the breast of his nephew. ("By Jove, one would think the old chap had only now awakened to a sense of his misconduct," he thinks, irreverently.)

"Oh, well," he says, leniently, "hardly *that*, you know."

"*Quite* that," emphatically.

"It has been often done before: yours is not a solitary case."

"Solitary or not, there were elements about it inexcusable," says the old squire, beating his hand upon the table as though to emphasize his words.

"I wouldn't take it so much to heart if I were you," says Brian, who is really beginning to pity him.

"It has lain on my heart for twenty years. I can't take it off now," says the squire.

"You have evidently suffered," returns Brian, who is getting more and more amazed at the volcano he has roused. "Of course I can quite understand that if you were once more to find yourself in similar circumstances you would act very differently."

"I should indeed! —*very* differently. A man seldom makes a fool of himself twice in a lifetime." ("He's regretting her now," thinks Brian.)

But out loud he says, —

"You didn't show much wisdom, I daresay."

"No, none; and as for *her*, – to fling away such a love as that – " Here he pauses, and looks dreamily at the silver tankard before him.

This last speech rather annoys Brian; to gloat over the remembrance of a love that had been callously cast aside to suit the exigences of the moment, seems to the younger man a caddish sort of thing not to be endured.

("Though what the mischief any pretty girl of nineteen could have seen in *him*," he muses, gazing with ill-concealed amazement at his uncle's ugly countenance, "is more than I can fathom.")

"Perhaps it wasn't so deep a love as *you* imagine," he cannot refrain from saying *a propos* to his uncle's last remark, with a view to taking him down a peg.

"It was, sir," says the Squire, sternly. "It was the love of a lifetime. People may doubt as they will, but I know *no* love has superseded it."

"Oh, he is in his dotage!" thinks Brian, disgustedly; and, rising from the table, he makes a few more trivial remarks, and then walks from the dining-room on to the balcony and so to the garden beneath.

Finding his friend Kelly in an ivied bower, lost in a cigar, and possibly, though improbably, in improving meditation, he is careful not to disturb him, but, making a successful detour, escapes his notice, and turns his face towards that part of Coole that is connected with Moyne by means of the river.

At Moyne, too, dinner has come to an end, and, tempted by the beauty of the quiet evening, the two old ladies and the children have strolled into the twilight garden.

There is a strange and sweet hush in the air – a stillness full of life – but slumberous life. The music of streams can be heard, and a distant murmur from the ocean; but the birds have got their heads beneath their wings, and the rising night-wind woos them all in vain.

Shadows numberless are lying in misty corners; the daylight lingers yet, as though loath to quit us and sink into eternal night. It is an eve of "holiest mood," full of tranquillity and absolute calm.

"It is that hour of quiet ecstasy,  
When every rustling wind that passes by  
The sleeping leaf makes busiest minstrelsy."

"You are silent, Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, glancing at her.

"I am thinking. Such an eve as this always recalls Katherine; and yesterday *that meeting*, – all has helped to bring the past most vividly before me."

"Ah, dear, yes," says Miss Penelope, regarding her with a furtive but tender glance. "How must *he* have felt, when he thought what grief he brought to her young life!"

"You are talking of mother?" asks Kit, suddenly, letting her large dark eyes rest on Miss Penelope's face, as though searching for latent madness there.

"Yes, my dear, of course."

"He would not have dared so to treat her had her father been alive or had we been blessed with a brother," says Miss Priscilla, sternly. "He proved himself a dastard and a coward."

"Perhaps there was some mistake," says Monica, timidly, plucking a pale blossom and pretending to admire it.

"No, no. We believe he contracted an affection for some other girl, and for her sake jilted your mother. If so, retribution fit and proper followed on his perfidy, because he brought no wife later on to grace his home. Doubtless he was betrayed in his turn. That was only just."

"There seems to be reason in that conjecture," says Miss Penelope, "because he went abroad almost immediately. I saw him shortly before he left the country, and he was then quite a broken-down man. He must have taken his *own* misfortune greatly to heart."

"Served him right!" says Miss Priscilla, uncompromisingly. "He deserved no greater luck. Your mother suffered so much at his hands that she almost lost her health. I don't believe she ever got over it."

"Oh, yes, she did," says Terry, suddenly; "she got over it uncommonly well. We didn't know who Mr. Desmond was then, of course; but I know she used to make quite a joke of him."

"A joke!" says Miss Priscilla, in an awful tone.

"Yes, regular fun, you know," goes on Terence, undaunted. "One day she was telling father some old story about Mr. Desmond, a 'good thing' *she* called it, and she was laughing heartily; but he wasn't, and when she had finished, I remember, he said something to her about want of 'delicacy of feeling,' or something like that."

"I was there," says Kit, in her high treble. "He said, too, she ought to be ashamed of herself."

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