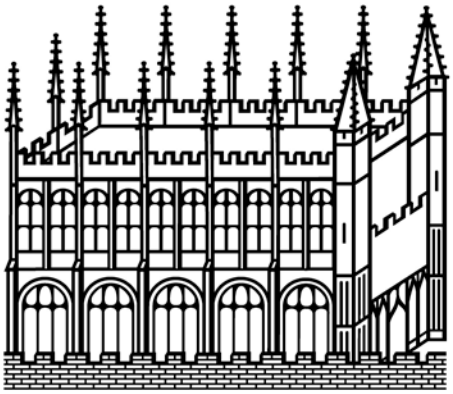


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MISS RUDD AND SOME LOVERS

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O'DUFFY

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MISS RUDD AND SOME LOVERS

MISS RUDD
AND SOME LOVERS

By

EIMAR O'DUFFY

AUTHOR OF
"The Wasted Island," "Printers' Errors,"
"The Lion and the Fox," etc., etc.



DUBLIN
THE TALBOT PRESS, LIMITED

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN, LIMITED

1923

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MISS RUDD AND SOME LOVERS

CHAPTER I

SHE BEGINS TO TELL YOU ALL ABOUT IT

THEY were discussing jumpers at the office.

"The best of a jumper," said Phyllis O'Dea, "is that you can fix it to suit any figure. If you're too thin, it'll make the most of you; and if you're too stout, it won't betray the size of your waist."

"Someone ought to tell May Looney that," said Fanny Keawell. "She looks a *show* in a blouse: you can see her bones sticking out."

"Ah, what matter!" cried Miss O'Reilly. "Poor May hasn't a chance any way."

"A chance," of course, meant a chance of getting married. So now that you know what my fellow-clerks were like, you'll be able to understand why I found it necessary to brighten existence by mildly pulling their legs occasionally. After the others had gone out I sat on at my desk, and read through Mr. Dunkerville's letter for about the tenth time, without extracting any more comfort from it than at the first. Then I put it down and sat gazing out of the window at the crescent moon that hung as it were between the chimney-pots of a distant house. Rather thriftless of Nature, thought I, to let so much moonlight run waste while the sun is still up, and then leave half our nights in darkness. Even as the reflection passed through my mind I became conscious that someone was standing beside me. I looked up and found that it was Phyllis O'Dea, who had come back with her hat and coat on.

"I'm going," she said, making a great show of

buttoning a reluctant glove. "I thought I'd say good-bye,—as I mayn't see you again."

"What?" I asked. "Are you leaving?"

"Oh, no," she said lightly. "But you'll be gone to-morrow, won't you?"

"No," said I. "Not till Saturday *week*."

"Oh, I see."

Miss O'Dea paused and stood hesitating, as if she wanted to say something but didn't know how to begin. I knew it must be something very important or very intimate, and I couldn't help being amused at the absurd pretext she had chosen to get into conversation with me, for everybody in the office knew when I was leaving. I sat and watched Miss O'Dea with a regular I-see-through-you expression; which so embarrassed the poor girl that she plunged headlong at the first topic within reach.

"Lovely moon, that! isn't it?" she said.

"Not bad, what there is of it," I replied.

She giggled at this, and was again at a loss. Miss O'Dea is one of those people whose conversation runs on well-ordered and predestinate lines, off which she would flounder like a tram-car on a country road. If my answer had been, "Yes: lovely," she would have glided smoothly and directly forward to her conversational objective; but the trivial remark I had made left her with no resource but giggles.

She checked the fit as soon as she could; and as I rose to go said: "Are you sorry to be leaving?"

"I can't truthfully say I am," I replied. "After all, it's by my own choice;" and rising from my desk I moved towards the door.

"All the same . . ." she began, accompanying me on my way, and fumbling for a while at the beginning of a sentence. Then as I pinned on my hat in the dressing-room, she remarked in a tone that, strive as she might, she could not render casual: "That was a curious youth you had under your wing to-day."

Oh, the transparent schemer! I had half anticipated that this was the point she had been coming to all along. The youth she referred to was a newly-joined clerk whom I had spent the morning coaching in his duties. Phyllis's curiosity about him was natural enough, for he was the most beautiful young man, without exception, that I have ever seen. Can you imagine Cuchulain in a serge suit and made-up tie? Achilles in a celluloid collar and spats? Diarmuid in a dickey? You have then an exact idea of the appearance of Horace Tackaberry, Esq. His face was flawless. His features I shall not attempt to describe further than by saying that they were of the purest Greek pattern; while his complexion was of that pink and tan colour which one associates with the life of ease, varied by long out-door holidays, led, if I am to believe the fashionable novelists, by those classes of society which have nothing to do, plenty of time to do it in, and lots of money to do it with. As a final touch to the picture I may tell you that his hair was brown, soft, lustrous, and curling; and his eyes dark, limpid, and long-lashed; with a dash of realism in the midst of this romance to the effect that a corner of his handkerchief always peeped perkily from his breast pocket, whose starched whiteness suggested than in some more secluded receptacle reposed another which—as the miner for the shareholder—toiled that it might flutter.

I had first encountered this vision that very morning, when he came into my room in tow of Miss Quirke, one of the supervisors, who handed him over to me with the request that I would show him the ropes.

"You have had some training, I suppose?" I remarked, as soon as she was gone.

And then I got a shock. By way of reply, there issued from those perfect lips the flattest, nosiest, stuffiest syllable-and-a-half ever uttered by dweller among the marsh vapours, dank with adenoidal germs, that rise from the bank between the Black Pool and the Ford of

the Hurdles. For lack of a phonetic alphabet I can only represent it thus:

"Yeah-ss."

It is unnecessary to record any more of that interview: I have said enough to show you what manner of man it was that had fluttered the heart of the little donkey who now stood at my elbow. For she *is* a donkey. You know the kind of romantic little fathead who has been brought up on second-rate novels and is always dreaming of the wonderful lover who will some day come into her life,—some abstract Adonis, beautiful, strong, tender, proud, and worshipful, who will throw himself at her feet and lift her out of this work-a-day world into the Land of Heart's Desire. I have often told her that such a man wouldn't waste a thought on a silly little goose like her. But she won't believe me. She seems to think that if Cuchulain himself were alive to-day he could not be better employed than in billing and cooing with her, and would have no higher ambition than to become the tame parcel carrier and clumsy-but-lovable pet that is her idea of a husband. At this time she was still looking for Prince Charming, and for his ethereal sake had rejected the proposals of two very decent young fellows in the office.

I wondered would she like to be told the remark that the object of her interest had made about her an hour before. She had been hanging around us artlessly while we worked in the hope of catching my notice and getting an introduction, but I had studiously ignored her.

"Who's that good-lookin' tart over there?" Mr. Tackaberry asked me. I told him her name.

"Will ye gimme an intro?" he pursued. "I'd like to bring her for a walk to-morrow. She looks as if she'd be game for a bit of a squeeze."

I promptly snubbed him. But, to return to Phyllis: at her fishing remark I turned a cold eye on her, and, as I slipped on my coat, awaited some further

self-revelation in silence. Plainly she expected some sort of response from me, but, finding that none was forthcoming, she began jabbering confusedly.

"I thought he looked awfully *queer* . . . I don't like a man to be *too* good-looking, don't you know . . . or to dress too well . . . I like a sort of nice untidiness, don't you know . . . What's his name, by the way?"

"Gregorio Gringorelli," I said.

"What?" she gasped.

"Gregorio Gringorelli," I repeated. "He's half Italian by birth. His father keeps an ice-cream shop in Corporation Street."

"How utterly unromantic!" said Phyllis.

"Not so unromantic as it sounds," I replied. "Old Gringorelli is a Count, and was driven from his estates some years ago by the Saracinesci—the terrible secret society, you know"—Phyllis nodded intelligently—"who had a vendetta against the family."

"How thrilling!" said Phyllis, with her eyes like saucers.

"But don't breathe a word about it to anyone," I cautioned her. "Not even to himself. He made me promise to tell nobody, but of course *you* . . ."

"I know. I'll be as secret as the grave."

"The Saracinesci have emissaries everywhere," I went on in a husky whisper. "Young Gregorio has killed three of them with his own hand, so naturally they hate him like poison."

Phyllis's face was a treat to see: a fine study for a close-up registering "loving pride"—I speak in cinematographese. Already, I could guess, she was picturing herself in all sorts of romantic and dangerous situations with the gallant Tackaberry. Now, by her tightened lips and flashing eye, I knew that he was galloping over the purple sage with Phyllis slung across his saddle-bow, his revolver spitting out death on the pursuing Saracinesci; then by a softening of her expression, I saw that Gregorio lay wounded in her

arms while she bathed his brow with water; and at last a limp look in her eyes and a quivering of her lips told me that all was well and the lovers were mouth to mouth.

"Not a word to a soul," I warned her. "And now it's time I was getting home to tea."

CHAPTER II

A GLANCE BACKWARDS

Our homes lay in different directions, so I parted from Phyllis on the door-step, little dreaming what consequences were to follow from the harmless jest I had played on her.

"And that," said I to myself, "is the sort of creature men fall in love with. That lying, prying, prattling little imbecile can scatter their commonsense and make them think her an angel."

I often wonder what men see in us women, for I can assure them we have no illusions about each other. There isn't an angel amongst us: not one. Take the girls in my office, for instance. There are four *fiancées* of long standing amongst them, of whom one is a fool, one a liar, the third a snob, and the fourth a cat; yet their young men look at them with eyes such as a Sicilian shepherd in Theocritus's time might have turned on a vision of Artemis. We women are equally silly about men, who, when all's said and done, are just flesh and blood like ourselves, and no more heroic than we are angelic. I ought to know, because I have seventeen brothers, dear fellows most of them, but about as thrilling as cold mutton. And yet nine of them got married, and I dare say their wives thought them marvels. Poor things! At the various wedding breakfasts, as I have watched the happily smiling face of the bride of the

occasion, I have said to myself: "Ah, you think you've snaffled a Tristan or a Cuchulain, but that's only Tom, who's pestered with corns," or "Dick, who has a running cold all winter," or "Peter, who washes his neck imperfectly," or whichever of the dear fellows it might happen to be.

My parents, you observe, were not very original in their choice of names. My eldest brother was called Joe, after his father; then came John and James, after their grandfathers; then Bill and Tom, after their uncles; and Pat, after the Saint. Then Dick and Mick and so on to Harry the penultimate. Lastly came Rudolf. Mother searched all through Butler's Lives of the Saints to get a nice-sounding name for him, and at last decided on Boniface; but father had been reading the "Prisoner of Zenda," and insisted on calling him after Rudolf Rassendyl. Mother didn't like the name at all: she said it had a wicked sound; and so it has for people who read nothing but novelettes. They argued a long time about it. Father said: "What's in a name?" and mother answered: "Everything." At last he gave in, "just to please her," as he put it; but as mother couldn't come to the church he got his own way in the end,—as usual. I may mention that both father and Shakespeare were wrong in the sentiment quoted above. There is a good deal in names, as the sequel shows. Joe and Bill and the rest all turned out most exemplary young men; but Rudolf—well, the less said about Rudolf the better.

But I fear I am wandering from my narrative.

Having parted from Phyllis and turned my steps homeward, I found myself again meditating on Mr. Dunkerville's letter. What a blow it had dealt me! Hopes wrecked, pride in the dust, vanity pricked, life that had looked so bright made blank and dull. "Aphrodite Anadyomene!" quoth I. "Why has no one ever proposed to me?" I had put that question the day before to Mr. Sitric, the philosopher, who lives

on the upper floor, and he said: "I'm sure I don't know, my dear. I'd propose to you myself if I was a little younger." "I wish you would," I said, but he only smiled, and clinched the aphorism he had been writing when I interrupted him. Then he put down his pen, took up Mr. Dunkerville's letter, read it, and said: "This makes it rather serious, doesn't it? But the answer to your question is simple enough." "Well?" said I. "It's because you don't let 'em," said Mr. Sitric.

This was only partly true, for the manners and customs of the country marriage-market had a share in the responsibility. In the city marriages may be made in heaven, but in the country they are arranged in a more practical way. First the bashful swain comes and sits about the house and makes himself agreeable to the mother and sisters of the desired one; then he makes a few sheepish advances to her; then he interviews her father and asks how much he is prepared to give to have this treasure taken off his hands. Then,—but at this point my love affairs were always abruptly cut short by my father kicking the devoted suitor down the steps for his impudence, so that I never had the opportunity of either rejecting or accepting anybody. Later, when I came to the city, I suffered from the usual pest of calf-lovers that afflicts every girl, but I was too merciful to allow any of them to propose to me: so far Mr. Sitric was right. But I had one genuine suitor who might have proposed if he had liked, and I have been wondering ever since why he didn't. Even Mr. Sitric, wise as he is, would be hard set to explain it. I had better tell you all about it, and you can judge for yourself.

We met at a dance in the Gresham Hotel just five years ago. I remember that one of the stewards whom I knew slightly (it was a Charity dance) came dragging him towards me by the elbow, mumbled something over us, and then bustled away, leaving us face to face, no

nearer to acquaintanceship than if we had been standing at opposite poles of the earth, ignorant even of each others' names, but for social purposes "introduced." The youth made no attempt to make the best of the position. He went pink, then red, coughed apologetically, fiddled with his collar, made clammy and strangulous by nervousness, and finally stammered out a request for the pleasure of a dance. I told him the numbers I still had vacant, and, almost with a sigh of relief, he dropped his eyes (till now turned up, in a stare suggestive of hypnotism, to a little mole between my eyebrows) and began searching the blank spaces in his programme, fumbling the while with thumby fingers at the ridiculous little pink pencil attached.

"Yes," he gasped at length, "number six," and I knew by an abrupt pause, an intensification of his blush, and a hovering of the pink pencil that he was shuddering before the appalling task of finding out my name.

"Miss Rudd," I vouchsafed him; and with a grateful glance he dashed off some hieroglyphics on the inadequate space provided. Then he hesitated, uncertain what to do, while I took stock of him leisurely. He had a pleasant cheerful face, with what are called "expressive" eyes; he was far from tall, and he had a tendency to plumpness, which gave him a forty-years-old appearance, though he was probably ten years younger. With a great effort he managed to ask for a second dance, and would have claimed a third if his courage were not already stretched to snapping point. Then, very awkwardly, he excused himself and went in search of more partners.

He proved a less laggard lover than might have been expected. We met again at another public dance the following week, and yet again the week after. I got to like him well, and cannot honestly say I didn't encourage him. At any rate, through what remained of the winter we went to picture-houses, theatres, and dances

together; and when the spring came, and the summer after it, we played golf, went for walks, and rowed and sailed on sea and river. I have not the faintest doubt that he loved me. A dozen times a day I have surprised those eyes of his—" expressive " is exactly the word: they expressed . . . anything and everything, I can't tell what, but they *expressed*—I have surprised them, I say, gazing up in the most expressive way into my face. Dog-like adoration was the mildest thing I read in their liquid depths. . . . And his hands: I cannot tell how often they came in contact with mine. Given the most trivial excuse—passing a plate, assisting me with a coat, or what not—I was sure to feel that lingeringly fleeting touch, gone before you knew it was there, of the shyly daring lover.

I confess that I began to wonder when he would speak: but I cannot tell whether I wanted him to do so or not. Of course I liked him, but then I have liked many men. I had no romantic feeling for him; but then, as may be deduced from recent remarks, I could not feel romantic about any man. I saw him as he was: a kindly, cheerful, companionable fellow with a kindly, cheerful, companionable face; moderately intelligent; moderately handsome, and, I dare say, moderately well-behaved. The question was whether, feeling for him in this way, I could accept an offer of marriage from him. I felt that he would expect more from me, and had in fact already given me more—that is if romantic illusions really are superior to a frank, clear-sighted affection. That he held such illusions about me I was quite certain: his eyes told me so more plainly than words. When he looked at me he saw not a girl with very ordinary good-looks, a clear and well-trained intelligence, and a character which I have taken some care in looking after,—but a wondrous creature, compounded of mystery and a thousand virtues, whose touch thrilled, whose companionship would give eternal bliss, who would never fade,—in short, the

very nonpareil, the quintessence of dream womanhood. Would such an exchange be robbery? Would it be fair to let him down? Those were the questions that agitated me.

And, while I doubted, he came, on several occasions, very near to saying what I knew to be in his mind; but always, at the very instance of utterance, a look of despair would sweep over his countenance, and he would turn away in dejection. What it was that checked him was a puzzle to me. I felt sure it wasn't shyness, for we were now sufficiently intimate for love-making to be the very slightest of steps forward. But what it was I never learned, for very suddenly our acquaintance came to an end.

One beautiful mellow evening at the end of summer we had been strolling out towards Bohernabreena, and on our return we sat for a while on the bank of the sleepy Dodder between Dartry and Rathfarnham. I have a memory of golden sunshine; of the odour of sun-baked earth and dying flowers; of the shrunken river gliding softly over greasy stones; of the voices of children and the bark of a dog heard above the murmur of the weir; of the groan of a tram-car taking the curve into the village; of two church bells tolling for Benediction. The air, I remember, was perfectly still, hot and heavy, and swarming with midges which all his smoking could not drive away. I sat erect on a mossy stone; Mr. Donovan—that was my lover's name—lounged at my feet. He kept throwing pebbles into the stream, and turned every now and again to look at me from under his hat-brim while making some casual remark. All at once by a look in his eyes and a lowering of his voice I knew that his moment had come. My heart fluttered.

"Can I? Can I?" I asked myself.

A fresh difficulty had arisen before my mind. I suddenly realised that, if I were standing up, Mr. Donovan could only kiss me by rising on tiptoe, and a

picture of him in that attitude immediately passed before my imagination. Disconcerted by the vision, I looked down and surprised him gazing at me in the most expressive manner I had ever seen. His hand moved towards mine while I sat petrified with indecision. He began to speak: "Ana— Ana——" Then he seemed to choke and came to a stop. He turned moodily away and flung a handful of pebbles into the river. As for me, I didn't know whether I was relieved or disappointed; but I was certainly puzzled.

And puzzled I was to remain for many years, though in the course of time I ceased to worry over the problem. From that day Mr. Donovan vanished from my life. He made no effort to communicate with me, and, strange to say, I knew neither his Christian name nor his address nor his occupation. Once, early in our friendship, I had asked him where he lived, and he had answered lightly: "In Tir-na-nOg, at the Rainbow's End."

"No; but seriously?" said I.

"Why do you want such sordid details?" he replied. "Think of me as a man from Nowhere, or anywhere you like, rather than as a denizen of some frowsty street."

He had a most romantic mind, as you may judge, otherwise such reticence would have made me distrustful; especially in the light of an experience undergone shortly before by my brother Bill. Bill is the fool of the family, but doesn't know it. He picked up a man at the Hippodrome one night, and in a quarter of an hour they were bosom friends. He's told us all about him when he came home. "Splendid fellow! Army man. Cousin of a duke. Took to me at once. Interesting chap. Clever devil. Said he'd put me up at the Towers next time I'm in Blankley." And so on: that was Bill's way. The friendship lasted nearly six weeks, and between drinks and borrowings the stranger got enough out of Bill to pay for his board and lodging

at the Towers for a twelvemonth. This didn't worry Bill in the slightest; and night after night we had to listen to his exclamatory panegyrics.

"A right-down good sort," he used to say. "Not a bit standoffish though he *is* the cousin of a duke. Ready to drink with any man. Took my arm when we walked home last night. Think of that! Arm-in-arm with the son of a duke! What!"

Or again:

"The Duke's in difficulties to-day. Tenants refusing to pay their rent. Scandalous behaviour! What are the lower orders coming to? Says he'll evict them right, left and centre. Borrowed a fiver off me in the meanwhile. Democratic, eh? Not ashamed to borrow a bit from a friend. What!"

The very next day Bill came home with a rueful countenance and a plaintive tale.

"Well, well, well!" he cried. "Just think of it. The Duke was arrested this afternoon for murder."

"For *what?*" cried everybody.

"For Murder. Just think of it. *A murderer!* And we used to go about everywhere arm-in-arm!"

But Mr. Donovan's conduct was not to be explained that way. It remained a mystery for a very long time; and ages before I could guess at a probable solution I had forgotten all about him.

CHAPTER III

FIRST STEPS TO FAME

I see that I have wandered once again from Mr. Dunkerville's letter; so I hasten to retrace my steps.

Mr. Dunkerville is my publisher. I have kept it dark until now; but the fact is that I am no other than Lucy Loveday, the rising novelist. What? You have never

heard of her? You are too highbrow. But never mind: I should never have heard of her myself if we did not happen to be identical. However, though my fame has not yet reached your ears, I am tolerably well known to a large circle of readers. My first book is now in its twelfth thousand; my second in its fifteenth; and my last, only four months out, in its twenty-fifth. I am in fact, in the words of one of my reviewers, "soon likely to fill the place in public esteem now occupied by Florence Barclay and Ethel M. Dell."

It all began in this way. I was sitting one evening in my room, tired out after a long day, and wondering whether I could hit on any way of earning money that would take me out of that beastly office, when Mr. Sitric, the philosopher, who lives on the floor above, came in to see me. He was, he explained, stony-broke,—a not unusual condition with him; and would be much obliged, as he was a poor hand at bargaining and I was supposed to be a good one, if I would sell a few books for him on the morrow. When I had readily consented, he departed, leaving the volumes on the table. There were six of them: a complete Spenser, Mitchell's edition of Mangan, the Adventures, Memoirs, and Return of Sherlock Holmes, and a little red volume called "The Writers' and Artists' Year-book."

This last I picked up and idly dipped into. Presently a heading caught my eye:

> NEAT NOVELS. 1½d. W. (Wednesday)—Contains one complete novel. Contributions should be 18,000 words. Preference given to *pathetic* stories, but a *very strong love interest is essential.* Everything must be suitable for young girls to read. Manuscript must be typewritten. *Payment* on acceptance, £7.

On reading this the first question that occurred to me was: how can manuscript be typewritten? The second:

how can a pathetic story with a very strong love interest be good for young girls? And the third: why shouldn't I try my hand?

Eventually I did. With my tongue in my cheek, on which was a blush of shame, I completed within a fortnight a story answering to the above description. It was accepted, and the money duly paid; and in a very short time I saw it in a newsagent's shop and soon after in the hands of Mrs. Buck's kitchen-maid. But never again! Neither shall wild horses drag from me its title nor a word as to its matter. Let it rest in oblivion.

But it was a beginning; for soon I began to ask myself: Why not do something a shade better, and a good deal longer? And so, still a little shamefacedly, but with my tongue in its proper place, I wrote "A Field of Daffodils," and, after consulting the Author's Year-book (which I had kept for myself, paying the owner about double what the man on the quays would have given), sent the manuscript to Mr. Dunkerville. Frankly, I must call that book unutterable rubbish: I have never been able to bring myself to read it. The actual prose is good enough—anyone with a good education and a clear head can write good prose; but the plot is hackneyed (two men and a girl); the character-drawing is all in rose-and-cream tints (with one sepia); and for the rest, it violates every canon of art I know of (I really do know a good book when I see it, though I cannot write one), and it accepts, nay, revels in, every sentimentality, every standard of judgment, every moral imbecility that will gratify or flatter my twelve thousand readers, and against which my whole soul is in passionate revolt.

Oh, my heroines, and Oh, my heroes—let me not think of them lest my heart fail for lack of the blood it will pump to my cheeks. . . .

My other two books, "Summer Love" and "A Seaside Romance," are on similar lines: "charming

idylls '' the reviewers call them, in the facile scribble with which they respond to the Editor's command to '' boost up that bit of tosh: Dunkerville's given a two-column ad.'' In my mind's eye I can see them do it. I can see also my readers, a widespread and variegated company: quiet comfortable people who take up a book '' when they've nothing else to do ''; silly, sentimental girls anxious for thrills and dissatisfied with the prosaic swains that are all that life offers; sloppy youths of seventeen, deadly curious about love and hotly excited by what a woman may have to say on the subject; old dullards who like to be tickled by the illusions of their adolescence; all persons whose lives are drab: clerks in offices, girls in shops, governesses, people placidly married, and I know not how many more. I am read by winter firesides by knitters and smokers, on summer lawns and beaches by drowsy holiday-makers; I am popped into desks and under counters; I lie by invalids' bedsides; I am propped against tea-pots and cruet-stands; I get left behind in railway carriages. My gaily-coloured wrappers get blurred and grimy and tear at the folds; my covers are cracked and warped; my pages are dog-eared and stained with butter and mustard and gravy; I am lent, borrowed, and never returned; I am bought and sold second-hand, third-hand, and fourth-hand. I suppose in the end I fall to pieces, for my binding is cheap. . . .

And so the morning came when I awoke to find myself rich. How well I remember my feelings as I gazed on my first cheque for a sum in three figures. I believe I was the happiest creature on earth. I could not help smiling whenever I thought of it, to the utter amazement of my fellow-clerks. One of them, I recollect,—it was that sentimental little widow, Mrs. Howley—said something arch about Love's Young Dream, but I was too delighted with myself to bother contradicting her; so that for some months after there was a general rumour round the office that I was

engaged to be married. But what cared I for the office? It had suddenly grown petty and unimportant in my eyes: if it had given me the sack I could have snapped my fingers under its nose. In fact I had resolved to give *it* the sack as soon as three-figured cheques became a regular occurrence. Meanwhile I amused myself with spending. I bought a piano, a couple of pictures, several long-coveted books, clothes, a necklace; and I took to dining at Jammet's. I gave myself a perfectly glorious time, for though my way of earning money is that of a charlatan, I am an artist in spending. As a rule a poor person who comes in for wealth gets more pleasure out of it than a person who has always had it; but a person who has been born rich, fallen into poverty, and then risen again gets more pleasure than either: for those who are born poor don't know how to spend; they either waste their money or make no use of it. There was a man in our town, for instance, a labourer with fifteen shillings a week, who was left ten thousand pounds by a relative who died in America. He rushed off at once on a trip to London, but it so overwhelmed him that he came back next day and settled down to a life of idleness in his old hovel, leaving the money to accumulate in the bank.

As for me, I had been born into very comfortable circumstances, but when my father died he left nearly everything to the boys, assigning me a mere pittance. This was no surprise to me, for he had always made his intentions clear. "You'll get married, Stasia," he used to say, "and I'm not going to leave my hard-earned money to be pegged about by some idle, worthless galoot." (Complimentary to my taste in men-folk, wasn't it?) Peter and Jack and Joe and the rest of them were quite ready, and even anxious to assist me; but so long as I had a pair of hands I wasn't going to be anybody's pensionary, so I went up to Dublin and in course of time became a civil servant. Eight hours work a day, and fourteen shillings a week in return

for it: those were the princely conditions under which I entered the service of His Britannic Majesty; and even when promotion came with the passing of years I was still as poor as a church-mouse. . . . But perhaps you are one of those comfortable people who think a single woman ought to be quite content with a salary of three pounds a week? Pah! I abhor content. It is the meanest and most selfish of vices. To be content with three pounds a week (or five, or ten for that matter) is to be content with savagery. You can live on it, I grant. That is to say you can feed, clothe and house yourself on it. But what Kaffir or bushman? what horse, rat, or rabbit cannot do as much? To live as I understand living, that is to say to enjoy that abundance of life which civilisation offers, you must have money in plenty. Poor people live under a tyranny more complete than was ever forged by mediæval despot. Think of it. If you can't afford to buy books you are as much cut off from learning as if the giving and receiving of education were a capital offence; if you can't afford to travel you are as securely tied to the soil as if serfdom were still in vogue. But I won't labour the point, for I'm no economist, and I don't want to be taken for a Socialist.

All these years, then, I had been living in a state of such destitution as I can only bring home to you by giving a list of the things I have been unable to do. In the first place, I had never been outside the Province of Leinster, except once when I crossed the bridge at Athlone and stood on the Connaught shore. Even in my prosperous days I had travelled no further, for my father never wanted to travel himself and consequently couldn't understand why anyone else should,—especially a girl. In addition I had never in all my life:—

Worn attractive clothes,
Eaten attractive food,
Owned a house,
To say nothing of a garden,

Bought a picture worth looking at,
Bought a book costing more than half-a-crown,
Owned a piano,
Had more than fourteen consecutive days' holiday,
Spent five shillings without trepidation.

And how I longed to be in a position to be careless about five pound notes! True greatness of soul can only be attained by those who needn't worry about money, and is therefore impossible on three pounds a week.

But all that was behind me now, for six months later I received another cheque even bigger than the previous one. I knew now that my vogue had come to stay; so the following morning, as soon as I reached the office, I walked up to the Lady Superintendent (beautiful phrase, isn't it?) and gave her a month's notice. The Lady Superintendent is a widow with one son, to rear and educate whom she has worn out her own life prematurely because a wise and benevolent civilisation has decreed that motherhood is not a profession of sufficient importance to require any remuneration. She looked at me through her glasses with weary eyes (she had been sitting up till the small hours darning socks for Billy), and, too lifeless to be surprised, asked perfunctorily was I tired of the work.

I had prepared my excuse, for I had no intention of identifying myself with Lucy Loveday.

"I've been left some money," I said.

"I congratulate you," said the Lady Superintendent, her eyes full of the envious admiration of the worker for the idler who feeds on him. Then their expression changed. I could see that she was saying to herself: "Why does such luck never come to *me?* Why should *she,* who has no child, get a fortune for nothing while I go on slaving myself to death?" But she put such vain questioning aside, as she must have done a thousand times before. Then quite suddenly her cheeks flushed red; she affected a cough, looked

down for a second, then up again, and glanced at my face in a nervous way that told me that she was not quite sure whether her congratulations were well-timed or not. "O, Lord!" I could fancy her saying to herself, "perhaps it's some near relative. . . ."

"May I ask . . .?" she began.

"It was a distant cousin," said I, and left her gasping.

Next morning the news of my good fortune was all over the office. For a week I was the subject of all the conversation, the cynosure of all the admiration, the object of all the envy, of everyone in that house of little interests. Some girls were glad they had been nice to me; others regretted they had been nasty to me; I dare say some of the men wished they had made better use of their opportunities; some certainly made feeble attempts to make up for lost time. Most of the envy, I believe, was good-natured: poor girls, how could they see that their life of useful toil was more honourable than the idle one that, as they supposed, lay before me. Some of it was of the grudging, spiteful kind: poor girls, I don't blame them either. But why was it that not one of them saw how absurd the whole thing was? Oh, Æsop, Phaedrus, La Fontaine, or whoever it was, that wrote that fable of the butterfly and the ant! You will have to revise your moralisings. In human affairs the butterfly does not die: he sits on the ant's neck. Neither does the ant rebuke him: he aspires to be a butterfly.

CHAPTER IV

WORDS OF WISDOM

So at last I had left the ranks of the deserving poor and joined those of the undeserving rich. After toiling all these years for a bare subsistence, I was now offered

thousands for the scribblings of my spare time. Absurd, wasn't it? And I was no more ambitious for wealth than I had formerly been content with poverty. All I wanted was a reasonable wage and a reasonable amount of leisure in return for a reasonable amount of work—say a thousand a year for a nine-month year and a six-hour day. But supposing I were to offer myself in the labour market on such terms I should simply be laughed at,—in a world where some people are paid ten thousand a year for doing nothing and others are worked to death for ten shillings a week. Man is supposed to be a rational creature: but that's his method. Bees do things better. I am not a Socialist, but I do think people should all be paid the same. Anyone with a sense of humour can see that it's ridiculous to pay them differently when they are all so much alike.

The only person who knew my horrible secret was Mr. Sitric, so he was the first to whom I told my good fortune. I found him sitting at his desk in his little room at the top of the house. Something better than an attic it was, but not much more comfortable. The floor was bare; the window curtainless. The four walls were lined with plain deal book-shelves stained with Brunswick black, constructed by Mr. Sitric himself. The books they housed were a very motley collection, mostly second and third-hand, dirty, and battered in appearance. There was a deal table in the middle of the floor with a Primus stove on it. One section of the book-case was a receptacle for crockery, pots, and pans: for Mr. Sitric took his meals either here or in town, never appearing at the general table. A narrow mattress rolled up in a corner with a couple of blankets folded on top indicated the philosopher's sleeping arrangements. Stacked up in one corner of the room was a great pile of brown paper parcels,—the manuscripts of the first eleven volumes of Mr. Sitric's monumental, but as yet unpublished work, " The His-

tory of Human Folly." At the window stood a writing-desk of mahogany, the one costly article of furniture the room possessed, at which, immersed in his twelfth volume, sat the philosopher himself. He was a smallish man with bristling red hair and large, prominent, ivory-white teeth. He had very nice brown eyes, which nearly always smiled when he spoke, but otherwise had a far-away expression,—though once or twice, when he seemed lost in thought, I have seen them look terribly angry. I don't know how old he was: he might have been anything from twenty-five to sixty.

I walked in and sat on the table so that he wouldn't have to offer me the only chair in the room. He went on writing. I whistled. He finished a sentence, put down his pen, and turned round in his chair. He didn't ask me how I did, for he could see for himself that I was quite well. Neither did he ask me what I wanted, for he knew that was what I had come in to say. He just sat and waited for me to speak. I told him all about my good fortune. When I had concluded he sat looking at me meditatively for some seconds. Then he said, speaking vaguely, as if the word conveyed very little meaning to him:

"Money . . ." Then in a brighter tone, as if he had just grasped the word more precisely, "Money. Oh, yes. I had some money myself once. I don't know that I was any the better for it."

"What became of it?" I asked.

He made no answer, so I went on with what I had to say. I wanted him to see that I was no gay worldling, but could think quite deeply.

"It all seems so absurd and unjust," I concluded. "After all, I've done nothing to earn it."

"Money," said Mr. Sitric, "isn't worth working for, so when it comes to one's hand without effort one should take it and be thankful."

I had never thought a philosopher would look on it in that light. Somewhat disconcerted, I said:

"But look at Mrs. Allen—the Lady Superintendent, you know—the widow with the son I told you about. How much more deserving of fortune she is: and how much more she needs it."

"Do you think she'd exchange with you?" asked Mr. Sitric. "I mean, would she give up the boy for your money?"

"I don't think so," said I.

"Then I fail to see how she is less fortunate than you are."

"Can't you understand!" I persisted. "With the boy to feed and educate, she *needs* more than I do."

"When we get all we need," said Mr. Sitric, "the world will have come to an end."

"You take other people's misfortunes very easily," I said, rather nettled by his obtuseness.

"Not more easily than my own," said Mr. Sitric.

This was quite true, but as I wanted Mr. Sitric to see that I was no fool even if I did write best-sellers, I clung to the argument.

"Society is very badly organised," I said.

"Society has the organisation it deserves," replied Mr. Sitric.

"Society is *rotten,*" I declared.

"Quite true, my dear," said Mr. Sitric.

I looked puzzled at the admission.

"The fruit must rot before the seedling can grow," said Mr. Sitric. "We are the rotten fruit from which will spring the tree of the future."

I was silent.

"The moral," said Mr. Sitric, "is: don't worry. Take the money that a foolish society flings at you, and enjoy it,—if you can."

"That's an ominous proviso," I said.

"In a foolish world," said Mr. Sitric, "who can be happy? Really, my dear, you give money too much importance. My income has varied all through my life, but it never seems to have made much difference."

"I'm sure," said I, "that I can spend my money well,"

"How?" asked Mr. Sitric.

"Well—for one thing I'm going to travel."

"Where?"

"Anywhere. Anywhere to get out of this abominable old cesspool of a city. I want to see pictures and hear music, and go to plays and meet people who have something to say and aren't always talking. I want to see the world instead of stifling."

Mr. Sitric pointed towards one of his book-shelves. "There," said he, "are some excellent works on the flora, fauna, and topography of Yucatan. I bought those by doing without a meat dinner for seventeen days. Above them are books dealing with the remoter parts of Mongolia and Siberia, with a couple of handbooks to Kamschatka. I lived on porridge for a fortnight to buy those. To the left of them is a whole string of works on darkest Africa which I've picked up at odd times; and I suppose my collection of second-hand Baedekkers is the finest in Europe. I assure you, my dear, that when I am not writing my book I spend far more of my time in Baluchistan or Antananarivo than in Dublin."

"I'm not a philosopher," said I, "and I'm deadly curious to know how you lost that money you told me about."

"If I told you that," said Mr. Sitric, "you would no longer consider me a philosopher, because you wouldn't believe the real truth about it."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Because you would insist on attributing to Quixotic chivalry an act which was dictated by economic theorising."

"I would not," I said.

"You would," he contradicted.

"Try me," I said.

He grinned and said:

"Very well. I'll tell you the tale in all its hard realism. And afterwards you can serve it up to an admiring public as a Cyrano or Sidney Carton romance."

He drew out a capacious curved briar pipe from his pocket, filled it, lit it, and after his third puff said:

"Many years ago I and a friend of mine fell in love with the same girl. He wasn't my greatest friend, but in your novel you may as well say he was. We were both afraid to propose to her: he because he was poor, and I because in those days I was constitutionally afraid of women. I was as poor as he was, but that didn't worry me a bit; whereas he was rather afraid of the girl, too: so it was I that first strung myself up to propose. She refused me. I pleaded. I asked could she never come to care for me. She said no. She liked me well, but not that way. There was someone else in fact. I guessed it to be my friend, and went home desolate.

"Next morning I received a letter saying that my only relative, an uncle, had died, leaving me a handsome legacy. In the hope of forgetting my disappointment I resolved to travel round the world. I set off as soon as possible, but soon found it was no use. I spent a few days in London; crossed over to Paris; spent a week there; then on to Berlin. But I saw nothing, and I couldn't forget. So I came home. I moped and fretted and neglected my food; I could not keep the thought of the girl from my mind, nor her picture from my imagination; I saw a dreary, useless life stretch endlessly before me; I thought I had lost the one and only woman in the world. I was very young.

"I found that my friend was still sighing after the girl, and though she gave him every encouragement he was still afraid to propose to her. My own grief did not so absorb me as to have deprived me of the power of sympathy. I was sorry for my friend, and sorry for the girl. It seemed so cruel that lovers should be

kept apart by lack of money. It was worse than cruel: it was stupid and wasteful. I raged against the stupid world that let these fine, healthy young people go to waste instead of making it easy for them to come together and produce fine, healthy children. Oh, a stupid, stupid, world! I laughed bitterly at the ironical situation: the lovers kept from their hearts' desire for lack of the money that was given to him whose heart's desire was dead. Then a sudden resolution came to me. I cared nothing for money; having lost the one woman in the world that mattered, I should never again want to marry. Why not give the money to my friend who could make such excellent use of it? I acted on the suggestion at once, but I had some difficulty in inducing him to accept it. He had a chivalrous idea that it was degrading to take money for nothing. I pointed out that I myself had got it for nothing. Oh, but a will was different, he said. I said that was nonsense. If it wasn't degrading to take a gift from the dead, it wasn't degrading to take one from the living. But he had a conventional mind, and couldn't see it. Then I took drastic measures. I showed him a five pound note; then I rolled it up into a ball and threw it into the fire."

"'Oh, stupid, wasteful world,'" I quoted ironically.

"Pooh!" said Mr. Sitric. "Money was made to be wasted. There's only one waste that really matters."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Waste of life," said Mr. Sitric. "I'd have burnt a thousand fivers to prevent that, but my friend gave in after I'd burnt five. A month later they got married."

"You behaved like a hero," I said.

"No," said Mr. Sitric. "Like a logician. And as my premises were all wrong I came to grief. I met many another woman I would have liked to marry, but could not induce them to share my limited income; and as for my friend, he speculated with the money I

gave him and did remarkably well. He's now disgustingly rich; but he hasn't any children."

"What an anti-climax!" I said.

"Anti-climax," said Mr. Sitric, "is the legitimate child of Truth; who, though commonly represented as a virgin, is in reality secretly wedded to Humour."

CHAPTER V

THE THIRD FLOOR

I AM afraid I have told this story so far in a very confused and haphazard fashion. I did my best to begin at the beginning, but I soon found that so many things of real importance had happened before the beginning that I had to stop and stick them in wherever I could. This is not according to the standards of modern art, but it is the method used by all the great epic poets. These, as far as I can see, must have been very old men (Homer, you may remember, used to nod at times), so that their memories, though excellent in quality, were spasmodic and disorderly. Hence we find the adventures of Ulysses beginning a third of the way from the end, and the early career of Cuchulain dragged in as an after-dinner story by Fergus on the eve of the battle of Gaireth.

I don't see why I shouldn't revive the old method in this little epic of Rathgar. You may think the words Epic and Rathgar incompatible, but they aren't really. Rathgar means the Fort of Gar, so it must have seen many a siege and foray in the olden times. I don't know who Gar was, but by the sound of his name I guess him to have been a sturdy fellow, a man of few words, with a strong right arm, that kept the ford of the Dodder against all comers, and lorded it over the herdsmen of Dartry and Ranelagh whom he had won from the sway of the neighbouring chieftain Mines.

The latter, I take it, was a crafty person with a sinister leer. Unable to resist Gar in the field, he had to submit to the loss of his fairest territories, but he nursed black schemes in his heart and bided his time. Eventually Gar became old and died; or perhaps he raised around him more enemies than he could cope with, and fell beneath a heap of slain down by the Dodder bank; or perhaps his rival bribed his steward to serve him with prussic acid in a cup of wine. Whatever the method, Mines must have triumphed in the end. If not, why do we always talk of Rathmines and Rathgar instead of the other way round?

But I have again wandered from Mr. Dunkerville's letter. If I were to digress to this extent in my novels Mrs. Barclay and Miss Dell would have to look elsewhere for a successor; but in that case I don't: there's no temptation to digress from a story that doesn't interest you and which you are only too anxious to get finished with. But let me keep myself well in hand from this out, and come rapidly to the point.

Mr. Dunkerville, as I have said, is my publisher. He is, of course, an Englishman; for which I make no apology. As my whole object in writing is a commercial one, it is only common-sense to take my wares to the richest market. All the Irish authors I know of are poor, so I have no desire to be an Irish author. My books are English in setting, English in character, English in thought, English in sentiment—English through and through; so of course they have an English publisher. Besides, I like doing business with Englishmen. They are so thoroughly efficient: so keen, so prompt, so reliable, so punctual, so up-to-date, so courteous, so solidly satisfactory—I cannot think of half the adjectives I could apply to them. Compared with Irishmen—well, I am too patriotic to draw a comparison; but in matters of business give me the English every time. In that they have sterling qualities which make me positively *like* them.

Pursuing such a course of reflection as this, I drew that crisp, business-like envelope from my hand-bag, scarcely noticing in my interest that I had come to a street-crossing.

"Mind out, Miss!" cried a rough voice behind me; and at the same instant I felt myself plucked suddenly backwards, almost from under the wheels of a huge Black-and-Tan motor lorry which, with its cut-throat crew presenting their rifles at the passing crowds, went thundering towards the city down the Rathmines Road.

"You're a nice wan to be out by yourself!" exclaimed the stout, shawled woman who had rescued me, while the man who had shouted the first warning passed on with a sympathetic grin. "Them murderin' Tans, bad cess to 'em! And holy Mike! look at yer lovely dress."

Here my preserver bent down, and with the edge of her own garment began to rub off the blobs of mud with which my skirt was generously bespattered,—making them, I realised, rather messier in the process. I strove to deter the good lady's efforts, pointing out that the stains could be easily removed when dry; for by this time quite a crowd had collected round us, loudly sympathising with me, and remonstrating even louder among themselves when one impeded another's view of my misfortune.

"Oh, the poor gyerrdle!"

"Oh, it's a shayum, so it is! Them Tans is the blackguards! . . . Don't be scroogin' me, yeou!"

"*Who's* scroogin' ye? . . . Oh, the lovely lady, God help her!"

"How long, O Lord, how long?" wailed a full, rich voice, the voice of an old man with the face of a seer, a well-known character of the Rathmines Road.

"Is she kilt? Is she kilt?" came a shrill cry; then shriller: "Arrah, will ye mind the baby with yer shovin'!"

Solicitous voices, not altogether disinterested, from the back, here sounded a chorus of: "Stand back ou' o' that! Give the lady air." (Indignant murmurs in reply from the front.)

"Galong out o' this now!" shouted my rescuer at the crowd in general. "Let the lady be goin' home. She'll be wantin' her tea, poor lamb."

General murmurs of sympathy.

"Them Tans," said a man who had been leaning up against the wall of a public house and had not stirred therefrom all this while, "them Tans," he said, taking his pipe from his mouth and spitting oracularly on the pavement, "will be the death of someone yet."

Which, considering the Tans had been the death of some dozen of persons per day for the past few months, was distinctly good.

My Anglophile rapture thus suddenly cut off, I hurried home to my lodgings in Rathgar. I found that I was trembling somewhat; but perhaps this was due to the cold; for cold it was, though the month was April. A burst of shooting in the direction of Camden Street seemed to cause no concern to the crowds of busy shoppers, so accustomed had our people grown to it; but it gave me hope that the lorry that had so nearly destroyed me had fallen into an ambush. A gust of hail whipped me in the face as I turned the corner of the road. Another lorry crashed past. Then came a newsboy running and bawling "Stop Press!" at the top of his voice, while his placard screamed "Fierce battle in Clare!"

We lived in stirring times. . . .

As I hurried along the Rathgar Road the gate of a house not far away opened, and a man came out whom I recognised at once as Mr. Oliver Carney, the playwright and novelist. He recognised me simultaneously, and rather nervously pronounced my name.

"Hello," I said.

"Lucky I met you," said Mr. Carney. "I was just

going up to see you. I . . .'' he gave an embarrassed cough—'' I wanted to see you on business.''

I looked at him inquiringly. He was a smallish man with a big dome of a forehead and a tumbled mass of black hair, very shy in manner except when too absent-minded to be self-conscious. He occupied two rooms at the top of the house he had emerged from. He was a real artist, and therefore miserably poor; and by a seemingly inevitable rule he had married a beautiful and charming girl who was absolutely penniless. Moreover, as they were barely able to maintain themselves above the verge of starvation, Nature had endowed them with five lusty children so as to bring them frequently below it; and showed no intention of limiting her benevolence in the future. A queer world, isn't it? For you may be sure that if Mr. Carney had had an income of ten thousand a year he would have married a wife with as much more; and their one child—supposing they had one—would have pined miserably for companions.

Mr. Carney had no employer, unless you can call the Public an employer: and a wicked, blood-sucking employer it is, too. Take a look at Mr. Carney's pay-sheet, and judge for yourself. Here it is, as estimated by me for a period of a year:—

By Fine Art	Nil.
By Pot-boilers	£93 0 0
By coaching one blockhead for Trinity Entrance . . .	10 10 0
Total	£103 10 0

As Mr. Carney worked about eight hours a day for at least three hundred days of the year, this averages out at rather less than a shilling an hour. When I add that this income would be more than doubled if he were not consistently defrauded of the acting fees on

many of his most popular pot-boiling farces, you will agree with me that Mr. Carney's employer (a good Catholic, by the way, who never misses Sunday's Mass and Friday's abstinence) is not at all defamed by the adjectives applied to him above. Indeed, he is let down too lightly; for the fellow is also a hypocrite, professing always an abiding love and admiration for Carney and his fraternity, and pluming himself no end on the strength of it.

But this hundred pounds odd does not quite mark the end of the Carneys' resources. Mrs. Carney had some talent with the pencil and brush, and an occasional sketch or a design for a Christmas card could be counted on to bring in another ten or twelve pounds. But, needless to say, the birth and management of children left her with less and less time for this; so that, by another beautiful arrangement of Nature or Society, the larger the family grew, the smaller grew its means of subsistence, while Mrs. Carney's talent went waste for lack of the leisure abundantly granted to women who didn't know what to do with it.

Such being their resources, how did the Carneys live? There is a general impression among respectable folk (of whom, I suppose, you consider yourself one) that artists are a happy-go-lucky tribe, with a special faculty for living on credit. Even if this were true I cannot find it in my heart to blame them. If an artist feels that his work is of supreme importance to Society (and Society itself fulsomely declares that it is); and if Society, while exploiting him to the full and defrauding him whenever it can, offers him a wage that an unskilled labourer would turn up his nose at; surely he is entitled to help himself to what he can at the public expense. But as a matter of fact the impression, like all general impressions, is false; and in the case of the Carneys particularly so. Both of them had a horror of debt that would have done credit to the most

conventional and strait-laced Philistine that ever saved up for an annuity and funeral expenses. But they had an equal horror of pinching and scraping,—having all the artists' carelessness about money and ignorance of its value.

So what they did was this. When money came in they paid their rent and fared handsomely so long as it lasted; and when they were reduced to their last pound they eked it out on porridge and potatoes until the next cheque came in. No bad way of doing it either, to my thinking; for instead of living in a state of chronic misery and semi-starvation, they enjoyed a stimulating alternation of seasons; so that—as the Winter is made tolerable by the prospect of Spring—when they were not in a condition of being actually well-fed and happy, they could at least look forward to a time when they would be, and reflect that as the porridge ran thinner that time inevitably came nearer.

All the same it hurts me to contemplate Mr. Carney's lot. Picture him sitting at a table heaped with sewing and children's toys, which he has pushed to one side to find room for his manuscript, while, amid the noise of household work and screaming children he seeks the pregnant word or strives to put form to the elusive thought. How many of them, I wonder, have been lost in the confusion? Some day a proud country will rank Mr. Carney's plays among its most treasured possessions: meanwhile it will not even grant him the leisure to write them. . . .

But in my moralising humour I have kept the playwright standing all this time in the cold.

"Well," said I, "what can I do for you?"

"I want to borrow some money," he said, pronouncing the words as if he were forcing them out. Then incontinently he blushed with shame.

"Well, why not?" I said, feeling sorry for him, and knowing that both the effort and the necessity must have been enormous to compel him to such a step.

"I've plenty and to spare," I added. "How much do you want?"

"Fourpence halfpenny," he said.

I laughed, and said it wouldn't break me; and then he stammered forth confused explanations. It appeared that the last penny of the last pound was spent, and nothing was due to come in for a week or more.

"And I've got this piece of rubbish to post," he said, holding up a long and bulky envelope. "I sat up all night finishing the damn thing when my head was positively buzzing with a great passage of my play. And now I haven't a penny to buy a stamp."

"Well, you shall have it," I said. "But—you're not short of food, I hope."

"Oh, Lord, no," said Mr. Carney, just a little too convincingly, I thought.

"Is Beatrice in?" I asked.

Yes. She was.

"Well," said I, "I'll just run up for a minute. I've got a few cakes and biscuits for Flann."

This was the only way by which, with any delicacy, I could smuggle food into that unfortunate family: Flann, aged two, was my godson.

"You're awfully good," said Mr. Carney, reddening again. "Well, I'm off," and he hurried down the street towards the nearest pillar-box. I had given him some stamps out of my bag, which I think was very tactful: the clink of money, as it passes from hand to hand, has such a humiliating sound.

I went into the house and hurried upstairs. The usual sounds of squalling and shouting came from the Carneys' room. When I opened the door I saw Mrs. Carney bathing the baby before the miserable fire given out by a cardboard box and some brown paper; Six-years-old lying on her tummy engrossed in a book; Four-years-old and Three-years-old quarrelling over the possession of a headless wooden horse; Two-years-old howling all by himself in a corner. Mrs. Carney paid

no attention whatever to this pandemonium; time had made her philosophical, or custom had dulled her senses, so that she scarcely heard it,—the baby, too, was yelling for all he was worth. She looked up with a smile of welcome when I entered.

She was still a pretty woman: but the curls had gone from her nut-brown hair and the bloom from her soft young cheek. Her eyes wore a perpetually tired expression; so did her mouth; and she had wrinkles that prosperity would have kept at bay twenty years longer. Her whole air said plainly that she had shouldered a burden too heavy for her, but had made up her mind to carry it to the end.

"Oh, Anastasia, you're a godsend!" she cried. "For heaven's sake, do something for Flann. He's howling himself sick because I won't give him the bread-knife to play with."

But Flann had already stopped weeping at the sight of me, and it wasn't hard to guess that the bread-knife was not the sole source of his woe. A swift association of ideas magically transformed his expression of grief and rage to a seraphic smile of sensuous beatitude as he joyfully shouted: "Bickens!"

Olivia had already left her book—Hans Andersen, a gift from myself on a recent birthday—crying: "Oh, Auntie Stasia, the Little Mermaid is lovely! I do wish I was a mermaid." Naoise and Imogen had abandoned their fight for the horse, and came clutching at my skirts with grubby little hands. (They were well-brought-up youngsters, but they must have been on the porridge diet rather longer than usual.)

"Don't be so rude, Neeshy!" warned Olivia.

I held out the paper bag. . . .

Have you ever seen a monkey at the Zoo grabbing a nut? That was how the children seized upon the cakes.

CHAPTER VI

APARTMENTS

HAVING left the Carneys I set off again for home. I turned in at the old familiar gate, with its unpolished brass plate proclaiming MRS. BUCK'S BOARDING HOUSE. I had been lodging there for years, and had not yet made up my mind to quit it, though now well able to have that house of my own for which I had so long yearned. I rapped with the knocker, for the bell was broken, and the lock out of order so that I could not use my latch-key. (It had been out of order for more than a year, and Mrs. Buck was always going to have it put right, but somehow always managed to forget.)

Mrs. Buck herself, in the usual white silk blouse stretched tight over her ample bosom, with her usual smile on her good-natured face, and with comfort radiating as usual from her comfortable figure, opened the door with the usual remark.

"Tch-tch-tch! I *must* get that old lock seen to. I've been up and down a dozen times this mortal day, so I have. Come in, Miss Rudd. Ye must be famished with the cold. Will ye have an egg to yer tea?" Then, as I signified assent, she called out over her shoulder: "Maggie! Is the kettle boiling?"

"Bilin' its brains out, ma'am," came Maggie's voice from the nether regions.

"Well, ye can wet the tea, then," said Mrs. Buck, "and put down an egg for Miss Rudd."

"Right you are, ma'am," sang out Maggie.

Mrs. Buck had been so intent on the expression of her feelings of solicitude, and the issue of the orders consequent thereon, that she had kept me all this time standing on the door-step. She now stood aside, and I entered the hall—for such was the name grandiloquently bestowed on the room,—apartment,—no: passage is the

word, in which I stood. Doubtless you have seen hundreds like it: draughty, gloomy, with an atmosphere redolent of oil-cloth, tobacco, and kitchen-odours, with an elusive suggestion of cat. In one wall were two doors; the first belonging to Mrs. Buck's private sitting-room, the other to the general dining-room. Between the doors hung a large oil-painting—yes: an oil-painting, and in a gilt frame, too. Mrs. Buck had bought it many years ago at an auction in Grafton Street, a marvellous function, where the artist painted picture after picture, half a dozen to the hour, in full view of the bidders, while his partner, the auctioneer, put them up and knocked them down even faster. And not so bad they looked either, as they came fresh from the artist's brush, with the paint still wet, and viewed from a distance. I myself had stood and watched the business in full swing one idle afternoon. It was a treat to see that charlatan's brush race over the canvas, calling into being skies, clouds, seas, mountains, with incredible speed and sureness; to watch the lightning dashes of the smaller brush, and see trees sprouting, rivers flowing, cataracts foaming from its tip; to mark with what accuracy he filled up an unaccountable blank in his greenery with the hint of a cottage in chinese white. He painted nothing but landscapes: but what a number of landscapes he kept in his head; all different, too, though he had a weakness for waterfalls divided into two foaming branches by a spray-drenched rock; his sign-manual, as it were, by which I could tell his work anywhere. But the auctioneer was a greater prodigy still. He was an American (so, I think, was the artist, but I did not hear him speak); and he had the most persuasive tongue I have ever listened to: I believe he could have sold pictures of the Pope in Portadown. I was witness to one singular triumph of his eloquence. Throughout a long afternoon he had been selling and selling those terrible daubs at the most astonishing prices, until the

pockets of his audience must have been pretty well drained. The inevitable slump followed; and after several pictures had gone for next to nothing he roused himself to a supreme effort of oratory. He spoke first about Art—very feelingly: of Art whose function was to educate, elevate, enliven, and enrich our minds; of Art without which civilisation was but a barren waste; of Art that could be installed in the home at prices ranging from half-a-crown to a few pounds. All to no purpose. The bidding for the picture in question—a sylvan scene measuring six feet in breadth and two in height, which he called "a piahno picture"—remained obstinately at eleven shillings. At that he changed his tone: he talked, more feelingly than ever, of the pecuniary side of Art. He told us that many a young artist who in his struggling days had sold a picture for a few guineas had lived to see it change hands for thousands. Why shouldn't one of us turn out one day to have made so fortunate an investment?

"Here's your opportoonity," he said, "and it's opportoonity makes the millionaire. How did men like Rockfeller and Carnegie and Pierpont Morgan make their fortunes? Why, by seizing their opportoonities. None o' those men will ever have to work for anyone any more. They're bossin' the show to-day because they knoo how to take advantage of their opportoonities. Do you think that if Rockfeller stood in any of your shoes here to-day he'd miss this opportoonity? Not he. If he'd only a dollar in his pocket he'd put it into one of this great and unique artist's picters. That's the way to get on: take advantage of your opportoonities."

The bidding advanced a few shillings.

"Come, now," said the auctioneer, "is there any guy here who doesn't want to have an easy life? Anyone who's tired of working for other people and wants to be his own boss? Put your money into this great and unique picter, and I give you my solemn word of honour it'll be worth ten times as much in a few years."

The bidding crept up to nineteen shillings.

"Anyone say pound? Anyone say pound?"

Silence. The auctioneer leant over the bar and addressed us in a tone of paternal admonishment. He waxed even more eloquent than before on the disadvantages of work, the advantages of riches and of being a boss, and the absolute necessity of seizing one's opportoonities. Through all this there stood close to me, listening with bated breath and credulous goggling eyes, a singularly dirty little working man; who, earlier in the day had purchased two small pictures at eighteen pence each, and now held them clasped under his arm. It was obvious that all this talk about wealth and opportunities was affecting him very strongly; he had bid for this picture in the early stages, but not since the price had passed seven shillings. Now, as often as the word Opportoonities fell from the auctioneer's lips, a sad look would come into his eyes on his realising the impossibility of seizing one; then, at the recurrent phrase: "You'll never have to work for anyone any more," a look of dogged determination would take its place. His body swayed with indecision.

"Seize your opportoonity!" cried the auctioneer. "One more shilling, and this unique and magnificent piahno picter is knocked down to the bidder." He looked full at my unkempt neighbour (I have never seen a crueller deed), and asked: "Who wants never to work for nobody any more?"

An incoherent gurgle from my neighbour. The little toiler was so overwrought that he could scarcely speak. But at last he threw up a sombre hand, rising on tiptoe in his excitement, and managed to gasp out:

"Fling it here! . . . Pound!"

When the attendant came to him for payment he took from his pocket a tin box that had once held throat pastilles. Within lay a sovereign and two shillings, evidently his week's wages (it was a Saturday). He fumbled for the sovereign with grimy fingers that

trembled . . . I think the reaction had set in. I saw him later, with the small pictures tucked under one arm and the piano picture under the other, waiting in the rain for a tram: a miserable spectacle.

I wonder what his wife said when he came home . . .

But I was describing Mrs. Buck's hall. There, between the two doors hung one of those unique pictures, its pasteboard foundation warped and gaping from the tarnished frame, its foaming cataracts yellowing, and all its bright colours shadowed with time and dust. The opposite wall was bare; but against it stood a table littered with a gong, a couple of clothes-brushes, and some meaningless odds and ends. Beside it stood a hat-rack, bearing the seedy felt hat of Mr. Sitric; the respectable velour of Mrs. Buck's son, Peter; and a smart new bowler evidently belonging to a visitor. On the back of the hall-door hung a horse-shoe and a Sacred Heart badge: emblematical of Mrs. Buck's two beliefs—in Luck, and in those superstitious devices by which our practical Mother Church lowers her mystic dignity to the comprehension of her humbler children.

Mrs. Buck, after closing the door, turned to me confidentially and said:

"Come in here: I want to show ye something."

She drew me into the dining-room, where the table was already laid for tea, and leading me to the folding-doors that separated it from her private sitting-room, whispered: "Put yer eye there," indicating a hole in one of the panels where a knot had fallen out of the wood. "Don't make a noise," she added.

The warning was not unnecessary, for the scene that presented itself to my eye when I did her bidding was sufficiently surprising. On a chair drawn close to the fire sat a young man. On his knees sat a girl whom I recognised as Mrs. Buck's daughter Vi'let. The young man's arms encircled the girl in one vast comprehensive hug; her head reposed on his shoulder; and her eyes looked up affectionately into his, which returned their

gaze no less fondly. I heard him murmur something over her: "Me heart's delight! Me lovely Treasure," if I caught the words correctly.

"Isn't it lovely!" whispered Mrs. Buck at my ear. "I've been sitting here for the last half-hour watching them. Me and Buck (R.I.P.) used to carry on just the same."

I didn't know what to say or do, so I just sat down in the nearest chair. Mrs. Buck turned away from the folding-doors, and stood over me with hands interlocked upon her capacious abdomen while she delivered, in that comfortable sing-song voice of hers, punctuated by little confidential smiles, the following disquisition:—

"Of course it's all nonsense, I suppose. But if we didn't believe in it at the time, sure no one 'd get married, and then how would the world go on! Ah! God be with the good old times. I remember when Buck was courtin' me I used to think him a regular Ivanhoe—ye know, in them little pink books: Books for the Bairns they call them: splendid value for a penny: I used to get them for Vi'let, and sometimes when I'd nothing else to do—when the children were in bed and the darning all done—ye know what I mean—I'd pick up one meself an' read a bit. Ivanhoe was a character in one o' them—Oh, a lovely young man, one o' them knights, ye know. I used to think Buck was just like him. But of course" (a worldly smile here) "I wasn't long finding out he was just an ordinary husband like anyone else's. Not that I'd say anything against him, ye know, for he was a most respectable young man and nearly always sober: member of the St. Alphonsus Sodality, too—Oh, a very good young man, as men go. But of course no great shakes of a marvel—ye know what I mean. We hadn't been married six weeks when one morning he forget to kiss me going to his work. 'Buck!' says I—I was full up o' romantic notions those days—'Buck,' I says, 'that's a milestone in matrimonial life.' Not long after, he

told me to shut me mouth when I contradicted him a bit. I still had me romantic notions. 'Buck,' says I. 'Another milestone! Another landslide!' And so it went on: milestone after milestone; landslide after landslide. But, God rest him, he was a good husband. And now," here she took a fond squint through the peephole, "there's Vi'let beginning the whole thing afresh. It's a queer world."

Mrs. Buck shook her head philosophically; and I, for lack of anything better to say, remarked:

"The young man is her *fiancé,* I suppose?"

"Her third," said Mrs. Buck proudly. "Ah, yes, Vi'let has been much admired. Her first young man—well, the less said about him the better. I never did approve of that young man. Rudolf Rudd he was called—no connection of yours, Miss Rudd, I'm sure, for he was a blackguard. There was a look in his eye that I never could abide—sneering like, and a bit uppish—ye know what I mean; and many a Mass he missed of a Sunda'. I often used to say to Vi'let: 'Mark my words, Vi'let, that man's a deceiver,' but she wouldn't listen to me. But I was right, as ye'll see. One day, when I thought things had been hangin' on long enough—too long in fact—I says to him: 'Mr. Rudd,' says I, 'or Rudolf—which is it to be?' says I. 'As you please,' says he. 'Well, Rudolf,' says I, 'what are your intentions?' 'Honourable, ma'am,' says he, with a nasty kind of smile he had. 'Well,' says I, 'isn't it about time ye got fixing a date?' says I. 'Oh, they're not so honourable as all that,' says he; and next day Vi'let came and told me it was all over between them. She was heartbroken. I thought she'd cry her eyes out, so I took her to the pictures and she forgot about it in the end.

"After that there was Mr. Hallibut. He was a banker; a *most* respectable young man; with thirty-two shillings a week—and expectations. He was a bit consumptive, too, but most genteel—always wore a navy

blue soote of a Sunda'. Well, it was goin' on a long time—seven year almost—and the expectations didn't come to much. Forty shillings was all he was getting, and the war sendin' the prices up. So at last I said to Vi'let: 'Vi'let,' says I, 'ye're wastin' yer time. That young fellow will never marry. Ye'd better break it off while ye're still young.' 'But, ma,' says she, 'he has expectations.' 'Ah,' says I, 'ye can't live on expectations.' Very sensible, I think, wasn't it: for Vi'let's gettin' on, ye know. Yes. Twenty-nine nex' June.''

'' And does the present young man meet with your approval?'' I asked.

'' Well, he does and he doesn't. He's a most respectable young man in himself, ye know: but then he's in trade. Slapjuice his name is: son of the butcher, but they don't live over the shop. I always tried to keep Vi'let from knowing business people ever since poor Buck (R.I.P.) said to me on what ye might say was his death-bed: 'Tricksie,' he said—he used to call me Tricksie when we were courtin', and the old name came back now as natural as natural—'Tricksie,' he said, 'don't let Vi'let forget that she's a Buck. We're not a distinguished family,' says he, 'nor a rich family,' says he, 'but our worst enemy would always say we were genteel. We always had a good name in Rathgar,' says he, 'so never let Vi'let forget she's a Buck.' He always had a horror of business people, and so have I, but then of course the war has brought a change in the times, and the greatest in the land has taken to trade. There's a very high up doctor's lady—of Fitzwilliam Square, mind ye—that has a business establishment in town, but then she only goes in for genteel things. I always think it's quite respectable to keep a shop so long as the things ye sell aren't any *use*—ye know what I mean. And then of course there's her husband to fall back on: a fashionable doctor, and very clever at his work they do say. He cured an ingrowing toe-nail for

Vi'let and never charged her a penny. And when she was goin' out the door, he said: 'Give up tight boots,' says he, and shook hands with her. Very simple, I thought. Tight boots are the ruination of the young girls of to-day. Vi'let seen this pair in that shop where all the sales are—I never *can* remember names—ye know where I mean—in Merrion Row. It was marked 'distinctive style,' and I needn't tell ye Vi'let is all for style. She bought them then and there, and that was how she got the ingrowing toe-nail, but she's all right now.

"I wonder how they're gettin' on," concluded Mrs. Buck; and took another maternal peep through her spy-hole. "It's lovely to watch them," she said, returning to me. "Love's Young Dream, Buck used to call it. Ah, well, let them dream while they can: it won't be for long: the landslides 'll come at last. . . . Did ye hear what they called each other? 'Me treasure,' says he, and 'me king,' says she; and there they are, thinking the sun, moon and stars shines out of each other's eyes, and she only me daughter Vi'let—a good girl, Miss Rudd, but no treasure—and he only Freddie Slapjuice, son of the butcher." Again that philosophic shake of the head. "But what matter? They'll find each other out soon enough. After all, the less a girl knows, especially about men, the better. I don't believe in letting a young girl know anything until it's too late. It saves worry and fuss."

At this point Maggie entered with the tea-tray, and I told Mrs. Buck I must run upstairs and take off my things.

"By the way," I added, suddenly remembering something, "have you given Mr. Kinsella his notice yet?"

"Well, no," said Mrs. Buck. "It's very hard to do it, you know, and he so nice and good-natured other ways. He'd want a reason, ye know."

"Isn't drunkenness a sufficient reason?" said I.

"If ye knew men as well as I do," said Mrs. Buck, "ye wouldn't be so hard on a man for taking a drop or two. If I was to refuse every man that took a drop or two I might go to the Union."

"Well," said I, "it looks as if I'll have to go instead."

"Oh, I hope not, Miss Rudd. . . . Perhaps if he'd give us a reason now . . ."

CHAPTER VII

A CUP OF TEA

I WENT upstairs rather perturbed in mind. In the first place, the end of our conversation left me none too pleased with Mrs. Buck. The person referred to as Mr. Kinsella was a broken-down newspaper reporter, who had been lodging at the house for some months. Nobody liked him. He was dirty and slovenly in his dress and habits; an intolerable bore; and a drinker. There are many ways of drinking; and his was one of the worst. He was never quite sober, and never quite drunk, except on Saturdays, when he would lock himself into his room early in the evening and drink himself into a state of coma; from which he would emerge in a maundering condition on Monday morning. During the rest of the week he appears to have been content with tippling at stray public houses, which reduced him by tea-time either to a garrulous or a blethering condition. In the first mood he would reel off interminable stories until everyone else had left the table; in the second he would sit weeping quietly on to his waistcoat, and finally fall asleep with his face in his plate. Everyone wanted to be rid of him, but Mrs. Buck, having a soft heart, could not bring herself to give him notice until he should give her "something definite to *go* on, like."

"Either he goes or I go—that's what I'll say to her this very night," said I to myself as I entered my room. (But I am not good at putting resolutions like this to the test of action.)

I occupied a nice airy room in the return, with two good-sized windows facing north-east. It was furnished in the usual lodging-house way, with the usual indeterminate carpet, the usual black-and-brass double bed, the usual uninviting armchair, the usual "bedroom suite," and the usual plush-covered mantelpiece. Amongst such surroundings my few art treasures looked incongruous and rather uncomfortable. Some hideous "religious" oleographs had (in face of Mrs. Buck's horrified protest) been replaced by a little landscape in a chipped frame (which I had picked up cheap on the Quays, and which I liked to imagine a Corot), two of Estella Solomon's etchings of Dublin streets, and one of Jack Yeats' West of Ireland sketches. Then on the mantelpiece, which I had stripped of its load of china animals and Buck photographs, stood two little plaster casts: one of that little Greek Boy extracting a Thorn; the other of the Nike of Paeonius—she who once stood exultant in her wind-blown draperies over liberated Messenia.

Well do I remember the dismay of Mrs. Buck when those two figures first caught her attention.

"I wonder ye'd be having things like that around ye, Miss Rudd," said she, glancing at them with a half-averted eye. "I don't think they're quite nice, ye know. That boy—well, ye wouldn't so much mind a small boy, especially as he's sittin' down. But that other! Well, there's no excuse for her. If she was wearing a skirt at-all she might as well have put on a petticoat underneath. . . .

"She's a goddess, I suppose," said Mrs. Buck meditatively. "Well, them ignorant Romans did worship some queer ones. . . .

"If ye wouldn't mind, Miss Rudd," she concluded,

" maybe ye could put the goddess away behind something . . . and perhaps ye might tie a bit of calico or crinkly paper around the boy—for a bathing-drawers, like. . . . It's not for meself I mind, but I'm responsible for the girl. She might be getting immodest thoughts into her head, don't ye know. . . ."

As I took off my hat another part of Mrs. Buck's recent conversation recurred to me. Rudolf! . . . For of course it was my Rudolf: the episode, the very words he used—were characteristic. Many similar affairs had come to light before, but that was the first I had heard of this one. " Young ass!" I said to myself, and wondered what he had seen in Vi'let. . . . What could *anyone* see in Vi'let?

There was no time to solve that enigma, so rapidly tidying my hair, I hurried downstairs. I was late for tea; but when I reached the dining-room I found it had been kept waiting for others who were later. There stood the tea-pot under its cosy; there stood the partly-sliced loaf, the two plates of rolled butter, and the two dishes of gooseberry jam; there stood the inevitable apple-cake, with a jug of cream beside it (in honour of Mr. Slapjuice, I surmised); and there lay my nicely-poached egg cooling on its round of buttered toast. But there was no one in the room except Mr. Colgan, a respectable young fellow living on the top floor, who looked up from his evening paper with a civil, though perfunctory " Good evening, Miss Rudd," and straightway became immersed in it again.

Mrs. Buck's dining-room was a cheerless apartment with a lace-curtained window looking out on the back yard and garden (by which is meant an area of sixteen feet by eighteen, paved with flags, and a slightly larger one, sparingly grassy, in which grew a lilac-bush, some jessamine, and a clothes-line). The table, which was a very large one for the size of the room, occupied nearly all the floor space; but there was room for a clumsy and ornate sideboard against the wall through

which the door opened. The folding-doors, painted a dull green to harmonise with the papering, made up the bulk of the wall facing the window. The fireplace, with its many-mirrored overmantel, and its plush-bordered mantelpiece loaded with china ornaments and photographs in velvet and brassy frames, occupied the remaining wall; on which hung another of that lightning-artist's pictures, and two portraits, painted from photographs, of Mrs. Buck and her lamented husband. The original photographs had been taken shortly after their marriage. Mrs. Buck was represented as a smoothly simple-faced girl of twenty, differing very little, save for the broadening and wrinkling caused by time, from the buxom matron who in all the intervening years had learnt nothing and forgotten a great deal. The companion picture was of a man of something over forty with close-cut wiry mouse-coloured hair, a pair of fishy, protruding eyes, a half-open mouth, and a face singularly devoid of expression: a hint perhaps of self-satisfaction; a suggestion of adenoidal obstruction—that was all one could deduce from the portrait of Mr. Buck. His lady, however, had filled in many details during the course of a long acquaintance.

"Very genteel he was in his ways and habits," said Mrs. Buck. "He had a very weak digestion and a bad heart, and no wonder, for reel high-up people are always a bit delicate like—ye know what I mean? Buck was reel aristocratic,—he never could abide the smell of onions. Whenever I had steak and onions for the gentlemen boarders he used to go and have his dinner out. . . .

"Proud he was, too, and always insisted on living like the best. Had his dinner every day at three, same as professional people; and pork chops of a Sunda' to make it different from the rest of the week. . . . Ah, yes! His pride was the ruin of him in the end. He used to be a clerk in the counting-house at Switzer's,

ye know. Very nice position, and very good pay. Well, one day the manager came to him and told him he wasn't good enough at figures and he'd have to go into the ribbons. I needn't tell ye that was too much for Buck. 'Ye'll see me in hell first,' says he,—them were his very words. Not that he was given to swearing, but there are times when a man can't help himself,—ye know what I mean. Well, he left, and never another position did he get. The figures was always against him and he wouldn't stoop to go behind a counter. Unfair I call it, don't you? After all, if a man is genteel ye can't expect him to be good at figures: the two things don't go together—ye know what I mean. . . .

"Yes. From that on he used to sit in the parlour there with his feet on the mantelpiece, doing nothing, just like a gentleman. . . ."

It will be observed that thenceforward Mrs. Buck bore the burden of supporting and educating the family on her unaided shoulders. Yet she had no word of blame for Buck; and I think she rather pitied the Dublin drapers.

My entry was succeeded by that of Mrs. Buck's son, Peter, a youth of twenty-two, somewhat under five feet in height, with a prodigious squint, and a kind of carbuncle cocked perkily askew near the tip of his nose. He was apprenticed to a chemist, the one trade which his mother, in consideration of its close association with the professions, did not deem derogatory to the blood of a Buck. Close on his heels came another lodger, Mr. O'Farrell, a smart young civil servant with an unhealthy complexion and a set of monstrously ill-fitting false teeth. And here I may mention that in all that household there was no one but myself and Mr. Sitric who retained his complete endowment of

Nature's ivories; and that the substitutes they wore were all the clumsy, inartistic work of quacks: which I think they were as incapable of distinguishing from good work as they were of seeing any difference between the respective makers. I wonder why it is that people, otherwise clean, will allow their teeth to rot in their mouths, apparently without experiencing the faintest sensation of disgust.

Scarcely a minute behind Mr. O'Farrell came Mrs. Buck with the two lovers, both very flushed and rather touselled. Vi'let was a well-made young woman with dark hair, a youthful complexion, and a pretty mouth spoilt by one of the makeshifts referred to above: altogether a more refined type than her mother, which may have been due to the blood of the Bucks or else to a better education. Her lover was an even smarter and cheaper young man than Mr. Colgan and Mr. O'Farrell: he went to the extremity of spats, a waistcoat slip, and a piece of maiden-hair in his buttonhole.

"Are we all here?" asked Mrs. Buck.

"All but Kinsella," replied Peter.

"Oh, well, we're not going to wait for *him*," said Mrs. Buck. "He's never in time. . . . Come in, Mr. Slapjuice—Freddie, I mean" (with a little laugh). "I don't believe I'll ever get used to it—come on, now, don't be shy. Miss Rudd: Mr. Slapjuice, me future son-in-law."

"Pleased t' meet you, Miss Rudd," said Mr. Slapjuice with a bow.

"Mr. Colgan and Mr. O'Farrell," Mrs. Buck continued.

"Pleased to meet you, gentlemen," said Mr. Slapjuice, in reply to which those gentlemen expressed reciprocal sentiments.

"Draw up your chairs, now," said Mrs. Buck hospitably. "I'm sure you're all as hungry as I dunno what. I know *I* am anyhow, and I'll be glad to get something hot into me inside, for I'm as *cold* as——"

Here Mrs. Buck broke off. It was her habit to leave the completion of her similes to her hearers' imaginations, for her own never soared to anything more original than "I dunno what." How drab is modern suburban life, so to impoverish the gift of language. An ancient Greek, if we are to believe Homer, would have said she was "cold as a peak of Rhodope that Boreas blows upon with icy breath"; an ancient Gael, if the Táin deserves credence, would have been "cold as the fear that came upon Conaire when the three red horsemen rode before him to the house of Red;" even a Connemara peasant, unless Synge was romancing, would have been "cold as a bittern on the bog at the dawn o' day"; and an American, if we can trust O. Henry, would have declared herself "cold as a nigger in an ice-box." But all that Mrs. Buck was capable of was a shrug of the shoulders.

Solicitously she showed us our places.

"Here, Freddie, on me left. That's right. There's yer egg, Miss Rudd, right as the mail, I hope."

We sat down. Mrs. Buck at the head of the table; Mr. Slapjuice, Vi'let, and Mr. Colgan with their backs to the fireplace; myself, Peter, and Mr. O'Farrell facing them.

"Don't you two be afraid to sit close, now," said Mrs. Buck archly, to the lovers as she poured out tea. "Don't mind *us*. *We* won't mind."

General titter round the table.

"Ah!" said Mr. Slapjuice, cocking his eye, "we'll have lots of time for that in future. Eh, Vi'let?"

His wit evoked a hearty peal of laughter, under cover of which Mrs. Buck whispered to me:

"Isn't he awful funny? I do split me sides sometimes laughing at the things he says. You just listen now, and ye'll hear some good ones."

"Have some scream, Vi'let," said Mr. Slapjuice, passing the cream-jug to his beloved; while Mrs. Buck

gave me a wink and a jab of the elbow with a muttered: "Didn't I tell ye!"

I felt it only polite to make some sort of attempt at a smile here; but the effect must have been rather ghastly. For some moments after tea had been passed round there was silence, at any rate as far as conversation was concerned. Peter and Mr. O'Farrell were rather noisy eaters, and Mrs. Buck was a noisy drinker, so the reservation is necessary. Presently Mrs. Buck turned to me and asked was my egg to my liking.

"Very nice, thanks," I replied.

"I always think there's nothing half as nice as a nicely poached egg," said Mrs. Buck. "Poor Buck (R.I.P.) thought the same. Always had one to his breakfast every morning of his life. Never asked for a bit of bacon because his stomach was bad, but *would not* do without his egg, even to his last day. I remember that morning still. 'Not a second more than three minutes,' says he, weak like. And when I came up there he was gone to heaven, and he without his breakfast. I always regretted not being in time to give it to him. Don't ye know, I think it's uncomfortable like, dying on an empty stomach. And if it hadn't been for the milkman..." Here Mr. O'Farrell quietly passed up his cup, and Mrs. Buck wiped away a tear. I fervently hoped Mr. Buck was now laid to rest for the evening; but his resurrection would not be altogether unexpected.

"And now that I think of it," said Mrs. Buck as she filled Mr. O'Farrell's cup. "Do ye feel like an egg yerself, Freddie?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," replied Mr. Slapjuice smartly. "What does an egg feel like?"

This remark set the table in a roar.

"I declare to goodness ye'll be the death of me, Freddie," cried Mrs. Buck, rocking backwards and forwards with loud laughter. "The things ye say! They do put me in mind of Buck (R.I.P.). Very

yumerous he was, and many's the half-crown he made sending jokes to the *Independent*. I wish I could remember the half of them. Let me see now: there was one—a riddle it was. I remember now. 'What did Moses say when he saw the rain falling?' Can any of yez guess the answer? D'ye give it up?'' We all did. '' 'Hark!' '' said Mrs. Buck with a laugh.

'' Where's the joke?'' said Mr. Slapjuice, puzzled.

'' Well, you're English anyway,'' said Mrs. Buck. '' I used to die laughing when Buck told it to me.''

'' But wasn't it Noah, mother?'' interposed Vi'let.

'' Well, Noah or Moses, sure it's all the same,'' said Mrs. Buck, undaunted. '' I know it was something out of the Bible. Buck'd have you in stitches with it. . . . Will ye have an egg anyway, Freddie? There's one just laid. I hear a hen cackling in the yard this minyute.''

'' No, thanks,'' said Freddie. '' The apple-cake's what *I* like.''

'' Anything in the paper this evening?'' asked Mr. O'Farrell of Mr. Colgan.

'' Shels. beat Bohs. three to two,'' replied the latter. '' Nothing much else but politics and ambushes.''

'' Tans getting it hot, I hope,'' said Mr. O'Farrell.

'' No. Four Shins shot, I'm glad to say,'' replied Mr. Colgan.

'' You're a traitor,'' said Mr. O'Farrell hotly.

'' You're another,'' replied Mr. Colgan coldly.

'' You're . . .''

'' Now, now, now,'' interrupted Mrs. Buck. '' Now, Mr. Colgan! Now, Mr. O'Far'll! No politics, if you please. They only lead to quarrels and bad temper. Buck (R.I.P.) never could abide politics. 'Always keep yourself *to* yourself '—that was his motto. And if ye'll take my advice, Freddie, when you and Vi'let are married ye'll do the same. Stick to yer business and leave politics alone. That's the way to get on. Don't you agree with me, Miss Rudd?''

'' Yes,'' said I. '' That's the way to get on,'' though

indeed neither Mr. O'Farrell nor Mr. Colgan nor Mr. Slapjuice was likely to suffer much impediment to their progress from politics, the support they gave to their respective parties being purely verbal.

"Meddling in politics is all foolishness," pursued Mrs. Buck. "What with getting put in prison and going on the run and getting yer name up in the papers, which is a thing I don't hold with unless you're getting married or dead or a thing like that—ye know what I mean. There's Mr. Carney that lodges with Mrs. Hurley down the road—always got something in the paper about his plays and his books and things, and a precious lot of good he gets out of it in the end—hardly able to pay his way, so he is. And as for Mr. Sitric up above, he's even worse. Last Christmas what de ye think he did? He went interfering with a policeman for knocking a drunken woman about, and got his head broke for his pains, and on top of that he kept writing to the papers about it, with his name and address and all, so that we had the hearts put across us between policemen calling to make inquiries and the neighbours talking for all they were worth."

"Sitric's an ass," proclaimed Mr. Colgan.

"If I'd been that policeman," said Mr. Slapjuice, with an eye for Vi'let's approval, "I'd have stuffed the fellow's teeth down his throat to teach him to mind his own business.

"I think Sitric was right," began Mr. O'Farrell.

"Rot!" cut in Mr. Slapjuice. "What call had he to put his oar in where he wasn't wanted?"

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Colgan.

I couldn't stand much more of this.

"You're a nice lot of *gentlemen*," I said; putting a special stress on the last word because it was a title which those youths were very punctilious in applying to themselves and to one another,—the word Man in their vocabulary being relegated to those beneath the rank of shop assistants. "You're a nice lot of gentle-

men to condemn a man for defending a woman from violence."

"The creature was drunk," said Mrs. Buck.

"Sitric said so himself," added Vi'let.

"What business was it of his?" reiterated Slapjuice.

"Setting people talking about a respectable house," grumbled Mrs. Buck.

"If I ever meet that policeman," said Mr. Slapjuice, "I'll give him a dollar."

"Pff!" I ejaculated disgustedly, and could say no more.

"That fellow Citron . . ." began Mr. Slapjuice, but was cut short by a scream of laughter from Mrs. Buck. "Freddie!" she cried. "Freddie! I declare I can't eat a bit with ye! Did ye hear him, Miss Rudd? 'Citron,' says he. "Well, upon my word, that's too good. . . . *Sitric,* ye great goose!"

"Well, Skitric, or Splitric, or whatever his name is—he must be a fool."

"He is not, then," said Mrs. Buck. "He's a very clever man. He writes books and things, ye know. And he's most genteel in his ways, too—but queer, like all them clever people. He used to be very attentive to Vi'let, once on a time, but I said to her: 'Take my advice, Vi'let,' says I, 'and avoid the clever ones: they don't make good husbands.' Nor they don't. I always mistrust them. Give me a good, religious young man that doesn't bother about what don't concern him, and keeps himself *to* himself, and doesn't get his name up in the newspapers."

"Well, I like that!" said Mr. Slapjuice, huffily. "Am I to be called a fool to me face?"

"Easy now, Freddie," said Mrs. Buck mildly. "Who's calling you a fool?"

"Haven't ye just been saying that that Skittric eejit is cleverer than me?"

"There's no offence in that, Freddie," remonstrated Mrs. Buck. "You don't write books, ye know."

"I should just think not," said Freddie with infinite contempt.

The conversational storm blew over as quickly as it had arisen: it is impossible to be angry for long on a stomach stuffed with apple-cake.

"Vi'let made that apple-cake," said Mrs. Buck presently.

"I thought there was something wrong with it," said Mr. Slapjuice facetiously.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Buck; to which Vi'let, with a pout, added: "Oh, Freddie!"

"I don't think," said Freddie, to make amends.

"Buck (R.I.P.) was terrible fond of apple-cake," said Mrs. Buck. "He always liked a sweet tea, but he'd go mad for trotters of a Saturda'. Another bit, Freddie?"

"No, thanks," said Mr. Slapjuice.

"Do!" urged Mrs. Buck.

"No, thanks," said Mr. Slapjuice. "Couldn't manage it."

"Come on!" insisted Mrs. Buck, cutting a slice.

"No thanks—reelly. I'm full," said Mr. Slapjuice, pushing away his plate with a sigh of repletion.

"Ah, g'way out o' that! Gimme his plate, Vi'let."

"No—no—please," protested Mr. Slapjuice, as Vi'let seized the plate to present it to her mother.

Then began an exciting combat. Mr. Slapjuice caught the plate half way, but his inamorata would not let go. Flushed and laughing, she strove to force it towards the slice of apple-cake which Mrs. Buck held poised between knife and fork. For a moment the battle hung undecided, Mrs. Buck hovering over it like an eagle. Then Mr. Slapjuice effected a diversion by tickling his sweetheart under the arm, whereat she gave a shriek and relinquished the plate, which the victor pulled back into safety. Suddenly excited to rashness, Mrs. Buck made a desperate throw with the apple-cake, missed the mark, and sent it over the edge of the table on to the floor.

"Whoop!" cried Mr. Slapjuice, and dived quickly to retrieve it.

Crash! His sleeve, catching in his saucer, brought it and his cup down on top of him. Guttural noises. For a moment his chair hung in the balance, too; but Vi'let steadied it, and next minute he came into view again with a rueful countenance and his collar and tie and waistcoat soaked with tea. Even in that pitiable plight his wit did not forsake him.

"This is what they call a tea-fight, I suppose," he said.

When the laughter caused by this sally was over he was rushed upstairs by Peter, to return in a few minutes' time freshly fitted out from that gentlemen's wardrobe.

"I wish ye could have seen yourself with the tea all over ye," said Mrs. Buck. "Laugh! I thought I'd burst," and she began to laugh again with such vigour that I began to be afraid she might do it yet.

"Will you pass me the jam, please," I said to Mr. Slapjuice when things were quieter.

"I beg your puddings?" said Mr. Slapjuice.

"Oh, that does remind me of Buck!" cried Mrs. Buck with renewed laughter. 'Beg your parsnips,' he used to say. 'Beg your parsnips: I've stood on your tomatoes'—meaning your *toes,* ye know. Buck was reel funny, but always the gentleman—ye know what I mean—never a bit vulgar. He liked to have his little joke, but he knew where to stop. I've got three pen-knives upstairs that he got for jokes he had printed in *Ireland's Own.* . . . Pass Miss Rudd the jam, Freddie, and when you're done I'll have a bit—'scuse me," she broke off, clapping her hand to her mouth. Everyone at once affected elaborate unconcern. Vi'let flushed and looked down at her plate; Mr. Slapjuice coughed and looked up at the ceiling; all managed to pass the thing off somehow except Mr. Colgan, who, in trying to look out of the window, caught my eye, became confused, and

incontinently began a volcanic struggle with some obstruction in his throat. "—a bit meself," went on Mrs. Buck placidly.

"Changeable weather, isn't it, Miss Rudd," observed Mr. Slapjuice, passing me the jam.

"Them onions do repeat," whispered Mrs. Buck to her daughter.

"Very," said I.

"You ought to give them up," said Vi'let, *sotto voce*. Then aloud: "That's a queer-looking bird on the garden wall."

"That's a magpie," said Mr. Slapjuice.

"A magpie!" cried Mrs. Buck, aghast. "Gracious goodness, child, don't be lookin' at it—on this day of all others."

"Why not?" asked Vi'let.

"They do say it's dreadful unlucky. Will ye stop looking at it when I tell ye, child! But I suppose it's too late now: the harm's done. . . . No. I tell ye what. Stand up at the winda' there and wait till ye see another. That'll make it all right. Better still, wait for three: that means a weddin'."

"D'ye want me to be standing there all day, mother?" said Vi'let in an aggrieved tone.

"Just you do as I bid ye, me dear," said Mrs. Buck, "or ye'll have no luck in your engagement."

"I'll wait for two and no more," said Vi'let, reluctantly complying.

"That's right, now," said Mrs. Buck. "Keep a good look out. . . . Put the saucer over her cup, Freddie. I don't hold with superstitions as a rule, Miss Rudd, except Magpies and salt., and I have the proof of them two. There was me own ant Minnie (R.I.P.). She was out walking with her husband near Dartry one day. 'Joe,' says she, 'is that a magpie?' 'It is,' says he, 'and it's unlucky.' And that same evenin' she had an egg to her tea and Joe helped her to salt, and before the year was out she was as dead as a

doornail! I always thought it was a pity she hadn't the patience to wait for another, but Joe wanted to catch the tram. . . . But sure I suppose it was to be, or he wouldn't have helped her to the salt."

Mrs. Buck sighed and helped herself to some jam.

"There's no magpie anywhere that *I* can see," said Vi'let from the window. "I'm fed up, and me tea's getting cold."

"Have patience, me dear," said Mrs. Buck consolingly. "Sure ye wouldn't like to spoil yer engagement for a cup o' tea."

"Ah, it's all nonsense," said Vi'let. "Miss Rudd's laughing at us. There's aren't any magpies to be seen, and I don't care anyway."

She returned to her place, while Mrs. Buck shook her head in grim despair.

"These old superstitions are a bit of a cod," said Mr. Slapjuice. "Throw your salt over your shoulder and never light three cigarettes with one match, and you'll be all right."

"Pigface is extra late to-night," said Mr. O'Farrell.

"Oh, Mr. O'Far'll!" cried Mrs. Buck. "How could ye be so vulgar? He means Mr. Kinsella, Freddie: the gentleman I told you about."

"The boozer?" said Freddie.

"Yes. He'll be rare sport to-night," said Mr. O'Farrell. "He's probably got more on board than usual to be so late."

"He'll be a treat," said Mr. Colgan.

"I wish Vi'let hadn't seen that magpie," muttered Mrs. Buck.

"Wait till ye see the tears rolling into his tea-cup," said Mr. O'Farrell.

"You're very silent in yourself this evenin', Miss Rudd," said Mrs. Buck. "Are ye tired, or are y'in love?"

Laughter.

"Don't look at *me*, Miss Rudd,' said the irrepres-

sible Mr. Slapjuice. "I'm booked," and he put an arm round Vi'let's shoulders.

More laughter.

"I'm awful worried about that magpie," murmured Mrs. Buck.

Suddenly there came a knock at the hall-door.

"That'll be Pigface," said Mr. O'Farrell.

"Sh!" cautioned Mrs. Buck.

We heard the hall-door opened; a step in the hall; a fumbling at the door-handle; and next moment Mr. Kinsella entered.

He stood peering and blinking at us with a pair of very small eyes, set in a flaming red face, whose principal feature was a large and coarse nose flattened at the tip, perhaps by a blow received long ago. An awful wreck of what must once have been a fine figure of a man. He stood fully six feet in height, but his shoulders slouched, and he carried a monstrous protruding paunch. His clothes were of good quality, but much stained and rumpled; half the buttons of his waistcoat were unfastened; and through a gap between it and the top of his trousers there sagged a pouch of unclean shirt.

"Good evenin', everybody," he said.

"Good evenin', Mr. Kinsella," said Mrs. Buck. "You must be dying with the hunger. Call down to Maggie for some fresh tea."

When he had done as requested, Mr. Kinsella shut the door and went to the sideboard, from which he took a tall thin bottle of H.P. Sauce, a short plump bottle of Bovril, and a large pot of ginger. These were his private property, and he never took a meal without them. Gathering them with trembling hands to his breast, he turned towards the vacant chair at the foot of the table. At the same instant a tear which had been growing to unwieldly proportions in the corner of his left eye, suddenly overbalanced and slid down the side of his nose. He made a dash at it with his

coat sleeve, and of course dropped the bottle of Bovril in consequence. With a petulant cry like a child's he fell on his knees to look for it, and in his eagerness banged his forehead on the floor and dropped the sauce and the ginger.

The whole company shook with silent laughter.

Mr. Kinsella lay sprawling on the floor, reaching out ineffective hands at his scattered bottles. It was pathetic to see him lying there, so big and helpless. One forgot what a beast and a bore he was and wanted, in a vague way, to assist him. He got the condiments together somehow; but as he attempted to rise he knocked the back of his head against the table with a crack that made the cups dance on their saucers. There were further signs of suppressed mirth as he clapped his hands to his head with a piteous moan. He pulled himself together at length, staggered to his feet, and lurched towards his place at the table. He ranged the three bottles before his plate with meticulous exactitude, and stood for fully three minutes gazing at them with a smile of imbecile satisfaction. Then he looked at Mrs. Buck.

"Strange how I managed to slip thatime," he said. "Mus' be hole in carpet. Very dange'ous. Might have fallen." Then his eye lighted on Mr. Slapjuice. "Haven't pleasure," he said.

"My future son-in-law," said Mrs. Buck. "Mr. Slapjuice. Mr. Slapjuice: Mr. Kinsella."

"Pleased meet y', Mis' Lapjoo," said Mr. Kinsella.

"Very pleased," said Mr. Slapjuice.

"Beg par'n for not—not—notishin' before," said Mr. Kinsella. "So dark, you know." He sat down heavily.

Mrs. Buck slipped out in the gloaming, and presently we heard the click of six pennies in the slot. We all sat blinking in the electric glare.

"Mus' forgive me, Mis' Labjoo," said Mr. Kinsella. "'Tirely unintenshal, 'sure you. So dark, you know."

Mr. Slapjuice forgave him as Maggie came in with the tea.

" Wouldn't dream of 'sulting genelman by overlooking him. Mus' forgive me, Mis' Labjoo. 'Tirely untenshal. So dark, you know."

With a deep sigh Mr. Kinsella took a slice of bread and butter, and having scooped some Bovril out of the bottle with his knife, plastered it thickly on top. Then he cut the slice into three broad fingers, dipped one of them into his tea, and opening his mouth to its fullest extent, popped the dainty morsel into its cavernous depths, and began to champ and chew with great deliberation and manifest enjoyment. When he had disposed of the other two fingers in similar fashion he took another slice, and, while smearing it with H.P. Sauce, turned his attention to Mr. Slapjuice.

" So you're going to get married, young man," he said. The Bovril had had some sort of sobering effect on him: at any rate his articulation was clearer.

Mr. Slapjuice nodded.

" I congratulate you," said Mr. Kinsella. " And Miss Buck, too. I hope you'll be happy," and, heaving a long sigh, he sent another sop to oblivion.

" There's only one way to be happy," he continued, laying on liberally with the H.P. Sauce. " If you'll take my advice, Mr. Scrapjuice—you won't take offence if I offer it, I hope. I'm an oldish man, so I am. Getting on. Getting on. I don't suppose I'll ever see forty again,—nor fifty neither. Ah, well . . ." And at the thought of all the vanished years he sighed again and drew his frayed and shiny cuff across his eyes. " You won't take offence, Mr. Scrapjuice," he resumed, " to be given advice by a man that has seen his best days and has wandered up and down among the cities of the world. I've served behind the bar of my father's pub; I've listed in two armies, and sailed before the mast under seven different flags; I've starved in more cities than you've seen streets; I've held more jobs than

you can count years; I've had sunstroke in the tropics and frostbite beyond both circles; I've had my words printed in more newspapers than you could put names to. So I know something of life, Mr. Scrapjuice, and I know what I'm talking about."

He brought his sauce-smeared finger of bread to the brim of his cup and held it there ready for a dip when his harangue should be concluded.

"I say I know what I'm talking about," he repeated. "And my advice to you is this: Keep off the drink. What is it turns good men into rotters? Drink. What is it turns hard-working men into idlers? Drink. What is it turns clever men into fools? Drink. What is it wrecks happy homes? Drink. What's the deadliest poison in the world? What's the heaviest curse on mankind? What's the most insidious weapon in the devil's armoury? Drink every time."

I noticed that the finger of bread, overweighted with sauce, had become bent, and had almost reached snapping point. Kinsella, however, went on in ignorance of its danger.

"Mind, I wouldn't say a fellow should give it up altogether," he said, changing the dramatic tone he had used hitherto for one of easy tolerance. "A man, to *be* a man, must drink a little. A drop for company's sake is no harm now and then. I take that meself: you have to in our profession, you understand. Then I take an occasional glass for me nerves when I'm a bit off colour; or maybe a dash of brandy to give me an appetite. But that's all. I never exceed it. Me purse wouldn't stand it if I did. Yes: alcohol is only for occasions: for a drink for a thirsty man give me good spring water every time. Nothing like it."

Here three-quarters of the poised finger of bread broke off and fell with a plop! into his tea. Nothing dismayed, he fished it out again, conveyed it to his maw, and continued his discourse, munching the while with porcine enjoyment.

"So much license, Mr. Scrapjuice, I allow meself as a single man. Maybe, if I was contemplating matrimony, I'd be more abstemious. Every mickle makes a muckle, ye know; and the man who begins with a drop or two ends with the D.T.s. Not that I'd suggest such a thing to you, Mr. Scrapjuice; but good advice is good advice, and no offence meant."

"I'm a teetotaller, as it happens," said Mr. Slapjuice.

"Good lad," said Mr. Kinsella. "I admire you," and he began fishing with his fingers in the pot of ginger. Having selected a piece to his liking, he turned to me with a reminiscent smile.

"I heard a story to-day that ought to interest you, Miss Rudd. I met a fellow in a pub this morning—maybe ye know him: Tom Shipsey, his name is: comes from your part of the country—well, maybe ye don't. Tom's a terrible drinker, and he was about half seas over when I met him, but he told me this story, and I can't help laughing whenever I think of it. There's a fellow down in Rathmines beyond "—jerking his thumb over his shoulder—"young Wilson, son of the turf man—maybe ye've heard of him? No? Well, *you* have anyway, Mr. Colgan. He's a terrible drinker, as you may know. He is indeed. That fellow's never off the booze. Well, he had a bet on with old whatsisname—*you* know, Mr. O'Farrell: that old fellow that never misses a first night at the Tivoli. Bless me, I know his name as well as me own, but I've let it slip. Ye know the fella, surely, O'Farrell,—a terrible drinker, with a nose as red as a radish. I'll be forgettin' me own name next. . . ."

My attention lapsed, that is if it had ever been aroused. Mr. Kinsella's stories always wandered on in this fashion, and one got accustomed to hearing him without heeding. Mrs. Buck yawned prodigiously into the end of her rolled-up table-napkin, and bending towards me said in a low voice:

" Has Peter told ye he's joined the Purity League?"

I shook my head.

" Well, he has," went on Mrs. Buck. " Very good work they're doin', I think. There's so many of these nasty papers and books goin' lately, it's about time they were stopped."

" We'll be droppin' on you for them statchews of yours, Miss Rudd," Peter joined in at my other side. " We're goin' to have no more immodest statchews or pictures or books in Ireland from this out."

" Indeed?" I said. " And how are you going to proceed?"

" Hammer and tongs, Miss Rudd," said Peter with a satisfied smile. " Last night we sent a notice to that shop in Nassau Street that if they didn't take that statchew—ye know the wan I mean: the wan o' the tart without any arms and the clothes fallin' off her——"

" The Venus of Milo," I suggested.

" That's it. Well, we sent them word that if they didn't take it out o' the window we'd bust the whole bloody shyop up. We're goin' to have no more o' that sort o' thing in th' Island o' Saints . . . They've put in a gran' new billiard table at the Catholic Club, mother. I'd be goin' down for a game to-night if it wasn't for the Curfew."

" Isn't that Curfew a terrible nuisance," said Mrs. Buck. " I declare I haven't been near a picture-house since it started. . . . But then of course ye get to bed earlier. I do be dead with the sleep sometimes."

Messrs. Colgan and O'Farrell were still getting the benefit of Kinsella's story. Apparently he had discovered the name of the red-nosed gentleman, or else had given up the attempt, for the narrative had now reached another stage.

" Yes," he was saying, " opinions differ. There's no harm in that if people can *agree* to differ. Differ, but never be intolerant: that's what I say. Now him and

me are like that. We differ on most things, but we can *respect* one another *personally*,—d'y' understand? . . ."

From Kinsella's stories there were three ways of deliverance (for they had no ending). Either he fell asleep in the middle of a sentence; or the post came; or, failing these, we had to make up our minds boldly and walk out of the room without waiting for him. This time it was the postman's knock that came to the rescue. Kinsella's monologue was cut short by the entrance of Maggie with the letters, and before he could resume everyone had risen from the table.

There were two letters for me. One, I saw at a glance, was from Mr. Dunkerville; the other—there was no mistaking the handwriting though it was years since I had seen it—was from my scapegrace brother, Rudolf.

CHAPTER VIII

CRISIS

THE less said about Rudolf the better; but some mention of him is at this point unavoidable. Rudolf wrote a book when he was twenty. It was called "Where Do We Get Off?" and contained the following amongst other sayings:—

"The Devil believes in God: but we do not hear that he is any the better for it.

"There are no tyrannies in the world; no injustices; no cruelties: no wickedness: only absurdities. People are just stupid, and by their bungling incompetence have made a hideous mess of things. That's what's wrong with the world.

" Stupidity is the greatest disease, and Ignorance the greatest crime. Our teachers are all afflicted with the disease, and spend their lives in propagating the crime.

" Honesty is the worst policy: otherwise it would not be a virtue.

" There is no such thing as a perfectly honest man. Any man who thinks himself honest is a danger to the community. Any man who claims to act entirely on principle should instantly be executed in the public interest.

" Doubtless there are many sound arguments against Socialism: but any I have heard could only emanate from inferior minds.

" People who speculate on the existence of Hell are wasting their time. What is far more doubtful is the existence of Heaven. If there is a Heaven, where is the merit of virtue?"

These extracts, which I have culled at random, are a sufficient indication of the quality of his mind. Needless to say, the book did not find a publisher; but having completed about the same time an invention for improving gas-stoves, he sold the patent cheap and published the book on the proceeds. I doubt if it has found many purchasers.

Rudolf started his career of iniquity by getting into what he called " a most unholy row " at school—a venerable Jesuit establishment in England. It began over an answer to a geography paper. What, he was asked, was the reason of England's success as a colonising power? To which Rudolf briefly replied: " Her thoroughness in wiping out the natives." For

this impertinence he was sentenced to twelve strokes of the ferule, and having persistently refused to take the punishment he was brought before the Rector. That august potentate gave him a long lecture, roundly denouncing him for his impertinence, obstinacy, conceit, and cowardice; doubled his penalty; and told him to go down at once and take his punishment like a man.

"Like a man!" cried Rudolf. "A man would give you a puck in the jaw for your lip."

And so Rudolf came home. The episode left its mark on his mind, for he has always had a singular contempt for schoolmasters. Another passage in that book of his reads:

"The world will be reformed when the old sit in class and listen to the young saying what they think of them."

In the intervals between affairs of which the Vi'let episode is a sample, Rudolf applied himself to the study of engineering, but between his love affairs and his extra-curricular inventions he seems to have had little time for examinations, for he made small progress towards his degree.

And then, without a word of warning, before he had turned twenty, he married: why, I don't know, unless it was because it was an absurd thing to do. There was this much excuse for him, that the lady was divinely beautiful; but he had small opportunity to find out whether she had any other qualities, for he left her inside a year, and had never been heard of since.

I looked at his letter for a moment and wondered what he had to say. Then I glanced at Mr. Dunkerville's and wondered what *he* had to say,—what on earth had he *left* to say after that last catastrophic epistle of his. (Don't be afraid. I really am coming to it presently, though for the moment Rudolf occupies my attention.)

Shutting myself into my room, I opened Rudolf's letter.

"*Dear Sniffy,*" it began—he used to call me Sniffy on account of a certain aristocratic aloofness he alleged to be indicated by the shape of my nose—"*Dear Sniffy, here I am in this God-forsaken hole, after a seven years' run of good and bad luck, absolutely broke to the wide. Send me a fiver, like a dear girl, just to fetch me back to Ireland, and I'll pay you back some time or other. Thine, Rudolf.*" And in a postscript he added: "*Don't let that she-wolf of Rathmines*"—by which he meant his wife—"*know of my whereabouts, as you value my life.*"

Knowing my Rudolf as I did, I was certain that he must have been sadly reduced before he would write a letter like that: for, in spite of all its jaunty tone, it was the cry of a beaten man. It was written from what must have been a very disreputable inn at Gravesend.

"Well, my poor lad," I said to myself, "you shall have one of my easily-earned fivers—as long as they last," and at that ominous proviso I turned to Mr. Dunkerville's letter—I mean the more recent one.

It proved to be the half-yearly statement on the sale of my books, and was accompanied by a cheque for royalties. According to the statement my sales were as follows:—

A Field of Daffodils . .	2,341 copies.
Summer Love . . .	3,023 copies.
A Seaside Romance . .	846 copies.

Nice enough on the face of it, no doubt: but not so comforting when you realise that these figures were less than half those for the previous six months, and if you appreciate the full significance of the fact that the latest book was the worst seller. And now I think I had better come straight to that first letter of Mr. Dunkerville's for which you have been waiting so long.

I took it from my desk and read it once again. This is how it ran :—

Dunkerville, Pondlebury and Pickthorpe, Ltd.,
Publishers,
Paternoster Row, E.C.4.

Dear Madam,

I have read your novel, "Over the Garden Wall," and wish to say a few frank words on the subject. Doubtless you are aware that in considering a work submitted to him, a publisher has two points of view from which he must judge it,—the artistic and the commercial. Now in the artistic sense your book leaves little to be desired. It is, in fact, in charm, in wit, in characterisation, and in construction quite up to the standard we have come to expect from the author of "A Field of Daffodils." From the commercial standpoint, however, I cannot speak of it quite so favourably, and I shall endeavour to explain the reason.

The public, as perhaps you are aware, is somewhat capricious in its taste. Your first book "caught on" because there was something fresh and appealing in its idyllic setting, some piquant flavour to which they were temporarily unaccustomed. The same quality brought an even greater success to your second book, so, perhaps rashly, we ventured to publish a third of similar type. The result, as you may judge for yourself when your half-yearly account is sent to you, has not been encouraging. The taste of the public has changed, or perhaps I should say developed, and if an author is to retain his public he must develop with them. The idyllic note is charming, and will sustain a young author for a time. But it is unsubstantial. Like an hors d'œuvre, it tickles the palate and makes it want for more, and if the author himself cannot supply the more solid fare which he has stimulated his readers to desire, they will go and seek it elsewhere.

"Over the Garden Wall" is not the solid fare which

your readers have by now come to expect. Gay, delightful, charming as it is, it suggests, if I may say so, that the author is still writing out of the exuberance of youthful imagination and not out of experience of life. To put it in a word, it lacks Passion,—and without passion it won't sell.

Perhaps an example will make my meaning clearer. Personally I have always particularly admired your love scenes. Their boy-and-girl airiness and vivacity seem tq me altogether delightful—but then I am a dry old bachelor with a taste for fineness. The public, if I may put the matter crudely, wants something more on these occasions than poetic speeches and a kiss on the lady's brow.

With this much explanation, I return your book herewith, not for rejection, but for reconsideration. Some not very extensive re-writing, and the insertion of perhaps two or three fresh chapters will, in my opinion, make the book readily saleable. Only supply the necessary touch of passion, eliminate a certain speculative tendency into which you have allowed yourself to lapse in Chapter XI, and I have no doubt that "Over the Garden Wall" will raise your name out of its temporary eclipse.

With all good wishes,
I remain,
Faithfully yours,
H. Thornley Dunkerville.

"In other words," said I to myself, "the public can only stand a limited quantity of treacle, and unless I can supply them with mustard I'm a back number."

One phrase in that mass of verbiage stood out stark before my eyes. I had written out of the exuberance of my imagination, not out of experience of life. What chance had I to get experience of life? For twenty years I had been cooped up at home; ever since I had

been stuck in an office; and nobody had ever told me that they loved me.

Passion?

I looked at myself inquiringly in the mirror over my dressing-table. I know I am not pretty, but was I good-looking or plain, I wondered. My hair is really quite nice, reddish, and inclined to curl. My eyes are at least good-humoured, even if their shade is open to question. Then my nose—Rudolf, you may remember, called it aristocratic, and I think it may be conceded to be my best feature. My mouth is neither a Cupid's bow nor a rosebud, but what matter? it's shapely enough, and my teeth are perfect. Perhaps I have too many freckles,—and then there is that mole between my brows—a little one, and fortunately hairless, but there it is. . . .

On the whole I can hardly call it disfiguring. There's even some—some *je ne sais quoi* about it that a discriminating male . . .

But enough of this. Facts are facts: and the fact is that no man has ever yet proposed to me.

"You're in a bad way, my girl," said I to my reflection. "You've got to write about Passion, and in all your life you've never tasted a kiss . . . at least none worth talking of;" for I remembered certain delinquencies of my teens. . . .

There wasn't a girl in the office who hadn't more experience than I. Madge Hughes, now . . .

"My boy's simply gorgeous!" I had heard her say. "Why, he'd eat the face off ye," which was vivid, though it lacked precision. . . .

"Does a girl always shut her eyes when a man kisses her?" asked Phyllis O'Dea once in her dreamy fashion. And Miss O'Reilly, a fiancée of long standing, answered: "Well . . . *nearly* always."

This was all that I knew of love, outside of what I had read in books: and even this was only hearsay. . . .

And I had to write of Passion, not out of the

exuberance of my imagination, but out of experience of life . . . Experience!

"I was a fool," said I to my reflection, "to leave the office."

But at that I pulled myself up. Nothing would ever induce me to return to the office.

"No," said I. "If it comes to that,—by Jove, I'll *get* experience!"

The image in the mirror smiled approbation at me.

Vi'let came bursting into my room without knocking.

"Well, look at that for vanity!" said she. Then, leaning confidentially over my shoulder: "What do ye think of me boy? Grand, isn't he? Ye'd never think he was in trade. He's getting me the ring to-morrow. He didn't get it before because he didn't know whether I'd have him or no. Of course I've refused lots of fellas, you know. . . . Did y' ever have a boy, Miss Rudd?"

"No," said I.

"Fancy!" said she, "and you're thirty, aren't you?"

"Twenty-nine," said I.

"I'm an awful cat, amn't I!" said Vi'let. "But ye mustn't mind. I can't help meself to-night, I'm so excited. . . . Y' ought to powder your nose a bit, Miss Rudd. It gives such a refined touch, ye know."

CHAPTER IX

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

When I arrived at the office next morning I found Phyllis waiting for me on the steps. She ran up to me and spoke breathlessly.

"Thank goodness you've come!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Whatsisname has gone in!"

"Mr. Who?" I asked.

"*You* know. The Italian fellow."

(I had almost forgotten, in the stress of more important matters, the prank I had played on Phyllis.)

"Mr. Tackaberry?" I said.

"Oh, don't call him that," said Phyllis reproachfully. "Call him his real name."

"You've dished yourself now," said I to myself. Then, "Signor Cherubino," I hazarded.

"Exactly," said Phyllis. "I never *can* remember these foreign names.

"Well, what about him?" I asked.

"He's just gone in."

"Well?"

"I . . . I noticed that the hall-porter stared at him very hard."

"No wonder, when he wears such socks."

"Ah, don't be codding," said Phyllis. "This may be very serious."

"Yes, indeed," said I. "He might be his long-lost heir."

"Ah, now, Stasia, I *wish* you wouldn't go on playing the fool. Peter might turn out to be one of those . . . . those . . ."

"Counts of San Francisco. Very likely. His noble birth is stamped upon his brow."

"Oh, *do* be serious!" cried Phyllis, almost in tears. "He might be a spy, you know . . . belonging to that awful secret society . . . the . . . the . . ."

"Tarantellas," I suggested.

"Yes," she said. "Now, oughtn't he to be warned!"

"Yes," said I, putting some constraint on my features. "I'll warn him."

"Good," said Phyllis without enthusiasm. Then, as she hung on some words that wouldn't come, I went up the steps into the hall. She came hurrying after me, and, slipping her arm through mine, "Stasia," she said, "I wish you'd let *me* warn him."

"Never fear. *I'll* introduce him to you," said I, and left her.

It was my intention, at some time during the course of that day's work, to lead the conversation round to the subject of love. But I had no need to take the trouble: it took that trend of its own accord without any manœuvring on my part.

They were discussing my imminent departure, and Miss O'Reilly, the fiancée of long-standing (six years her engagement had lasted), said, as with a wearily mechanical air she smoothed the blotting-paper over a long page of figures: "Well, Miss Rudd, I envy you. You'll be able to marry now, and settle down."

"Thank you," said I. "I'd prefer to remain single and shake myself up a bit. I've been stodging all my life."

"Hear, hear!" said Miss Danaher, a cynic.

"Oh, now, Miss Rudd, I'm sure you don't mean *that!*" said good-natured, sentimental little Mrs. Howley,—ten years a widow.

"I do mean it," said I firmly.

"Well, I don't believe you," said Mrs. Howley. "What every girl wants is a cosy little home and a nice, big, cuddly husband;" and at these words the little widow hugged herself erotically.

Everyone had now abandoned work—for the Superintendent was out of the room—and the discussion became general. Picture a vast, finely-proportioned chamber, with bare, blue-distempered walls and linoleum-covered floor: with ornamental cornice and ceiling—once gilt, but now whitewashed; with mantel of sculptured marble and carved oak doors—all witnessing to the taste of a vanished caste, cultured dastards who had sold their country and fled the wreckage. Not that any of its present occupants paid heed to such testimony. In fact, there wasn't one of them who ever cast an eye over that mantelpiece or could have deduced this story from it if she had. There they sat, blind and complacent as oysters, there among their half-dusted paper-littered desks and grimy filing-fixtures, all work-

touselled and stale-faced, lounging back in their chairs, pen in mouth, yawning perhaps,—and talked of love.

I reduce their remarks to sequence, and report.

MISS DANAHER. Well, of all the slush—— If *I* ever marry it'll be a sailor or a commercial traveller who'll be away most of the time.

MADGE HUGHES. I'd rather have a fella that'd be able to give you a good squeeze now and then.

PHYLLIS. Don't be disgusting, Miss Hughes. What sort of a man would *you* like to marry, Minnie?

MINNIE [*slim, young, and bourgeois*]. I'd like a really good-looking man,—an Army officer, if possible, because they go into the best society. Anyway I'd want him to have a decent income—unearned, of course—and I'd like him to be over forty, but under fifty, so that I could look up to him without regarding him as a father.

PHYLLIS. Minnie doesn't want much! Personally, I wouldn't bother about the money provided he was tall and broad and good-looking. . . . And I'd like him to have a job that wouldn't take him away from home too often.

MINNIE. Heaven defend us from the household cat! Phyllis would like a tame pet to put the cushions at her head and hand her the chocolates.

GLADYS [*eighteen, and rather pert*]. Who wants a man to be handsome, anyway? So long as he was big and strong and very dark I wouldn't care *how* ugly he might be.

MINNIE. Quite right. I *detest* fair men.

FANNY KEAWELL [*a beautiful booby, with pink and white complexion, and the richest of figures*]. So do I. And I don't like *clever* men, either. You never know *what* to say to them. I like a man who can enjoy a *joke* and go to the *pictures* and *that* sort of thing.

MAY LOONEY [*sharp-featured and sharp-tongued; not*

young]. What does it matter what a man's like, provided he has money?

PHYLLIS. Oh, May! How cynical.

MINNIE. I don't think it's right to marry altogether for money, but if the right man has the money, well and good.

MRS. HOWLEY. What if the right man *hasn't* the money?

MINNIE. A man has no right to ask a girl to marry him unless he has . . . well, at *least* three hundred a year. After all, a girl ought to *raise* herself when she marries.

PHYLLIS. But if they love each other . . . ?

MRS. DELANY [*a grass-widow, much soured. She has with difficulty contained herself all this time, and now bursts in with concentrated scorn*]. A nice pack of fools you are, the lot of you, thinking of men and imagining that any one of them is different from the others. They're all the same,—a pack of selfish, good-for-nothing creatures, all honey till they get you, and once they're sure of you—good-bye! You needn't tell *me*. I know what men are like. Women had much better earn their own living and keep their peace of mind than think they're going to live in Paradise with anything that wears trousers. . . .

Re-enter Superintendent.

That afternoon I again had Mr. Tackaberry under my tuition, and I thought a golden opportunity to learn something about love had been thrown in my way. So beautiful a creature must, I felt sure, have had many passionate experiences; so, rather unscrupulously, I set to work to get on friendly terms with him. This proved easy enough, but alas! I found that his beauty was not the only quality he shared with Narcissus.

He could talk of nothing but himself. I learned that

he was fond of snooker and twenty-five; preferred cigarettes to a pipe; was not superstitious, but wouldn't dream of lighting three cigarettes with one match, or walking under a ladder, or that sort of thing; was fond of music, and preferred the Arcadians to any other opera; was a bad sailor; preferred tinned salmon to fresh; and was very liable to bad colds in the winter. . . . No: he wasn't interested in politics. He didn't properly understand Sinn Fein, but he didn't agree with it anyhow. . . . . Women? Well, women were all right [*his* word] in their proper place, but as for all this rot about their being equal to men, it was just—*rot*. They weren't equal to men. Men were stronger and cleverer and . . . and everything. Women should never have been given the vote. They couldn't reason; they were apt to follow their hearts rather than their heads; they were changeable and hysterical; they didn't *understand* politics. . . ."

He remembered who he was talking to, and blunderingly began to hedge.

" Of course, personally he *preferred* women not to be too clever. Most men did. The clever ones didn't care for housework, and after all, though clever girls were nice to talk with, and pretty ones to . . . to spoon with, when it came to marriage it was comfort that mattered."

I gave up all hope of learning anything of love from the creature, but for the fun of it I went on drawing him out, like a spring tape, to see how much of him there was,—and there wasn't much. He was a typical product of what is called popular education: that is to say, he had been taught how to read, write, and figure, and been rendered incapable of learning anything else in the process. It was for him and his kind that the popular press and the popular novel had been instituted. He told me that he was extremely fond of Miss Lucy Loveday's books, especially the " Field of

Daffodils," but he opined that her latest had gone off a bit: " Not *juicy* enough, if ye know what I mean."

After that he talked away without the stimulus of further inquiries, till we became quite intimate.

" I'm not what ye think I am," he said at last in a tone promising rich revelations. " I'm not a clerk in the' or'nary way, ye know. Me fadher was reel well off, ye see. He was a bookie, and made pots o' money, and he always said his children would never have to work for their livin'. But all of a sudden his luck turned, and he went clean bust before he kicked the bucket. So here I am. Rotten luck, isn't it? to be stuck here stewing in an office when I might have been swankin' around in me motor and never doin' a tap.

" Of course it's not so bad for *you,*" he explained, " being used to it, ye know; but when ye've been brought up to look forward to a good time . . ." Words failed him, and he shook his head despairingly.

I must have a sympathetic and elicitive way with me, for presently he became exceedingly confiding.

" Me name," he whispered to me, " isn't Horace at all. Ye won't tell anyone, will ye? because I'd get an awful time from the fellahs if they found it out. It's "—lowering his voice still further—" it's Hyacinth . . . Ye won't tell, will ye? Because I'd be rooned if ye did. Awful, isn't it? Like a girl's name. If it got out among the fellahs! . . ."

So this was the thing that Phyllis loved. This was what quickened her fancy, roused her soul, and thrilled her senses. This filled all her thoughts, concentrated all her ambition. With this, lip to lip, she would drift into Paradise.

I introduced them in the hall at five o'clock.

" Pleased to meet ye, Miss O'Dea," he said, taking her hand even before she offered it.

A look of startled perplexity crossed her face when she heard his accent, but I think she deliberately reassured herself, for with her most charming smile she

said: "Miss Rudd has been telling me a lot about you, Mr. Tackaberry."

("Little fool," said I to myself.)

"I know," she began with an arch look, then faltered under my anger, telepathically conveyed. "I . . . I know you don't seem what you are, you know," she stammered, ending with a nervous giggle.

At that Mr. Tackaberry smirked, delighted that I had been so impressed by his origin.

"Ye shouldn't be talking about me like that, Miss Rudd," he said, trying his best to look modestly remonstrative.

Phyllis regained confidence when she saw how easily he took it.

"Oh," she said airily, "you needn't mind *me*. Miss Rudd always tells me everything, and I'm as silent as the grave,—amn't I, Stasia? My memory's bad anyway, and I don't believe I could remember your name even if I *wanted* to. . . ."

But here Phyllis broke off in consternation, for, even before she felt my warning hand on her arm, she saw an awful change sweep over Mr. Tackaberry's countenance. A flood of shamed and horrified scarlet seethed up in his cheeks; his eyes opened, and his jaw dropped.

"Well, *by* Gad, Miss Rudd!" he said, turning angrily on me: then, speechless with indignation, he swept past us, charged down the steps, and was gone.

"You little ninny!" said I to Phyllis. "Didn't I *tell* you not to pretend you knew?"

Phyllis was now as red as the unfortunate Tackaberry; but she is one of those people who never admit they are in the wrong, and always defend themselves by counter-attack.

"Pooh!" she said. "There was nothing to pretend about. I don't believe he's an Italian at all. He's got a Dublin accent that'd knock you down."

I thought it was high time to drop the joke which I

had started so thoughtlessly and which had become such an incubus. So I admitted the impeachment.

"Then," said Phyllis, "why did he cut up so rough when I talked about his name?"

I could have bitten my tongue out. I had been within an ace of doing what poor Tackaberry fancied I had already done. Desperately I ransacked the remotest attics of my brain for an expedient to cover up my blunder, but could find nothing—nothing but a fresh deception, which was destined to land me eventually into deeper complications than ever.

"As a matter of fact," I said, "—now you positively *must* be more discreet this time, Phyllis. I've no right to tell you this at-all, really, only you're such an inquisitive little beggar. The truth is that he's a prominent Sinn Féiner, and the Black-and-Tans have sworn to shoot him at sight. I believe," and here I sunk my voice to a conspiratorial whisper, "I believe he's D—— F——"

Phyllis, you must understand, was a Sinn Féiner—of a sort. She didn't know anything about politics really, and had taken no interest in them at all until quite recently. The change came about in this way. She was shopping one day in Camden Street, when suddenly she found herself in the middle of a battle. A passing lorry of Black-and-Tans had just been ambushed and had opened a brisk return fire. People were running about in panic; bombs were bursting and rifles banging in front of her, behind her, and on all sides of her. Phyllis lost her head completely. (I think I have mentioned that she is a bit of a fool.) "Help! help!" she screamed, and threw herself into the arms of a convenient young man, who caught her up and carried her into the nearest shop. There he dumped her into a chair and tried to make off; but she caught hold of his coat, thanked him fervently for his kindness, and begged him to stay a little longer. He, however, scarcely listened to her, and, hastily plucking

his coat from her grip, rushed out of the shop by another door. It was only then that she noticed he was carrying a smoking revolver; and it was a good while before she'd collected enough of her wits to deduce that he must have been one of the ambushers and had risked his life to save her. She had been a Sinn Féiner ever since.

I wasn't a Sinn Féiner myself. Of course I wanted Ireland to be independent, and I'd have liked to see England sunk to the bottom of the sea. But I'm no politician. I looked at the question in this way: the English held Ireland down by fraud and force; so, if we were to free ourselves, we must outdo them in both. Well, I didn't want freedom at the price of becoming more treacherous and ferocious than the English. Some of my more patriotic friends rather despised me for this attitude; but things that have happened since ought to have changed their opinion.

However, I'm not going to talk politics. Phyllis, as I say, was a Sinn Féiner; so, when I hoarsely whispered that mighty name, she gripped my arm fiercely and said "Ssh!" looking around anxiously with eyes of alarm.

"Mum's the word!" said I; and at that I left her.

CHAPTER X

DISTRESSFUL SITUATION OF A FALLEN POTENTATE

WHEN I reached home it was Maggie who admitted me.

"Oh, Miss Rudd!" she cried. "There's a gentleman to see ye. He's in with the mistress in the parlour," and, opening the door of that apartment, she ushered me in.

At the table, poring over Mrs. Buck's fat photograph album with the gilt clasps, sat my brother Bill,

and over him stood Mrs. Buck with her hands folded comfortably on her abdomen.

"I tell you, Mrs. Buck," said my brother Bill with great firmness and emphasis, "that boy is the handsomest boy that ever was born in the whole universe."

"No, Mr. Rudd," replied Mrs. Buck. "It's very kind of you to say so, but it's not true. Peter's a good boy; but handsome he isn't. . . ."

Knowing Bill as I do, I can reconstruct that conversation word for word. This is the way it must have gone:—

Bill, bored with waiting for me, picks up the album and glances through it. Enter to him Mrs. Buck.

MRS. BUCK [*conversationally*]. Are ye fond of photographs, Mr. Rudd?

BILL [*politely assuming enthusiasm*]. Oh, yes! Yes, of course.

MRS. BUCK. There's some good ones there.

BILL [*desperately anxious to be tactful*]. Oh, certainly. [*Pointing to the first he sees, which happens to be an early portrait of Master Peter Buck (he with the squint and the carbuncle perched as afore-described.)*] And that . . . . that's the handsomest boy in the book.

MRS. BUCK [*with a deprecating smile*]. Oh, *really*, Mr. Rudd, you'd hardly . . .

BILL [*firmly*]. Yes, yes. The handsomest boy in the book. I repeat it: the handsomest boy in Dublin.

MRS. BUCK. Oh, come now, Mr. Rudd. After all . . .

BILL. Yes, Mrs. Buck. I give you my word for it, that's the handsomest boy in Ireland.

MRS. BUCK. You're codding me, Mr. Rudd. Sure, he's got a *squint*.

BILL. What of it, Mrs. Buck? Some of the finest men I know have squints. The best people have squints. Anybody who's any good at all has a squint. I tell

you, Mrs. Buck, that son of yours is the handsomest boy in Europe.

MRS. BUCK. You're the first that ever thought so, Mr. Rudd.

BILL. No, no, no. Oh, no, no, no. The others simply wouldn't *say so,* Mrs. Buck. They were jealous—green with envy—frantic—furious. Never you mind them, Mrs. Buck. That's the handsomest boy in the whole world.

MRS. BUCK. Ah, that's a bit *too* much! Ye can't expect me to believe *that,* Mr. Rudd.

BILL. I shall be seriously offended if you don't. I'm not given to exaggeration, and I tell you, Mrs. Buck, that boy of yours is the handsomest boy that ever was born in the whole universe.

In the midst of her answer to this frantic hyperbole, Mrs. Buck became aware of my entry. So did Bill, who, forgetting the beauty of the universe and his mother as well, burst forth at me in his high-pitched querulous voice:

"What a time you've been, Stasia. I'm sick of waiting for you."

"Well, I'm sure!" cried Mrs. Buck, and flounced out of the room.

"What's wrong with *her?*" asked Bill. "But no matter. Sit down. I want to have a talk with you."

You must picture Bill as a stoutish little middle-ageing man, with scanty, ill-nourished beard, and sandy-grey hair thinning out to baldness.

Bill is the fool of the family.

"What shall we make of him?" said my father, when he reached man's estate. "He hasn't enough guts for farming, nor enough brains for the law, nor enough polish for medicine, and he's no head for business. I'll put him into Parliament."

So into Parliament he went, and in that exalted

situation interfered with many matters which he didn't understand. I did not follow his political career with any interest. As far as I know he never spoke at Westminster; but I remember a speech he made one time down at Rossnakilty, our native place, during the great war.

"Fellow-countrymen," he said. "Civilisation is in danger. Christianity, the Conscience of Europe, the Home Rule Bill, and all the other amenities that make life worth living, are menaced by the onrush of the Teuton hordes. Every one of those countless millions carries a map of Ireland in his pocket: and on that map is drawn a plan of every farm in the country, with the name of the German soldier who is to get it written clearly across it in blood-red ink. Germany is out for world-power: to wrest from the British Empire the territories that have cost her so much blood and treasure. Compare the mottoes of the two countries. 'Dootchland yuber allies,' cry the Huns: 'Germany over all'—how different from the noble hymn of England, 'Rule, Britannia!' Irishmen, stick by England, and the Allies, and the Irish Party, and Home Rule will be certain at no far distant date."

Thus Bill in his glory. Alas! his fall was imminent. A few years later his seat was challenged by one, Liam O'Ruaghadáin, a distant cousin, a dreamy-eyed young man with long hair, who addressed the people as "a cháirde" instead of "ladies and gentlemen," promised them a Republic instead of Home Rule, extolled a beloved President instead of heaven-sent leaders, and gave them a speech in which Idealism, Gaelic Civilisation, Self-reliance, ten-foot pikes, and the Spirit of the Patriot-Martyrs took the place of Bill's less striking catchwords. Our people are nothing if not downright. For fifteen years they had been returning Bill almost unanimously; now with equal certitude they threw him out. For myself, I never could understand why. Cousin Liam was not very different from Bill; his

speech didn't mean a jot more; and if Bill didn't get them Home Rule, as events turned out Liam didn't get them a Republic either. Instead, he got them a civil war, which had entered into nobody's calculations.

But I'm not going to talk politics, so let us return to the scene at Mrs. Buck's.

"Well," said I. "What's the matter with you?"

For answer Bill drew something from his pocket and thrust it into my hand.

"Look at that," he said.

It was a small square of white cardboard, with a halfpenny stamp stuck in the middle.

"Well?" I repeated.

"What's the meaning of it?" cried Bill. "I saw an advertisement in the *Daily Mail* the other day offering a magnificent steel engraving of King George for half-a-crown. I sent in my half-crown, and this is what I get!"

"And aren't you satisfied?" said I, hardly able to restrain myself from laughing.

"Satisfied!" he screamed. "Satisfied! Why, I'm swindled."

"Not a bit of it," said I. "This is exactly what you asked for: a steel engraving of King George. What you wanted it for I'm sure I can't guess, but, such as it is . . ."

"Oh, do stop being sarcastic," implored Bill.

"I'm not being sarcastic," I replied. "Can't you see you've got exactly what you asked for: a steel engraving. . . ."

"But this *isn't* steel," protested Bill. "It's *paper!*"

"Bill!" I gasped. "Do you mean to tell me . . .?" And then I saw that he did, so I had to sit down and explain the process of steel engraving.

"Good heavens!" he said when I had finished. "I never knew that!" (Bill always betrays astonishment on discovering any of the numerous things he doesn't know.)

"Curious!" he went on. "Very curious. How little one knows, after all! Nothing! Absolutely nothing!" He shook his head sadly as he moralised thus. Then, in a brighter tone: "So really, when you come to think of it," he said, "I wasn't swindled at all."

"You great gam!" said I. "To think of your being taken in by the hoariest old trick in the swindlers' trade."

"Oh!" said Bill, who had quite recovered his equanimity, "we live and learn, Stasia: we live and learn. . . . The man who never made a mistake never made anything; and the more mistakes we make, the wiser we become."

"At that rate," said I, "you ought to be a perfect Socrates by this time;" but he didn't hear me. He was too busy scrutinising the stamp through a totally unnecessary monocle which he had screwed into his eye. After a moment or two he looked up with a smile of beaming satisfaction.

"'Pon my word, Stasia," he said, "I'm not sure that I regret this purchase. When you come to think of it, a stamp is a marvellous piece of work. Yes, marvellous! Now just look at that. I never saw anything like it. Never! Think of all the trouble they must have gone to, to get so much on to so small a piece of paper. Those two haddocks, for instance. See how neatly they fitted them in by giving that little twist to their tails. Clever, eh? Extraordinary!"

"Well," said I, "if you're satisfied, I am. . . . Will you stay to tea?"

"No, thanks. No," said Bill. "I dine at seven. I'll be off."

I escorted the dear boy into the hall, where, to my surprise, I saw Mrs. Buck and Vi'let loitering without obvious intent. My astonishment was increased when Mrs. Buck, who would normally have been huffy for a week after such a snub as Bill had dealt her, came smirking forward and said:

"Oh, Mr. Rudd, what a lucky chance. Ye must meet me daughter Vi'let,—the one I told y' about, ye know. . . . Vi'let, me dear, come here." Vi'let obeyed, not without maidenly hesitation and blushes. "This is Mr. Rudd, the eminent statesman. . . . Mr. Rudd: me daughter Vi'let."

I saw at once that Mrs. Buck intended to marry Bill to her daughter Vi'let.

"A beautiful girl, Mrs. Buck," said Bill. "Charming! Wonderful! Magnificent! Finest girl I ever saw in my life. . . ." In the pause I knew he was seeking for some feature to praise: Bill was incapable of letting well alone. Then, "What a splendid big mouth she's got!" he declared with enthusiasm.

"Oh, Ma!" cried Vi'let.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Buck; and Bill smiled his adieux quite ignorant of the havoc he had created. . . .

But eligibility covers a multitude of sins. Coming down to tea a few minutes later, I caught the tail-end of a conversation, which my entry brought abruptly to a close.

"After all, Vi'let," said Mrs. Buck, "no matter what he does, he's a reel gentleman. And Freddie, though I haven't a word to say against him . . ."

"He's a reel nice boy, Ma," interposed Vi'let.

"Sure, they're all the same when they're married," said Mrs. Buck.

CHAPTER XI

DISGRACEFUL BEHAVIOUR OF MR. KINSELLA

THAT night I met with a most dreadful adventure, which was destined to have far-reaching effects on my life.

This way of heralding an incident I have picked up

in the course of my trade as a novelist. I find it useful at moments when my imagination is sterile and my narrative wearing thin. It thrills the reader with the promise of great things, and, even if the promise is unfulfilled, that thrill is not forgotten. On this occasion, however, I have no such dishonest intent. What is to follow really was quite exciting: at least *I* found it so, though none of my heroines have been half so perturbed in far more terrible circumstances. Take Felicity, for instance, the heroine of "A Seaside Romance," who was cut off by the rising tide on a desolate promontory, alone with the villain of the piece. With an evil light in his eye (whatever that may be like), the scoundrel came gliding (I must have forgotten the rockiness of the place) towards his intended victim. How did she feel? What did she do? What could I make her do but grow pale, tremble (like an aspen, of course), bite her quivering lips, clench her helpless hands, and utter a strangled cry from her nerveless throat? You see, nothing of the kind had ever happened to me. Ah, if only the experience I am about to describe had occurred before I wrote that passage, what a tumult of soul I could have painted: what sick, frighted horror; what shuddering despair; what primeval confusion of fascinated loathing—and all expressed outwardly by the merest change of colour, stiffening of the muscles, and shortness of breath. Out on us quack artists! who trade, like the quack medicine-mongers, on an ignorant and sedentary population, dosing out sham life to the lifeless as they dose sham health to the sickly.

I had sat up till long after midnight, pondering over the manuscript of "Over the Garden Wall" and wondering how I could manage to make it saleable.

"It's hopeless!" I said at last. "I know as much about life as a nun. I wish to goodness something would happen to me."

How soon that prayer was to be granted!

I pushed my manuscript back into its box, and rose,

yawning, to undress. Slipping on my dressing-gown, I sat down before the dying embers of the fire to comb my hair. Lazily I combed, pausing sometimes to think. I thought of Rudolf—Rudolf the gay and dauntless—starving in an attic at Gravesend. He must have got my money order by this time. (Crackle of electricity as the hair slips through the comb.) Would he really use it to come back to Ireland? Or would he gamble it on some hundred-to-one chance of a fortune? How had he discovered my address? Did he know that his one-time flame lived here? Poor Vi'let! scorched like Semele, but healed by common balm. Would the old fire sear the rawness under her scars? Or would it find her numb? What would happen when they met? (All tangles out, and the comb running smoothly through the hair with long, soothing, hypnotic sweeps.) A picture of the scene passed before my imagination: Rudolf, dressed, absurdly enough, in silk hat and frock coat, standing in the doorway; and Vi'let emerging from the dining-room, picking at a back-tooth with one forefinger. Would they be paralysed with astonishment? Would they redden or whiten? Stammer, or be silent? The figments of my imagination were no guide, for the door kept shutting on Rudolf's coat-tails, and Vi'let kept pouring the contents of a tea-pot on to the floor. Now Rudolf was making frantic efforts to hang up his hat, which obstinately refused to stay on the rack; and Vi'let threw the tea-pot at his head. . . . Jerk! My own head dropped forward, and I awoke, rubbing sandy eyes.

The house was still as the night in lonely places. Stiller: for there was no water-rush as where campers lie. Four hundred thousand people, densely packed, slumbered in silence; but a low-moaning wind wandered among the chimney tops. The cooling embers cracked softly, and a cinder dropped. Then stillness. . . .

A key clicked, and the hall door opened and shut. One of the lodgers must have been out late. Steps

came up the creaking stairs, slowly, uncertainly. Why did I feel uneasy? Why did my heart flutter? Up, up, up. He lurched on to the landing. He fumbled, breathing heavily, and flung open my door.

It was Mr. Kinsella, horribly drunk. He stood swaying in the doorway, blinking at the light. I had already risen to my feet, tremulously drawing my gown about me.

"G'r'evenin', Miss Rudd," said the creature. "Sorry to 'sturb ye."

"Don't mention it," I said as bravely as I could manage. "Kindly close the door as you go out."

"Mus' 'pologise for 'ntrusion, Miss Rudd," he said, advancing a step. "Wouldn't dream of 'truding on a lady, y' know."

"I quite understand," I said. "Good-night."

"'Npardonable 'ntrusion," said the beast. "'Strornary mistake, come to thing of it," and he laughed weakly. Then with great solemnity he put out an unsteady hand, raw, and mudstained on the back, saying: "Shake'ands an' say no more about it."

"Good-night, Mr. Kinsella," I said. "And the sooner you withdraw from my room the easier I'll forgive you."

The vinous *bonhomie* of his attitude vanished at those words. His little eyes narrowed and his flush deepened. He came yet further into the room, while I retreated before him, disgusted at his reek.

"Won' take genelman's 'pology, won't ye?" he said. "If I wasn't a genemul I'd say ye were no lady. I'm a genemul, I am: norra Rathgar tomnorry, junnerstan'?" He swayed a moment, and steadied himself against the table before resuming: "Rathgar tomnorries jus' a lot of hyp-hypcri't'l scoundrels." Then he blazed out angrily: "Nice sor' o' lady you are to be sittin' up at this hour. Nice name you'll bring on a 'speckable house. . . . Jus' listen here now, Miss Ana-anablinkin' Rudd: *I'll report you.* I'll

report you to Mrs. Buck, so I will . . . bringing bad name on a 'speckeral house.''

'' Mr. Kinsella . . .'' I began.

'' I tell ye what 'tis, Miss Rudd,'' said he in a tone of deep solemnity. '' You're drunk;'' and he shook his head sadly.

He was silent a moment, and I was about to renew my entreaty to depart, when he cut me short with: '' Now I'll take no contra-bloody-diction. You're drunk, and thash all about it. 'Shnotorious, so it is. The people of Rathgar all drinks—every blinkin' tom-norry o' them. There ishn' a man in Rathgar wouldn' sell his mother for a glash o' whiskey.''

He wiped a tear from his eye and went on in highly moral fashion: '' Bad enough when the men drinks, but when the women takes to it it's all up. Thash Rathgar all over. The people of Rathgar is the lowest, meanest, mos' drunken people in the country. Rathminesh bad enough, mind ye. There's more liquor drunk in Rathmines than ye'd ever dream of. It's awful! And the people of Ranelaghsh terrible drinkers, too: and as for Drumcondra—it'd shock ye. But the people of Rathgar is the dirtiesh lorra drunken blackguards in the cirry o' Dublin. . . . Mind ye, people 'll do queer thingsh for drink. I know men that'd never go home on a Sarrurda' till they'd spent their week's wages in a pub. An' I know men that'd pop their clothes an' sit swillin' in bed. An' there's some that'd sell th' eyes oura their heads for a pint o' porther. But the people o' Rathgar—gorr, if it was only for the smell of a cork, I don' know what they wouldn't do.''

'' Mr. Kinsella,'' I said. '' If you don't leave my room this instant I'll report all this to Mrs. Buck to-morrow.''

'' I'm goin', Miss Rudd,'' he said, coming yet nearer to me. '' But lemme tell ye this, me dear. It's norra thing I'd tell ev'ryborry, bu' for your own sake, ourof a sense o' jooty, mind ye, I wanna warn ye.'' He was

close to me now, and I was paralysed with horror and disgust. "Wharr I mean is this," he said with ponderous emphasis: "Mrs. Buck drinks."

Horrible as the moment was I could not forbear a smile; but, unable to endure his proximity any longer, I slipped away from him and managed to put the table between us.

"Don't be frightened, me pretty dear," said my tormentor, turning and following me up. "I wouldn' lay a finger on ye. Norra finger. Trush ole Bill: not one o' your Rathgar tom-blurry-norries."

I was reduced to utter despair. Was this to go on all night, or was I to rouse the house and make a scene? I saw that the awful creature was coming towards me again, with a leer on his face that sickened my very soul. A nameless dread was upon me. I became weak. I was near swooning. A dryad struggling in the grip of Pan; the pole-axed bride of some primitive caveman, coming to herself in the home of her lord, must have felt as I did. I could not move. I think I must have broken into a sob.

Mr. Kinsella was standing over me, and I was near poisoned with his whiskey-laden breath. Another moment and his filthy paws would be upon me. I staggered back against the wash-stand, and in a last moment of lucidity caught up a ewer of water and dashed the contents in his face. . . .

When I opened my eyes it was to see the enemy sitting on the floor, partly sobered, rueful of countenance, with dripping hair and soused collar, staring in bewilderment at the fragments of the ewer. My courage returned at his abjection.

"Now," I said, "will you kindly pick yourself up and get out of my room."

He opened and shut his mouth two or three times; then rolled over and raised himself, baby-fashion, by stiffening his knees. He stood waving helpless hands explanatorily.

"Mos' 'stronary thing," he said. "Comin' into lady's room—quite for'n timme naycher. I'm 'n Irish Cath'lic 'n chace as a lamb."

"Good-night, Mr. Kinsella."

"Wouldn' frighten a lady for the worl'," he said. "Mos' 'stronary. Can' unnerstan' it 'tall. Won' you 'scuse me, Miss Rudd," and with a dozen similar phrases he got himself out of the room. I fairly slammed the door on him, and turned the key. . . .

Next morning I reported the whole matter to Mrs. Buck, who at last decided to give him his notice to quit: and that—I am a novelist, so I can't help saying it—was destined to have far-reaching consequences.

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CHAPTER XII

REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATION OF MR. TACKABERRY

After an experience like that I was rather late next morning in setting out for the office, so I had to take a tram; an unusual thing for me, because not only do I like a morning walk, but I positively hate trams. To sit bolt upright in a row of bolt uprights immediately opposite another row of bolt uprights, all trying to look as if they didn't know there was anyone else within miles of them, is too much for my sense of humour. I always have to smile, and then the whole tram-load turns to stare at me.

As I wanted to get at least a little fresh air and exercise I walked as far as Rathmines before taking the tram. It proved to be crowded. Quite near the door sat Mr. O'Farrell, of ours, who must have seen me mount, for he had buried himself in a newspaper in order to avoid offering me his seat. . . . The men of Annaly were never much use. If you search the pages of history you won't find them taking part in a single

rebellion. For four hundred years the English, wanting to get their land from them, used to raid and rob and slaughter them in the hope of forcing them to rebel. But it was no use. They just sat tight; and in the end the English had to confiscate the land without any excuse. After that the clan set out for Dublin in order to emigrate; but within sight of the goal they lost heart, and settling down where they were they founded the cities of Rathmines and Rathgar. This theory is a better explanation of a problem I once put to Mr. Sitric than the answer he gave me. "Why," I asked, "has Rathmines such an evil reputation for respectability and snobbery? There are more poets and philosophers here than in the city," I said. "There's you, and Mr. Carney, and A.E., and Susan Mitchell, and . . ." "I'll tell you why," said Mr. Sitric. "It's because all the greasy Gaelic Leaguers live in Drumcondra."

Mr. Sitric, you see, preserved a certain aloofness from the Gaels. "I am a Gall," he said to a Sinn Féin canvasser during the elections. "A thousand years of Irish air have not made a Gael of me. My countrymen were driven out by an infamous rebel, one Brian Boru; but here I stand, true to the old flag (whatever it is)—Denmark's faithful garrison in Ireland."

What on earth has all this got to do with my tram-ride? Let me concentrate. Having cast a look of contempt on Mr. O'Farrell, I caught the nearest strap and hung on. Then my eye fell upon a pleasant-faced young man sitting near me, who looked at me with a quizzical smile. I fancied he might have read my thoughts, so I said: "Don't stir. I never allow a man to give me his seat."

"Quite right," said the young man. "I had guessed you were that sort. As a matter of fact I didn't intend to offer mine. You've got the vote now, you know."

"Indeed I haven't," said I. "I'm not thirty yet, though I may look it."

"In that case," said the young man, "you're entitled to the privileges of your sex. Besides, I get out here." And, lifting his hat, he arose and left the tram.

Impudent person! He had rather nice eyes and a slim, wiry figure. . . .

I had one purpose in my mind when I got to the office, and that was to set myself right with Mr. Tackaberry; for I could not bear to think that one who held so low an opinion of my sex should imagine that I had abused his confidence. Fortunately, he was in the hall when I arrived, and I approached him at once.

"Mr. Tackaberry," I said, "I want to have a word with you. I must explain . . ."

"There's nothing to explain," he said stiffly. "Ye've vi'*lated* me confidence, and tha's enough for me. Go' mornin'," and he turned on his heel.

I couldn't let it go at that. I had only myself to blame for this snub; so—conscious that another couple of men in the hall were watching me curiously—I swallowed my pride, and laid a hand on his arm, saying: "Mr. Tackaberry: please: it's all a mistake: you *must* listen to me,"—but he shook me off rudely, and, calling out: "Come on up, Jim!" to one of the men loitering near, he walked off and up the stairs, leaving me scarlet with humiliation.

And then, as I turned to bury my shame in the friendly solitude of the dressing-room, whom should I see in the doorway but Phyllis O'Dea, who had emerged in time to observe the whole scene.

"*WELL* ! ! !" she said. Her vocabulary is poor, but her voice is sufficiently expressive. I knew that she was shocked, rather pleased, and fundamentally jealous: which put me on my mettle at once.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked as coolly as possible.

"Well, I *must* say!" said Phyllis, again making up in tone what she lacked in diction.

"Say it then," said I. "Fill the lacuna. Close the gap. Transitive verbs take a direct object. Come on. Out with it."

"Oh, you can bluff as much as you like," said Phyllis. "But I know what I think."

There's no use arguing with these perspicacious fools. "Ass!" I said, and pushed my way past her into the dressing-room.

Yes. I had carried it off well enough with Phyllis; but there was a whole roomful to face upstairs: a roomful of sharp-eyed, sharp-eared minxes—disappointed old maids, embittered grass-widows, and girls sick of drudgery, and desperately, if unconsciously, longing for life—great smellers-out of scandal, devout worshippers of mean things, keen relishers of other people's misfortunes (poor creatures! can you blame them, all things considered?)—a roomful, I say, of such fertile soil for the winged seed of rumour, had to be outfaced for the next three hours.

I did it. Somehow—I yet marvel at my nerve—I managed to sail into that room with a face of bright unconcern. Somehow, under those eleven pairs of questioning eyes, I got through my humdrum work. But what a morning! Time and again that shameful scene in the hall conjured itself up before my imagination: and every time a hot, prickly blush would break out all over my body and creep up to my very ears. What I should have done if Mr. Tackaberry had been sent to me for another day's coaching I don't know. But I was spared that ordeal. The young brute did not appear in our office at all that day; but the door never opened without attracting a look of apprehension from me and one of expectation from all the others.

Cats!

And then happened, towards the end of the afternoon, what seemed to me at the time the most astounding and inexplicable event in this embarrassing comedy in which a thoughtless jest had landed me. Can you

imagine Tackaberry behaving like a gentleman? Well, on this occasion it appeared that he could.

A decent young man called Burke, from the Accountant's office, came up to me with some papers, supposedly connected with my work, and with them he unobtrusively slipped me a note addressed *Miss A. Rudd* in a flowing copper-plate hand. As soon as he had withdrawn I opened it, and read as follows:—

Dear Miss Rudd,

I beg to apologise most sincerely for my ungentlemanly conduct this morning. What possessed me to be so rude I don't know, but I was so put out by you violating my confidence that I couldn't help myself, and hope you will excuse me.

Dear Miss Rudd, I am really very sorry, and hope you will forgive me as I forgive you for violating my confidence. I don't know how I could have been so rude.

If you can forgive me I will be waiting in the hall, and hope you will shake hands with me when I come forward to apologise. If you can't, you can pay me out by snubbing me there before everybody, and I am so disgusted with myself that I'll feel I have deserved it.

Hoping to be favoured with your forgiveness, dear Miss Rudd,

I remain,

Your most obedient servant,

H. Tackaberry.

What could I do after that? I am a Christian, I hope, and by nature I am not vindictive. So when at five o'clock Mr. Tackaberry came towards me, hat in hand, prepared to take, under the noses of some half-dozen men and girls who were loitering in the hall, any snub I might inflict on him, I gave him a moderately friendly bow. Then, as he attempted to speak, I cut

him short with a hurried: "I'll see you to-morrow," and made off briskly for home.

But I was now firmly resolved to end the ridiculous situation which my thoughtless jest had created, by making a clean breast of it to both my victims. So first thing next morning I sought out Mr. Tackaberry.

"Look here," I said, "I want to explain that unfortunate business of the other evening."

"Oh, that's all right, Miss Rudd," he interrupted in magnanimous tone. "We'll say no more about it."

"Oh, yes we must," I replied. "I can't possibly allow you to go on thinking that I violated your confidence, and the explanation is perfectly simple."

"Sure, what does it matter now, Miss Rudd?" said he. "I'm ready and willing to overlook it."

"But there's nothing to overlook," I persisted. "I can't blame you for thinking what you did, but really you are mistaken."

"Well, of course, if ye *say* so . . ." he began.

"Now please let me speak, and I'll explain everything," I said. "When Miss O'Dea made that remark about your name she didn't refer to what you think at all. I never mentioned that to a soul: and wouldn't. What happened was this: Miss O'Dea is one of those people who . . . well, she has a leg that one can't possibly resist pulling." Mention of female legs has an unholy effect on people of Tackaberry's type. I saw that at once by a slight change in his expression, which made me wish I hadn't chosen that metaphor; but I went on : "The day she first saw me coaching you she asked me who you were, and, on the spur of the moment, I told her you were an Italian nobleman pursued by some vendetta or other. She took it quite seriously, and it was to that she alluded when she said she knew the secret of your name."

Tackaberry burst out laughing.

"That's the greatest bit o' gas I ever heard," he said. "We must keep it up. We'll cod her up to the two eyes."

"We'll do nothing of the sort," said I stiffly. "I've no desire whatever to create gas for you. I'm going to tell Miss O'Dea the truth as soon as I see her."

He was not at all abashed, but actually pleaded with me to keep up the joke.

"No, Mr. Tackaberry," I said firmly. "My mind is made up. Good morning." And I left him.

Phyllis, whom I approached in the lunch hour, took my confession in very different spirit. I saw her face harden as I spoke, and when I concluded with: "So you see, my attempt to pull your leg ended in my getting my own nose tweaked," she did not smile at the pleasantry. I guessed she was going to be nasty, but she had her curiosity to satisfy first.

"That's all very well," she said, "but what was it that made him flare up when I said that about his name."

"I'm sure I don't know," I said. "I suppose he's sensitive about it—being such a queer one, you know. I dare say he gets a lot of chaff from the men."

I don't think Phyllis was quite convinced by this explanation; but she decided at last to let herself go.

"A likely story!" she said in cutting tones. "Of course, after a certain age, I understand it might be necessary to keep one's young man from seeing too much of other people: but to try and keep them off with cock-and-bull stories that no one in their senses would believe—well, it's a bit thick, isn't it? But you needn't worry as far as I'm concerned. If your young man makes eyes at me it's not *my* fault: I'm sure *I* never encouraged him," and before I could think of a retort she had vanished.

I could not bring myself to feel angry with the little goose, for, at bottom, I had only myself to blame. Besides, I felt immense relief to think that the complications resulting from that fatuous joke of mine were at an end.

But, as the sequel shows, they were only beginning.

. . . As I left the office that evening Mr. Tackaberry asked permission to see me home; which so astonished me that I could not think how to refuse him.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD

"I WISH to goodness things would settle down," said Mrs. Buck as she poured out tea. "It's as much as your life's worth to go down Camden Street these days. The sugar in the bowl there was near bein' th' end o' me this evenin'. I was just goin' in at the door o' the shop when along came one o' them cage-lorries. Then bang! went a bomb in the road in front of it, an' the Tans went blazin' away with their rifles, an' there was three or four people hit an' lyin' screechin' in the roadway, an' only that I got in behind the counter I'd 'a' been killed meself."

"Ireland is *ambutious* for a Republic," said Mr. Slapjuice, and looked around for laughter, but in vain.

"Tell us a new one," said Mrs. Buck unpleasantly.

"Ye must have had an awful fright, Ma," said Vi'let, ignoring him with calm deliberation.

"Fright!" said Mrs. Buck. "Sure, I was that terrified I clean forgot to wait for me change."

"Those Black-and-Tans," said Mr. O'Farrell, "are the most blood-thirsty set of blackguards I ever heard of. Talk of the German baby-killers!"

"If those Sinn Féin swine use women and children as cover," said Mr. Colgan, "the Black-and-Tans can't be blamed if some of them get shot."

"Now, look here, Colgan——" began Mr. O'Farrell, but Mrs. Buck stopped him at once.

"Mr. O'Far'll, how often have I asked ye not to talk politics at yer tea? And you're as bad, Mr. Colgan,

tho' I *will* say Mr. O'Far'll began it. Can't ye talk about something sensible? . . . Another cup o' tea, Miss Rudd?''

'' No thanks,'' said I. '' I'm not ready yet.''

'' Well, let me add a drop to what you've got. I always do think there's no cup tastes as good as the first, so I always try to carry it on, like. Ye know what I mean. Poor Buck was the same,—R.I.P. ' Another sup into that, Ma,' he used to say, and his cup wouldn't be near empty. A great connoysure of tea was Buck: he wasn't much of an eater, ye know, but he'd want the tea-pot to be always on the hob. He liked it strong, too. ' Tea's no good unless ye can stand on it,' he used to say, and he'd always tell me to put a pinch o' soda in the pot.''

'' Mr. Sitric seems to be waking up these days,'' said Vi'let, breaking the short silence that followed this speech. '' He passed me in the hall just now, and what do you think he said? ' You're looking quite handsome to-day, Miss Buck,' says he. ' You must have discovered the great secret at last.' ' What secret?' said I. ' What every woman is supposed to know,' says he. ' What's that?' says I. ' That you must labour to be beautiful,' says he. Sounds like po'try, doesn't it, Ma? ' Well,' says I, ' thank you very much for a doubtful compliment,' and he went away laughing like I don't know what.''

'' That Citron fellah's pretty candid, eh?'' said Mr. Slapjuice, adding, in the cold pause that followed: '' Candied, ye know—play on the word—ha! ha! ha!''

'' Tell us when to laugh,'' said Vi'let tartly.

'' Ye needn't crack any of your jokes at Mr. Sitric's expense,'' said Mrs. Buck. '' He may be a bit queer in his ways, but he's a gentleman.''

'' Oh, sorry I spoke, I'm sure,'' said Mr. Slapjuice.

I could not help pitying the poor fellow. Ever since Bill's advent, the two Bucks, mother and daughter, had been steadily trying to make him feel unwanted. His

jokes, once the delight of the family circle, were now received with the most chilling scorn. He was told at different times that he was a great deal too smart; that he wasn't half as smart as he thought he was; and that some of his jokes were not in the best of taste. Once Mrs. Buck let fall, as if by inadvertence, a remark, disparaging people in trade. It was evident that sooner or later he would be frozen out of the house, had not Fate, or Chance, already decided to end the matter at a blow. The atmosphere resulting from that last cruel snub was not likely to be conducive to the usual prolonged session over the tea-cups and breadcrumbs; so as soon as the meal was over we rose as if by general consent and began to leave the room. As we streeled out, pleasantly replete, into the hall, there came a knock at the door: a very sharp, determined knock which, for lack of onomatopœic symbols, I can only represent in Morse fashion, thus:



It was ten years since I had heard that knock, but I knew it at once. I looked around quickly, and saw by the expression of her face that Vi'let had recognised it, too.

"Go on and open the door, Vi'let," said her mother, "I let Maggie go out to see her ant that's sick;" but Vi'let had shrunk back behind me in piteous consternation, and it was Peter who stepped forward to do her bidding.

Framed in the doorway stood the tall figure of my brother Rudolf: Rudolf, as young and debonair as ever; Rudolf, with his tolerant, half-cynical smile; Rudolf, picturesque and striking, even in his cheap ready-made suit and ill-fitting second-hand boots. The question: "Is Miss Rudd at home?" was on his lips when he suddenly seemed to recognise Peter, who was looking at him with bashful hostility. Then his eye fell

on Mrs. Buck towering indignantly in the background, glanced over her carelessly, and turned on me.

"Well, old girl," he said. "Here I am," and, flinging his hat on the rack, he came forward and stooped to kiss me. Few men could do that: stoop, I mean.

"Well! !" said Mrs. Buck, drawing his attention before he could discern Vi'let crouching in the shadow of the stairs.

"Hello! Mrs. B.," said Rudolf cheerily. "How goes it?"

"Mr. Rudd," said Mrs. Buck, "I wonder ye'd have the face to show yourself in me house again after the dirty, low, mean way ye behaved. . . . As for you, Miss Rudd, y'ought to be ashamed of yourself, tellin' me lies all these years and pretendin' he wasn't yer brother. Maybe ye think ye're mighty clever, but ye'll take yerself an' yer gewgaws an' yer indecent statchews away out o' here on this day week; an' you, Mr. Rudd, will just walk out o' the door this very minyit."

To this torrent of eloquence Messrs. Slapjuice, Colgan, and O'Farrell stood listening in utter astonishment. Peter said: "The door's open for ye, Mr. Rudd;" and Vi'let, with a little sob, pushed past her mother into the dining-room.

"There! You've done it now," said Rudolf to Mrs. Buck. "Raked up a buried sorrow with your blatherskite. Better go and hold her hand instead of ballyragging me. . . . Have you a private room, Stasia?"

"Mr. Rudd," said Mrs. Buck firmly, "I won't have you in me house. D'ye hear?"

"I hear your daughter getting hysterical inside there," said Rudolf, and sure enough the sound of frantic sobbing came from the dining-room.

"God bless us!" cried Mrs. Buck, and rushed into the room after a parting word to Peter to "keep that fellow out."

"Walk out now," said Peter, but Rudolf gave him a look that turned him pale. I motioned Rudolf

towards the stairs, but now Mr. Slapjuice, recovering from his stupefaction, stepped forward.

"Look here," he said. "What's the meaning of all this?"

"Better not butt in where you aren't wanted, sonny," said Rudolf.

"Not wanted!" cried Mr. Slapjuice. "Not wanted! See here. I'm that blinkin' girl's fiancy, so I am, and I want to know the meaning of all this hanky-panky." (A rattling sob from Vi'let within.) "Hear that! That's not for nothin', I suppose. Tell me what's up, Peter."

"Nothin'," said Peter blankly.

"Nothin' me eyeball!" snapped Mr. Slapjuice: "Didjever see a girl carryin' on like that for nothin'? What's up, I tell ye? Come on, now. Out with it, or be cripes I'll know what to think. Come on!"

"I dunno," said Peter.

"Well, by Hell's blinkin' blazes," said Mr. Slapjuice, half incoherent, "if I find she's been kiddlin' an' cussin' other fellahs before me, I'll chuck her to the devil. I'll take no man's leavin's, I tell ye. D'ye hear? If this fellah's been maulin' her I'll break the blinkin' match, so I will. Yes. And would if we were goin' to the altar to-morrow mornin'. Here," turning towards the dining-room, "what's all this bally row about? Will ye hold yer noise, Vi'let, and explain. . . ."

He strode into the room. Rudolf and I went upstairs.

"I *have* put my foot in it, haven't I?" he said, when we were seated in my room. "Hope she doesn't lose her swain. I loved her once—years ago—in happy youthful days in far Drumcondra. But when Ma became auspicious, I fled. She should have forgotten my kisses by this time: I had certainly forgotten her name."

The Vi'let affair didn't interest me.

"What have you been doing with yourself all these years?" I asked.

"I say," remonstrated Rudolf. "Give a man a chance! You don't expect me to rattle off a ten-years' autobiography right on the nail, do you? On an empty stomach, too."

"What?" said I. "Have you had no tea?"

"My dear Stasia," said Rudolf. "You surely don't imagine that a ticket from London and the price of this outfit—such as it is—" overlooking himself distastefully, "would leave any change out of a tenner?—It was decent of you to make it ten, by the way."

"The ticket must have been under three pounds," said I, "and I don't believe that suit cost you more than five . . ."

"But, hang it, Sniff, when that money-order came I was hungry . . . and, look here, old girl, I'm hungry still. Come on out and stand me a decent feed. I'll pay you back that tenner as soon as I get a job."

I took him down town forthwith, and in the downstairs room at Jammet's he polished off a grilled mackerel, braised steak enough for two, a couple of Welsh rabbits, three helpings of chocolate pudding, and half a melon. Then, having replenished for the third time his pewter mug of draught beer, he lit his great curved deep-burned briar pipe, and puffed away for three minutes in placid contentment. It must be nice to have a fine strong man of your own puffing away by the fire in the evenings. If I ever marry it will be a man with a good jaw and fine lips and strong white teeth; and he'll smoke a sturdy pipe, not one of your finicky cigarettes, nor danger-signal cigars. That's a choice epithet, isn't it? The cigar cocked at a rakish angle in the silk-hatted, white-mufflered six-footer's mouth, as the stamp, hall-mark, trade-mark, signboard, or symbol of the villain of the piece, is in my mind inseparable from dark and sinister compound adjectives. Rudolf ought to smoke a cigar to be in character: and he should sip Vermouth instead of swilling this

good brown beer. Perhaps there is something to be said for him after all.

"Well," he said at length, "how's the Island of Prigs and Bookworms messing along?"

"Bother the island!" said I. "It's all in the newspapers anyway. What about yourself? What have you been up to? How did you discover my address?"

He looked at me with a grin of amusement, and said: "By the chance discovery, intuitive unravelling, and sleuth-like pursuit of the same clue that told me you were worth touching for a fiver."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"In an idle moment I picked up a volume of fiction belonging to my landlady's daughter: 'A Field of Daffodils,' by Lucy Loveday: fourteenth thousand. 'This charming idyll'—*The Times.*" My cheeks were blazing, but he didn't seem to notice. "Having nothing to do, I read a bit of it, and between you and me and the mug there it's a pretty tolerable bit of slush. Read it?" I nodded. "You can imagine the author: sweet young thing fresh from school, full up of romance, and with a photograph of Prince Charming always in her mind's eye." Reassured I nodded again. He drew a long whiff, exhaled it, and without any change of tone, said: "If you wanted to preserve your anonymity, Sniffy, you shouldn't have drawn Bill from life and put in that story of how he nearly dished himself with Sara Skinner."

"Don't split on me, Rudolf," I implored.

"Split? Not I. I wouldn't be uncle to the thing for a million."

"Promise," I said.

"Honest Injun," he said. "Your secret is safe with me."

"Well, go on. What did you do next?"

"Oh, the rest is pretty obvious. It was only a question of looking up your publisher."

"*He* wouldn't tell you," said I.

"No. Nor did I ask him. I went in to discuss terms in connection with my forthcoming work, 'Unknown Potentialities in Nether Polynesia.' I hoped to fish the thing out somehow or other, but by a stroke of luck he had a letter on his table addressed to you, waiting for the post. . . . And here I am."

By degrees, that evening and the next, I got him to tell me the story of those years of wandering. He had left his wife, he said, because he had found that he couldn't stand domesticity. He took what blame there was on himself. He had married in haste, like a fool, but he had needed no leisure for repentance. Marriage and he were simply incompatible. If he had wronged her, there was no sense in continuing the wrong. She was well provided for, having money of her own—far more than he had, in fact; so he had avoided all scenes and other troubles by simply taking his departure without a word. He had gone at once to America and, settling in New York, had started to work out those electrical and mechanical inventions for which he had such an astonishing genius. He made a living that way, and a good living, too,—up to four or five thousand dollars a year. But young men of Rudolf's type want more than a living; and Rudolf felt that his work ought to earn him more. He observed with great dissatisfaction that while the number, ingenuity, utility, and output of his inventions was daily increasing, and the profits of the manufacturers mounting up in proportion, his own income remained almost stationary. After that he was not long in finding out the inadequacy of the protection afforded to the inventor by the Patent Laws, and the ease with which they could be infringed or circumvented. And when one day he learned that one of his most ingenious appliances, which he had disposed of on singularly generous terms, had been "improved" by some trifling addition and was making thousands of dollars for someone else, he came at last to the conclusion that, while he might still go

on inventing for the love of it, he must find some other way of making his fortune. The attempts that followed were not prosperous. He gave me rambling accounts of gold prospecting in California, of oil prospecting in Mexico, and of a treasure-hunt in Polynesia; in all which regions he met with adventures, too numerous even to mention here, but which will give me material for many novels in the future; yet at the end of it all he returned to New York no richer than he had left it. For a short time after his last failure he was back again at his inventions; and then, all of a sudden, came a great slice of luck; the drawing of a winner in a big racing sweepstake, which put ten thousand dollars into his pocket and an inspiration into his head at the same moment.

Rudolf paused in his narrative; drew from his pocket a pink newspaper; opened it; folded it backwards; and handed it to me. A prominent advertisement caught my notice:

DIGBY DANAHER

TURF ACCOUNTANT

BASLE

Books now open on CESAREWITCH

DOUBLE EVENTS A SPECIALITY

"DIGGIE *ALWAYS* PAYS"—*vide Press.*

"That's me," said Rudolf.

"Oh, Rudolf!" I said.

"What of it?" said Rudolf. "If Society gives inventors the merest pittance, and thrusts thousands into the pockets of parasites,—well, the only course for an ambitious man is to turn parasite. You needn't look smug, Stasia. I know how things ought to be and might be, and in my youth I fought against things as they are. Didn't I join the Fabians? Didn't I hand out their dope wherever I went? Didn't I listen patiently to the cackle of objections that any fool with a tongue in his head can roll off inside five minutes? Didn't I answer it all cheerfully and tolerantly as if they were new and original arguments I'd never heard before? 'Oh, Mister Rudd, surely you don't think it fair to pay a prime minister or a bank manager the same wage as a coal heaver?' Porridge-brained blatherskites; as if there was any fairness in the present system of paying railway porters better than school teachers, stockbrokers better than doctors, idlers better than anybody, and not paying mothers and poets at-all. God, Stasia, what a world! If some hard-working poor devil has two hundred a year for the goal of his ambition it'll screw him down to a hundred and fifty; whereas if you scheme after ten thousand you'll be pressed to take twenty. When I offered the world ideas and service it wouldn't listen to me; and when I offered it priceless mechanical inventions it gave me a bare subsistence; when all of a sudden I found it had its pocket open and was eagerly waiting for me to pick it, can I be blamed for yielding to the temptation and helping myself? You did the same yourself, after all."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Oh, come!" said Rudolf. "You don't surely imagine that those books of yours are literature, or that the money they bring you is in proportion to their merits or to the work you put into them,—do you?

No. You found that Society wouldn't pay you a decent wage for the difficult and important work you were doing, but was prepared to shower wealth on you in return for the execrable trash you could scribble quite easily in your spare time. So, like a sensible woman, you accepted that standard instead of playing the ass—as I did in my fatuous youth—by setting up one of your own,—or some philosopher's that you happened to agree with. You found that in this world nothing can be done without money, and very wisely set out to get as much of it as you could. Same here, except that I was intellectually conscious of the process. Society wouldn't come my way for its own good; so I decided to go its way for mine: and that's all there's to it. Any further virtuous objections before I proceed?''

'' I'm overwhelmed by your eloquence,'' I said, '' and I was never any good at theology anyway. But all this apologia seems rather superfluous in view of your subsequent cropper.''

'' Wrong again, my dear,'' said Rudolf with a laugh. '' The worldly hope I set my heart upon prospered exceedingly. It was a last flaring up of youthful ardour and unselfishness that turned it once more to ashes. Digby Danaher was a first-class paying proposition from the very start. He had ups and downs, of course; but the ups predominated. Many an idle rich was neither rich nor idle by the time Diggie had finished with him. It was as easy as the multiplication table. That Double Events a Speciality business was the best booby trap of the lot. The chances against any double event are about a thousand to one, but I never had to put up more than about five hundred, and even that was generally covered twenty times over. I tell you, Stasia, Solomon in all his glory hadn't as many tributaries as I had in those days. They came in endless streams, showering gold on me. There was little enough work to do at the outset—advertising mostly—but soon there was none. I only had to sit

there and watch the money come waltzing in,—yes, waltzing in, light and glittering like a golden fairy, ever so different from the sullen dame whom clerks and artisans and shopkeepers and dentists spend such toil and thought in wooing.—There's poetry in the most sordid affairs, Stasia. Well, as I say, I was raking in the shekels, conscience pretty well smothered, and the ways of a wicked world comfortably swallowed, when lo and behold, that blighted European War came slopping over everything. I was in Paris when it began, and caught the prevailing war fever rather badly in the neck. You mayn't believe me, Stasia, but I really did swallow the current dope—I mean about gallant little Belgium and the rest of it. I tried to join the French Army, but they wouldn't have me; so, with temperature still high, I crossed the Channel and, much against the grain, took the Saxon shilling. Yes. Fought through the whole absurd affair, too, from Ypres to the Armistice. When it was all over I went back to business and tried to pull it straight again, but it didn't seem quite the same. Money was short—both mine and other people's—and somehow I seemed to have lost touch with the hang of things. My luck was gone, too. Clients must have their day, I suppose, and mine had theirs with a vengeance. Gee whiz, but there was a landslide! I sat there like a patient gold-mine while a swarm of needy adventurers dug fortunes out of me. Well, they worked me out, and left me in the end with nothing but the clothes I stood up in and the price of a third-class ticket to London."

"And then?"

"Well, in London I picked up a sort of living in—various ways."

"How?" I pressed him.

"Oh, by my wits principally."

"Rudolf!" I said reproachfully.

He blew smoke and answered:

"In a world of fools what else could a wise man do?

Remember, I know how the world *ought* to be run, and did my bit towards setting it on the way——"

"That's no excuse," I said.

Rudolf smoked impassively.

"So you lived by your wits," I said. Rudolf nodded. "Confidence trick, I suppose?" I queried.

"Amongst others," he admitted.

"Selling steel engravings of King George for half-a-crown?" I suggested.

Rudolf smiled reminiscently.

"I only found one fool green enough to be taken in by that stunt," he said. "Can you guess who it was?"

"Bill?" said I.

"Dear old brother Bill," said Rudolf. "I suppose he came whining to you to have his nose wiped, eh? Well, I'll pay him back some day. But you know, Sniffy, the thimble-rigging business is no trade for a man, and I was about sick of it when I came across that remarkable literary production of yours. You were a decent old bird to come down with that tenner.—Hello!" he broke off, staring across to the other end of the room, where a complicated-looking apparatus glowed warmly, "I'm durned if that isn't one of my patent self-conservating re-combustive stoves. Wish I could handle a cent in every thousand dollars the manufacturer makes out of those."

He sat pensively puffing at his pipe.

"What do you propose to do now?" I asked presently.

"Well," he said, "before I left London I wrote to some of the manufacturers over beyond to cable any royalties that might be due to me to your address. If it's enough to put me on my feet, I guess I'll *get* on my feet. Meanwhile I'm thinking out a scheme or two. In a dog-fight like what's going on over here a good dog ought to have a dog's chance, eh?"

CHAPTER XIV

LARGELY ABOUT CHOCOLATES

DOMESTICITY is a virtue which the least reasonable of mortals do not expect to find highly developed in persons in their early twenties. The word summons up visions (I look now through Rudolf's eyes) of cares and responsibilities dutifully undertaken; of sober joys and still more sober pleasures; of regularity of habits; of early rising and retiring; of punctual meals; of rare outgoings, long pre-arranged and sedately carried through; of quiet evenings by the homely fireside: in fact of husband and wife contentedly "settling down." No more fun; no more excitement; no more snatched lunches of lobster salad at Jammet's buffet; no more oyster suppers in the Dive; no more flirtations; no more dances till five in the morning; no more sitting up in a friend's digs over pipe and whiskey and philosophy in the small hours; no more binges; no more suddenly-planned excursions; no more irregularity of any kind. Such, at any rate, must have been the prospect that revealed itself to poor Rudolf, when, having loved at first sight, and precipitately married, the beauty and wonder of the world, he found himself, at twenty-one, tied to a female human being with a pretty face and a homely soul. Reading his case thus, I could not find it in my heart to blame him very severely for absconding; but I was not so ready to excuse his refusal to return. Rudolf was thirty-two now, so domesticity must have lost some of its horrors for him,—ought, after such a life as his, to be even welcome. I had thought as much from the beginning; now I said it.

"No, Sniffy," he replied quite gravely. "I can't go back."

"You're getting old, Rudolf," I said. "The fireside

should have lost some of its terrors for you by now. You'd find it very comfortable at times."

"So I would," he said. "So I have, too," he added, "down in South Carolina, where they have sensible marriage laws."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Quite simple. Wife I had in Carolina. Nice little thing. Lived together for fifteen months. Then we got fed up: asked for a divorce: no questions asked: kiss and part: and there we are."

"Then you're a bigamist," said I in horror.

"Trigamist," he corrected. "I've a little coloured wife in Polynesia.

Beside the sea
At Waikiki
She waits for me.

Now amn't I a bold, bad man?"

"It's certainly high time you settled down," I said.

"Well, you're a cool, unshockable maiden, and no mistake."

"Oh," said I, "one hasn't to go to the ends of the earth for purple stories. As a worker in the Dublin slums I've encountered theatrical villains beside whom you're a sanctimonious paterfamilias."

He gaped at me incredulously.

"What you need," I said, "is someone to look after you and a good rest."

Rudolf took his pipe out of his mouth, uncrossed his legs, stretched them out before him, put his hands in his trouser's pockets, leant back his head, and sighed.

"Oh, Sniffy," he said, "if you only knew Nancy!"

So the truth was coming out at last: it wasn't mere wanderlust that had sent our hero out into the world: I had been right in thinking that a man doesn't call his wife a she-wolf for nothing. I may mention that I was not by any means well acquainted with my sister-in-law, though I had tried at the beginning to make friends with her in order to please Rudolf. That,

however, had proved a fruitless task, for we had neither an idea nor a taste in common. Besides, if there's one quality in humanity I detest it's coolness; and Nancy is one of the coolest customers I ever met. It's cool enough to put things down to a friend's account if you run short of cash when shopping; but if you make a habit of it, and dodge paying up every now and then, cool seems too mild a word. Then she had a perfect mania for borrowing things, and a marvellous disinclination for returning them; and she had a habit of inviting you to tea with her in a restaurant and then finding she had forgotten her purse, which had been a sore embarrassment to me in those days when my own purse had been anything but a long one. Perhaps Rudolf had discovered these little flaws in her character and had fled to America in shame of the burdens which had been laid upon his friends. I waited anxiously for enlightenment, but he remained silent.

"Well," I said at length. "What if I did?"

"She starves a fellow," said Rudolf. "In all the year I lived with her I never had a square meal. It was always pinching and scraping and 'easy with the butter' and 'that joint has to last till Thursday,' and so on, though goodness knows we had enough money between us. And she was always trying to 'stretch things out' and borrowing from the neighbours when she ran short: I don't suppose she ever repaid them either: I used to feel ashamed to face them some times. Lord, the things she used to do! One day she had a couple of girl friends in to tea, and as I knew she wouldn't have enough on the table I bought a big box of chocolates on the way home, and handed them out. What did Nancy do? Passed them round once and then put them by to guzzle afterwards by herself."

"No!"

"'Deed she did. It was that guzzling habit of hers that finally put the lid on everything. One day she stopped me helping myself to a third slice of cold

mutton at lunch. ' That mutton has to last to the end of the week,' she said. I asked for bread and butter. ' No,' says she, ' we're nearly through this week's butter.' So I went off to work hungry. Well, halfway down the street I found I'd forgotten my fountain-pen, so back I went for it: and there I found her, sitting in the dining-room, guzzling away at a huge box of chocolates that I didn't even know was in the house. Pretty thick, wasn't it? I left her next day, and I tell you, Stasia, wild horses won't bring me back to her."

I had kept a card up my sleeve all this time, and now, when the conclusion of the above narrative had deprived me of all wish to win the game, I was compelled to play it.

" I hope she feeds the child better than she fed you," I said.

Rudolf sat up with a violent start.

" The child!" he said. " What child?"

" *Your* child."

" Good Lord!" he said. " I'd no idea. Do you mean it, Stasia?"

" What do you take me for?"

" Did you say it was a boy?"

" Yes. And very like its daddy, too, poor kid."

" Lord!" he exclaimed. " I wish I'd known. She's had him at her mercy all these years. I bet she's ruined him. A mean, scringing, scraping little cuss, that's what she'd make of him, damn her!—But she shan't have him any longer," he blazed out suddenly. " I've as much right to him as she has. I'll take him from her and make a man of him."

" Good," said I. " You're getting domesticated already.

" What's his name?" asked Rudolf.

" Ernie," said I.

" It would be," said Rudolf gloomily. Then, starting to his feet he said: " Come. We'll save him from

her clutches before it's too late. Where does she live?"

The hot-headed fellow would have gone straightway and bearded the she-wolf in her den if I had been fool enough to tell him where it was. But by refusing to enlighten him I brought him eventually to reason. I pointed out that a man who had deserted his wife all these years could have no claim, legal or otherwise, to the child she had reared, supported, and educated; that to use force would be out of the question; that the judge who would take the child from a comfortable home and entrust it to a vagabond father would be little short of a lunatic; and that he had better make up his mind to behave sensibly, pay his wife a visit, and come to some amicable arrangement with her. To this, after some argument, he agreed, and eventually it was decided that I should call on Mrs. Rudolf and arrange a meeting.

I put the decision into practice that very evening. My sister-in-law lived in a two-storeyed red brick villa, in a quiet terrace approached by a side street leading off the Rathmines Road. Admitted by a hungry-looking servant, I was shown into the harshly-furnished but speckless dining-room, where I found my sister-in-law sitting over the remains of a meal, and luxuriously stuffing herself with chocolates. She had been a pretty girl when she married Rudolf: brown-haired, grey-eyed, graceful, with slim figure and delicate features,—perhaps a shade too slim and too delicate, but undeniably attractive. Now she was distinctly thin, and the roundness of her cheeks was gone, leaving drawn skin, and bones too prominent. She made the most perfunctory show of rising at my entry; asked me to take a chocolate, but without pushing the box towards me; and on my refusal crammed a couple into her own mouth before putting the box away in the sideboard in case I should change my mind.

"Well, have some tea," she said. "I can tell Lizzie

to put water on the pot. It hasn't been up long: God knows we don't be long over our meals these hard times, and butter the price it is."

I declined the hospitality, saying I had had tea already.

"A good one, too, I'll be bound," she said in her hard, querulous voice, pitched like the overstretched string of a banjo. "It's well to have only yourself to look after in these days."

I made conversation for a bit. I said the weather was fair, and she said it might be better. I said the times were awful, and she said they were frightful. I said I hoped she was well, and she said she was so-so. I asked how Ernie was, and she said he might be worse. I asked had she had any visitors lately, and she suddenly roused herself to vigour and said yes, indeed, she had: but they generally came to suit their own convenience, not hers.

"This Curfew," she said, "is a grand excuse for people who want to get a meal out of you and then run away. Your brother Tom was in last week with a model steam yacht for a birthday present for Ernie—by the way, I must thank you for the cricket bat you sent, Stasia: it was awfully good of you, and I really meant to write to you, but knowing you'd be in soon, and postage being so high these days, and paper the price it is—well anyway, Tom came in with the steam yacht—a most expensive-looking one it was—and I asked him to stay to tea. 'Course I needn't tell you, Stasia, I don't mind a man dropping in for a cup of tea, or a thing like that, but I declare to goodness when he had the face to turn round and ask for an egg, as if the place was a hotel or a restaurant, and then shovelling on butter as if it cost sixpence a pound—not, of course, that I'd like to complain of what a person eats, but at the same time— Will you have a cigarette, Stasia?"

"No, thanks," I said. "If we women are to main-

tain our superiority over men we mustn't succumb to their vices."

"Well, you're not an expensive visitor anyway," said Nancy, lighting one for herself, and motioning me to a seat by the carefully-slacked fire. After a little more small-talk, I drew her back to the subject of Ernie, who, I learned, was out, playing with some neighbouring children, but would be in soon. I asked if he ever inquired for his father, and was told very sternly that he didn't. But now I was well away for my objective, and with little more shilly-shally told her that her husband had returned to town. If she was startled she did not betray it. All she said was:

"Hm! it's about time."

"He wants to see you," I said.

"I dare say," said Nancy. "I suppose he's hard up."

"What if he is?" I said hotly. "He won't come to *you* to support him."

"And why wouldn't he?" she snapped. "Amn't I his wife?"

"Oh, well," I said, "if that's the way the land lies, I'm delighted. But I may as well tell you, Rudolf could easily earn a very good income if he'd only settle down and stop trying to make his fortune."

"So he would," said Nancy. "And why wouldn't he? It's not as if he hadn't a quiet enough home to settle down in."

Matters having reached this amicable stage, it was only necessary to make arrangements for the actual meeting. I wanted it to take place the very next day, but Nancy, wishing, I suppose, to punish him by keeping him in suspense, excused herself on the grounds of another engagement, and appointed the following Tuesday; replying to my protest that, as Master Rudolf had waited so long, he might very well wait a bit longer.

CHAPTER XV

FROM HEROINE TO VILLAINESS

MEANWHILE my term at the office had almost expired, but the last few days there had been by no means uneventful. It will be recollected that after I had accorded my gracious pardon to Mr. Tackaberry I had been surprised into allowing him to see me home. I had attached little significance to his desire to do so at the time, attributing it to an over-zealous but well-meaning purpose of amendment, and therefore not expecting to find the attention repeated. Judge, then, of my surprise and annoyance when the very next evening, with an air of cool assurance, he stepped up to me in the hall, where he had been awaiting my descent, and requested a renewal of the favour. Of course I refused point-blank; but, at sight of the look of disappointment that forthwith clouded his handsome face, I relented, and—like a fool—hedged so far as to trump up an excuse to soften the blow: a fatal step, for henceforward it was impossible, by any means short of violence, to keep him at arm's length.

He developed the acquaintance rapidly after that, the more easily as I was requested to devote the entire of my last few days to his tuition. His looks gradually became bolder; he lost that slight awe of me which I suppose his consciousness of my superior age and position had made instinctive in him; he found himself at last quite at ease with me. And then, almost immediately, came another change, opposite, but not reverse. He became shy again, but in a different way. His glances became fleet and flickering; but they held a challenge. His manner was timorous; but with alternations of feverish momentary boldness. His speech, however it might halt, began to develop in suggestion. His hand-shake showed a tendency to linger; and one

day, in the course of our work, his hand, as if by accident, brushed mine with hesitant caress that set me wondering. Could he—could he possibly—could he dare to think that *I* could ever . . . ? Nonsense! I put the suspicion impatiently aside. I knew my looks were fair enough; but they were not of the kind to attract men of the Tackaberry stamp. Neither was my conversation likely to be of interest to him; and surely he must know how different all our standards were. He surely could not imagine that I would be (in his own picturesque language) "game for a bit of a squeeze." Ugh! No. He wouldn't dare.

Thus I reassured myself; but my equanimity was quickly shattered by the behaviour of my fellow-workers in the office, who were well aware how matters stood, and by winks and nods and hints and smiles endeavoured to convey to me what was in their minds. Phyllis's demeanour, too, should have put me on my guard. She was stiff and frigid, never spoke to me unless under absolute necessity, and looked at me, whenever I was in Tackaberry's company, with a strange glitter in her little washy eyes: symptoms which I attributed to pique, but which I ought to have known were an indication of boiling jealousy. The office, however, was determined that I should not be left in such a state of ignorance, and set to work to enlighten me by conversations such as the following:

GLADYS. Do you like handsome men, Minnie?

MINNIE. In a way. Do you?

GLADYS. *No.* They're much too conceited. I don't think a man *ought* to be too handsome.

FANNY. Who's the handsomest man in the office?

MINNIE. Tackaberry, of course.

FANNY. I suppose he is.

GLADYS. Deedn' he isn't. I'd rather have Jim Burke any day.

FANNY. Well, Jim has a cheerier sort of face, of course, but he hasn't Mr. Tackaberry's features.

PHYLLIS. I don't see anything very wonderful about Mr. Tackaberry. [*Sweetly*] What do *you* think, Anastasia?

Or again:

MINNIE. Gladys, if a man asked to see you home and you refused him, and he asked again and you refused him again, and he asked again, would you think he was in love with you?

GLADYS. I'm sure I don't know.

MINNIE. Would *you,* Fanny?

FANNY. Well, I might. It would depend.

MINNIE. Would *you,* Phyllis?

PHYLLIS. I'd think he thought he was, anyway.

Delightful people, weren't they? But they opened my eyes, and I made up my mind that the very next time Mr. Tackaberry ventured to offer me his escort I would treat him to a snub that would make him wish that he had never been born. The opportunity occurred that very evening. When I descended to the hall, there he stood, handsome, immaculate, expectant. His face lit up at my appearance, and he raised his hat.

"Can I have the pleasure . . . ?

I looked him slowly up and down, a cold, cutting answer ready to my tongue. But as I did so a memory flashed into my mind: Mr. Dunkerville's letter: exuberance of imagination: experience of life. Yes. I must get experience of life: and here it stood before me, modestly suppliant, offering itself for trial. Swiftly I made my resolution. I blinded myself to his rosebud and dickey; I deafened myself to his Dublin accent; I smiled graciously and said: "You're very kind."

"Not at-all," he replied, intoxicated with delight.

"It's a pleasure;" and off we walked together under the very eyes of Phyllis, who had just come down to the hall. We had not gone fifty yards when he slowed his pace and said: "Tell me, Miss Rudd: y'aren't in a great hurry home, are ye?"

I glanced at my wrist-watch and said I wasn't. Why?

"Well," said he, "I thought p'r'aps ye'd come and have a cup of tea somewhere: Cairo, maybe, or some place like that."

I thanked him; but I had too many friends who were frequenters of the Cairo to be able to face it with equanimity in my present company. The various tables at Bewley's are more secluded, so at my suggestion we took a tram there at once. The experience proved less trying than I had anticipated, for Mr. Tackaberry had a plentiful fund of small talk which I did not even attempt to interrupt, and in the exuberance of his hospitality he ransacked the shop-counter for cakes such as are not usually put upon the tables,—rich, luscious-looking, many-coloured creamy confections, to which I did full justice. Then, greatly daring, he suggested a picture-house; and I, maddened by the gods who had decreed my destruction, consented. In the darkness I wondered if he would try to take my hand, and was at my wits' end to know what to do if he should; but fortunately he did not venture so far. He bought a generous box of chocolates, of which he compelled me by his assiduous hospitality to consume by far the major portion—rich, clinging, mellifluous, perfume-savoured, I ate them to satiation. Meanwhile Pathe's Gazette had flickered out, and a long, intense society melodrama had begun. Tackaberry, interested in the story, ended his chatter. I sat on, first in amused, then in patient, boredom, alleviated by chocolates. Reel after reel went by, dull, senseless, unimaginative. Chocolates began to cloy, then to sicken. The atmosphere throbbed heavy; a revulsion of feeling came over

me: hot-faced, I suffered the tingling prickles of shame. I was ashamed of the puerility before me; ashamed of myself; ashamed of the creature beside me. I sat up and touched his arm.

"I must go now," I said. "I have some important letters to write;" and out we went in the middle of a reel.

But the fresh keen air on the tram-car top blew away the scruples that had come crowding upon me in the enervating atmosphere of the picture-house. My resolve returned to me. Fame and money would be mine. Tackaberry sat close beside me on the narrow seat, discussing the drama he had witnessed with as much seriousness as other people discuss politics and literature; weighing its merits, calculating its probable ending, comparing it with other classics of the same school. It amused me to see how thoroughly he was imbued with cinema-philosophy,—the world's philosophy now, is it not? To him the failure of a multi-millionaire's million-making scheme was tragedy,—matter for faintings, despair, suicide maybe. He found something eminently satisfying in the rise of a pauper to the position of a millionaire's bride. Poverty, drunkenness, and physical malformation made him scream with laughter. He sat close to me, making the most of those last few minutes, scanning my face in the dusk, talking in high, vague terms of his hopes and ambitions, and fancying that he was impressing me tremendously.

Rathgar.

You would have thought us lovers had you seen us there murmuring in the twilight over the garden gate. He took my hand at parting, and I made mental notes. Here was my hand in his: a man's; a stranger's; not a brother's. And his face was handsome. Oh, yes: I suppose there was something of a thrill in it.

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

And he went down the road to Rathmines swinging his cane and stepping out very smartly, leaving a trail of cheap cigarette smoke behind him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE UNFATTED CALF

On Monday evening I received a note from Rudolf, written in the curt fashion characteristic of him.

Meet me at the Town Hall at 5.45, *and we'll go together.*

I couldn't understand it at all. His wife's house was obviously to be our destination, but why did he want me with him? My presence would make their meeting ten times as embarrassing,—and as for me, I knew I should feel magnificently *de trop*. However, I met Rudolf at the time and place appointed, if only to tell him so.

"What!" he exclaimed in reply to my remonstrances. "You don't suppose we're going to have a kiss-again-with-tears stunt, do you? No, thanks. No sob-stuff for me. We're just going to call off hostilities and negotiate about the spoils. A week now and again with the boy is about all I want. Come on."

I went on, full of misgiving. When Mrs. Rudolf's door was opened by the hungry-looking servant, Rudolf gave her a searching glance, cocked at me an eye that plainly said: "I thought as much," and taking a parcel from his pocket, addressed the girl:

"Say, young lady, I brought these along for the missus, but I guess thy need is greater than hers. Take 'em to the nether regions and guzzle.—No, don't

waste tissue guiding us to the parlour. According to precedent it should be first on the left, and my grip's just good enough to turn the handle myself."

As the maid stood by in amazement we piloted ourselves into the parlour and sat down. Rudolf looked around despairingly at the meagre and comfortless furniture, pointed to the small and carefully-slacked fire, and said:

"Is this what you want me to come back to?"

Before I could answer, Mrs. Rudolf came into the room, and stood flushed and hesitant at the door. I felt horribly embarrassed, but Rudolf seemed quite at ease, and rattled along in genial fashion.

"Well, old lady," he said, "here we are again. You've moved since I saw you last, eh? Nice neighbourhood you've chosen, too: quiet and respectable. I always did like Rathmines.—Do you remember Tom Lenihan, of Clonkieran, by the way? I met him out in Chicago a couple of years ago, and he said he'd seen you in Grafton Street when he was over, and you were looking prettier than ever and his heart was broken about you. But, of course, that's nonsense, for he has a wife and two kids himself. How's my own wee lad, by the way? I suppose he should be home from school by now. Puzzling over his sums upstairs, I guess. No, they'd come easy if he's his father's son. Languages were my weakness, and I'll bet a dollar they're his. Don't let them give him too much home-work anyhow. That's what's ruining the coming generation. Eh, Stasia? Big heads, skinny bodies, and spectacles: that's what we're coming to. All the fault of these durned schoolmasters. Not a spark of imagination in the whole pack of them. They ought to go through a course of the Cangue and Stylites: you know what I mean: stand on a pillar like old man Simeon with that wooden apparatus the Chinks reprove dishonesty with around their necks. Cultivate the imagination no end, that would. Ought to be part of the regular pedagogical

curriculum. Can't you sit down, Nancy. I'll give the fire a poke."

He took up the poker and thrust it into the heart of the mass of black slack till smoke and flame darted out; which achieved what his chatter had failed to do, namely, the restoration of his wife to her normal self. Up till then she had stood motionless facing her husband: now she took a step forward, snatched the poker from him, and said: "Just you let that fire alone, Rudolf;" after which she drew a chair nearer to the fender and sat down primly, muttering: "Such extravagance! That fire would have lasted the evening if you'd let it alone. It'll be burnt out in an hour now."

"My dear Nancy," said Rudolf, "how often shall I have to tell you that stinting coal is a false economy? A certain amount of heat is necessary to life, and if the body can't get it externally it has to manufacture it by stoking up its own furnaces with sugar and fats, which are far more expensive than coal, as you'd find to your cost if I were to sit down to tea without having stirred up that fire."

"It's a queer thing," said Nancy with a sniff, "that after all your travels you can still be talking the same old nonsense as ever."

"I can talk newer nonsense if you like," said Rudolf.

"No, thanks," Nancy snapped. "If you can't talk sense you'd better not talk at all."

Rudolf looked at me, and then spoke in a strange, bitter tone I had heard him use once or twice on occasions that the present one seemed to remind me of.

"The infallibility of ignorance is only equalled by the impeccability of vice. We live in a topsy-turvey world: criminals sit in judgment on saints, and cowards on heroes; fools administer lectures to the wise; and the bray of the donkey is heard in the land."

"Is it me you're calling a donkey?" asked Nancy indignantly.

"No, my dear," replied her husband. "I was only indulging in easy and futile generalisations. It's a wicked and a foolish world, and we don't make it any better or wiser by bringing children into it. Where's my wee boy, by the way?"

"*Your* wee boy!" cried Nancy. "Well, I like that! What have *you* got to do with him, may I ask?"

"Single person present," said Rudolf in a low voice. "I'm surprised you should ask me such a question, Nancy."

"There you are," said Nancy, reddening. "Always trying to put me in the wrong: and everything you say as coarse as the pictures you used to hang in the drawing-room."

"She refers to a copy of *La Source,*" said Rudolf to me.

"The other was just as bad," said Nancy. "There's no decency in a dress that's as thin as a veil."

"Look here!" I interjected, thoroughly embarrassed by this time. "Stop these connubialities and get to business."

"Practical as ever, Sniffy," said Rudolf. "And sound dope, too. Say, Nancy, this squabbling leads nowhere, and I've got a proposition to put up to you. Fact is, I'm getting old and sentimental——"

"You'll never grow old," Nancy interrupted, "and you certainly aren't sentimental."

"Yes, I am," said Rudolf, "and to prove it I'll make you an offer. I made good in America, and though I did a bit of a speculation once that didn't come off, I can still turn out a pretty decent income. Stasia can tell you that only the other day my agents cabled me over pretty near a thousand dollars. Well, there's more where that came from—not enough to let me cut the figure in the world that I'd like, but enough to be going on with. Now what I propose is this. You're kind of struck on saving money. It's a sort of hobby of yours, like stamp-collecting or politics. Good.

Every man and woman to his taste. Save money by all means, so long as I don't have to suffer for it. That's fair and square. Now, supposing you're agreeable to let bygones be bygones and kiss and be friends and all the rest of it, I'll give you three hundred a year that you can save to your heart's content, provided you'll spend all the rest on a splash establishment and a decent way of living."

"Well, upon my word!" said Nancy. "What do you call a decent way of living? Didn't we always live decently? Amn't I living decently now?"

"Every man to his taste, Nancy, as I said before. This may be your idea of decency, but it isn't mine. Come now: make your choice: yes or no?"

"I never *heard* of such a proposition," said Nancy. "It's no better than an insult."

"Yes or no?" said Rudolf.

"Then it's no," said Nancy.

Rudolf gave a sigh—but it was a sigh of relief. He looked into the fire for a minute or two while silence reigned. Then he said:

"Well, Nance, if we can't splice up again, I've another proposition. I'm kind of keen on having a share in that wee boy of mine."

"You're mighty cool, considering everything," said Nancy.

"I won't ask much," said Rudolf, "because I won't have much time to spare. I'll be settling down presently in this town, and I'm looking round for a house. I'll give you that three hundred I suggested before if you'll let me have the lad for a week in every month."

Cupidity glistened in Nancy's eyes. She couldn't resist the temptation to bargain.

"Every two months," she amended.

"Every six weeks," Rudolf compromised.

They closed on that just as a knock came to the door. It was the maid come in to lay the tea things, for in the cold weather Nancy had all meals served in the

sitting-room to avoid the necessity of an extra fire. When all preparations were completed, and the tea-pot itself on the table, a little boy came running in and stopped at Nancy's side.

"Well, dearie," said Nancy, and gave him a perfunctory peck on the forehead. "That gentleman over there is your father," she added.

"I know that," said the boy, who had been looking sideways at Rudolf while enduring his mother's caress. "Celia told me he was here."

"Well, go and shake hands with him, like a good boy.

Ernie went slowly forward, his eyes fixed boldly on Rudolf's face. He was one of those boys with meagre bodies, large heads, and formed, intelligent features, whose age it is impossible to compute within five years of accuracy. He paused at Rudolf's knee, with his hands behind his back, looking up at him. Rudolf, who, strange to say, had been silent all this while, gazed at him a moment undecidedly. He flushed slightly. It was the first time I had ever seen him at a loss. He put his hands on the slim, jersey-sheathed shoulders of the boy, seemed to swallow something, and said: "Well, son."

The boy fidgetted.

"Have you got any more of those chocolates you gave Celia?" he asked.

Rudolf straightened up with a laugh. Nancy frowned.

"Hm!" she said. "Nice example for the boy! Giving chocolates to servants, indeed! and they the price they are. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. However"—with a sigh of resignation—"you're off *my* hands now, and you can spend money like water for all *I* care."

"Have you got any, father?" repeated the child.

"Of *course* he hasn't," snapped Nancy. "Why would he buy chocolates for *us?* Sit down to your tea, now, like a good boy. Sit down, Stasia. You, too,

Rudolf: but I suppose you dine at seven. Six o'clock tea's good enough for a grass-widow, though it's poor enough, God knows, and things the price they are. But you're welcome to it, such as it is, if you don't despise it. . . . Easy with the butter, now, Ernie, and help yourself with the butter-knife in future. Sugar, Stasia? I thought so. . . . Now, Ernie, let the jam alone till your third slice. . . . Pass that to Stasia, please, Rudolf. . . ."

Nancy's fare was plentiful enough, but there was an indescribable air of inhospitality about the table. There were two plates of bread cut up, and there was an uncut brown square. There was a dish of what Nancy called butter, which was really nothing of the kind, and a small glass pot with a not too generous measure of plum jam. In the middle of the table was a dry-looking cake; and close to Nancy was a rack with four pieces of toast. The table itself was large, and our chairs widely separated, so that we felt reluctant to trouble one another with constant requests to pass things: which had considerable effect on the quantity of refreshment consumed. Nevertheless there was remarkably little conversation round the festive board. Young Ernie got through his two slices with amazing rapidity, and as he plastered his third with jam he said:

"Mummy, I put fourpence halfpenny in my money-box this week."

Rudolf paled and looked at me.

"That's a great boy," said Nancy. "He gets sixpence a week for pocket-money," she explained to us, "and he nearly always saves the half of it."

Ernie flushed with pleasure at his mother's tender pride, and seized the opportunity to make a thicker spread of jam.

"What are you saving up for?" Rudolf asked with a faint hope in his voice.

"To become rich," said Ernie.

"Oh, my God!" said Rudolf. Then he fished a

handful of money from his pocket and planked it down in front of his son. "Boy," he said, "now you're rich. Quit saving and have some fun."

The little wretch's eyes sparkled, and his fingers clutched the pile of silver.

"Oh, I say!" he cried. "I can have a bank account now!"

"You'd better let me take care of that for you," said Nancy, reaching out an avid arm. But the boy covered his treasure protectingly with both hands.

"I can take care of it myself," he whinged.

"All right, then," said his mother. "Keep your old money. You needn't come to *me* for sixpences any more."

The youngster's face shadowed; then he turned hopefully to his father.

"Will *you* give me sixpences, father?" he asked.

"I'll give you pounds," said Rudolf. "I'll dress you in cloth of gold, and deck your hair with diamonds, and put shoes of silver on your feet. I'll give you opals for toys, and lumps of platinum to play ducks and drakes with—if you'll promise to go right off and buy a packet of butter-scotch with 'em."

"What does he mean, mummy?" asked Ernie, round-eyed.

"More of his nonsense," said Nancy, who wasn't quite sure herself. "Don't mind him. . . . Have some cake, Stasia? I'm not sure that you'd like it, though. It doesn't look very nice. I bought it in a hurry."

"Father isn't half wiring into the maggie, mother," said the young hopeful across the table.

Nancy went really scarlet this time. "How dare you speak like that!" she shouted; and after boxing the unfortunate youngster's ears she turned him out of the room.

"Guess I'll give Nance an extra hundred to keep the

little cuss away from me," said Rudolf, when we found ourselves in the street.

"What! Your own son!" I reproached him.

"Pooh! Why not?"

"Blood is thicker that water," I said.

"And mine," said Rudolf, "is a deuced sight colder. Come! Let's do something desperate. Let's go to the pictures."

CHAPTER XVII

SPRINGES TO CATCH WOODCOCKS

By what process my brother Bill became a constant visitor at Mrs. Buck's I cannot say for certain. I fancy he must have complained one day of the loneliness of his life, and that Mrs. Buck may have suggested that he should drop in from time to time to his tea, like, and if his sister was too busy to entertain him, sure, there were others that weren't. Be that as it may, he took to dropping in rather frequently both at tea-time and other times, and as I was busily engaged in reconstructing "Over the Garden Wall" by the light of recent experiences, he must have spent a good deal of time in Mrs. Buck's private parlour. I warned him of his danger, but he only pooh-poohed. "Nonsense!" he said. "Nonsense! Lovely girl! Young enough to be my daughter. Marry a Duke if she wanted. Yes, a Duke. The Prince of Wales would be lucky if he could get her." Mrs. Buck, too, was a charming woman. "Designing? Not a bit. Delightful woman! Clever! Well-informed." I suppose Mrs. Buck gave him that which we all require, and to which he was totally unaccustomed—respect. I could imagine her listening in comfortable serenity to that eternal babble of his; assenting to his inanities; soothing his

querulousness; deferring to his pomposity, and ministering to his petty snobbery. To one used, like him, to being treated as a fool, this must have been the wine of life. Small wonder, then, that he came daily to the vineyard.

Mrs. Buck had, of course, withdrawn my notice to leave, and had indeed been quite apologetic about it.

"I hardly knew what I was saying," she explained. "I was bothered entirely by the suddenness of it all, and didn't know whether I was on me head or me heels,—d'ye know what I mean? Of course I'd no right to be blaming you for the low-down conduct of your brother,—so many years ago, too. But ye won't let him come to the house again, will ye? It does come hard on Vi'let."

Vi'let herself did not take too kindly to her mother's new arrangements. I think that, if it had not been for Rudolf's untimely appearance and the consequent catastrophe, she would have written off Bill's social and economic advantages against his age and folly, and stuck to her smart young lover. As it was, she seconded her mother's efforts in the most half-hearted manner conceivable.

One evening Bill happened to drop in just as tea was ready, and was invited to share that meal. We sat down as usual, all but Mr. Kinsella; Bill occupying the place on Mrs. Buck's left where the sprightly Slapjuice had formerly sat.

"That's where Vi'let's admirers always sit, Mr. Rudd," said Mrs. Buck, beaming on him. "And many a one she's had in her day, but she's awful hard to please."

"I hope Miss Violet won't think me too old to count among the number," said Bill with perfectly innocent gallantry.

"Ah, don't be talking!" said Mrs. Buck. "Old, indeed! Isn't Miss Rudd a second daughter to me, and

aren't you her brother? If you're old, it's in me grave *I* ought to be."

"But I *am* old," said Bill. "Old as the hills; old as Methuselah: doddering, in fact; nearly in my second childhood. I tell you I'm the oldest man in Rathgar."

"Galong, now!" said Mrs. Buck. "And you with such a bold eye for the girls! D'ye think I didn't see ye making a dart for the chair next Vi'let? Oh, ye deceiver!" and she wagged a fat finger at him.

"Well, Mrs. Buck," said Bill resignedly, "if you will have it so, I suppose I am young. What, Miss Violet? Do you think I'll do, eh? Am I young enough?"

"Galong now!" said the blushing maiden, and bit into a slice of apple-cake.

"Vi'let," said Mrs. Buck, "I saw ye walkin' down the Rathmines Road with that O'Connor girl this morning."

"Well?" said Violet.

"I wish ye wouldn't do such things," said Mrs. Buck. "Them O'Connors are awful common."

"What can I do if she comes and walks with me?" grumbled Vi'let. "'Tisn't of my seeking, but I couldn't tell her to go to blazes, could I?"

"Ye could show her ye didn't want her," said Mrs. Buck.

"Mr. Rudd wants some more tea, Ma," said Vi'let, passing Bill's cup.

"That's very good tea," pronounced Bill, watching the issue of the fragrant stream. "Excellent tea, Mrs. Buck! Re-markable tea, if I may say so. Finest tea I ever tasted. The Emperor of China couldn't have better on his own table."

"It's Injun tea," said Mrs. Buck.

"The Emperor of China *always* drinks Indian tea," asserted Bill.

"Ye don't say so!" said Mrs. Buck.

"I do," said Bill firmly. "I pledge you my word

for it—my honour—my oath, if you like. I'll swear it in any court you may mention. I'll——''

"Oh, Mr. Rudd, ye needn't swear," said Mrs. Buck. "I'll take your word for it."

"As I have said," Bill went on, "this is remarkably excellent tea. If you saw the tea I get in my own lodgings—black as my hat—cold as ice—dishwater, in fact—you'd pity me, Mrs. Buck."

"Sure, I know," said Mrs. Buck. "They're all the same."

"They're the worst lodgings I've ever had, Mrs. Buck. Dirty, uncomfortable, and expensive. And the blankets, Mrs. Buck! They're thinner than handkerchiefs. I'm shivering all night."

"Ye should make them give you a hot jar," said Mrs. Buck.

"I do," said Bill. "But it's never hot. Lukewarm at the best, and cold most of the time. Last night I do believe they'd had it in a refrigerator."

"Ye should try bed-socks, Mr. Rudd," said Mrs. Buck. "They're grand: *much* better than a jar. Buck (R.I.P.) always swore by the jars. It was one o' them half-gallon whiskey jars we used to have, and it was nice and warm all right. But one night the cork came out, and from that on we took to the socks."

Here Mr. O'Farrell choked and spluttered tea, and Mr. Colgan discovered an extraordinarily interesting spot on the ceiling, which he began to study with preternatural gravity, tightly screwing up his eyes to appreciate its intricacies, and biting his lip in the intensity of his concentration.

"I must take your advice, Mrs. Buck," said Bill. "I'll get a pair: two or three: dozens if necessary. But I'll have to change my lodgings all the same. They're unbearable."

Mrs. Buck emitted the clucking sound that she used to express commiseration.

"Try some of that apple-cake, Mr. Rudd," she said.

"Good lodgings are scarce these days. Have ye got any in yer eye?"

"Not one, Mrs. Buck," replied Bill. "*Not* ONE——" Then, finding to his dismay that sheer negation was a barrier that no superlative could cross, he concluded: "None at all."

I saw at once what was coming.

"Well," said Mrs. Buck, "I don't like to be pushing me own wares on a friend, but one of my gentlemen—Mr. Kinsella, ye know—is leaving to-night. He has a nice room on the second floor, and if ye care to have it——" she broke off expressively.

"That's my foot you're standing on, Stasia," said Bill. "Well, Mrs. Buck, this is a most kind offer of yours. Very kind indeed. Tremendously kind. I'm sure I'd be very comfortable here."

"Well, we'll take it as settled," said Mrs. Buck. "I always like to have gentlemen I *know* for lodgers. It's so much nicer—ye know what I mean. Nicer for them and nicer for me, d'ye understand? We're all a happy family here, ye know. All except Mr. Kinsella, that is. He's the one blot on the scuttle, and thanks be to God we're rid of him."

It was Mr. Kinsella's habit always to come in at the moment we happened to be talking of him, and this occasion was no exception. The instant Mrs. Buck stopped speaking we heard his latch-key.

"Enter Pigface," said Mr. O'Farrell.

Mr. Kinsella entered in woeful plight. He had evidently been drinking harder than ever during the past few days, for his face was red and puffy, his eyes horribly inflamed, and he was covered with mud from a recent fall. He stared stupidly at the gathering, said: "G'r' evenin', everyborry," and flopped into his chair. Mrs. Buck had taken the precaution to set out his jars and bottles herself so as to prevent him from making his usual exhibition before Bill. He sat and stared at them morosely.

" Well, Mr. Kinsella," said Mrs. Buck cheerfully, " I've ordered you a rasher and egg to yer tea, as it's yer last night. It'll be up directly."

Mr. Kinsella did not heed her. Turning a filling eye on me, he said: " Of all the vices in human nature, ingrarrichude is the worce. To betray a frien' is the bashesh ingrarrichoo. You're a nungra'ful hussy, so you are, an' if I wasn't perfeckly shober I'd call you some'ing worshe. God help me!" and he began to weep.

Maggie here came in and laid a most tempting-looking rasher and egg, done to a turn and piping hot, before him. With a trembling hand he let some H.P. Sauce trickle over it; then he seemed to lose heart and sat staring stupidly at the plate, while the egg and rasher cooled and lost their fragrance. The chatter around went on. The sot attempted to put his elbows on the table in order to rest his forehead on his hands; but to his eyes the table had many edges, and the one he chose was unsubstantial. Down went his elbows, and his head nearly hit the table. The company sniggered. Mr. Kinsella straightened himself up and again attempted to find a place for his elbows. Again he failed, and this time his face banged down into his plate, and his cup overturned, spilling the tea all unheeded on to his clothes. With a baffled cry he sat up and looked at us piteously, the tip of his nose all yellow with yolk of egg. Mr. O'Farrell laughed outright. One by one we crept out of the room, leaving that queer, unfortunate creature weeping silently on to the congealed victuals on his plate.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOVE AMONG THE RAGWEED

APRIL cast off her chilly airs and became her moist and balmy self; and then came May, bringing the almond and the cherry blossom. Lilac and laburnum bloomed in our suburb; the primrose was out by the wayside; and in the mountains the young cones glowed rose-pink among the fresh green needles of the pine trees. It was splendid to be free in those days. After breakfast of a morning I would stroll down to Rathmines and watch the bustling shoppers; or perhaps I would take the tram to Terenure and walk out along the country roads towards Crumlin or beyond Rathfarnham. And sometimes I would take my bicycle and ride out to Glendhu or Barnacullia, or far away towards Callary Bog. After the long years in the city it was good to be among the trees and the hills again; to hear the rabbits scampering in the brake, or start a wood-pigeon on his blundering flight, or maybe surprise a squirrel in the path and see him whisk up a tree as if I were a ferocious beast of prey. And in the Spring time, too, with everything fresh and new, and the smell of the damp earth in the air. And yet I couldn't be perfectly happy; for one day, standing beneath a young beech tree clothed in a glory of vivid green, disturbing questions assailed me. Why did this beech tree bloom for me alone? Why had those other girls to wilt in the office? Why had some people nothing but leisure, and others no leisure at all? And then I looked down from my height on the shrouded city, and thought of the multitudes sweltering there, and wondered at the silliness of their tragedy.

A year ago, when the dead leaves at my feet were fresh from the bud, I myself had been down there, lost among the throng I pitied, a wage slave, tied to the

hour. Now I was free and at leisure. Blessed leisure! The greatest gift that wealth can bring. The demi-god Leisure, son of Plutus! Showman of the world's wonders! Opener of the books of wisdom and of the gates of beauty! I have been betrayed into a rhapsody, but in sober fact isn't leisure all that I have described? We must have leisure to rest, leisure to think, leisure to know ourselves, leisure to learn, leisure to love, leisure to pray. If you haven't leisure, as far as you are concerned, poet might never have sung nor painter painted, and all the beauties of the world are going to waste: the dawn never sparkles among the dewdrops, mountain rivulets run in vain, no wave washes on lonely shores, no sails blow over leaping waters, and beyond the horizon there is nothing. Leisure is the key to life. What plans I made for the spending of mine as I stood there on the pine-clad hill. I pictured all the lands I would go and see: the vast plains of snow and ice; the great virgin forests of America; the hot lands of the South; the crowded bazaars of the East. I looked again at the city below.

I laughed at myself. I had won this privilege of leisure by writing silly books for silly people, and sometimes I trembled to think on what flimsy foundations my fortune rested. But I was labouring stoutly to reinforce them. The *naiveté* was gone from "Over the Garden Wall" ("Passionate Pauline" I called it now) and something else was taking its place. It was not a whit nearer to life, but it was gathered and adapted from experience. And what experience!

I will confess it. The possession of wealth and leisure had made me unscrupulous. Having once had them, I could not do without them any more. "Passionate Pauline" simply MUST be a success; and if Mr. Tackaberry was willing to be my tool to that end, why should I reject him? I didn't reject him. In fact I led him on. And to be quite candid (for it may be a further palliation), he was just a little more than a

tool. I had never been loved but once, and I found it by no means unpleasant to have a young and handsome admirer to go about with on these delightful Spring days. Of course I had no illusions about the gentleman. Such as he was I had turned him inside out often enough to know him thoroughly. To begin with, he was what I call a Prize Catholic: that is to say, he was a member of half a dozen sodalities; he had a religious emblem stuck in his lapel; and, you may be sure, had a bunch of unclean scapulars secreted about his person. His faith was something enormous. He told me that he always said three Hail Maries before betting on a horse, and he nearly always won. If he lost it must have been because he scamped or yielded to distractions. He had once offered up a most successful novena for Derby Day. Indulgences were another of his hobbies. He had an idea that a hundred days' indulgence meant the remission of a hundred days in Purgatory, and had made it his business to accumulate a goodly pile of them,—though how he imagined that his wretched little soul could ever earn a fraction of the punishment I cannot understand. I suppose he thought it best to be on the safe side.

Then he was a confirmed petticoat-squinter. You know the sort: always ready with a swift sidelong glance at certain shop windows, and at girls on bicycles in windy weather. How I hated to ascend to the top of a tram in front of him! And he always made me do it. I wonder why they find our underwear so exciting. All the shirts in the world could not give me a thrill: but perhaps that's because I've so often seen seventeen of them fluttering in a row in the garden at home.

Let us return to Mr. Tackaberry. His pride of sex, you may remember, was invincible. He had a fixed idea that all men are superior to all women. He thought that, being a man, he knew a great deal more than I did; and for my own purposes I made no

attempt to dispel the illusion. Out of his omniscience he condescended to give me much casual instruction: nothing heavy or prolonged, of course, lest the frivolous female should be bored; but just such light, attractive information as would indicate the depth of the knowledge from which he spoke. His education was largely derived from papers of the "Answers" type, which he was in the habit of storing up and periodically binding. He knew a vast number of anecdotes about great people; he knew who had made the first telescope, and how the game of billiards had been invented; he had some very inaccurate information as to the origin of surnames. Though he had never read a book or a line of poetry, he could tell you how long Milton had taken to write "Paradise Lost," how much Daniel Defoe had been paid for "Robinson Crusoe," and the style of paper or the shape of nib used by any number of authors. Then he had the science of comparative statistics at his finger tips. He could tell you that the number of sausages eaten in a year in England would make a chain that could be wrapped three time round the moon; or that the railway lines of America, if they were fused into a great iron ball, heated red hot, and dropped into the Pacific, would turn that ocean into steam in sixteen and a half minutes. He specialised in the financial side of this branch of knowledge, and would tell to a nicety what star or planet the national debts of various countries would reach to if spread out in a line of francs, or marks, or two-shilling pieces. He had taken all this as gospel from his various periodicals, yet he hadn't a notion how far his own salary would stretch across a table.

If he hadn't been so beautiful he would have been intolerable; but for his beauty I forgave him everything. I liked to see the sunlight glint on the gold in his hair; to watch the curve of his perfect lips, and the flash of his strong white teeth. It was pleasant, too, in difficult places to lean on the strength of his arm. I

wondered when he would try to kiss me, for to this was my whole aim directed. I must be kissed to describe a kiss, and but for the kissing stage "Passionate Pauline" was almost finished; so the sooner the better. Time and money were flying; the public was waiting; and perhaps for my own part I was—just a wee bit curious.

One golden Saturday afternoon I stood before my new cheval glass decking myself out for a walk with my admirer. I was hesitating between a very smart brown costume and yellow blouse, and an extremely pretty flowered muslin frock. The former suited my style of figure to perfection; but the latter accorded more with Mr. Tackaberry's tastes in fluffy femininity. It was for that very reason I had bought it, for it wasn't the sort of thing I would have chosen myself. I had just tried it on, and feeling it somehow unsuitable, had discarded it for the brown costume, which really became me exceedingly. I looked at myself in the glass and admired myself hugely. It was really a remarkably handsome costume. All the same—I looked out of the window at the brilliant sunshine. I looked at the heap of prettiness flung on an adjacent chair. I thought of Mr. Tackaberry and his dilatory tactics. A glance at my watch told me I had just enough time to do it; so quick as lightning I changed again, snatched a handkerchief, and ran.

Alas! in the street I discovered I was still wearing the brown shoes and stockings that belonged to the costume. I dashed back to the house, changed them rapidly, and started off again. I reached the trysting place breathless, and ten minutes late.

"I'm so sorry," I said as Mr. Tackaberry raised his hat.

"It's all right," he said. "I was talking to another gentleman till a few seconds ago. Besides," he added gallantly, "it's a lady's privilege to be late."

"Nonsense," I said. "I'd have been in time only

that I had to hunt for a handkerchief." (How he would have loved to be told the real reason!)

"Talkin' of hankercheeves," said Mr. Tackaberry, "I was readin' th'other day that if all the hankercheeves in England—yes, I think it was England, but it may have been Europe—anyway, if they were all knotted together in a line they'd stretch from the Earth to Mars, and half a million miles to spare. And if they were laid out flat and piled up one on top of another they'd make a pillar—let's see now, I think it was five thousand feet high. Yes, that was it. Or if it wasn't that it was fifty thousand. Most likely that's what it was; I'm no good at remembering noughts. Fifty thousand feet: yes, that's right: or was it miles? I've forgotten. But isn't it wonderful, anyway?"

"Marvellous!" I agreed.

"'Nother thing I was reminded of while I was waitin' for ye. If ye were to add up all the time wasted by people waitin' about for each other it'd be enough to build twenty-five cathedrals the size of Saint Paul's,—in London, ye know."

In such confabulation we strolled along together. I had noted with satisfaction that he took in all my charms with a single admiring glance. How far would he go to-day, I wondered. He had taken my hand several times; once even he had put his arm around my waist. Surely he would kiss me to-day, and then I could be rid of him for ever.

At that my mind paused uneasily. Did he really love me? Was I doing him a great wrong? Ugh! No. All he wanted was "a bit of a squeeze." Well, he should have it.

We walked on till we came to a quiet reach of the Dodder behind Clonskea. Many other couples were strolling here. We sat down in a sheltered nook, bedizened with dandelions, plantains, and ragweed, and talked of trivial things. But my heart was beating, and

Mr. Tackaberry did not light his usual cigarette. Something was surely going to happen. . . .

He took my hand, proprietorially, and as a matter of course. Presently his arm was slipped about my waist. He looked around and saw that there was nobody in sight. Then he bent down to me, smiling. The blood mounted to my cheeks. I looked into his bright blue eyes, and his face came close to mine. Suddenly he kissed my lips.

"Stasia, will ye marry me?"

This came as a shock, but I didn't want to spoil the scene. (Pauline's answer would be Yes.)

"Yes," I said; and at that he held me tight and kissed me so often that I lost count.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, and pushed him off, feeling rumpled and rather ashamed of myself.

And as I looked up I saw a sight that fairly took my breath away. There on the opposite bank of the river stood my one-time lover, Mr. Donovan. Whether he recognised me or not I couldn't tell; but he turned and walked slowly away, hacking at the grasses with his stick.

Thereupon shame came over me with a rush. To think that *I*—Oh, heavens! what had I been doing? Spooning with a vulgar young man on the banks of the Dodder. I shuddered at the realisation. It was too big a price to pay for any amount of success. I must undo it at once. At once. I turned to Mr. Tackaberry, but he seemed so delighted with himself that I hadn't the heart to speak. I would write, I promised myself.

"Let's go," I said.

No sooner were we on our feet than he clasped me in his arms and kissed me again. He didn't have to stoop to do it; neither had he to stand on his toes. You see I was cool enough to notice such details.

I disengaged myself firmly but not unkindly, and we walked on. Already the day was waning.

"This is grand!" said Mr. Tackaberry. "I feel

awful bucked. I don't know whether I'm on me head or me heels. Gosh, it's gorgeous!'' and he whistled and swung his cane.

But the worst of the day wasn't over yet. As we came up to the bridge of Clonskea I saw three young men walking towards us, one of whom I recognised as Mr. Slapjuice. Mr. Tackaberry was overjoyed. '' Friends of mine,'' he said. '' I must introjuice ye,'' and before I could protest I found myself being introduced all round as '' Me feeongsay, Miss Rudd.''

'' I have the pleasure already,'' said Mr. Slapjuice.

'' Oh, ye know each other, do ye?'' said Mr. Tackaberry. '' I hope it's nothin' for me to be jealous about,'' and the whole four burst into uproarious laughter. I looked from one to the other, filled with dismay at realising the position in which I had landed myself. How I hated their asinine merriment! I could have hit them.

Yet they were decent fellows enough. When you think of the dullness of their lives, isn't it rather a credit to them that they should be so easily amused? Except for Slapjuice, they were all obviously clerks: overworked, underpaid, their lives bounded by desk and digs. I should have made allowances for them; but in the agony of the moment I couldn't. I looked down at them disparagingly, taking in all their defects. I have already forgotten the names of Mr. Slapjuice's two friends, but I remember that one of them was of very low stature, short in the neck, and meek in manner: while the other was of medium height, very smart in dress, and wore ill-fitting false teeth. When the laughter had subsided the latter asked how long we had been engaged.

'' Just about ten minyits,'' said Mr. Tackaberry.

'' Well,'' said Mr. Slapjuice, '' I conglomerate you both.''

There was renewed laughter, after which the short-necked man asked when would be the happy day.

"Give us a chance," said Mr. Tackaberry. "We haven't had time to think of that yet."

"These things can't be settled on the instinct," said Mr. Slapjuice, but the joke miscarried because his hearers all pronounced the word that way by nature.

"Well, let us know in good time," said the man with the false teeth, "so's we can lay in a good stock of old shoes, ye know."

"I've got a pair that's old enough for anything," said the short-necked man, looking down at his feet.

"I'll see y'all get tickets," said Mr. Tackaberry.

"We'd better be movin' on," said the short-necked man. "I can see the lady's anxious to be rid of us."

"Tol-lol, then," said the man with the false teeth. "We won't be spoil-sports," and he winked meaningly at Mr. Tackaberry.

"The moon 'll be late to-night," said Mr. Slapjuice, "so mind ye don't get curfewed."

"Galong now!" said Mr. Tackaberry. "Will we be movin' on, Miss Rudd?"

"Are ye sure ye wouldn't like us to accomplish you?" asked Mr. Slapjuice.

"Go to blazes," said Mr. Tackaberry, and, seeing that my patience was exhausted, he took my arm and hurried me away.

I was very short with him on the homeward walk, partly because of my annoyance at this meeting, but principally because I was puzzling over the mystery of Mr. Donovan. Who was he? What was he? Why had he made friends with me? Why had he not proposed to me? Why had he disappeared? Why had he turned up again? Above all, why was he jealous?

For he *was* jealous. I had seen it in his eye, quick as his glance was. I had seen it in the swish of his cane among the daisies.

CHAPTER XIX

A QUIET EVENING

I FINISHED "Passionate Pauline" with a flourish, and packed it off at once to Mr. Dunkerville. I let Mr. Sitric read it first, though, and when he had finished it he grinned and said he would insert it as an appendix in his History of Human Folly.

"Folly or no folly," I said, "it'll bring me in money: and if you weren't such an old recluse I'd ask you to come to the pictures and celebrate."

"Do you call *me* a recluse, madam?" said Mr. Sitric. "*Me*, the historian of the world's folly!"

"Well, aren't you one?" I replied defiantly.

"If I were," said Mr. Sitric, "the History of Human Folly would be a work of no value, being written out of the exuberance of my imagination rather than from experience of life," and he gave me a quaint look that told me plainly that he had formed a good idea of the way I had obtained the necessary pigment for the more purple passages of "Passionate Pauline." The worst of a philosopher is that he needs no experience, as he is so horribly good at guessing.

"*Apropos* of the foregoing," said Mr. Sitric, rummaging in his desk and fishing out a letter, "have a look at that."

I unfolded the sheet and read as follows:—

251 Frankfort Ave.,
Rathgar,
Saturday.

My dear Olaf,

I want to ask you as a special favour to come out of your shell for once and pay us a visit. I know WE *aren't clever enough for you, but there is a lady coming to our at-home on Tuesday who is sure to interest you; she has*

been out in Austria in the famine and is simply full of it. Now do try and come. Jack is most anxious you should meet her, as she has LOTS *to talk about. Don't bother answering, but come along if you can possibly manage it.*

Your affectionate cousin,

Alice Gilfoy.

"That's very queer," said I.

"Decidedly," said Mr. Sitric. "The lady isn't at all affectionate: neither is she my cousin. That high honour is held by her husband, and she presumes accordingly."

"Can't you stop talking for a minute," said I. "The lady's husband is an old friend of my father's. I met him in town the other day, and he asked me to this very at-home."

"Well, then, we'll go together," said Mr. Sitric. And so we did.

Mr. Gilfoy was a quiet, good-natured little man of a retiring disposition, who had once been my father's solicitor. He had no aptitude for business, and came a complete failure; but fortunately his wife had money, on which he was now living an aimless but comfortable life as her pensionary. She, I understood, "wore the trousers," for in Rathgar everyone knows everyone else's affairs. When Mr. Sitric and I were ushered into the drawing-room they both came forward to greet us.

"So you *did* condescend!" said Mrs. Gilfoy—a stout, bustling woman with coal-black hair, rosy cheeks, and fat arms and hands—effusively greeting Mr. Sitric.

"Miss Rudd, my dear," said Mr. Gilfoy modestly.

"Delighted to meet you," said Mrs. Gilfoy. "Come along now and be introduced."

Then followed the ordeal of being presented severally to a whole circle of people already establishd comfortably round the fire. Men stiffly rose from their chairs,

and women languidly sat up as Mrs. Gilfoy performed the rite.

"Miss Rudd, and my cousin, Mr. Sitric—Miss Kenealy—Miss Lambert—Miss May Kenealy—Dr. Fanning—Mr. Booth-Shanahan—and, O lord, I always *do* forget your name—what is it? Mr. O'Neill, of course. There now, that's over, and you all know each other. Terrible things introductions are, aren't they."

"Terrible," agreed one of the ladies (I think it was the younger Miss Kenealy). "I could never carry it off *half* as well as you do, Mrs. Gilfoy."

"Ah, one gets used to it," said Mrs. Gilfoy. "Sit down here beside me, Olaf. Jack, fetch over another chair for Dr. Fanning."

When everyone had settled down again I found myself sitting between Eva Lambert and the young man called O'Neill. The former gave me an ultra-genial nod. She was wearing a blue satin frock cut rather low, and very short in the skirt, and she sat with crossed legs so as to display both knees and a generous length of silken hose. Poor Evie! A couple of years ago she had been employed in our office. Then she had been engaged as secretary by a well-known writer, and so had got into "intellectual," and then into social, circles. To suit her new environment she had changed her manner of dress, but nothing else. She still chattered fifteen words to the second, contorting her face the while, and flinging alternate thumbs over her shoulders in the way that had earned her in the office the title of the Underwood. She still folded thick slices of bread and butter into thicker rolls, rammed them home, and babbled vivaciously with her mouth full. She had been a decent enough little guttersnipe before she got her rise; but now she was capable of awful things. Her generosity, for instance, was boundless; but her way of exercising it made it a positive infliction. I remember once inviting her to tea at Mitchell's in return for numerous treats which she had forced previously on me. When the waitress came

round with the bill, the Underwood began grimacing and gesticulating at her and calling: "Here! here!" I tried to get her to sit down, informing her that this was my treat. "No! no!" she said, "it's mine." "But I invited you," I protested. "No matter," she replied, smiling with profuse benevolence. "Sure I've heaps of money. D'ye know how much I've got in that bag?" Then to the waitress: "Here, give me the bill." "It's my bill," said I to the waitress, who, ignoring the Underwood with majestic scorn, handed it over to me. But there was no daunting the Underwood. Grinning like a Cheshire wild-cat she tore it from me and crumpled it up in her fist. Such pugnacious munificence was too much for me. "Oh, very well," I said. "I don't want a public scrimmage. You can pay for it." But she was too obtuse even to see I was annoyed.

There's my bad habit of digression rising up again after a long subjection. Let me get back to Mrs. Gilfoy's at-home.

The Underwood received me with a nod that would have done credit to a china Mandarin, and a smile that nearly met at the back of her neck. "How aur ye?" she said. "So glad to see ye. Dreadful times, aren't they? And how's everybody in the office?" Without waiting for an answer she rattled off a long chain of small talk with astonishing vivacity, flinging her thumbs about so recklessly that I wondered how she ever got them back again. Presently she slowed down, recrossed her legs, and began affectionately stroking the silken calf of the upper one. "Been to any sales lately?" she asked. "D'ye remember when we used to go bargain-hunting together in the old days? I don't bother now, because I don't have to. Of course ye get robbed if ye don't. Would y'ever think, now, that I gave twenty-five shillings for these stockings? Rotten value *I* call it. Don't *you?* And isn't four guineas a ridiculous price for shoes like those?" (Fancy the little idiot thinking I couldn't see through her!)

"Why pay it then?" I asked.

"Oh!" she replied, "ye couldn't get anything ye could *wear* for less."

"I only paid two-ten for mine," I said.

"Ah, well, of course," she conceded. "But a novelist's secretary has to keep up appearances, ye know."

She went on jabbering, but I gave her no more attention. Instead I took a survey of the circle of guests. They didn't seem very interesting. On the extreme left, sitting close up to the fire, was the younger Miss Kenealy, a dowdy woman of forty with a babyish mouth, vacuous eyes, and listless manner. Next her was Mr. Sitric, and next him Mrs. Gilfoy. On Mrs. Gilfoy's right sat the elder Miss Kenealy, whose hair of raven hue, fashionable crimson gown, and general air of assurance made her a startling contrast to her sister. Her neighbour was the thin, tall, white-haired Dr. Fanning who had given me his chair; and next to him were Eva, myself, Mr. O'Neill, and Mr. Gilfoy. On the extreme right sat a silent person with an exceedingly stupid face, whose name, if I remember rightly, was Mr. Booth-Shanahan.

"I think he's an awful person," said the younger Miss Kenealy, evidently resuming the conversation at the point where it had been interrupted.

"Awful isn't the word," said the Underwood.

"He's so bumptious and full of himself," said Mrs. Gilfoy.

"He's an ass," growled Mr. Booth-Shanahan away in his corner.

"I wouldn't go so far as that, Mr. Booth-Shanahan," said Mrs. Gilfoy. "Whatever else he is, you know, he's clever."

"He must have a very nasty mind," said the younger Miss Kenealy. "I met a man the other day who'd been reading his book, and he told me so."

"It's a frightful book," said the Underwood. "Of course, I haven't read it—needless to say, I wouldn't

look at such a book—but I believe it's the outside edge."

"I haven't read it either," said Mr. Booth-Shanahan, "but according to all I hear it's pretty bad."

"Oh," said Mrs. Gilfoy blandly, "it's not so bad as all that. I've read it, so I ought to know. Parts of it aren't very nice, of course, but after all——" and she concluded with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Anyway," said Mr. Booth-Shanahan, "the author must be a moral degenerate. I was talking to a well-known doctor the other day, and he told me so."

"What do *you* think, doctor?" asked Mrs. Gilfoy, turning to Dr. Fanning.

Dr. Fanning, who was a general practitioner of no particular distinction, said he was inclined to agree with his colleague. The person under discussion (I never found out who it was) being now thoroughly belaboured, the conversational theme changed.

"Terrible state the country's in," said Mrs. Gilfoy, and everyone agreed that its condition was "awful," or "frightful," or "appalling," as his vocabulary suggested.

"That mysterious man Collins must be a Bolshevik of the worst type," pronounced Dr. Fanning at last.

"A British *agent provocateur*, more likely," said Mr. Booth-Shanahan.

The company seemed to be about equally divided on this question, and a long but inconclusive wrangle began. On two points, however, all were agreed: namely, that Michael Collins was a very terrible person, and that the country was rapidly going to perdition. Meanwhile I sat and marvelled that, with burnings, floggings, torturings, shootings and hangings going on from one end of Ireland to the other, a crowd of persons could be found to talk about the matter with such *naïve* detachment.

"And what do *you* think of the Reprisals, Mr. Sitric?" asked Mrs. Gilfoy at length.

"As a loyal Dane, madam," replied Mr. Sitric, "I

regard with complete indifference the squabbles of two revolted Crown colonies of our glorious Empire. But if Turgesius had been as thorough as Sir Hamar Greenwood, you'd be a Danish colony still."

"I don't quite understand what you mean," said Mrs. Gilfoy, who hadn't the slightest idea who Turgesius was, any more than anyone else in the room,—except perhaps Mr. O'Neill on my right, who chuckled appreciatively.

"Turgesius," said Mr. Sitric, "was Chief Secretary for Ireland when it was under Danish rule. He kept the country in subjection by a policy of burning, looting, killing and torturing, and by suppressing missals, epic poems, and other seditious literature; in short, by much the same methods as those employed at present by Sir Hamar Greenwood. Unfortunately, he lacked that gentleman's glibness, so that he has earned the execration of history, while his imitator has found apologists even among humane and respectable people."

This speech was followed by a profound and uncomfortable silence.

"Clever old chap, but a bit cracked," I heard the Underwood whisper to Dr. Fanning.

"Bats in his belfry, I suppose," returned the doctor, and the Underwood nodded hard.

"Well," said Mrs. Gilfoy at last with a yawn, "bad as we are there's other countries worse, and that's a comfort of a sort. Now, Miss Kenealy, won't you tell us all you saw in Austria. Mr. Sitric's dying to hear you."

"Do you know Austria well, Mr. Sitric?" asked Miss Kenealy, in a carefully cultivated drawl.

"No," said Mr. Sitric. "I've never been abroad."

"Oh!" said Miss Kenealy, "you *really* ought to travel. You've no idea how it broadens the mind. Until I had seen Pahree and Vienna I always felt that my education was incomplete." She spoke in a finicking English accent with a French flavour to her R's and I's,

the whole being grafted on to a still perceptible Rathgar patois.

"Tell us about the famine, anyway, Kitty," said Mr. Gilfoy, speaking for the first and only time that evening.

"I think there's too much sympathy wasted on the Austrians," said Miss Kenealy. "I found things extraordinarily bong marshay there. Cheap, you know. Heh! heh! heh! These French words slip in somehow without knowing it. Really, you know, I think that if only the people could be got to work, everything would be all right. But they won't. I suppose Bolshevism is at the bottom of it all."

The young man on my right gave a little chuckle, and I turned and looked at him for the first time. We recognised each other simultaneously: he was the man I had met on the tram the morning after my midnight adventure with Mr. Kinsella.

"Do you remember me?" he asked.

I said I did.

"I was sure we'd meet again," he said.

"Did you now?"

We talked together in low tones, while the rest of the company, engaged in demolishing the Bolsheviks, left us to ourselves.

"I'm not altogether a Bolshevik," said Mr. O'Neill. "But when I look around at people like these I think there's a lot to be said for them. Have I put my foot in it?"

"No," said I. "I never met any of them before except Mr. Gilfoy. But even if they were my bosom friends you've a right to criticise them."

"No," said he. "When you come to think of it, isn't there enough unkind talk going around already? I've heard nothing else since I arrived here half an hour ago."

"Yes," said I. "It's rather terrible. But isn't there an extraordinary fascination about it all the same? I'm afraid I rather enjoy a good backbite."

"So do I. But don't you feel horribly mean at the end of the evening?"

"Yes, indeed. If only I could keep the good resolutions I make at such times!"

"'Tis better to resolve and fail than never to resolve at all."

"I don't know so much."

"Oh, yes. The just man falls seven times a day, you know."

I yielded the point.

"Isn't it funny," I said, "that a dud poet like Tennyson manages to hit the truth now and again. You can substitute all sorts of words for 'love' in that line, and it's still true."

"The man who wrote 'Break! Break! Break!' wasn't a dud poet," said Mr. O'Neill.

"The man who wrote the 'Palace of Art' was," said I.

"Oh, well, for that matter Keats and Shelley wrote the most frantic drivel at times. 'The world is dreary—'"

"Have you been to any of the operas, Miss Rudd," Mrs. Gilfoy's voice here interrupted. She evidently didn't want the circle to break up into a series of *tête-à-têtes*.

"I was at 'Lohengrin' last night," I said.

"Very heavy, isn't it?" said Dr. Fanning. "I prefer the 'Bohemian Girl' and things like that."

"I agree with you," said the younger Miss Kenealy.

"I just love 'Madam Butterfly,'" said the Underwood.

"So do I," said Mrs. Gilfoy. "I think the *music* of that is *lovely*. But I wish the *story* wasn't so sad."

"I hate sad things," said Mr. Booth-Shanahan. "After all, you go to a theatre to be amused, and sometimes you get put into the dumps instead. I call that a swindle."

"Oh, but a really touching opera is so elevating," said the elder Miss Kenealy. "When I'm in Pahree I

go to the Opayra every night, and I really think I enjoy the sad things the best.''

'' I'd rather have a good musical comedy than an opera any day,'' said Mr. Booth-Shanahan.

'' Same here,'' said Dr. Fanning. '' There's only one opera I'd put in the same street with the really good musical comedies, and that's the ' Mar'ge of Figaro.' I was at that the other night, and who do you think I saw there, Mrs. Gilfoy? Your friend, Mrs. Popham.''

'' That woman!'' said Mrs. Gilfoy. '' She's no friend of mine. I suppose there isn't a more ignorant upstart in the whole of Rathgar.''

'' You're about right, Mrs. Gilfoy,'' said the Underwood.

'' And isn't she frightfully suburban,'' said the elder Miss Kenealy.

'' Do you know her husband, Dr. Fanning?'' asked the younger Miss Kenealy.

'' Indeed I do, poor devil. He wasn't with her last night.''

'' Was anyone else?'' asked the Underwood.

'' You want to know too much,'' said Dr. Fanning roguishly.

'' I wouldn't be surprised if there *was* someone else,'' said the younger Miss Kenealy.

When they had finished demolishing Mrs. Popham they had a set-to on a well-known politician who was supposed to be addicted to drink, if not to drugs; and then on a neighbouring nonentity who was rumoured to be on bad terms with his wife. When these were duly consigned to perdition there was a moment's pause while every mind was racked for further victims. Mr. Sitric seized the opportunity to rise, and say:

'' Well, Mrs. Gilfoy, I must bid you good-night, and thank you very much for a pleasant evening.''

'' I'll have to go, too,'' said Mr. O'Neill. '' I've a long way to go, and it's only half an hour to Curfew.''

'' Oh, won't you wait for tea?'' asked Mrs. Gilfoy,

but her query was drowned in a chaos of apprehensive exclamations: "Half an hour! . . . I never dreamt! . . . Can we ever manage it? . . . We must rush!" etc., etc.

There was an immediate break up of the party; a rush for coats and hats; a confusion of hurried good-byes in the hall.

"Safe home!" called Mrs. Gilfoy from the top of the steps. "Good-bye all! Mind the Black-and-Tans."

"Good-by-ee!" cried the Underwood.

"One feels a bit hungry," said Dr. Fanning, when the door closed. "But one wouldn't care to run any risk for the sake of any tea the Gilfoys might offer."

Each went on his own way, laughing derisively. Mr. O'Neill accompanied Mr. Sitric and me for a short distance. He shook hands with me when we parted; but somehow he must have forgotten Mr. Sitric.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE SOUP

It was not until he put the ring on my finger that I realised how I had wronged Mr. Tackaberry. My acceptance of his proposal had been so thoughtless and hurried that I had not imagined that I was in any way pledging my honour. During the week that followed I regarded the engagement as an annoyance that could be lightly shaken off at will, and I let it linger on merely because I was afforded no suitable opportunity for breaking it off. Such an opportunity was bound to arise sooner or later: he might kiss me once too often, perhaps; and then I could speak in hot blood. But for the moment I dallied. My conscience, however, began to worry me more and more as time slipped by, and at last one day I went to meet him, fully resolved to end

the matter as kindly as might be. It was a damp evening, and we were to go to tea and the pictures together. I could not broach matters in the street, and we were hardly seated at a secluded table in the restaurant before he had slipped the ring on to my finger.

"Now we're *properly* engaged," he said, beaming.

I gazed at the ring in a kind of fascinated horror. It was a hideous half-hoop of sham diamonds set in rolled gold.

"Oh," I said, "you—you shouldn't, you know."

"Galong now!" said Mr. Tackaberry. "Why shouldn't I?"

"I—I don't deserve it," I said.

"Go 'way ou' o' that. Sure, it looks lovely on ye."

"But it's so—it must have—— It——" I couldn't go on.

"Well, it was a bit of a squeeze, of course, but you're worth the sacrifice."

What more could I say? For the moment a breach was impossible.

Yet some day it must be done. That was certain. I could now do nothing else but think out ways of doing it as kindly as possible. I wrote a dozen letters, and tore them all up. I composed calm and considerate speeches. "Mr. Tackaberry," I would say, "I have something to say to you. Something of grave importance to us both. In fact I have a confession to make to you. Mr. Tackaberry, I have done you a grievous wrong, and I may say frankly that there is no excuse for my conduct whatever. You have trusted me, and I have grossly deceived you; and the best and kindest thing I can do now is to undeceive you at once,"—and so on. But when it came to delivering the speech something always went wrong. "Mr. Tackaberry," I would begin, and he would at once interrupt with: "Call me Horace, dearie;" or if I got so far as "I have a confession to make," he would say: "How long is it since your last, me child?" so that the thing became impossible.

Though not addicted to the bad habit of confiding in others, I now felt that I really needed advice, so I sought out Mrs. Howley, the sentimental little widow, who had always been very nice to me. She had heard, of course, about my engagement, Mr. Tackaberry having broadcasted the news over the whole office.

"I was never so surprised, my dear," she said. "You were always such a cynic."

She was still more surprised to hear that I wanted to break the engagement off.

"Ah, my dear, don't do that," she said. "If you take my advice you'll marry him. A broken engagement does a girl no good. Men fight shy of her, you know. 'The bloom's gone off her,' they say, or 'No other man's leavings for me,' perhaps. They like to think that no one else has ever kissed their girl, no matter how many girls they may have kissed themselves. It's unreasonable, of course, but they're like that."

This was no use to me, so I sought out the Carneys in their brief hour of leisure after the children were all asleep. Mr. Carney was writing industriously, while his wife was combing her hair by the fire. The moment I entered the playwright flung down his pen with alacrity. I apologised for interrupting, but he cut me short.

"Good excuse to chuck it," he said. "My brain's like cold porridge to-night. No wonder, too. Flann was like a demon in his bath this evening."

The pair of them listened sympathetically to my tale. When it was over, Mr. Carney said: "There's no kind way of breaking off an engagement. It hurts no matter how it's done, so it's best done sharp and quick, like the stroke of a lancet." "Besides," Mrs. Carney supplemented, "you'd hurt him more by marrying him. If you didn't like a man you'd give him the very deuce of a time."

This was perfectly true, but I didn't find it helpful. So I went to Mr. Sitric. He was engaged in writing his

history when I entered the room, but when he had finished off a sentence he laid down his pen.

"Do I interrupt you?" I asked.

"You do," said Mr. Sitric. "Obviously. But sit down."

I did so.

"One of the grossest of human follies," said Mr. Sitric, "is the belief, enshrined in proverbs, that there are two sides to every question, and that it takes two to make a quarrel. I have had to spend the last ten days and some half dozen chapters in demonstrating the absurdity of both propositions. They are the invention of cowards and the mainstay of hypocrites. If a man with a bludgeon tries to relieve me of my purse and I resist him, am I party to a brawl? The case of England and Ireland is similar. Take a chair."

"I have already done so," I said.

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to have a talk with you."

"Tobacco," said Mr. Sitric, filling his pipe, "is generally supposed to assist thought. It isn't true. It's just a lying excuse for the self-indulgence of smoking, of which I intend to avail myself. Talk away," he added as he lit up.

"I want your good advice," I said.

"Advice you can have in any quantity," said he. "It's cheap enough. But I can't guarantee the quality."

"Let me get a word in edgewise," I said; and I told him my story. When I had concluded he said:

"You must break it off, of course. Sit down now and write him a note. Beg him to forgive you for your cruelty and lies, return him his ring, and ask him to release you from your promise."

"But that's so harsh and abrupt."

"Do you think it'll break his heart?"

"It'll hurt his feelings, anyway."

"Tush! You're not thinking of his feelings, or you'd

never have done what you did. You're thinking of the unpleasantness to yourself.''

How horribly true! But it was no help to me, for I really couldn't bring myself to do what he advised: I hadn't the pluck. In my despair I sought out Mrs. Buck.

'' Ah,'' she said, '' why can't ye go and marry him? You're gettin' on, ye know, and ye won't get many more chances.''

'' But I don't *want* to marry him,'' I said.

'' Sure, what matter? One man's much the same as another. Poor Buck (R.I.P.) was a good husband, but I might just as well have married Mr. Dunphy—the banker, ye know—because he asked me the same week, and a very good husband he is, too, to Molly Hill that he married afterwards.''

Strangely enough, it was Phyllis O'Dea who at last solved the difficulty for me. She met me in Grafton Street one day with a face as stiff as if she'd been keeping it in corsets.

'' I suppose I must congratulate you on your engagement, Miss Rudd,'' she said. '' You certainly deserved to win him.''

'' Thank you,'' I said.

'' Pray don't,'' said she. '' Congratulations cost nothing. You've certainly secured a very eligible young man.''

'' I'm glad you think so,'' I said. Nasty as she was trying to be, I couldn't help being sorry for her, with her restless eyes and pallid lips. Here was another wrong to my credit.

'' It's more than thinking,'' said Phyllis. '' I see him on the tram every morning.''

'' Indeed!''

'' Yes. And he's most attentive. I envy you.''

'' Spare my blushes.''

'' He always makes a point of sitting down beside me. And he talks to me in the office, too.''

"I hope you find him good company."

"I should just think so. We get along splendidly together."

"That's good."

"You're not jealous, of course?"

"Jealous? What about?"

Phyllis's tone, studiously careless up to this, became suddenly charged with passion.

"Ha! you think that because he's engaged to you, you've got him for good, do you? You'll soon find out your mistake, my friend. You think he's in love with you, I suppose. Well, I know better. It's your money he wants. So there!"

"Come, Phyllis," I said. "What are you hinting at?"

"I'm not hinting at all. I'm *telling* you. Do you remember the day he snubbed you in the hall? and how quickly he made up with you again? That was because Gladys told him you'd come in for money."

"Humph!"

"Oh, you can humph away. Ask Gladys herself, and she'll tell you the same."

"I shouldn't be surprised," I said. "I always had a suspicion that might be at the bottom of it."

"You take it very calmly," said Phyllis resentfully.

"How else should I take it?" I asked. "Why, you little fool, you don't suppose I'm in *love* with the ass, do you?"

But I was anything but calm in reality. However my appearance might deceive Phyllis, inwardly I was seething with rage and shame. To think of the kisses I had taken—and given—to that vulgar little fortune-hunting flirt! Oh, it made me shudder with horror, and sent red waves flowing from the soles of my feet to the crown of my head. And when Phyllis's tale was confirmed (as it was, though reluctantly) by Gladys herself, I sank into the very abyss of humiliation.

However, my scruples were all vanished now, and on

the earliest possible occasion I sought out Mr. Tackaberry and told him what I thought of him. He listened to my speech with a perfectly impassive countenance. Then, having reassured him as to the healthy state of my own feelings, I drew his hideous bauble from my purse and thrust it into his hand. I was just turning away when I noticed a queer smile on his face.

"Thanks," he said. "Three of me friends can swear I introjuiced ye to 'em as me feeongsay. I have *six* photographs and a lock of yer hair. And everyone in the office knows we're engaged."

"What of it?" I asked.

"Breach o' promise," said Mr. Tackaberry, looking up at the sky.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I might be taking an action," said Mr. Tackaberry.

"What nonsense! Men don't take actions for breach."

"Don't they? I never heard there was a law to prevent them."

I stood and stared at him, wordless.

"Even if I did lose the action," he went on, "ye wouldn't like to be stuck up in court while I told the jury how often I'd kissed ye. Eh?"

Still I said nothing. My mouth was dry and my brain paralysed.

"But it needn't come to that," said my persecutor, assuming a milder tone. "We get on right well together, you and me, and I don't see why we couldn't make a match of it."

"You beast," I cried, finding voice at last. "I wouldn't marry you to save my life. No. Not if you were to fetch the Black-and-Tans to twist the finger-nails off me."

"I wouldn't do that, me pretty dear. Come now, be sensible. I'm not a bad-lookin' chap, as fellahs go. Why won't ye have me?"

"I won't, and that's an end of it."

"Ye think it's only your money I want," said Mr. Tackaberry. "Well, ye're wrong. I'll admit the money was a consideration when I first heard of it, but after all . . . well, ye needn't think so little of yerself, ye know. You're a good-looking girl, and ye know how to talk, and ye're a lady, which is more than any other girl in the office can say."

"Look here, Mr. Tackaberry," I said. "You think I've got a great deal of money. Maybe I have. It mayn't be the only thing you're after, but it's the first thing, and if I lost it all you'd wash your hands of me. Well, I'll put every penny of it in a bag to-morrow, and I'll let you see me dump it into the Liffey. If you want to marry me after that you won't be the Mr. Tackaberry I know."

"It'd be a silly thing to do," said Mr. Tackaberry. "And ye'd get tired of it after a couple of quarters."

"Quarters?" I said. "It's not . . ." And then I broke off, realising that I had almost betrayed my terrible secret.

"It's a legacy ye've got, isn't it?" said Mr. Tackaberry. "Well, the dividends 'll come in every quarter. But look here. I don't want to be unreasonable. I'll give you a month to think it over, and then . . ."

"Then?"

"We'll see," said Mr. Tackaberry.

CHAPTER XXI

RUDOLF INTERVENES

A NICE mess I had landed myself in; and all through pulling Phyllis's leg. How Bill would crow over me when he heard it! A few days before he had been snared into taking Vi'let to the pictures, and I had renewed my warnings against Mrs. Buck's designs.

"Nonsense!" he had said. "Nonsense! Sweet, innocent child! Barely seventeen! Looks on me as a sort of uncle. Yes, a sort of grandfather. Surely a man can take out a girl that's young enough to be his great-great-granddaughter?" And then, with a sly look, he added: "What about yourself, Anastasia? I seem to have heard something about a handsome, but common, young man that goes about with you. What? Eh? What?" "Tush!" I had said. "I know how to take care of myself." "So do I," had been Bill's rejoinder. "No," said I. "You're a great, big, silly baby." "Oh, we'll see," said Bill. And now he would have the intense pleasure of saying: "I told you so."

In my perplexity I sought no more advice from poets, philosophers, or widows. I wanted a man of action, so I called on Rudolf. He was furious when he heard my tale.

"Lead me to the brat's lair," he said. "I'll make him sit up."

So we went out at once and took a tram to Drumcondra. Rudolf nearly stove in the door of Mr. Tackaberry's modest lodging with the bang he dealt it with the knocker. It was opened by a grubby woman with bare arms and touselled hair, who came prepared to remonstrate, but gave up the idea at sight of Rudolf. She knocked at a door leading off the hall, and my *fiancé's* voice shouted: "Come in."

"Lady and gentleman to see you," said the landlady, and vanished.

Mr. Tackaberry started when he saw me, but at the appearance of my escort his jaw dropped.

"Won't ye sit down?" he said, giving up his arm-chair to me and nervously tendering another chair to Rudolf.

"Thanks, I'll stand," said Rudolf, taking up his position on the hearth-rug, with his back against the mantelpiece, while poor Tackaberry hovered about miserably as if he didn't know what to do with himself.

"Sit down," said Rudolf, and almost with relief he obeyed. The sitting posture seemed to restore some of his self-confidence, for he put his hands in his pockets, crossed his legs, and said:

"Well, to what do I owe the pleasure . . . ?"

"See here," Rudolf cut in. "Let's get to the point at once. You want to marry my sister's money, or else separate her from a roll of it. Well, you'd better get right away from any such notion. That's all I've got to say. The question isn't open to discussion."

"I want to marry Miss Rudd," said Mr. Tackaberry, "and until the other day Miss Rudd wanted to marry me."

"We won't argue it, sonny," said Rudolf. "I don't fancy you as a brother-in-law, and that settles it as far as I'm concerned."

"This matter only concerns me and Miss Rudd," said Mr. Tackaberry.

"I wouldn't advise you to cherish any such delusion," said Rudolf. "It's customary in our family to scrutinise carefully anyone who seeks a matrimonial alliance with one of its members. You've been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and that's all there's to it. Good evening, sir."

"Hold on, now," said Mr. Tackaberry. "I take it that the weddin's off. But there's other formalities, if I may say so. Gettin' engaged one week and breakin' if off the next isn't a thing ye can't do with impunity. The law has a word or two to say on that, and if you aren't prepared to do the decent thing by me—well, I don't want to threaten ye, but I'll get the law to look after me rights."

"Now see here, kid," said Rudolf, "you've got a kind of a peach-bloom dial that I'd be loth to spoil, but if you give me any of your sauce I'll push it through the back of your skull. Just keep that in mind while I conclude. You want us to do the decent thing by you. Well, you're dirt, that's what you are; and the decent

thing to do with you would be to put you in the dustbin and have you dumped on the sloblands. This engagement farce is off: get that into your head and keep it there. And you're not going to touch a cent of Miss Rudd's money neither: get that into your skull, too. If you can't I'll have to drive it in somewhere else with my boot."

Mr. Tackaberry was not credulous enough to be more than half frightened by this threat.

"Oh, ye threaten me, do ye?" he said. "Well, go ahead. Kick me if ye like. It'll double the damages."

At this Rudolf took a step forward and would undoubtedly have taken Mr. Tackaberry at his word had I not held him back.

"Don't be absurd, Rudolf," I said. "Violence won't achieve anything. It'll only land two of us into court instead of one."

"All right," said Rudolf, shrugging his shoulders. "Have it your own way. I won't touch him . . . for the present. But see here, you miserable little chipmunk," and he turned again on Mr. Tackaberry, "go on with that action at your peril. As soon as it's decided I'll take a horsewhip and I'll cut you into so many pieces that it'll cost you every penny you get to stick yourself together again."

"Thank you very much," said Mr. Tackaberry, whose courage had returned rapidly when the immediate menace vanished.

"Come now, Anastasia," said Rudolf. "Let him bring his action if he dares."

"I'll bring it all right," said Mr. Tackaberry. "Never you fear about that."

We left him, master of the field.

"So much for your men of action," said I to myself that night. "I must rely on myself now."

There was only one course of action left to me. Mr. Tackaberry wanted to marry me for my money, so my money must be got rid of. Never mind how, so long as

I didn't reveal the secret of its origin. My *fiancé* thought it came from investments. Very good. I would sell my investments, and buy new ones. I would buy the unsoundest speculations on the market, and let my whole financial system go crash in broad daylight. He would surely break off the engagement then.

Delighted with my plan, I rang him up at the office next morning.

"This is Anastasia," I said in reply to his "Hello?"

"Good-morning, dear," he said with hateful smugness.

"I just rang you up," I said, "to tell you that I'll marry you this day twelvemonths—if you'll have me."

My brother Bill was as obtuse as an angle of a hundred and seventy, but he had heard of my engagement at last. He encountered me that evening with a smile of triumph that scampered all over his fatuous countenance.

"Oh, ho!" he said. "Ha! ha! He! he! What's all this I hear? Here's the lady who knows how to take care of herself, eh? Everybody's adviser, eh?"

"Shut up," I said.

"Oh, ho!" said Bill. "Nasty, eh? Caught by a minnow, what?"

"Will you shut up," I said.

"Well, well, well," said Bill. "I gave you credit for more sense. I did, indeed. Engaged to a fellow young enough to be your nephew! A child! A mere infant! And you had the audacity to go warning *me*. Well, well, well. Pride comes before a fall. It does, indeed. There was never a truer saying. Deep! Deep! Profound."

I left him babbling and shaking his head. That same evening I received a strong reminder of the urgency of my case in the shape of a letter from Mr. Dunkerville, accepting "Passionate Pauline," and with it a fat cheque by way of advance royalties.

CHAPTER XXII

STOP PRESS!

YOUNG Olivia Carney came clattering into my room and said:

"Mummy and Daddy say you're to come to tea this evening. Daddy says the ship's come home, but it isn't a ship really, it's only a letter. And mummy's making a cake with currants in it."

"Very well," I said. "Tell Mummy I'll be delighted to come."

"Isn't it funny of Daddy to call a letter a ship?" said Olivia.

I opined that it was.

"Why does he call it a ship?" she asked next.

I tried clumsily to explain the metaphor, while the wee thing listened with wide-open eyes, twisting a corner of her pinafore between fingers that should have been chubby. When I was finished I could see that she was quite unconvinced, but she politely admitted that p'r'aps that was it.

"Daddy says such funny things," she added. "And then Mummy tells him not to be s'castic. What's being s'castic, Auntie Stasia?" (All the children called me Auntie for some reason or other.)

I am afraid that my explanation of this word was even less lucid than the other, and that the little maid must have come to the conclusion that I was a stupid person interested in nothing but combing my hair.

"Auntie Stasia," she said, "why do you comb your hair when you haven't got to? I simply hate it when mummy combs mine. When I'm a big lady I won't comb it at-all. . . . Auntie Stasia," holding back her exiguous skirts to give me a clear view, "aren't these nice stockings I've got on. Mummy got me brown stockings

because Daddy said he'd buy me some brown shoes when the ship came home."

I duly praised the stockings.

" Baby was awfully bold in his bath this morning," Olivia informed me. " Isn't it funny, Auntie Stasia? baby gets a bath every day, and us big ones only get one now and then."

I conceded it was funny.

" Why does he get a bath every day, Auntie Stasia? He's so small, you know. I'm sure I'd need it a lot more."

How on earth do parents manage to exist? I bundled my small questioner back home, and soon was ready to follow her. When I arrived I found that the table was already laid, and the cake with currants in the middle of it; but otherwise pandemonium reigned. The baby, on his mother's knee, was taking occasional half-hearted pulls at his bottle in the intervals between frantic spasms of howlings, Flann, strapped in his high chair, was yelling even louder for release; little Imogen was wailing miserably in a corner; while Olivia and Naoise were fighting ferociously for the possession of that eternal horse with no head. Poor Mrs. Carney, her nerves, like her hair, completely disordered, hailed my entrance with a cry of relief.

" Thank goodness you've come, Anastasia. I'm at my wits' end. Baby's so cross and won't take his bottle, and I had to slap Imogen for stealing sugar off the table, and that little wretch Flann won't be quiet in his chair, and I haven't had a moment to change my blouse, and my hair's a sight: if you would only make the pancakes for me. You'll find the batter standing ready in the kitchenette."

" Right," I said. " But I'll have to restore order here first."

Flann had already forgotten his bonds so far as to cry to me for " Bickens." Being for once without any of that commodity I gave him a bangle off my wrist to play

with, and having soothered little Imogen, and kissed her slapped hand, and wiped her eyes and nose, I turned on the embattled Naoise and Olivia.

" Olivia," I said, " are you the nice sort of little girl that tries to help her mummy, or are you the nasty sort that Auntie Stasia doesn't like? Which?"

The child paused and looked at me dubiously, while Naoise seized his opportunity to bolt with the horse.

" Don't mind him," I said, as she made to run after him. " Let him keep the old horse, and you and I will go and make the pancakes."

" All right," said Olivia. " *I* don't want the dirty old horse, Neeshy," and she put out her tongue at him. Then she slipped her hand into mine to lead me to the kitchenette. At that Naoise's lower lip began to turn inside out. " Boo-hoo!" he roared. " Wants to make pannakes, too:" whereat the three of us set off in friendly alliance for the kitchenette, while Imogen, with a scream of joy, swooped down on the abandoned horse.

Harmony being thus restored, preparations for the feast went on apace. The baby was at last induced to finish his bottle and go to sleep in his cot, and just as I added the last pancake to the golden stack, Mr. Carney himself came in.

" Oh, Imogen! what a grubby face!" he said as the little girl went running to his arms. " Has she been crying, darling?"

" She's been very bold, Daddy,"' Mrs. Carney said. " Stealing sugar, if you please."

" Imogen! Imogen! Oh, Imogen!" Mr. Carney declaimed sonorously: " I could have sworn—You had stolen nought, nor would not, tho' you had found—Gold strew'd i' the floor. But perhaps sugar's different," he added. " Never mind, my girl. Give me a kiss. And for heaven's sake wash her face, Mummie."

" Dadda! Dadda!" Flann, beating the apron of his chair with my bangle, claimed his father's attention,

while Olivia and Naoise came running for a kiss apiece. After that my host had leisure to turn to me.

" So glad you came," he said. " Just received a letter from the Editor of the ' Leinster Record ' offering thirty-five pounds for the serial rights of that story you lent me the stamps for. Five pounds more than I expected. Hence the jollification. . . . Come in," he called in answer to a knock at the door.

It was Mr. Sitric's bristling red head that appeared round the jamb. " Am I late?" he asked.

" Just in time," said Mrs. Carney, returning with the pancakes and the newly-scrubbed Imogen.

" Unpunctuality," said Mr. Sitric, " is a vice unknown in the race to which I have the honour to belong; neither has the residence of a long line of ancestors in this misty island implanted it in me. If I had been late the fault would not have been mine, but that of the Irish and English forces recently contending in Camden Street."

" What?" said Mrs. Carney. " Another ambush?"

Mr. Sitric held up a venerable hat, the crown of which had been drilled neatly through from side to side.

" *Ecce signum!*" he said.

" A narrow escape," Mrs. Carney declared.

" If this brawling goes on much longer," said Mr. Sitric, " the Danish authorities will have to reconquer the two islands and restore law and order. This shows the absurdity of giving liberty to small nations. They're no sooner free than they fly at each other's throats."

" Stop talking nonsense, and sit down," said Mrs. Carney. " The pancakes will be cold."

" Did you buy my new shoes, Daddy?" asked Olivia, as her mother began putting sugar into the cups.

" No, darling," Mr. Carney replied. " I haven't the wherewithal as yet. The ship's in port all right, but the captain doesn't get paid off for a week or two."

" That's no good of a ship," said Olivia.

" Are my soldjas in the s'ip, Daddy?" inquired Naoise.

" Yes. They'll be landing presently. But they're all laid up with sea-sickness at the moment."

Naoise, not knowing what to make of this, after a long, solemn stare, turned to investigate the fragment of pancake that had been allowed him.

" Chew well," his mother cautioned.

" Shall I chew well, too, Mummie?" Olivia asked.

" Yes, of course," said Mrs. Carney.

" Livy can't chew as hard as me," Naoise announced with pride.

" I can," retorted Olivia. " Twice as hard."

" You can't," said Naoise. " You's only a girl."

" You're only a baby," snapped Olivia.

" I'm not."

" You are."

" I'm not."

" Children!" said Mrs. Carney.

" You *are* a baby," repeated Olivia.

" I'm *not,*" shouted Naoise, and began to cry.

" Oh, Naoise!" said his father. " I'm ashamed of you. Be a brave Volunteer, now, and wipe your eyes. Behave yourself, Olivia, or maybe it's black shoes you'll be getting instead of brown."

" Oh, Daddy!" Olivia protested, looking down her nose with an expression of seraphic innocence.

All this chatter did not prevent the children getting through a very hearty meal. Though their young digestions were only burdened with the merest *soupçon* of pancake, there were limitless quantities of bread and jam for their delectation, and on this excellent provender they battened full. I think it was many a long day since the little ones had enjoyed the delicious sensation of feeding themselves to repletion: childhood's necessity usurped by lapdogs and financiers. But it was good to see them do it now; to hear the greedy champing of their jaws; and to know that each little tummy was being filled up as tight as a drum. Olivia ate with elegant determination; Naoise gobbled truculently and

rather noisily; and Imogen chewed away with a silent, business-like perseverance that was wonderfully effective. As for Flann, it was almost alarming to observe the rapidity with which, after carefully rubbing the butter and jam into his hair, he sent crust after crust down the long and narrow way.

"Will you lodge a claim for compensation for your hat?" Mr. Carney asked of Mr. Sitric.

"Indeed I don't see why I shouldn't," said Mr. Sitric. "Most of these clamant shopkeepers could better afford a new shop than I can afford a new hat. But one must have some consideration for the unfortunate ratepayers; and besides, I've thought of a better plan. I'll wear it about the streets until the British Propaganda Department bribes me to burn it, or the Sinn Féiners buy it as evidence to convince a horrified world."

"Alas, that a good velour should sink so low," Mr. Carney said.

"It looked respectable enough when I bought it," said Mr. Sitric. "But with these second-hand goods you never know. Perhaps it's now suffering for the sins of its former owner. Do you believe in the transmigration of hats, Mr. Carney?"

"To a limited extent," Mr. Carney conceded. "For surely a time must come when the head-weary thingumagig shall demand, and be awarded, rest."

"Surely," agreed Mr. Sitric. "In the ineluctable process of Time, its personality must at last be dissolved and become merged in the infinite."

"The Absolute Negative, the Dust-bin," said Mr. Carney solemnly. Then they both laughed. Aren't men asses? Mr. Carney recited:

> There was an old man who said "Dash!
> The truth is revealed in a flash:
> My soul's transmigration
> Shall ne'er find cessation.
> I'm not even cold meat: I'm a hash."

I don't know how much more nonsense they would have carried on, but at this moment they were interrupted by a heavy knock at the door. Mr. Carney opened it.

"Parcels for Mr. Carney," said a voice outside, and a carter came in and put down two heavy ones on the floor.

"Who are they from?" asked Mr. Carney, but the carter didn't know.

"Oh, do let's open them, Daddy!" chorussed the children.

"What about finishing tea first," Mrs. Carney suggested.

That was soon done. By this time Imogen was red with jam up to the cheek bones; Nacise looked as if he had been trying to swallow a two-edged sword and slit his cheeks to the ears in the process; and even Olivia was decidedly sticky. As for Flann, he was a mess of butter and jam and crumb from head to foot.

There was a great scramble for front places when Mr. Carney took a knife and went to cut the strings of the two parcels; and such squeals of curiosity as he peeled off layer after layer of wrappings; and at last a general yelp of delight as the shining metal parts of a brand new gramophone came into view. There was a card tied to the handle. "*From a life-long admirer of your work,*" Mr. Carney read out.

"Now I wonder who the deuce that is," he said.
I had taken great pains to disguise my handwriting.

"God bless him, whoever he is," said Mrs. Carney.

"Or she," said Mr. Sitric. "It looks like a woman's hand."

My knees trembled.

"Oh, Daddy! make it play a tune," cried the children. So Mr. Carney opened the other parcel, which, sure enough, contained a dozen or more records, and in a moment Olivia was capering about to the Ballet music

from " Faust," and Naoise clumsily imitating her, and Flann beating a tattoo on his chair with a spoon.

Then a sort of happy madness came over us grown-ups also, and we cleared away the table and the chairs, and Mr. Sitric gravely solicited a dance of Mrs. Carney, and Mr. Carney begged the pleasure from me, and the two pairs went whirling round the room, to the huge delight of the children, who stopped to watch us.

" Oh, Daddy *does* look so funny!" Olivia burst out at length. Whereat Mr. Carney took his little girl and tossed her up to the ceiling, and caught her again and told her she was a little cynic, while I went to the gramophone to change the record, and Mrs. Carney carried Flann, loudly protesting, off to bed.

I wish I could tell you all the fun we had after that: how Mrs. Carney rigged up a sheet, and how Mr. Carney made the most ridiculous shadow pictures on it; how Mr. Sitric did conjuring tricks, and brought two dolls and a bugle out of his hat; and how we played blind-man's-buff, and musical chairs to the gramophone. Then Imogen became cross with tiredness, and had to be taken to bed, and it was just at that moment that I heard the first distant cries of " Stop Press."

At her father's request Olivia now stood up, smoothed down her pinafore, curtseyed, and recited " The Lake Isle of Innisfree," which he had taught her himself. She declaimed the first two stanzas elegantly and with some feeling, but when she came to the third she tripped through it impatiently, dashed lightly over " the deep heart's core," gave a perfunctory bob, and, jumping up on Mr. Sitric's knee, demanded that he should tell her a story.

" Stop Press!" rang out down the road. " Stop Press! Stop Press Edition!"

" Oh, yes! Tell us a story," cried Naoise, clambering up to the Philosopher's other knee. Steadying the pair with an arm around each, Mr. Sitric began:

" Once upon a time there was a little boy and a little

girl called Billy and Lily, and they lived at the top of a tree; and when the wind blew they went this way and that way, and this way and that way.''

'' Why didn't they fall off?'' demanded Naoise practically.

'' They did fall off,'' the Philosopher admitted. '' They fell off three times a day, but they always picked each other up again.''

'' Stop Press Edition!''

'' Well, as I say, they lived at the top of a tree, and they ate pineapples and Peggy's leg and cocoanut ice.''

'' Where did they get them?'' asked Naoise.

'' Well, you see there was a pineapple tree and a cocoanut tree growing beside them, and the grass underneath was all covered with marguerites. So they lived on the top of the tree, and they had a splendid time, and they'd no horrid house to go into, and no lessons to learn, or anything.''

'' What did they do when it rained?'' asked Olivia.

'' They got wet,'' said Mr. Sitric.

'' They must have got awful colds.''

'' They did. But then, you see, the tree they lived on was an Ipecacuanha tree, and they used to eat the berries, so they always got well again.''

'' Stop Press! Stop Press!'' was yelled hoarsely under our very window.

'' More atrocities, I suppose,'' said Mr. Carney gloomily.

'' We have supped full with horrors,'' said Mr. Sitric. '' Never mind it.'' But Mr. Carney went out.

'' Go on!'' the children urged the Philosopher. '' What happened after that?''

'' The Nine Muses inspire me!'' said Mr. Sitric. '' Let's see now. Where had we got to?''

'' They were eating—Ippy—Ippy—Ippy-something,'' Olivia prompted him.

'' Of course. Well, as I say, they used to eat these Ipecacuanha berries, and their colds used to vanish like

ghosts on a gridiron. Now one day . . .'' Here Mr. Sitric hesitated, scratched his red head, and looked at me pathetically for inspiration.

'' A fairy came along,'' I suggested.

'' Of course. A fairy. The fairy Dandelion it was, a naughty little fairy that used to be called Honeysuckle, but she was ever so lazy and spent all her time asleep in a buttercup, so the Fairy Queen punished her by ordering her to blow away all the dandelion clocks in the world every autumn for ever and ever. Well, this little fairy came along and found the children eating Peggy's leg at the top of the tree. So . . .''

Here Mr. Carney came back into the room. His face was white. He held a newspaper crushed up in his hand.

'' Darling!'' cried Mrs. Carney anxiously. '' What is it?''

He handed her the paper. She stared at it a moment, then passed it on to me. In the disordered type of the Stop Press column I read:

ANOTHER TOWN DESTROYED
BALLYLONGFORD SACKED AND BURNED
BY BLACK-AND-TANS.

As a reprisal for the shooting at Kilbeg, ten miles away, Crown forces in lorries entered the town of Ballylongford to-day. . . .

My eye skipped to the list of ruined premises:

The Town Hall, Sinn Féin Club, Dooley's licensed establishment, Reilly's drapery emporium, offices of the '' Leinster Record.'' . . .

'' I've no other copy,'' I heard Mr. Carney explain.

'' Oh, Mummy! Mummy! Mummy!'' wailed Olivia, with a child's intuition that something was wrong.

" It's all right, dear," said Mrs. Carney, but the little girl went and plucked at her father's coat. " What is it, Daddy?"

" The ship's gone down," said Mr. Carney.

" Oh, Daddy! Will I not get any shoes now?"

" Some day, perhaps," said Mr. Carney.

But Olivia's eyes held the abysmal woe of one who feels that the world is come to an end. Poor Naoise, too, seems to have suddenly realised what was afoot.

" Boo-hoo!" he roared. " No soldjas!"

CHAPTER XXIII

AN INSPIRATION

Mr. Sitric and I seized the first opportunity to slip away as unobtrusively as possible, and, not trusting ourselves to speak, walked home in silence. Between worrying over my friend's misfortunes and racking my brain for plans to help them, it was long before I slept that night; and, when I did, my dreams were haunted by Mrs. Carney's white face, and Olivia's disappointment, and little Naoise's distracted cry, " No soldjas!" The situation of the family was indeed precarious. Knowing their habits as I did, I guessed that the evening's festivities must have pretty nearly emptied their cash-box, since they would have been relying on the " Leinster Record's " cheque to carry them through the next three months. Something must therefore be done at once: but what? Mr. Carney was too sensitive to accept gifts in any form; and it was a principle with him never to borrow unless he could count with certainty on the means of repayment. I thought for a moment of offering him work as my secretary (even at the sacrifice of revealing my terrible secret); but the motive would have been too obvious, and, when I came to

think of it, I couldn't *quite* see Oliver Carney writing letters for Lucy Loveday.

With a vague idea of giving assistance of some sort I called on the family next day, and found Mr. Carney parcelling up the gramophone in its wrappings while the children looked on with faces of intense gloom.

"I've got to sell it," the novelist explained; whereat Imogen's grief broke out afresh.

"Well," said I, as indifferently as possible, "if you don't want it, why not sell it to me? You wouldn't get more than half-price for it at a dealer's, because theoretically it's second-hand; but I'd give you the catalogue price."

His brow darkened with suspicion, but pretending not to notice, I went on: "I'll go out and get a boy to carry it over to my digs at once, and Olivia and Imogen can come round and play it for me this afternoon."

The little mites brightened up at once and came dancing round their father, crying: "Oh, Daddy, *do* sell it to Auntie Stasia!" until he consented.

So the wolf was scared from the Carneys' door for the time; but I wanted to drive the brute away for good. The position was really absurd as well as tragic. Here was an artist scraping up a bare living by writing pot-boilers, while his proper work (a first-class novel and a remarkable play dealing with modern problems in an entirely original way) could not even find a publisher. You see, at this time there was a slump in Irish books in England, like the slump in German music during the European War. And as for Ireland: well, the Abbey wouldn't take his play because the characters were neither modern peasants nor prehistoric heroes; and the Gaiety wouldn't take it because it wasn't a musical comedy. And the publishers wouldn't take the novel because its length made it impossible to sell it profitably at less than ten shillings, a price which nobody in Ireland would pay for a book, though ready enough to spend it on horse-racing, prize-fighting, or drink. I in-

terviewed one publisher in Mr. Carney's interest, and was assured that the thing was impossible. "To publish that book would ruin me," he said, "and that's the long and the short of it."

Instantly a bright idea flashed across my mind. At last I saw a way by which I could get rid of my money, not only without wasting it, but with substantial profit to many deserving people, and with some benefit to Society at large.

I would set up as a publisher and bring out all the unprofitable books in Ireland. I would pour money into the pockets of Mr. Carney and his kind, and in a few months' time I would be bankrupt. The scheme was no sooner conceived than I set about executing it. I went to a solicitor, registered myself as a limited company under the name of Carhampton and Co., took offices in Sackville Street, and installed a manager in charge. Then I put a large and attractive advertisement in the papers, and sat down to await events.

At an early stage I took Mr. Tackaberry into my confidence. I told him that there was likely to be a fall in my dividends next year and that I had anticipated matters by selling out. He commended my acumen. Then I told him that I had decided to start a business of my own, and that I was actually the chief shareholder in Carhampton and Co. He hadn't heard of the firm, so I explained. He was delighted with the idea.

"I'm told there's tons of money in the book trade," he said. "I believe Ethel M. Dell's next door to a millionaire, and some o' these American fellahs don't know what to with their money. I was readin' in a paper the other day that if ye were to take all the copies of Nat Gould's books that have ever been sold and spread 'em out in a straight line they'd reach ten thousand miles beyond the moon."

The first venture of the new firm was Mr. Carney's novel. I drew his attention to the advertisement myself, and he sent in his manuscript at once; the manager for-

warded it to me; and in a week's time Mr. Carney received a polite note offering liberal terms, and three hundred pounds advance royalties. The poor fellow could hardly believe his eyes.

"I must be dreaming," he said. "Beatrice, run out and get me a bottle of chloroform to keep me from waking. . . ."

"Oh, Daddy!" cried Olivia rapturously. "Is it another ship?" And Naoise, filled with a sudden revelation, cried "SOLDJAS!"

"It must be a madman or a philanthropist," said Mr. Carney later. "He won't be in business long, God help him. It doesn't seem fair to take the money, somehow."

"Nonsense," I said. "You're receiving proper payment for your work for once. Take it while it lasts, and be thankful."

There was another venture, too, which I was anxious to undertake, and which promised to be even more ruinous financially than Mr. Carney's novel. This was Mr. Sitric's "History of Human Folly." Bearing a copy of a newspaper containing my advertisement, I went up to the Philosopher's room one afternoon, and found him lost in thought and tobacco smoke.

"Ahem!" I coughed.

"Sit down," said Mr. Sitric. "I acknowledge your rebuke. Tobacco smoking is a dirty, unhealthy, unnatural, and silly habit. A man sucking a pipe is like a baby sucking a rattle or a booby sucking his thumb. A schoolboy sucking a cigarette is a smack-inviting pup. A plutocrat sucking a cigar is an incitement to riot and rebellion. As a boa-constrictor obtains as much pain and trouble as enjoyment from the enormous meals with which it crams its none too capacious maw, so the smoker finds the soothing qualities of the weed almost neutralised by the worries incidental to its consumption. See the novice vainly puffing at an ill-filled pipe. See him shaking out its accumulated juices in a futile

attempt to stop its bubbling. See the hungry eye of the confirmed smoker who has mislaid his pouch or who cannot find a match. See the hatred roused on tram-cars by the smoker who neglects to take a seat behind the trolley. See all this and pity the blind slaves of the drug. Its apologists claim that it promotes a certain sociability. Bah! What is that but a mutual condonation of folly? Tobacco, my dear lady, is a poison, and its consumption must therefore be a vice. It unsteadies the hand, blurs the sight, blunts the taste and smell, injures the heart, and stains the teeth. It enslaves the will, dulls the intellect, and cools the noble fire in the heart of man. It is an abomination and a curse," he concluded, striking another match, " but, by Jove, I do enjoy my pipe."

" I hope you feel better now," I said.

" There is a consistency in inconsistency," said Mr. Sitric, " that makes both qualities tolerable. What do you want?"

" Has it ever occurred to you," I asked, " to publish that History of yours?"

Mr. Sitric turned and indicated the topmost parcel of the great pile in the corner.

" That is Volume One of the work," he said. " By the frayed and unclean appearance of its wrapper you may guess that it has travelled far and endured much handling. It has been sent to no less than a hundred and two publishers, who have all returned it with expressions of regret that their financial position was not on a scale commensurate with such an undertaking."

" Well, your chance has come," I said, and I showed him the advertisement.

With a little persuasion I induced him to send in the manuscript; and in due course my manager informed him that the firm would have pleasure in publishing the first six volumes at once.

I wish I could tell you about all the people who now came swarming into the offices of Carhampton and Co.

Ponderous persons with still more ponderous tomes; gay young ladies with frisky attempts at novels; pious nuns with stories that began with "Dear Reader," and claimed to be "instructive" and "elevating" on the title-page; journalists with clippings that they wanted to make up into books; poets with material for any number of those eternal slim volumes. There were simple youths in scores who expected to win immortality with this sort of thing:—

Oh, I was a maiden, fair and young,
By the pleasant Liffey's side,
And all the boys that lived on Ormond Quay
Wanted me for to be their bride.
My heart ne'er beat with flying feet,
No love sang me his queen,
Till down the street marched the Irish Volunteers
All dressed up in Orange, White and Green.

There were no less than eleven short histories of Ireland submitted in the one week; eight nonentities sent in immense autobiographies; and one brilliant genius offered me a transcription of my own "Field of Daffodils" with the names and the colour of the heroine's hair altered and the locality shifted to Ireland. Altogether I received nearly a hundred manuscripts, from which I selected nine as being of some literary value and likely to lose me money.

As soon as I could I published my autumn list and showed it to Mr. Tackaberry, whose face took on a dubious expression at the first glance, and grew longer and longer as he read it through.

"This doesn't look very like business," he said. "Two books o' po'try. Ye'll lose on them. Nobody *I* ever heard of buys po'try. And what's this? Hist'ry! Holy Moses, what were ye thinkin' of. If it was a half-crown book, now, ye might sell it in the schools. But a quid! Now who in his senses is going to buy that? Two books of plays. That's no good either. I've done some

amachoor actin' meself, and we used to buy one book and copy our parts out of it. . . . And what's this? Only one novel? By Oliver Carney. Is that the fellah that lives on the Rathgar Road? He was at school with me, so he was. Sure, nobody'd buy a book written be that fellah. Ye should have got hold of one of these English people. Hall Caine, or Ethel M. Dell, or Lucy Loveday, or one o' them. I don't believe ye'll make a penny out of all this lot."

He put down the list in very ill-humour, which was in no wise improved when I unfolded some of my future plans.

"Holy Mike!" he exclaimed at last. "Are ye try'n' to rune yerself?" I couldn't help laughing at that, which so perplexed and annoyed him that he did not kiss me at-all that day, and was very sulky at parting.

Next morning I read in the newspaper that his lodgings had been raided and himself taken away as a prisoner by the Black-and-Tans.

CHAPTER XXIV

LETTRE DE CACHET

I WAS never more astonished in all my life, for Mr. Tackaberry was the last person one would expect to find involved in a revolutionary movement. In all my acquaintance with him I had never heard him utter any political opinion beyond an occasional complaint against the inconvenience of Curfew and the unsettled condition of the times. His ambitions were purely commercial, and he was constitutionally incapable of thinking in abstract terms or considering anything but his own comfort. I therefore put the arrest down as an error, for it was notorious that hundreds of people had been seized on the flimsiest suspicion, and that the internment camps

were filled with prisoners who had never cast a vote or handled a gun in their lives. Cad as he had shown himself to be, I could not help feeling sorry for Mr. Tackaberry. His innocence, I knew, would avail him nothing, for inquiries into the cases of individual suspects were rare, and the probability was that he would remain in durance until the conflict was settled one way or another. My own plans were likely to be upset, too. I had calculated on a rapid rush to bankruptcy, a sudden breaking off of the engagement, and an immediate return to affluence on the proceeds of "Passionate Pauline." To have to go on pouring money into Carhampton and Co. until his Britannic Majesty should see fit to restore Mr. Tackaberry to freedom was an extremely unpleasant prospect.

As I was thus meditating, came a knock at the door, and Mrs. Buck appeared with a telegram. I tore it open and read:

Dine with me Jammet's seven to-night celebrate your freedom.—Rudolf.

"I shan't be in to tea this evening," I told Mrs. Buck as I scribbled my acceptance on the prepaid form. "I'm going to dine with my brother at Jammet's."

"Jammy's, is it?" said Mrs. Buck. "Well, I hope they'll do you better than they did me and Buck (R.I.P.) last time we were there. We were just a month married, and poor Buck said: 'Let's do a bit of a celebration, and have our dinner in reel style. We'll go to Jammy's.' I'd never heard o' Jammy's before, but I needn't tell ye Buck knew everything in the social line—ye know what I mean. Well, we went. Ye never saw such a place! The tables were all shinin' with glass an' silver,

and the cloths all clean and starched as if they'd just come from the la'ndry. Then there was a whole crowd of gentlemen standin' around, and all dressed up as if they were goin' to a dance. Leastways I *thought* they were gentlemen, but one of them came up and helped Buck off with his coat, so I knew they were only waiters. Well, we sat down at a table, and I'm blessed if there wasn't near a dozen o' knives and forks and spoons of one kind or another in both our places. We thought we were goin' to have a grand blow-out, but we soon found it was all for show. We'd just got our napkins nicely tucked into our necks when one o' the waiter fellahs came along with a couple o' small little plates about the size of a saucer. Then another fellah came round with one o' them dishes like they have in a restaurant with cheese and butter and biscuits,—ye know what I mean; only there was more places in it like, and there was the queerest collection o' little fallals in it that ever ye saw. There was a few sardines in one place, and a sort o' tomatoey thing in another, but what the rest of the things were I couldn't make out. I didn't like the looks o' some o' them either,—ye know what I mean. Well anyway, we took as good a helpin' as we could fit on them little bits of plates; an' when we'd finished the waiter fellah came along with a card, an' asked us what we'd like to follow. 'Hold on, now,' says Buck. 'I'm not ready for me sweet yet. I'll have another helpin' o' them vittles first,—such as they are,' says he, sarcastic like. So they brought us round the queer contraption again, and we took a bit more; and after that Buck said: 'I'm paying through the nose for this, so I'll eat me full,' and we had another bit. But, God bless us! we were hungry still, because ye couldn't fit anything on them ridiculous little plates. So we asked for a bit more, and they said they hadn't got any. That made Buck reel angry, because he liked to get value for money, did Buck. But there was no help for it, so we had a bit o' rice puddin' and a cup o'

tea and then we come away. A regular take-in, *I* call it, but everyone to his taste, as they say. I know *I* wouldn't go there again, not for a hundred pounds."

Undeterred by this advice, I arrived at Jammet's at the hour appointed, to find Rudolf awaiting me in the hall. We had a very *récherché* little dinner, for Rudolf was quite a gourmet; and at the end of it he raised his glass, saying: "To your Freedom." When we had honoured the toast I asked Rudolf how long he thought Mr. Tackaberry would be kept in durance.

"Just so long," he replied, cutting the end of a cigar, "as the British take to reconquer this God-forsaken island. What they want with it I don't know. I wouldn't take it as a gift myself."

"It was a curious chance," I mused.

"Chance?" said my brother. "Do you think it was altogether chance?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did it not occur to you that *I* might have something to do with it?" And he lit his cigar with elaborate care.

"What could you have to do with it?" I asked.

"When you entrusted your affairs to a man of action," said Rudolf, "you should have expected something to happen."

"You'd better explain," I suggested.

"It's quite simple," Rudolf said. "After I left you that night I dropped into a pub for a drink. There was a lot of strong political talk going, and, by Jove, it opened my eyes to the things that are being done here. Of course I'd heard a lot of it already across the water, but at the time I'd thought it was mere eye-wash meant to catch the sympathy of an indignant world, and so on. The chief topic of conversation was the number of arrests on suspicion that had taken place recently. It seems that you can be arrested not merely for acts of rebellion or on suspicion of having so acted, but on suspicion of being about to commit an act, or even on

suspicion of being about to contemplate committing an act. One man said that people had been arrested on the suspicions of casual informers, and another said he knew of actual cases in which perfectly innocent people had been arrested on the information of personal enemies. Then everybody began telling stories of cases they knew or had heard of, and though some of them sounded rather tall, I think they were true in the main. I remember there was one fellow that I'm sure was pulling the long bow, but his dope will pass with a grain of salt. He told us he knew a fellow who'd been bothered for years by the man that lodged above him. He used to kick off his boots with a bang night after night just as the chap below had dropped off to sleep. He had no connection whatever with Sinn Féin, but my informant's friend tipped a wink to the Black-and-Tans, who pounced on him in the middle of the night and stuck him in Ballykinlar. If my friend is to be believed, the fellow is now thinking of applying the same treatment to his successor, who keeps a gramophone. . . . Sniffy, if you gape like that, the top of your head will come off."

"Rudolf!" I cried. "You don't mean to say that you went and informed on Mr. Tackaberry?"

"If the British Government," said Rudolf lightly, "is so obliging as to provide us with a Bastille, why shouldn't we occasionally avail ourselves of a *lettre de cachet?*"

"But, Rudolf——" I protested.

"Not so loud," he cautioned. "There's an Auxie at the next table."

"That was an awful thing to do," I went on in a lower tone.

"Why?" asked Rudolf blandly.

"To land an innocent man into prison for an indefinite period because he was—well, an annoyance to me. . . . Why, it's outrageous."

"That's a nice return for all my trouble," said

Rudolf, rather nettled. "Instead of abusing me, kid, you ought to be thanking me on bended knees."

"Rudolf," I said "you've no sense of responsibility. Things like that simply can't be done."

"It *is* done," retorted Rudolf.

"Well, it'll have to be undone," I declared. "It's not fair to the boy."

"The blight only got what was coming to him," said Rudolf. "You've got no durned sense of reality, Sniffy. You seem to think that the British Criminal Code is a complete catalogue of the crimes of men. Well, it isn't: not even with Dora and the Restoration of Order Act thrown in as supplements. This Tackaberry creature has committed a worse crime, in trying to blackmail a woman into marrying him, than any of these unfortunate boobs with their misguided attachment to a sham republic." He took a long pull at his cigar, blew off smoke, and, by a sudden transition of thought, added: "Wish I could take some of them out to the States and show them a real republic in working order. Maybe they'd sing another song then."

"Let's get back to the point," I said. "I'm not going to have Tackaberry kept in gaol for what's partly my fault."

"He's not in gaol," Rudolf corrected. "He's in Ballynakilty Camp."

"Very well. You'll have to get him out of it."

"How?"

"Own up."

"Can't be done," said Rudolf shortly. "It'd only land me in his place."

"Nonsense. You could say you'd made a mistake."

"Thank you. I just see myself. Would you walk into a lion's den to tell him he'd mistaken your pet lamb for an antelope?"

"Very well," I said. "We'll just have to rescue him."

Rudolf sat up and looked at me with sudden amused admiration in his eyes. He had been clearly annoyed by my refusal to approve of his clever plan to rid me of my tormentor, but the moment I spoke of rescue vivid pictures passed before his mind's eye and quickly fired his imagination. Boy as he was, he already foresaw another unmitigated lark; and I knew he would now be as active and ingenious in winning that wretched creature's release as he had formely been in securing his incarceration.

"Sniffy," he said. "You sure are the stuff! I'd never have thought this of you. But these Auxies are all ears, so as soon as you've finished your coffee we'll adjourn to my digs to plan things out."

But in the cool air of the street the full significance of my proposal began to dawn upon me in all its wild absurdity. Rudolf and I pitting our feeble strength against the terrible and relentless forces that had devastated Ireland and almost broken the national movement! What sort of imbecile must I be to think of it? If we failed in our attempt—and it was almost foreordained that we should—Rudolf would certainly be shot, and I would probably spend the rest of my life in penal servitude. Far better leave Mr. Tackaberry where he was. It would do him no harm: very likely it would do him good: and, as Rudolf had said, he thoroughly deserved his punishment. I said as much when at last we found ourselves in Rudolf's sitting-room.

"What? Hedging already?" he rallied me. "Well, if you won't help me I'll see the thing through myself. I'm not scared of their one-horse travelling atrocity circus."

"It's madness, Rudolf," I said.

"Pooh!" said Rudolf. "Everything worth while is called madness by the wiseacres. You're as bad as Nancy. Worse, in fact. She only wanted me to stodge my money: you want me to stodge my life."

"I want to prevent you throwing away your life," I said.

"Just what Nancy used to say about my money. Life, like money, was given us to spend, not to put away in a money-box for our old age. Buck up, now. I got away from the Germans twice. Do you think these piebald pistoleers, that even the Sinn Féin hay-seeds can bamboozle, can do in a four-flush man from New York?"

I was over-ruled. After a short discussion we decided that Rudolf should go up to Ballynakilty next day to reconnoitre the ground. Four days later he returned, and came to see me at once. Mrs. Buck, fortunately, was out, so that it was Maggie who admitted him.

"We'll do the trick," he announced jubilantly. "It's only a case of cutting some barbed wire entanglements—I've done plenty of that in my time—, and then there's a corrugated iron fence to negotiate. I'll dig under that. The soil is loose and sandy, so it'll be a durn sight easier going than the time I had to dig under a live-wire fence in Germany with a broken shovel and a sprained wrist."

"And where do *I* come in?" I asked.

Rudolf explained that it would be necessary to warn the prisoner of our intentions. I would have to ask for a permit, as his *fiancée,* to visit him, and must seize what opportunity I could to give him oral or written instructions.

"It'll be a ticklish job," Rudolf said. "They'll keep you separated for one thing; for another there'll be a soldier present all the time you're talking; and possibly you'll be searched before admission. However, cheer up. Difficulties only exist to be overcome. And anyway, it'll be a deuce sight easier for me to get the fellow out of Ballynakilty than for you to get out of your engagement afterwards."



CHAPTER XXV

ON THE ROAD

RAPIDLY now we made preparations for the rescue. Rudolf bought a good strong pair of wire-cutters, and in an odd-and-end shop on the quays he picked up an army entrenching tool. He also found among his belongings an old revolver he had used in his prospecting days in Mexico, but fortunately he had no cartridges for it, or he would, in spite of all my protestations, have brought it along loaded.

"And lastly," he said, "we must take along our good brother Bill."

Astonished, I asked why.

"As camouflage," Rudolf explained. "In the first place, he'll be a sort of guarantee for the general innocence and respectability of the party. In addition, you'll want someone to occupy the jailer's attention while you slip Tackaberry the hunch. Bill's fatuous blatherskite will be just the right dope for that."

"He won't come," I said.

"You go and get the permits, old girl," said Rudolf, "and I'll fix him."

Fix him he did, and a few days later we started on our journey. Rudolf travelled separately, professedly as an extra precaution, but really because he didn't want to be bored by Bill's conversation. Bill and I took corner seats in an empty carriage. We thought we were going to have it to ourselves, but just as the train was about to move off, what should appear at the window but the inflamed and besotted countenance of Mr. Kinsella. He tugged the door open, lurched inside, and dropped into a seat, mopping his brow, and breathing heavily. To avoid his recognition I turned my head to look at the roofs and chimney pots that were slipping past. For a while there was silence. We rattled past Clondalkin, Lucan, Celbridge. Then, after several

grunts and gasps and groans, Mr. Kinsella addressed my brother.

"Beg your pardon, mister. Have ye gorra match?"

Bill looked over his questioner haughtily, decided that he was not a gentleman, and remained silent.

"I say," said Mr. Kinsella, "have ye gorra match?"

No answer. Mr. Kinsella bent nearer, and in a louder key repeated his question.

"I'm not deaf," said Bill stiffly. "I don't lend my matches to casual strangers."

Mr. Kinsella was silent for fully half a minute. Then he said:

"Do ye know what you are, Mister Cashual Stranger? You're a Black-and-Tan, you are. A Black-and-bloody-Tan. That's what you are."

"I'm not a Black-and-Tan," said Bill.

"Yes, you are. A Black-and-bloody-awful-Tan."

"Sir," said Bill. "I don't want to argue with you. Kindly leave me in peace."

"Why!" cried Mr. Kinsella in altered tones. "If it isn't old Bill Rudd! Don't ye remember me? Kinsella's my name. Used to be at old Mrs. Buck's in Rathgar. *She* was a Black-and-Tan if ye like. Pitched me out on me neck, she did, after paying me rent regular all these years. Basest ingratitude, I call it. Come now, old sport, lend us the loan of a match. D'ye know where I'm goin', now? Down to Ballynakilty, to report on the state o' the camp. Disgrace to the civilised world, I'm told. Lend us a match."

"I have already told you, sir," said Bill, "that I don't desire your acquaintance. Kindly be silent."

"You *are* a Black-and-Tan," said Mr. Kinsella with intense conviction.

Bill remained silent.

"And I tell ye what," Mr. Kinsella went on. "Your sister's a Black-and-Tan."

I thought he had recognised me, and looked round involuntarily; but it was only then he noticed me.

"Ah!" he said. "Miss Rudd herself! Nice sort o' young lady. Gettin' drunk on the quiet and throwin' water over respectable people."

"Sir," said Bill, "if you say another word I'll report you to the guard at the next station."

"Oh, ye will, will ye?" said Mr. Kinsella, rising unsteadily to his feet. "Well, take *that* for yourself," and he dashed his big flabby fist into Bill's face.

Bill was taken completely by surprise, but pulling himself together he rose up and returned the blow. There was little force behind it, but Mr. Kinsella was rather fuddled, his condition was of the poorest, and it got him on the solar plexus, so that he went down as if struck by a prize-fighter.

"Oh, Lord!" cried Bill, panic-stricken. "Have I killed him?"

Mr. Kinsella answered by getting up again and retiring to his corner, where he spent the rest of the journey glowering at us with his baleful little bloodshot eyes, and muttering his resentment under his breath.

Our destination was the little town of Kilmoran, situated about six miles from the camp, and, according to the universal custom in Ireland, nearly three-quarters of a mile from the railway station. It was raining when we arrived, but we were fortunate enough to find two outside cars waiting in stolid endurance in the downpour. Bill and I took one; Rudolf and Mr. Kinsella apparently went shares in the other; then, wrapped snugly in the rugs produced from the well, we dashed off for the only hotel of which the town could boast,—a frowsty, down-at-heel sort of place, ill-built, ill-ventilated, and ill-lighted—which we reached just in time to be told that dinner was over, but we could have tea with bacon and eggs in the Commercial Room.

When presently we descended to that apartment we

found two men at the table finishing off a similar meal. One was a big, fat, florid fellow with a smile for everyone; the other a smart, pale-faced youth who seemed to regard each entry into the room as a grievance. Warm as the night was, a fire burnt in the grate, reflecting itself in half-a-dozen round mirrors that advertised as many different kinds of soda-water. There were two writing-desks in the room, and a book-case in one corner containing a number of dingy and uninviting volumes. Bill and I had just sat down at the table—a horrid confusion of sauce and pickle bottles, dismembered butter-pats, and battered cutlery—and I was pouring out tea, when Rudolf and Mr. Kinsella entered. The latter and the fat man at the table seemed to recognise each other simultaneously.

"God, if it isn't old Dan Kinsella."

"And is it yourself, Mick Ryan? God, it's an age since I saw ye."

"Put it there, old chap. You're a sight for sore eyes."

They shook hands sentimentally. Then Kinsella turned to introduce his companion.

"Mr. Ryan: me friend Mr. Fortescue-Merryweather."

"—travelling," added Rudolf, in his best Americanese, "in the new patent self-conservating recombustive auto-cleansing stove: the Rudolfo Company, two thousand and one, Sixty-third Avenue, Detroit, Michigan."

"I'm in the woollens meself," said Mr. Ryan. "Our friend here's in the pen and ink line, and this—" introducing the pale youth—"is Mr. Bergin, who's in the fancy goods."

The new arrivals sat down, and were presently served with two more plates of that strange combination of salt flesh and embryo fowl whose habitual use as a breakfast dish has made old England what she is.

"Trade good, Mr. . . . Mr. . . . ?"

"Fortescue-Merryweather," Rudolf supplied as the

fat man faltered. "No, sir. Rotten. The people of this tarnation island seem to be too much concerned with politics and bedevilment to think of brightening up their homes with an efficient, economical, inexpensive, and I may say genuine article of domestic utility. Is that your experience, sir?"

"Well," said Mr. Ryan heavily, "maybe if I was travelling in stoves—but people must have stockings and vests and pants even if the sky falls."

"Sir," said Rudolf, "when you talk of stoves you don't do me justice. Mine are no ordinary stoves. They're the celebrated self-conservating, recombustive, auto . . . ."

"Fancy goods are rotten," Mr. Bergin interrupted.

"Sir," said Rudolf, "give me your hand. You're the first man that has ever dared to break in upon the flow of my remarks since the day I pipped Buckshot Webster down Texas way in Nought-six. You were saying?"

"After you, sir."

"No, sir. The field is to you."

"I wouldn't dream of it, sir."

"Sir," said Rudolf, "I never yet asked anything twice of any man. You will oblige me by continuing your very interesting and instructive remarks."

"I only said," Mr. Bergin faltered, flushing and looking very foolish, "that the fancy goods trade is rotten."

"Thank you," said Rudolf. "I'm sure it is."

The unfortunate Bergin collapsed in his chair, and did not venture to open his lips again that evening. Rudolf now looked down the table towards Bill, and in courteous tone said:

"I beg your pardon, sir, I am not acquainted with your name, but would you be so obliging as to pass me the tomato chutney which I observe adjacent to your elbow."

"Crusher Rudd,—that's *his* name," said Mr. Kinsella, who had been helping down his meal with liberal

potations of stout. "Crusher Rudd, a sanguinnery prize-fighter. Punched me in the bread-basket, he did, but I deserved it well, and I bear no malice. Old Dan Kinsella never bore ill-will to nobody, so he didn't. So let's shake hands, old shiny-top, and say no more about it. *I* forgive ye."

"Well, well, well," said Bill. "Your impudence astonishes me. Forgive me, indeed! Never heard such impudence in my life. Cool! Brazen! Colossal! Take away your hand, sir. I wouldn't touch it for a fortune. No, sir. Not if I was drowning and you wanted to save me. Not even if I had a hundred mortal sins on my soul."

Mr. Kinsella blinked stupidly, wiped away an incipient tear, drank off half a glassful, and, seeming to forget Bill's existence altogether, went on steadily and silently filling himself with food and liquor. I never saw anyone consume so much alcohol in a week as this unfortunate creature got through in one meal. Not only did he swill stout the whole time, but he poured about a gill of whiskey from a flask over his bacon and eggs, and when he had finished that he called for a cup of the dubious decoction that passes for coffee in our country hotels, and having poured it into a tumbler, filled it up with some more of "the crathur," and took a long, voluptuous draught.

"I'm very fond o' coffee," he said, sucking noisily at his moustache, "and that reminds me of a story I heard the other day. You know Jack Mulligan, Mick, don't ye? No? Oh, ye must know Jack. He used to live in Marley Road one time. Ye know the place, of course, don't ye? Well, I'll tell ye how to find it. Ye know Doyle's public house on the Phibsborough Road? I thought so. Well, ye pass Doyle's by till ye come to a turn on yer left, and that brings ye right on into Connaught Street. But before ye come to Connaught Street ye'll see a public house, Lanty's, it's called. Ha! ha" he laughed, "do ye know Lanty, Mick? Do

you, Mr. Forscue Werrymether? Funniest little man that ever drained a glass. God, he was a terrible drinker! I don't know if there was a bigger drinker on the North side, unless it was Ginger MacGee." God," he laughed again, " but Ginger was the stuff! That man had a head! I tell ye now! And I never saw him screwed. Not that he wouldn't stagger a bit when he'd a lot taken, or fall down the stairs, maybe, if he lost a holt o' the rail, but properly stoshious I never saw him yet. That's as true as I'm sittin' here, and I give ye me solemn word of honour. God, I'd like to tell ye some o' the stories he used to be tellin', but there's a lady present; leastways she calls herself a lady, though I give ye me solemn oath she's a Black-and-Tan. But Ginger's stories are neither here nor there anyhow, and ye wouldn't appreciate them either if ye didn't hear him tell them himself."

At this point, having finished my meal, I got up and went to the book-case to see if it contained anything readable. " Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans," " Hardware Retailers' Directory," " Pear's Encyclopædia," " Hazell's Annual " for 1903, a bound volume of the " Railway Magazine " for 1899, " Journal of the Commercial Travellers' Benevolent Association," " Elevating Extracts from the Poets," " Sermons of the Rev. T. H. Poodleshanks ": such were the titles I read on their faded backs. My eyes wandered disconsolately from one to the other for several minutes, till at last in despair I pulled out " Hazell's Annual " and, settling myself in a chair in a retired part of the room, I tried to interest myself in the burning questions of a forgotten age.

Meanwhile the men had gathered round the fire, but the migration had not interrupted the even flow of Mr. Kinsella's story, which was still droning drearily along. Glancing up occasionally from Hazell's yellowing pages I saw Rudolf and Mr. Ryan exchange despairing but half-humourous looks, Mr. Bergin frankly reading a

newspaper, and Bill, who sat a little aloof from the others, watching the narrator's face in fatuous wonderment. On went the endless monologue. Presently Bill's head dropped against the back of his chair, his mouth fell open, and a long snore brought Mr. Kinsella's tale to a sudden halt.

"Well," he said in great dudgeon, "I called that fellah a Black-and-Tan, but from his manners I'd be more inclined to say he's a Sinn Féiner. . . . Flung me hand o' forgiveness back in me teeth, he did. Sanguinnery Sinn Féiner. Hear that, Mr. Crusher-bloody Rudd?"

Bill's answer was another snore.

"Drunk. That's what he is," said Mr. Kinsella. "These Sinn Féiners are awful bloody drinkers. Punched me in the waistcoat and flung me hand o' friendship back in me teeth. Thash what all Sinn Feiners are. Ungrateful swine. Ignorant fellahs with no manners. D'ye know wharritis, Mister Foscue-Rethermerry? these camps are *too* good for such ungra'ful hounds. Thash what I'll say in my article. Too good altogether. . . . But as I was tellin' ye. . . ."

"Excuse me, sir," said Rudolf. "We have listened for the last half hour to a yarn that would tax the patience of Job and the comprehension of Plato. Well, I'm not gifted like those gentlemen, so I suggest that we give the rest of your anecdote a miss."

Mr. Kinsella rose to his feet.

"I been 'sulted," he said, "three times to-day. If you were a gen'elman, sir, I'd give you a blow in the face, but you're only a Black-and-Tan Sinn Féiner, and I wouldn' soil my hand on you. G'r'evenin'."

He began to walk majestically towards the door, but he had not taken three steps before he fell over Bill's outstretched legs. Utterly unable to help myself, I laughed outright. Mr. Kinsella regained his feet with difficulty, and shook an angry fist in the dazed countenance of the innocent cause of his downfall.

" 'Nother insult, Mr. Crusher-bloody-Rudd-Sinn-Féiner. I won't hold out any hand o' bloody friendship this time."

He stalked out of the room, and just at the door turned to give one look at me in my corner. I saw that his little eyes were ablaze with hatred.

CHAPTER XXVI

TO THE RESCUE

NEXT morning Bill and I took a car and drove over to the camp. At the entrance gate, where our passes were examined, Bill was perfunctorily searched by the sergeant of the guard; and when we got inside I was taken to a small office and patted all over by a female searcher. She found nothing, however, for Rudolf's note to Tackaberry, written in tiny letters on a little roll of paper, was concealed at the back of a brooch I was wearing prominently on the front of my blouse. After that we were passed through to another room, divided in two by a wooden barrier. Beyond the barrier was a door by which in a few minutes Mr. Tackaberry entered in charge of one of the redoubtable Black-and-Tans. The poor boy looked sadly perplexed, as well he might, considering the circumstances under which we had last met; so much so that he scarcely brightened up even when I addressed him as " Darling."

As for me, I was horribly nervous. The length of time allowed for a visit was exactly a quarter of an hour; in which time I must contrive either to whisper my instructions to Mr. Tackaberry while Bill distracted the attention of the guard, or to snatch an opportunity to convey him the note in my brooch. At first I was afraid that Bill was going to fail me. His ordinary loquacity seemed to have deserted him, and he simply

stood by in stolid silence while I said such things to Tackaberry as a *fiancée* may when the exigencies of the moment abolish that modesty which the presence of spectators would otherwise inspire. (Even had I wished it the regulations did not permit kisses or even handshakes.) I think Bill was paralysed with fear at his own temerity in pitting himself against the British Empire, and it was only his still livelier fear of Rudolf that recalled him to his duty. As it was, a third of the allotted span had expired before he succeeded in uttering a word.

"Very fine day, sergeant," he said.

"Very, sir," said the Black-and-Tan, without, however, taking his eye off the prisoner.

"Yesterday was nasty, though," said Bill.

"Very, sir."

"Very *wet*," said Bill. "Wettest day I ever saw."

"Yes, sir, it was a bit dampish."

"Dampish is the very word," said Bill enthusiastically. "The very word. Describes it to a T."

The Black-and-Tan did not feel called upon for further comment, and the conversation fell to Tackaberry and me for a while. Presently, however, Bill made another effort.

"I hope your quarters aren't damp, darling," I said.

"Oh, nothing to complain of," answered Tackaberry.

"Splendid body of men, you Black-and-Tans," said Bill. "Splendid men! Fine fellows! Brave as lions, and gentle as new-born lambs. Great work you're doing for this unfortunate country. Law and order, sir. Nothing like it. Badly needed here, sergeant, isn't it?"

"You could do with a bit, sir."

"Yes, yes. Ever since the contemptible factionists who are now in power hounded the Parliamentary Party out of public life, the state of the country has been going from bad to worse. Shocking! Nothing like it in history. French Revolution—Balkans—Bolshevik business—quiet and dull in comparison. Eh, sergeant?"

" Dunno, sir. Fought in the Balkans and the Murman stunt myself, sir. Toughish, sir. Lot worse than this."

" Darling," said I, " won't you promise me never to wander too near the wires? You might get shot trying to escape, you know."

" Oh, I promise," said Mr. Tackaberry, readily.

" I can hardly believe it," said Bill.

" Fact, sir. Ambushes are a bit trying, sir, but the rest's child's play. Why, I remember over at Salonika one time . . ."

The worthy Tan plunged into a long and vivid narrative. He still kept his eye on Tackaberry and me, but I could see that his mind was elsewhere. Happy in the possession of so credulous a listener, he waxed eloquent over doughty deeds and scenes of privation away in the wintry regions of Thrace in the dead years of the Great War. I took advantage of my opportunity, and began to speak in a lower tone. The story-teller paid no heed. Still lower, I asked Mr. Tackaberry to give me his close attention. Still the wild narrative went on, punctuated by Bill's monotonous " Really!" and " Extraordinary!" Greatly daring, I took the plunge, and began rapidly sketching out for Tackaberry the line of action laid down by Rudolf. It was brief and to the point: a mere location of the spot where the tunnel would emerge, and the time and manner of the projected escape. But we had reckoned without our captive. Tackaberry was surprised, and would scarcely hear me out. Then he declined flatly to have any part in the scheme. It was absurd, he said. There was no chance of pulling it off. He'd rather stay where he was for ten years than risk being shot trying to escape. No. He wouldn't dream of it. Thanks all the same.

The beginning of a remonstrance was cut short on my lips by the voice of the guard:

" Sorry to interrupt you, Miss, but time's up."

Amid our hurried farewells Mr. Tackaberry repeated

his refusal in a low voice, and in a moment more Bill and I were on our way back to the main gate. As we reached the barrier where the passes were examined I heard the sound of a familiar voice.

"No need to search *me*, sergeant. I'm a loyal British subject, *I* am. Comin' here to expose the lies of these bleating Sinn Féiners. Write 'em up in a dozen English newspapers, so I will. Them and their propaganda! All bloody humbug, that's what it is. They're too well treated, so they are. Lot o' hide-behind-the-hedge starve-the-barber galoots!"

At this point Bill and I approached the barrier. Mr. Kinsella, his search completed, saw us, and his little piggy eyes lit up with an evil smile.

"D'ye know what it is, sergeant-major?" said he. "If ye're keen on searchin', now's yer chance. That wan's a fierce Sinn Féiner, and th' ould fellah's as bad. Punched me in the waistcoat, he did, because I went crackin' up the Auxiliaries. 'Damn fine fellahs,' says I. 'Ye're a liar,' says he, and puck! comes his fist right in me breakfast. I'd search that fellah, if I was you, and his Missis, too, even if she is a feminine."

"It's orlright," said the sergeant. "They been searched already, they 'ave."

"Well, if they were only searched the way I was ye couldn't find much on 'em. I've got a pipe in me hip pocket, and I was sure ye'd take it for a gun, but ye never noticed it."

"Excuse me, sergeant," I said, "may we pass out?"

"Certainly, Miss," said the sergeant, standing aside.

"All right," said Kinsella. "Don't blame me if one of your prisoners escapes to-night."

"Don't mind that fellow, sergeant," said Bill. "He's drunk. Always is. Never saw him sober in my life."

"Sergeant," said Mr. Kinsella, "I'll say no more. In tellin' ye that these two doubtful lookin' characters is Sinn Féiners, I've done me jooty as a loy'l British subject. The rest is in your hands."

"Thank you, sir," said the sergeant. "I'm sure you mean well. I'll see to it, never fear. Will you pass in, sir?"

With a hideous leer at me, Mr. Kinsella walked out. Bill and I had reached the main gate by this time and stood waiting while the man on duty fumbled clumsily at the lock. He got the key turned at last, but even as the heavy gate swung open the voice of the sergeant behind rang out:

"Hold on, there!"

The janitor closed the gate again as the sergeant approached us.

"Very sorry, Miss," he said, "but I've got to act on the information given by that gentleman, so——"

"Gentleman!" cried Bill. "Do you call that drunken, good-for-nothing loafer a gentleman? I'm an ex-M.P., sir. Sat at Westminster for fifteen years. Yes. And you want to search me on the word of a tipsy bar-lounger. I never heard of such a thing!"

"Very sorry, sir," said the sergeant, "but I'm bound to act on information received. After all, sir, it's a mere formality. Can't possibly 'urt you."

"Tyranny, sir," said Bill. "That's what it is. Tyranny as bad as Nero's. Yes, sir. Worse than Nero's. Worse than Ivan the Terrible's. Worse than any tyranny in the history of the world."

"To 'ear you talk, sir," said the sergeant, "makes me think the hintoxicated gentleman ain't so far wrong after all. Come along, sir. May as well get it over."

"Under protest," said Bill. "Absolutely under protest," and we followed the boy of the bulldog breed back behind the barrier, Bill fearlessly indignant (for he knew nothing about the note I was carrying), and I full of apprehension, and praying heartily for the eternal welfare of Mr. Kinsella.

"Pure formality, Miss," said the sergeant, as he handed me over again to the female searcher.

That lady was a hard-featured person of uncertain

age, with straight black eyebrows and rigidly ordered hair. Her scrutiny this time was far more exhaustive than the previous one. She took my hair down and ran her fingers through it; she made me open my mouth, and examined it with a dentist's mirror for hollow teeth; she probed the soles and heels of my shoes; and finally she bade me take off my outer clothes. With trembling fingers I began to do so. First I gave up my coat. She took it, and stood waiting, her inexorable eyes on mine. The opening of my blouse was secured with the brooch that contained the incriminating slip of paper. Striving desperately to be calm, I unfastened it, and as innocently as possible kept it in my hand as I surrendered the blouse.

"The brooch, please," said my tormentor in an utterly expressionless voice; and as I gave it up I knew that my manner had told her all.

I felt as if I should faint when she took the little ornament and pulled out the roll of paper so cunningly inserted behind. Her countenance never changed as she read the message. Then she told me to resume my clothes, and in a kind of trance I obeyed her. I scarcely remember what followed. I was locked up in a room for I don't know how long. Then I was whirled off in a motor-lorry to Kilmoran, and lodged in a police-cell for the night. But it was only when the gates of Mountjoy Gaol clanged behind me that I fully realised what a fool I had been to pull Phyllis O'Dea's leg.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE GRIP OF THE BLACK-AND-TANS

Oh, the weary hours in a dungeon cell those long summer days. To think of all the sunshine I was losing, the opening flowers, the warble of the birds in

the hush of evening, all the sounds and smells of the ripened earth! I felt I was being robbed of something irreplaceable. My term was short, I knew. I knew that birds would sing in the future as they had always sung; that the wild violet would bloom again, and berries be red on the rowan, too. But this particular season of beauty would be gone beyond recall, and as far as I was concerned it might never have been. I think sometimes it cannot be right to put people in prison, no matter what they do. If a man who hasn't enough money to live on steals some jewels from someone who can very well do without them, we could easily make him replace them, or even replace them ourselves if we felt strongly enough about it. Instead, we take the frightful vengeance of robbing the poor wretch of seven years of his life, which we can never replace. Pay one crime back with another: it doesn't seem very good sense or very good morality, does it? Wouldn't it be much better to give the poor warped soul a holiday in the country in the hope of straightening it? But men are such fools they can't see that. They talk solemn nonsense about justice, and deterrents, and the protection of Society, and the rest of it, although four thousand years of undeterred crime shout Humbug behind them.

But I'm not an authority on criminology, so I'd better get back to my story. I was now on the wrong side of the barrier when the visiting hour came round. The first person who came to see me was my manager, who brought a very long face and a tale that pleased me mightily. He had spent a large sum in producing a really handsome edition of Mr. Carney's novel, and a still larger one in advertising it; but the book-sellers' orders were parsimonious in the extreme. One book—a volume of first poems by a young writer of some promise—was already on the market, but there was no demand for it at all. As for Mr. Sitric's book, he had received an estimate from the printer which was so

exorbitant that he had taken the liberty of holding the matter up until he could consult me. I told him to go ahead and get the first three volumes printed at once; at which command my worthy manager's face expressed more frankly than words a firm conviction that I was off my head.

My next visitor was Mr. Carney, who was so oppressed by the cage he had to stand in, and the constable, serene and portly between us, and the difficulty of recognising me through the two gratings, that his usual volubility deserted him, and we merely exchanged commonplaces about our health and the children. Mrs. Buck, who arrived next day, was under no such constraint, but meandered along in her old soft-spoken way.

"To think of you being in prison, Miss Rudd. Well, I never! Not that there's any great disgrace in it these days, ye know what I mean, with all sorts of quiet, respectable folk getting run in who never had wish nor will to do harm to anybody."

"Ye mustn't talk politics," interrupted our custodian.

"I'm not talkin' politics," replied Mrs. Buck.

"Now, ma'am, I'm not goin' to argue with ye. Yez can talk about annything else yez like, but politics is barred by the regulations."

Mrs. Buck gave a sigh of resignation and changed the subject. "I've left a few newspapers for ye over beyond. There's news in them ye won't find very pleasant, but I won't be wastin' the little time I have in tellin' it to ye. I always do believe in breakin' bad news gently, ye know what I mean. Poor Buck (R.I.P.) was just the same. Very discreet and considerate he was. I remember now the time me brother Joe (R.I.P.) was killed in a railway accident. Buck came into tea that even' with the paper in one hand, an' a bottle o' smellin' salts in the other. 'Take a sniff o' that, Tricksie,' says he. I was surprised, of course, but I did. 'Can ye bear up, now?' says he. 'I can,' says

I. ' Then look at that,' says he, and sticks the paper under me nose. Well, I fainted clean off, but I'd have died only for the smellin' salts. Very considerate of him, wasn't it? And how are ye feelin' yerself, Miss Rudd? Is yer bed comfortable?''

" Prisoners are not to be asked questions about the prison arrangements," said the policeman sternly.

" Well, what the mischief *are* they to be asked?" demanded Mrs. Buck. " Nice manners I call it, standin' there interruptin' ladies' conversations. If ye were ten years younger I'd turn y'over me knee an' dust yer breeches fer ye."

" Aisy now, ma'am," said the constable, reddening. " I don't want to be hard on ye, but jooty's jooty. Can't ye talk about something else?"

" I hope ye're well, anyway, Miss Rudd," said Mrs. Buck resignedly.

I assured her I was, and inquired for Vi'let and my brother Bill.

" Oh, Vi'let's grand," she said, " and so is Mr. Rudd. The two o' them have got awful fond of each other lately. I declare to goodness, they do be always playin' footie under the table. They'll be comin' round to see ye *together* one o' these days."

" Time's up," said the policeman, and we parted.

I went to my cell full of apprehension for what the newspapers might reveal. They were brought to me there soon after, and I opened them with trembling fingers. I was not long left in suspense, for one of the first headlines that caught my eye was as follows:

VISITORS ARRESTED
SENSATIONAL OCCURRENCE AT
BALLYNAKILTY

A certain amount of mystery surrounds the circumstances under which Mr. William Rudd, ex-M.P., and his sister, Miss Rudd,

> were arrested yesterday at Ballynakilty. It is known that they visited the camp in order to see an acquaintance who is interned there, but what led to their detention has not transpired. Later in the day Auxiliaries raided the hotel at Kilmoran, where they had been staying, and made an exhaustive search of the guests and their luggage. A young man, who gave his name as Fortescue Merryweather, was taken into custody.

With what horror I read that brief announcement can well be imagined. Rudolf had been taken in the Martial Law Area with a revolver in his possession. Inevitably he would be condemned to death: a sad end to my fooling. Poor Rudolf! To think of that gay laugh silenced for ever; that agile brain smashed by stupid lead. All night I could not sleep, and the next day I could neither eat nor keep still. I could think of nothing else but Rudolf; I saw him always a crumpled figure lying on the ground, his white forehead broken, his brown curls dabbled in blood, and silence on his cold lips. A young life cut short for nothing, and the fault mine. Oh, what a fool I had been! with my silly-clever lies and artifices.

Thus reviling myself, I spent the day pacing my cell backwards and forwards, until about noon I was told that a lady and gentleman were waiting to see me. Descending to the cage, I found myself face to face with Bill and Vi'let. The latter at once blushed and giggled, but Bill was his old, unsuspicious self.

"Well, well, well! Here we are," he said. "Miss Violet here was so anxious about you that I had to bring her along."

"I thought you'd been arrested," I said.

"So I was. So I was. But they let me out after two days without a stain on my character. Not that I minded. Oh, Lord, no. Very pleasant spot, Ballynakilty. Nice, quiet, orderly. Pleasantest spot in Ireland at present. Yes. Pleasantest spot in the world, if you ask me. And how are you, Stasia?"

"What about Ru—Mr. Fortescue Merryweather?"

"Poor fellow," said Bill. "Poor fellow! Booked for Kingdom Come, I'm afraid. Ah, yes. Not a doubt of it. However, let's hope for the best. While there's life there's hope, eh? Well, well, well."

"Good-bye," I said, and left him there gaping by the side of his giggling huntress.

That evening, however, I was considerably cheered by a note I received from Rudolf. It was inscribed *Kilmainham Prison,* and ran as follows:

I hope you aren't worrying about me, old girl. They can't shoot me for that tin-pot gun. There was no ammunition for it, and the thing was rusty anyway. I don't suppose I'll get much worse than yourself. So cheer up, Sniffy, and when we've paid the penalty for our crimes we'll recede westward from this one-horse island and bathe in dollars in God's own country.

Dear Miss Rudd, pray take this as a proposal of marriage.

Eternally thine,

James Fortescue-Merryweather.

His confidence was infectious, and, indeed, it was half-convincing. My anxiety did not altogether disappear, but from that moment it was considerably diminished. And soon I was to find distraction from my brother's troubles by being called to the contempla-

tion of my own. In a few days' time I had to stand my trial by court-martial at the City Hall.

My memory of that ordeal is disordered and vague. As I have previously explained, I was not possessed of any political principles or hampered by allegiance to any particular party, so I had a free hand in choosing my attitude to the court. I had really no defence, as the incriminating document was undeniably found on my person. Besides, I resented these English having the impudence to try me in my own country, and was determined to show it. So I decided to dispense with an advocate.

When in due course I appeared before the court, I was so confused by my surroundings, so obfuscated by confinement, so nervous as to my carriage, that the proceedings made no very strong impression on my memory. I remember standing face to face with a number of figures in khaki: a kind of top dog in the middle, and some minor canines on each side of him; but to this day I cannot recall their number or the features of a single face. I only know that none of them had the manners to stand up when I entered.

The top dog asked me my name, and at his tone all my nervousness vanished. I made up my mind to fool these pompous dogs-in-office to the top of their bent, and even higher.

"Do you mean to say you don't know it?" I said with a cool insolence that astonished even myself.

"Your name, please," repeated the top dog peremptorily.

"Well, if you don't know that," said I, "what on earth are you trying me for?"

The top dog glared at me, and was still striving to find words to express his feelings when one of the minor

canines suggested in a mild voice that it might be well at the outset to ascertain whether the prisoner recognised the court. The top dog crushed the junior with a look, but adopted the suggestion.

"Do you—er—recognise this court, prisoner?" he asked.

"I don't understand you," I said.

"It's perfectly simple," said the top dog. "Do you recognise this court?"

"The question doesn't become any simpler by repetition," said I.

The top-dog cast a murderous glance at the unfortunate youth who had proposed this line of attack, and then turned on me once more.

"Can't you understand," he said, speaking slowly, and making a desperate effort to subdue his rising irritation. "Do—you—recognise—this—Court?"

"I understand the words," I said, "but not their implication."

The top dog looked round despairingly at his colleagues as if to imply that he gave me up, whereupon another of the juniors began to question me in brighter tones.

"What particular words do you not understand, Miss—er—Prisoner?"

"Well, 'Court,' I suggested.

"What's wrong with 'Court'?"

"It seems to be begging the question. *Is* this a court? I don't see any wigs about." (Laughter.)

"This is a court-*martial*," the top-dog explained. "Well, do you recognise us now?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'recognise.'"

"Oh, come!" remonstrated the top dog. "Don't you—er—recognise our authority?"

"Isn't that what you're trying me to find out?" said I.

"No," said the top dog. "We're trying you on the charge of having contemplated the commission of an

offence under the Restoration of Order Act, namely ''— he consulted a sheet before him—'' the rescue of a prisoner from Ballynakilty Camp, and the possession of a document relating thereto.''

'' Well,'' said I, '' go ahead. I recognise you've got me in your power and can do what you like with me, but I don't see how you can expect me to give you any help in the matter.''

They left me alone after that and carried their silly formalities through on their own account. The only witness that I examined was Mr. Kinsella, whom I asked to say: '' The sere shins and sheer sins of sincere Sinn Féiners,'' at which he floundered so helplessly that the top dog ordered him out of the box. In the end they found me guilty and sentenced me to six months' imprisonment. Then I was taken away, and the top dog called for the next victim.

I had a premonition who that might be, and it was instantly fulfilled; for as I left the room I saw Rudolf, in handcuffs, come down the corridor guarded by two Black-and-Tans. He passed me with a cheerful nod, saying: '' Any luck?''

'' Six months,'' I said. He whistled; and next minute the door of the trial-room closed behind him.

'' Come on, now,'' said the wardress who had charge of me.

I turned to her desperately, clutching at her arm.

'' Do you hope for the mercy of God?'' I said.

She looked at me inquiringly, but not unkindly: a hard-featured, large-boned woman without a grace in the world, but a pair of eyes that jail-duty had not altogether robbed of softness.

'' That man is my—my——''

'' Yer best boy, is it?''

I nodded. '' He's going to be tried for having a gun. I may never see him again. Let us wait here till he comes out.''

The wardress hesitated.

"It won't be long," I said. "They're always quick when they mean to kill a man."

"The lorry's waiting for you," said the wardress, but I saw that she was relenting.

"For the love of God," I said.

"Aisy now," she whispered. "There's a small little room off here that maybe——" She led me a few yards further down the passage and stopped at a door. She opened it softly. "All right. Come in."

It was a bare, dusty room, its furniture piled under a dust-cloth in one corner. The wardress pulled out two chairs; placed one by the door where she could listen; and gave the other to me. We kept a silent vigil there in the semi-darkness. My heart-beats were positively painful; every breath I took gave me distress; my nerves were in a state of frightful tension. I could not sit still for a second, and all kinds of trivial things loomed large in my consciousness. I was acutely aware of the ticking of my guardian's watch; of the occasional flap and rustle of one of the drawn blinds in the breeze that blew through a broken window; I synthesised fantastic pictures out of the shadows and discolourations on walls and ceiling; I drummed weird tunes with my fingers on the edge of my chair. Every step I heard outside thrilled me with expectation, with hope and dread. Once I started at the sound of a shutting door, but it was only a single footstep that came down the passage, and the wardress opined that it was just a soldier, or maybe a witness. A distant clock chimed the quarter, and still we sat on. The length of the trial gave me renewed hope. If they meant to shoot him, surely the finding of the revolver would be enough. That could be proved in an instant, and the case would be over. Delay augured well. They were considering palliating circumstances. He would receive sentence of imprisonment, longer than mine probably, but some sort of political settlement must come soon, and he might manage to escape anyway. Rudolf himself had

been confident, too. They could never kill a man for having a rusty old revolver in his suit case, and no ammunition for it either. Oh, no. They couldn't kill him. I couldn't imagine Rudolf dead. . . . And yet—and yet—the strict letter of the proclamation—and the note to Tackaberry. . . . But he was so cheerful himself. No, no. Never! . . . Thus I wavered between hope and fear, and the distant clock chimed the half hour.

"I'll get into a terrible row if this is found out," said the wardress apprehensively.

Still the slow minutes went by, and the blind flapped and rustled in the draught of the broken window. Then at last my strained ears heard the opening of the trial-room door, and heavy steps come down the passage. I staggered forth to meet them, but they would not let him stop. He looked at me over his shoulder with a queer twisted smile on his face.

"Firing squad at seven a.m.," he said; and for the first and only time in my life I fainted.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

THEY killed Rudolf a thousand times in my dreams that night; and when I awoke the sun was high, so I knew that he was already dead. He was lying, a still, broken figure, at the foot of a grey wall, just as I had often imagined him; and millions of stupid, cruel, idle people were waking to a new day.

Presently a wardress (not the one who had been my guard at the trial) brought me breakfast. To my astonishment she spoke to me.

"Heard the news?" she said. "Truce declared yesterday. De Valera's to go to London to talk with

Lloyd George. They'll be letting you out of this soon."

How my heart bounded with hope; yet I dared not ask the question that was uppermost in my mind. The wardress, however, needed no questioning.

"Lucky for that young fellow, Merryweather, isn't it?" she said. "He was to have been shot this morning. Seán MacKeon, too, the Ballinalee fellow. It's a good job: I need a bit of a holiday meself;" and she yawned.

The wardress was an optimist; for it was six months before Rudolf and I regained our freedom. First of all de Valera had to go to London to arrange a basis for a conference; then he had to show off his skill at English prose and his imbecility at everything else in a long epistolary contest with Lloyd George, which left both of them short of wind, but otherwise much as they were before; then came the three long months of negotiation in London, with their diplomatic storms and constant rumours of break-down; and at last, when all hope seemed gone, the news was flashed across the water that a Treaty had been signed and that Ireland was free. It wasn't nice to be in prison that joyous day, but we had the consolation of thinking that our release would not be long in coming. Alas, it was only Dawn's left hand that we had seen. Dáil Eireann was determined that whether we entered proudly on the freedom for which our fathers had fought in vain, or signed away our nationhood for the fleshpots of Empire (whichever you prefer), the occasion should not be speechless; so all through that interminable debate, while blatherskite after blatherskite bleated fatuities to a bored and disgusted public, we poor silent ones languished away in gaol. But even Irishmen cannot talk for ever. The stream of oratory ran dry at last; hyperbole reached its zenith, invective its nadir; the

division was taken; the Treaty was ratified; and within a week Rudolf and I and Mr. Tackaberry were at liberty. I had served my sentence all but a few days.

The good Mrs. Buck was entirely overcome by surprise and emotion at my sudden and unexpected appearance at her house. She threw herself into my arms and sobbed out her heart and a large quantity of salty fluid on my far from adequate bosom. It was a most embarrassing display, especially as I was conscious of the scrutiny of several curious or amused passers-by; so I manœuvred the affectionate creature back into the hall, and shoved the door to with my foot. Presently Mrs. Buck recovered herself sufficiently to say:

"Oh, 'tis grand to have ye back! Grand! Grand! Won't yer brother be delighted! Sure we were all so lonely for ye. The place didn't seem the same without ye, ye know what I mean. Ye'll have an egg to yer tea, won't ye? and I'll tell Vi'let to make the biggest apple-cake that ever was."

Mr. Sitric, on the other hand, took the whole affair with philosophic calm.

"Prison?" he said. "Yes. A useful experience, by no means difficult of attainment in this country. I was in prison myself once."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"It was in my extreme youth," he explained. "Under the influence of alcohol and the oratory of the Ninety-eight Centenary, I assaulted a regiment of British cavalry. . . . You should have come to me for advice before you made this rash and foolhardy attempt of yours. I should have referred you to Plato's *Crito*, which sets forth the most cogent, and indeed conclusive, arguments against escaping from prison or facilitating the escape of others. By the way, has Greenwood been drowned in Lough Owel?"

"Not yet," I replied.

Mr. Sitric shook his head. "That's very unfair to Turgesius," he said.

That was all Mr. Sitric cared about my great adventure. As for Bill, he was so bitter against Sinn Féin in its hour of victory that he had not a word of welcome for me. "Well! well! well!" he kept saying. "Dominion Home Rule! The Party could have got the same without firing a shot. Well, well, well!"

So easily does one take the troubles of one's relatives; so hardly those of one's party.

It was only to be expected that Mr. Tackaberry would pay me an early call; and so he did, two days after my release and six after his own. When I went down to him in the parlour, I found him in a mood of unwonted sheepishness, and at first quite unable to speak. If you are to understand the poor fellow's state of mind you must try to put yourself in his place. Imagine (no matter how impossible it may be) that you are an underbred, ill-educated youth, without an idea in your head beyond "getting on in the world," and without enough ability even for that. Imagine that your innate human kindliness has been so pushed aside by that idea that you have behaved like a cad to a woman who but half deserved it; and that she in return has put you under such an obligation as to revive your sense of decency and start a battle for supremacy between it and your superimposed caddishness. Imagine in addition that your better part has conceived a certain honest admiration for the woman, and agrees with your worse in assuring you that, even money apart, she is not without her points; while all the time you have a horrible fear that your baseness may have alienated her for ever, and you are unable to make up your mind whether the decent or the caddish way will win her. Imagine all this, and you will have some idea of the turmoil that raged in Mr. Tackaberry's breast as he rose to greet me.

To give his embarrassment ease, I plied him for a while with common places, to which he responded in similar vein. Then, to get rid of him, as I wanted to

avoid any discussion of our relationship until I could present him with the accomplished fact of my bankruptcy, I told him I had an appointment and must leave him.

"Well, I must say good-bye, then," he said. "But look here, Stasia, I want to tell ye something. After what's happened I'm not goin' to take all the things ye used to say seriously. And—and maybe I was a bit nasty meself once in a way, but I couldn't help it, the way ye used to be pretendin' not to like me. . . . After all, Stasia, ye must be fond o' me, or ye'd never have run all that risk on my account." Here he looked at me for comment, but I was speechless. "I hope ye didn't think I was—ungrateful, to refuse the way I did. I knew it was impossible to escape, and I didn't want to get you into trouble. . . . That's true," he added, "honest to God," for he read scepticism in my eye.

"Mr. Tackaberry," I said, "don't let's discuss this question any further. Six months ago I promised to marry you in a year's time. I intend to keep that promise. Meanwhile I wish to be spared your society except on such occasions as I may express my willingness to endure it. Good afternoon."

Greatly bewildered, he took his leave, but the young wretch was too eager for his prize to let many days elapse without paying me a visit. He used to write to me, too, with deadly regularity letters of honeyed phraseology, in which he never failed to mark off the dwindling tale of weeks which yet separated us from the day when at length he could call me his. Against all this I had but one revenge: to show him the weekly returns of Carhampton and Co. That certainly wrinkled his brow; but the creature had a most sanguine disposition.

"Maybe trade 'll begin to buck up now that we've got peace," he suggested, and a horrible fear seized me that perhaps he was right.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BOOKSHOP

My fears proved groundless, for the continued disorder in the country and the preparations for civil war made any revival of trade impossible. Week by week Carhampton's returns fell, and my spirits rose proportionally; but so impatient was I to be rid of Mr. Tackaberry that I never seemed to lose money fast enough. Presently, however, an opportunity arose to remedy that. It happened that the shop beneath our offices fell vacant; so I took it over and fitted it up for the sale of our own publications and interesting books in general. Needless to say, "Passionate Pauline" was not in the latter category. That inane production, already in its twelfth edition, figured prominently in the windows and on the counters of every bookshop in town; the reviews vied with the advertisements of the publisher in loading it with praise; it occupied the mind and conversation of the public to the serious detriment of the seizure of the Four Courts and other preparations for civil war openly going on in our midst; but at the shop of whose credit it was the mainstay fifty people inquired for it daily, in vain.

Just for the pleasure of it, I took over the management of this department of the firm myself, explaining to my friends that I was compelled to seek a job owing to the failure of some of my investments to produce a dividend. I arranged the little shop according to ideas of my own. There was no counter: just a little unobtrusive cash-desk. Neither were the books piled in orderly confusion on big tables, as in most shops. My aim was to give the appearance of a study where people who were fond of books could drift in to look at them, and buy them if they wanted. So the principal furniture consisted of armchairs and small tables, and the

books were ranged on shelves all round the room, neither so high as to be out of reach, nor so low as to impose undignified attitudes on prospective purchasers. The latest acquisitions were displayed on one of those handy little standing cases placed on a centre table. How happy I was in that little kingdom of mine, arranging and rearranging my stock, keeping my accounts (a very light task this), poring over publishers' and second-hand dealers' catalogues, examining and placing new stock, chatting with book-lovers. These were of two sorts: young students who could learn things from me, and old connoisseurs who frequently got me out of my depth. They were mostly poor, and came to talk and look around rather than to buy, though there were some, and they the poorest, that would go without a meal to buy some old favourite, or some particular volume that caught their fancy. Also they were generally people without leisure, who worked from nine to six with an hour for luncheon; on which account I did not close till seven, and during that last hour of the day the little shop used to be thronged with readers and talkers, of whom perhaps one would make a purchase just as the boy came to put up the shutters.

I wish I could tell you all the books that passed through my hands during that pleasant time; but that's impossible, so I'll give you instead a list of those published by Carhampton and Co. First of all there were two novels and a volume of plays by Mr. Carney, and a book of Irish Nursery Rimes, written and illustrated by his wife. Then there were the first two volumes of a twelve-volume History of Ireland by an unknown man who was neither a *naïve* politician trying to keep the fires of patriotism burning in the hearts of Irish youth, nor a benevolent professor of Trinity trying to be impartial; but a coldly analytical searcher after truth, who had taken the trouble to investigate first-hand sources instead of relying on inaccurately

remembered transcriptions of other writers coloured by his own emotions. Another volume of plays, a first novel of some promise, and two books of verse completed my modern list. In addition, I had planned out a series called the Irishman's Library, which was to contain all the classic Irish authors, both in Gaelic and English, from the " Táin Bó Cuailgne " to Swift, and from Swift to the Young Irelanders. Two volumes were out already: the Poems of Eoghan Ruadh O'Suilleabhain, and the works of Fintan Lalor, in a handsome red cloth cover (no green with gold shamrocks for me, thanks), at the price of one shilling. There was another set which I had planned entirely for my own satisfaction: namely, my favourite Shakespeare plays, printed large like seven-shilling novels, without preface, introduction, or notes, but with a very short glossary of real archaisms. My favourites would not have run to much over twelve volumes, for I love my Shakespeare very much on " this side idolatry." " Henry IV " revolts me, and the rest of the Histories bore me—all except " Richard III." Then I heartily detest " Othello," " Cymbeline," " Much Ado," and " All's Well." Let me rewrite those plays and the women will treat the cads or bullies who have so unaccountably won their affections in far different fashion from that set down by the divine William. You'll never hear protestations of wifely duty and obedience from any heroines of mine. At the very first whisper of suspicion Desdemona will tell Othello he's a jealous ass, and leave him forthwith. Then Imogen will show no joyous relief when she learns from Iachimo that his nasty suggestions were only to try her. She'll send him packing back to Rome, with a note to Posthumus that he need never return to Britain so far as she is concerned. Hero is such a little fool that I suppose it would be impossible to alter her behaviour, but I would never have degraded my sex by drawing such a character. As for Helena—well, I could never have

written that play at all. You will understand, therefore, that I was prepared to sacrifice many feathers from the wings of the Swan, and followed my own taste rather than the commentators'. "Hamlet" was already out; "Measure for Measure" and "Twelfth Night" were soon to follow; and "Titus Andronicus" (which I adore, it's so like a play I wrote myself when I was young) was in the press.

Mr. Sitric's philosophical discourse I have left to the last. Though sent to the printer six months ago it had not yet reached book form, because the author, who had not read any of these early volumes for some years, found, on reading the proofs, that in the interim he had altered his opinions radically on many points, and insisted on rewriting vast tracts of the work in the light of his maturer wisdom and experience. He became a regular visitor to the bookshop, where he used to sit of evenings talking with the younger men who frequented it. He had no use for the old and middle-aged. "After twenty-five," he used to say, "those who are not yet on the road to wisdom are too firmly rooted in folly to be moved." "What is wisdom?" someone asked him once, scoffingly; and he answered: "As it is virtue to love your neighbour as yourself, so it is wisdom to know that thereby you benefit yourself as much as your neighbour." "Do you love me?" asked the scoffer. "I do," said Mr. Sitric. "I love fools more than wise men, because I learn more from them." The scoffer began to get angry. "Maybe you'd love me if I gave you a puck in the jaw," he said. "Alas!" said Mr. Sitric, "maybe I wouldn't. I might yield to temptation and return the blow. But, try me, and I'll do my best." The scoffer, however, walked out of the shop.

Usually Mr. Sitric could command a very patient hearing, for the wiser of my customers found him interesting, and the remainder thought him a little cracked, and affected to regard him as a "character,"

whose sayings could be retailed, more humorously than accurately, at home. He was quite an advertisement for the shop, though he did his best to keep many people out of it.

"What are we all doing here?" he would say suddenly. "Reading books. Admiring the thoughts and deeds of other people instead of living for ourselves. Bad enough for an old chap like me, but what are you young fellows thinking of? Up and be doing!" And as a sequel one of his audience joined the National forces and another the Irregulars, while a couple more emigrated because there was nothing to do in Ireland but kill people.

Mr. Sitric did a good deal of reading himself in the mornings before the other customers came in. He was specially pleased with my big history of Ireland, in which he became utterly absorbed, making copious notes, as he read, for the further enrichment of the History of Human Folly. He wouldn't buy it because, as he frankly explained, he couldn't afford it; but he bought Mr. Carney's three books and his wife's fairy tales, which amounted to nearly as much.

One day when I was quite alone in the shop, who should walk in but Mr. O'Neill. Do you remember him?—the young man I had met first on a tram and later at Mrs. Gilfoy's. He started with surprise at the sight of me.

"Well," he said. "I never expected to meet you here. Are you . . . ?"

"Employed here," I completed for him. "Yes."

"I just dropped in to get Oliver Carney's plays," said the young man. "None of the other shops seem to have them" .

I produced the required volume. "Nicely got up," he remarked approvingly. "You've read it, I suppose?"

I nodded.

"I read that first play some years ago in a magazine," he went on. "Good stuff, isn't it?"

"Yet they refused it at the Abbey," I said.

"Oh, that Abbey!" he cried impatiently. "No play has a chance there that isn't written on the assumption that this country is exclusively inhabited by peasants, publicans, and patriots. Carney was a fool to go near it."

"Well," said I. "It was his only chance. The Gaiety takes nothing but English musical comedies."

"And those chaps in the Four Courts think the oath of fidelity a disgrace, and expect to free Ireland with pop-guns! . . . However, don't let's talk politics lest we choke with our own spleen. May I have a look round? You seem to have a fine collection of books," and he began to make the round of the shelves, stopping here and there to take down a volume that caught his interest.

I felt some pleasure in watching him. He wasn't what you would call handsome, but he had the kind of face you would pick out in a crowd. He had a delightfully humorous mouth, and light blue eyes that looked up and down and around you, and were never still for an instant.

"By Jove!" he cried suddenly as he seized upon my extra special edition of "Hamlet." "That's a great notion. I've been looking for that all my life. Carhampton, whoever he is, must be a bit of a genius."

"It was I that suggested the idea," I remarked.

"Really?" he said, with a lack of interest that annoyed me somehow. Then: "How much?" he asked.

"Four and sixpence."

He plunged a hand into his trouser pocket and fished out an assortment of coins, which he counted dubiously: "Two and six—nine—three bob—and fivepence. Will you trust me for the balance?"

"Keep it," I said. "You're the first to ask for the thing."

Mr. O'Neill came in frequently after that, sometimes to buy a book, but more often, I think, to have a chat with me: at any rate, he generally came when the shop was empty. He was very interesting to talk to, because he had read nearly everything, and he had views on all sorts of subjects that were mere names to me,—like bimetallism, and relativity, and the fourth dimension. Of course I knew something about the fourth dimension from "The Time Machine" and "The Plattner Story," but Mr. O'Neill had read all sorts of ponderous and learned tomes that proved and disproved it, and had upheld a theory of his own against an acknowledged authority in a leading scientific weekly in a long series of letters of singular vigour and unintelligibility, which he had pasted into a scrap-book and brought into the shop to show me. I had always prided myself on being well-read, but he made me feel positively unlettered, and I couldn't help thinking that he rather scorned my reading for being all poetry and fiction. Once I tried to take him down a peg by lending him "The Ring and the Book." It proved too much for him, but he never turned a hair. "I couldn't wade through it," he said in a tone that plainly implied that the fault was not his, but Browning's.

You mustn't think from this description that he was anyway crabbed or prosy. He was really quite youthful and unsophisticated, as you may judge from a story he told me once.

"A few years ago," he said, "I went to Dieppe for a summer holiday with a friend of mine. His name was Garbut, so of course he was always known as Garbage. He was a decent sort of fellow, apt to fall in love at first sight, but so shy that he seldom made too big an ass of himself on the head of it. We hadn't been twelve hours in Dieppe before I knew from his manner that he'd been and gone and done it again. He became gloomy and distraught, neglected his food, and gave me the slip whenever he could. I waited in

vain for confidences, and at the end of three days, as they weren't forthcoming, I took the initiative.

"'What's her name?' I demanded at the end of a breakfast which had been disposed of in the deadest imaginable silence. He coloured like a girl of sixteen and mumbled 'Yvonne D'Eclude.' There were no wild horses handy, but I lugged the particulars out of him somehow. He had seen a beautiful face in a crowd, knew at once it belonged to the only woman in the world for him, traced its owner to her home, saw her in her window next evening, by various sleuth-like methods discovered her name, but had not yet dared to make any further advance. Poor Garbage! He'd never have advanced another step only for me. For a week he hung about in her tracks, worshipping her from a distance, but unable to make up his mind to start a-wooing. One night he got so far as to sing 'Roses in Picardy'—lord, he must have looked a frantic idiot—under her window; but he balked at the second verse, and he never ventured to repeat the performance.

"At last one day I said to him: 'See here, Garbage, you old blitherskite, that Under thy Window stunt has given me a notion. What you want is a spokesman.' He brightened up at once. 'A Cyrano de Bergerac,' he suggested. 'Yes,' I said. 'Or a Judson Tate.' Old Garbage jumped at the idea at once. 'And you're the very man for the part,' he said. I'm reputed to have the gift of the gab, heaven knows why, so I supposed he was right. Anyway, I undertook the job, and began a prowl of investigation. I wasn't long in finding out that the fair Yvonne was the well-brought-up daughter of conventional middle-class parents—not at all the sort of person to be wooed by caterwauling in a back lane at night. A brief survey of street and house, and a casual glimpse of *papa et mamman* convinced me of that. Convention's the weapon, I told myself, and I used it to such effect that I was on speaking terms with the old couple inside twenty-four hours, and was bringing the

Garbage for an afternoon call in forty-eight. You should have seen the poor fellow that day. He was distilled almost to a jelly with funk, as the over-rated Swan puts it. We sat and exchanged commonplaces for a while with Monsieur and Madame—at least I did, for Garbage had less French even than gumption, and anyway his ears were strained for the first tinkle of the footsteps of Mademoiselle. He caught it at last, and his face went white with excitement, but the next moment I had eyes for nothing but Yvonne.

"Yes. I'd done the Cyrano-cum-Judson Tate trick. I had fallen in love with the girl I had promised to get for my friend. Needless to say I didn't imitate Cyrano. I told Garbage to go to the mischief, and started in to woo her myself,—if wooing it can be called, with French conventions as they are, and the old birds always hovering around. That was an awful time for poor Garbage. He went off his feed altogether, and began shrinking visibly under my very eyes. He hadn't the gumption to be angry with me, but just sat about looking miserable until I was sick of the sight of him.

"'Cheer up, you galoot,' I said to him one day. 'There's other fish in the sea.'

"'Not for me,' he replied with melancholy dogmatism. 'I can't live without her.'

"At that extraordinary statement I sat up and stared; and at once I saw that it was true: the unfortunate poor devil was frightfully thin. Lord, how I despised him! To make such an admission, even to oneself, and still call oneself a man!

"'I can't live without her,' he repeated miserably.

"'Well,' said I to myself, 'I can, so he may as well have her.' Then I slapped old Garbage on the back and told him I'd only been clearing the way for him, and advised him to go in and win. Which he did. They've been married eight years now. I met Mrs. Garbut the other day, and felt jolly glad she wasn't Mrs. O'Neill."

"Life is a parody of Art," I said.

"There's too much romantic tosh still going round about women," said Mr. O'Neill, paying no heed to my epigram, at which I was rather vexed. "Women are just our fellow-creatures, and not very different from ourselves. Now that they've got the vote, it's time they dropped all this mystery and tomfoolery and stood out plain for what they are. Don't you agree with me?"

"Well——" I began. I was about to remark that this was a leading question, but he rattled on:

"The fact is, women want to have it both ways. I remember once a girl I was in love with asking me to fetch her tennis racket, which was lying on the ground about five yards off. 'Fetch it yourself,' said I. And that finished that little affair. A man has something better to do than dance attendance on his equals. What I like about you, Miss Rudd, is that you don't seem to expect that sort of thing. You act like man to man. I'm sure you'd never think it was your privilege to be late for appointments."

"Do you like that?" I asked dubiously.

"Of course I do. You've no idea how I hate being kept waiting at street corners. There was a girl once—nice girl she was, too, and I was desperately in love with her while it lasted—well, she thought men were just toys to be kept dangling till she wanted them, and she kept me waiting half an hour one day. Next time I gave her five minutes' grace, and as she didn't turn up then I cleared off."

"For such a scorner of our sex," said I, "you seem to fall in love pretty often."

"I don't scorn your sex," he answered. "I admit you're our equals, and that's why I want the humbug cut out. . . . Going to shut up shop? Well, let's go and have a cup of tea and an hour at the movies."

CHAPTER XXX

PERSUASION

THERE was one person who, if ever he were to find out about my bookshop venture, would want to know the reason for it, and could not be put off with the story that satisfied other people. That was Rudolf, who knew where my money came from, and was probably well aware of the phenomenal success of "Passionate Pauline." For a long time he remained in ignorance of my doings, being so wrapped up in a new invention—an automatic self-airing and self-making bedstead—that he could hardly spare a moment to take a stroll down the street. At length, however, he heard something about it as a result of a casual meeting with Bill, and he came along at once to make inquiries. At first I tried to fend him off, but that proved useless, as I might have known, and in the end I was forced to confess the truth,—the whole truth, about the shop, and Carhampton, and Tackaberry, and all. Rudolf would hardly hear me to the end. His indignation was something terrible.

"Thunder and lightning!" he swore. "You chose an expensive weapon to squelch a flea. And is the little pest bothering you still?"

I nodded.

"After the lesson we gave him!" said Rudolf. "And after all the risk we ran for him afterwards. The ungrateful hound. I'll teach him."

"Nonsense," I said. "I've no desire to teach him anything. I want to get rid of him."

"Well, I'll get rid of him."

"Thank you," I said. "I want no more experiments in violence. My method may be a slow one, but it's sure."

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean to remain engaged to him until Carhampton and Co. goes smash. Then he'll clear off on his own account."

"And jilt you publicly?"

"I'll have to put up with that," I said.

"Well, I won't," said Rudolf.

"Now, Rudolf," I said, "you must leave this affair in my hands. I landed myself in this mess by my own folly, and I mean to work out my own salvation."

"See here, Stasia," replied Rudolf angrily, "if working out your own salvation means that you're walking out with that pink-faced galoot for another six months, I'm not having any. And I'm going straight after him to tell him so."

He made for the door, but I caught his arm.

"Don't be silly, Rudolf," I said. "You know where your last manœuvres landed us. For heaven's sake don't butt in again. It's my own affair after all."

"Your prospective husband may be your affair," returned Rudolf. "But my prospective brother-in-law is mine," and in an instant he was gone.

I learned afterwards that he took a tram and sought out Tackaberry at his lodgings.

"See here, young fellow," he said, going straight into his room. "Did I or did I not tell you to quit following my sister?"

"I thought we'd argued this all out before," replied Tackaberry insolently.

"None of your sauce, now," said Rudolf. "Last time I had to endure the discomfort of talking to you I told you I'd break your back if you didn't call off your alleged engagement to my sister. To-day I've come to do it."

"I'm not afraid of your tall talk," said Mr. Tackaberry. "And if ye don't clear out o' this damn quick I'll have ye 'rested for intimidation."

"Oh, you will, will you?" said Rudolf. "Well, just you attend to me, sonny. You feel durn plucky because

you think the law's at your back. But it isn't. There's no more law in this country. In a week or two there's going to be civil war, and you needn't think anyone's going to bother about your breach of promise or your assault and battery then. It's man to man these days, and no one to keep the ring. Now, once and for all, will you do what I tell you?''

Tackaberry, undecided, remained silent. Rudolf at once gave him a blow with the open hand that left his cheek red for an hour and crooked for a week. Tackaberry recoiled with a cry of pain.

'' You cowardly bully!'' he said.

Rudolf promptly knocked him down with a heavier blow and then kicked him up on to his feet again. Then he dragged him towards the table, found paper, pen, and ink among its litter, put them before him, stuck a chair underneath him, steadied him with a bang on the top of the head, and commanded him to write to his dictation. The document thus produced ran as follows:

I, the undersigned, being of as sound mind as can be expected of so worthless a creature, humbly conscious of my ineffable caddishness, and heartily ashamed of my very existence, do hereby declare:

(1) That I am not, never have been, and do not dream of becoming engaged to marry Miss Anastasia Rudd,

(2) That by mean and disgraceful methods I misrepresented myself as being engaged to the said Miss Rudd, but I cannot understand how any intelligent person could have believed so ridiculous a suggestion,

(3) That I abjectly implore Miss Rudd's forgiveness for this unspeakable outrage, and promise in return that I will not knowingly walk in the same street with Miss Rudd from this date.

Horace Tackaberry.

"Now," said Rudolf, when he handed me this document the following day, "you're free of that little pest for good; and if he's been kissing you lately you can go and disinfect yourself in freedom of soul."

"Don't be coarse, Rudolf," I admonished him.

"Coarse!" cried Rudolf. "You little Pharisee! Why, bad as I am I never kissed a girl I didn't love."

"Yes, but you loved so many."

"Zest of life, my dear. The more the better. The man who can only love once needs a tonic. . . . But talking of life, I'm leaving this gol-darned island next week."

"What's the connection?" I asked, more curious about this than the news.

"No life here. Nothing doing but speechifying and shooting. No money to be made, and no way of spending it if you had any. I offered that invention of mine—the bed, you know—to four Dublin firms, but they wouldn't touch it. Times too bad, and so on. So I've sold it in America by cable. Gee, Stasia, that's some country! I can make a few thousand a year there anyway, and though it didn't satisfy me before,—well, I'm getting on, and old man Death nearly got me with that last swing of his scythe. That sort of practical demonstration steadies a man, and makes him kind of philosophical."

"What about Nancy?" I asked.

"Nancy can save better without my help than with it."

"And Ernie?"

"Ernie is Nancy's boy. The little piebald brats at Waikiki have more of their dad than he has. . . . Cheer up, old girl. It's the right ending. You can tack on the 'happy ever after' dope to our story now: if it was the other way, you couldn't."

CHAPTER XXXI

SOME IRRELEVANT MATTER

It was about this time that my unfortunate brother Bill got what had been coming to him for a very considerable time. Of course it was, to a certain extent, my fault, for I should never have left such a great baby entirely to his own devices in a house so full of traps for the unwary male. I can only excuse myself on the ground that my own affairs were now so pressing that I was unable to concern myself very deeply with anyone else's. Relieved, by Tackaberry's capitulation, of the necessity to ruin myself, I was now making all possible haste to wind up Carhampton and Co. with as little loss as possible,—" remaindering " my own publications at sixpence a copy, and selling off the stock in the bookshop at heart-breaking prices. " The History of Human Folly," Volume One, was still in the hands of the printers, and would have to be " remaindered " the moment it was ready. As for the subsequent volumes, I cancelled the agreement to publish them, and paid the author a lump sum by way of compensation, which he promptly invested in a large consignment of my wares at bargain prices.

The Island of Saints and Scholars paid remarkably little attention to the harvest of learning which could have been reaped so easily in its midst: kindly Irish of the Irish, neither Saxon nor Italian, they were too busy preparing to cut each others' throats. A lorry load of bravoes from the Four Courts swooped down on me one afternoon and, with much brandishing of weapons and a good deal of spitting, demanded had I any Ulsther stuff on the premises. Failing to get an answer from me they made a valiant assault on the bookshelves, swept their contents on to the floor, turned them about with boots and bayonets, and finally discovered two

books which (strange to say) had been published in Belfast. With shouts of triumph these were handed over to the leader of the gang, a gloomy-looking youth whom they addressed as "Captain," and who stood aloof trying to look like Napoleon and Hofer rolled into one, and succeeding no better than might be expected in so impossible a task. This hero gave one glance at each title-page; then, with the light of serene idealism shining in his face, he said: "Tear 'em up." The command was carried out with enthusiasm, his men vying with each other for the pleasant duty. Then they smashed my windows, to teach me, as they said, to "obey ordhers" in the future, and having made a distraint on my cash-box by way of "contribution to the funds of the Republic," the warriors mounted their chariot and whirled away. Even this piece of advertisement availed me little. The descendants of the saints and scholars left me severely alone, and the bulk of my stock was bought by a rude stranger from barbarous England. This vile materialist gave me a very decent price, and paid cash down, too. As a strongly Gaelic young lady of my acquaintance said when I told her about it, these English think of nothing but money.

You can have no idea how delighted I felt when that transaction was finished. The last link with the shameful Tackaberry episode was severed; a large part of the dead weight of Carhampton and Co. was lifted from my shoulders. I sat on in the empty shop, day dreaming, and feeling strangely happy, without knowing why. I suppose the coming in of Summer had something to do with it. Oh, the lovely May-time! There was sunshine in the street inviting me forth, so out I went and found myself presently in Grafton Street. What a gay place it was that day. I simply couldn't tear myself away from the shop windows, so full they were of lightsome daintiness: frocks woven of sunlight and gossamer, hats to enhalo beauty for adoring eyes, parasols that made you dream of backwaters and sandy beaches and banks

of wild strawberry and prunella. My own costume seemed dull and shabby by comparison, though indeed I had only had it a few months; my hat seemed dowdy; and my hair—ugh! I hated the sight of myself that was flung at me by every mirror I passed. Summer was a-coming in and making me feel ever so frivolous, so without more ado I plunged into Mrs. Bothwell's. I have never spent a great deal of money on clothes, but that day six guineas seemed but a trifle for the beauty of a hat that I selected. It was a model of black crêpe and ninon relieved by a silver ribbon looped at one side. I remember Mr. O'Neill once saying that nothing becomes a woman so well as a black hat. I seem always to have had the same idea myself, with this addition, that I think a shabby gown will destroy any hat. It was probably some such line of thought as this that carried me automatically to Slyne's. I had only intended to get a simple walking costume of soft grey, but when I had purchased it my eye fell upon an exquisitely designed afternoon frock of lemon ninon over a silk slip, draped to one side and caught with a jade rose. I thought at once of my hat, and saw how faultlessly they would go together. For a person who has never been extravagant about clothes before, I think my purchase was excusable. I remembered that Mr. O'Neill once said—— But I don't know what put Mr. O'Neill into my head. Heaven knows my thoughts were far enough away from him. From Slyne's I ran across to Laird's and had my hair shampooed. Fortunately it has a natural wave in it, for I would have had no time to spend in getting it done. Mr. O'Neill had once made some rather poetical remarks about the waves of my hair. Queer, isn't it? the things men notice. I had to rush back from the hairdressers, as it was close on five, and I wanted to release the young woman who helped me in the bookshop.

The first thing that caught my eye when I entered

was a large hat-box from Mrs. Bothwell's. Funny, wasn't it? By some extraordinary absence of mind I had had it sent to the shop instead of to my lodgings. To make it still more absurd, while I was attending to a customer, I saw my assistant receiving, and signing for, two large cardboard boxes which I knew at once could be from no other place but Slyne's. I am not usually so scatter-brained. I suppose I had been so constantly at the shop during the winding-up weeks that I had come to regard it as home and gave the address without thinking.

When I had safely got rid of my assistant I was in a flutter to try on my new things. I contented myself with slipping on the afternoon frock and hat, and just stood looking at myself in a long cheval glass I had happened to pick up a few days before and installed in the little dressing-room at the back of the shop. I don't think I have any illusions about my appearance, but really and truly, to put it mildly, I looked *extremely* handsome. Everything was so simple, and yet so perfect, and my face looks quite decent in a nice hat. If only someone would drop in, I couldn't help wishing,—some customer even. And then, while the hope was half-framed in my mind, I heard footsteps in the shop, and coming through the door I found myself face to face with Mr. O'Neill. I'm afraid my memory must have been breaking down from overwork, for it was only then that I remembered he had told me the day before that he would come in that evening.

"Hello!" I said. "You're just in time for a cup of tea;" for the winding-up had kept me so busy that lately I had started taking tea in my office instead of going out to it.

Mr. O'Neill accepting my invitation, I closed the shop forthwith, and began to lay the tea-things on one of the empty tables. Usually I was content with a few slices of thin bread and butter, but this evening, by some extraordinary coincidence, I happened to have some

delicious cakes in. I had no idea whether Mr. O'Neill liked cakes, but I dare say he did—to judge from the appearance of the plates when the meal was over. When we had washed up—or rather when I had washed up (Mr. O'Neill helped me in the drying)—he suggested Kingstown—I beg its pardon, Dun Laoghaire—where we took out a boat and rowed about, listening to the band. All the girls in Dublin seemed to be there with their lovers, looking ever so contented and possessive as they drifted around in happy aimlessness to the strains of "God Send You Back to Me": a singularly fitting accompaniment to a little comedy that here intruded itself. Just as the melody soared to its most plangent closing bars we nearly collided with a punt, in the stern of which sat Phyllis O'Dea comfortably resting against the shoulder of—whom do you think?—of the gallant and debonair Horace Tackaberry. Phyllis gave me a look of triumph and snuggled closer to her admirer. Mr. Tackaberry's perfect complexion became suffused with pink as he gave her a squeeze. (Final wailing chords of the chorus from the band.) The sides of our boats scraped. Mr. Tackaberry grasped frantically at his oars. Mr. O'Neill, with a vigorous stroke, carried us clear. "Pair of maundering idiots!" I heard him mutter, and the bandsmen prosaically began blowing the saliva out of their instruments.

In the dusk we sought the station among the returning crowds. Lovers happily chattering; sedate older folk; young parents, tired out with looking after still active and unwearied children, drifted along with us.

"Lord, lord!" said Mr. O'Neill, with a glance at a group of these last. "To think that it should come to this!"

"That what should come to what?" I asked.

"Romantic love," he replied, "to responsibility and a string of toddlers."

"To what better end could it come?" I asked.

"I don't know," he admitted, and quoted morosely:

"Time turns all our days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives,
And marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives."

"That 'division,'" I answered, "was put in simply and solely to rime with derision. It makes no sense, and it spoils the antithesis."

Mr. O'Neill gave me a quick glance and said: "There's a lot of truth in it all the same. Look at that pair of sweethearts enjoying themselves. Look at that pair of draggled parents walking just in front of them as if to point the moral: 'To this, too, shalt thou come.' What's the connection? Why should one involve the other? Why should a few months' pleasure be paid for with a lifetime of care?"

"You make too small a thing of love," I said. "Kiss and catch hands and romp in the sunshine. It isn't that. If it were, Swinburne's lines would be true enough. But oh! surely it's more. The kissing and the rest of it are only the lure to make us shoulder a big burden that we'd otherwise be inclined to shirk. To lament the turning of a love into a wife is barren pagan sentimentality. You might as well lament the turning of the flower into fruit."

"The lure to make us shoulder a burden," Mr. O'Neill repeated. "But suppose the lure doesn't deceive us?"

"Shoulder the burden without," I said. "That's the hero's way."

"We can't all be heroes," said Mr. O'Neill.

"No," I said.

I didn't meet him again for some time, and in the meanwhile civil war had broken out and enveloped the city for a week. In the Sackville Street fighting the

offices of Carhampton and Co. were utterly destroyed, and with them the manuscript and still unbound sheets of the first volume of the "History of Human Folly" were reduced to ashes. Then the thunder of war rolled away into the mountains, and the cheerful tram-bells sounded again on the streets, and the citizens of Dublin stood about and gaped at the ruins.

A few days later—it was a Sunday—I met him outside the Church of the Three Patrons after the eleven o'clock Mass. "Let's go for a stroll," he said, and we went by way of Kenilworth Square towards the Kimmage Road. He was silent for a long while, and I had nothing to say either. Then as we wandered out beyond Larkfield he suddenly remarked:

"We've been very good friends, Anastasia, haven't we?"

I assented.

"I've been thinking over what you said last time we met," he went on. "And I think you're right."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I've been in love so often," he said, "that I've no romantic illusions left. What's a girl? Just a young female of the species with faults and failings like the rest of us. But there's something about her—a lure, you called it—that makes you want her no matter how clearly you see them. I can see a girl just as she is; I know just how much and just how little love is; I know what it leads to and how it ends: but still the lure is there. I've fought against it; argued with myself; told myself the truth. I've said: 'Her hand is flesh and bone like other hands: its thrill will pass.' I've said: 'Bliss is short-lived, and a good job, too.' I've said: 'Think of the unbreakable chain, and the forbidden lure of other girls;' and at the end of it all I long for her hand, I dream of bliss, I am ready to accept the chain, and I forswear other women. I just want her, and that's an end of it."

I looked at him as he paused.

"You don't mind me telling you these things?" he said. "You have a woman's sympathy and understanding, and I can talk to you freely as man to man. It's because I look on you as a real friend that—— Anyway, I proposed to her last night, and she wouldn't have me. At least she said she'd like a little time to think about it. Now tell me, Anastasia. Knowing women as you must, do you think that's a good sign? I mean, if a girl—cared for a fellow, wouldn't she know it at once, or——?"

He broke off expressively and conveyed the rest of his enquiry with a look.

"Oh, well, I don't know," I said. "Women are so queer, you know."

CHAPTER XXXII

VAE VICTIS!

BUT I meant to tell you about poor Bill and the terrible mess in which he had landed himself. While the bookshop and—well, other interests—had been absorbing all my attention, this helpless infant had been abandoned to the mercy of Mrs. Buck and her daughter. That he escaped capture so long as he did is due not to any lack of pertinacity or resource on the part of his pursuers, or to any firmness or astuteness on his own, but rather to that very innocence which made him apparently such an easy catch. He was like an old grandfather-carp in a pool: too blind to see the bait that was flung at him; too stupid even to think that anyone was fishing for him. Better comparison still, he was like a jellyfish, for whom the anglers were trying with rod and fly: a futile occupation. To all the hums and haws and smiles and winks and nods and nudges and teasing and tact and japes and jokes and hints and hypotheses and

implications and innuendoes, with which mother and daughter daily plied him, Bill remained serenely indifferent. It was useless for Mrs. Buck to say of an evening (the three chatting cosily in her parlour): "Well, I'm sure you two must be longin' to be rid o' me. I think I'll run off to the pictures." "Oh, no, no, no," Bill would reply. "We wouldn't be without you for worlds. Would we, Miss Violet?" Or else he would offer to escort the old lady to the pictures and give Miss Violet a chance to have in some young fellow of her own—ha! ha! Nor was any advance made even when Vi'let succeeded in dragging him off to the pictures with herself. "He wouldn't try to hold yer hand,—not if ye were to stick it under his nose," was her complaint. No wonder, then, that the modest maiden was on the verge of despair, or that her mother was driven to try bolder methods.

The result was that one evening Bill found himself alone in the parlour with the old lady.

"Vi'let's gone out," she explained. "She's gone to see a friend of hers back from her honeymoon,—just to give her a few wrinkles about housekeepin',—ye know what I mean. Vi'let's a reel good housekeeper, ye know, and this friend o' hers is wan o' them clever wans,—not a bit o' good at annything useful, ye know what I mean. I mind now there was a reel clever wan settin' her cap at poor Buck (R.I.P.), but he wouldn't have her at any price. 'She'd never have me meals right,' he said; and she wouldn't either, for the fellah she married after committed suicide on the head of it. Well, I never did hold with the clever wans. This wan that Vi'let's gone to see would break yer heart. I declare she doesn't know the size of a pound o' butter or the name of a floor-polish. I'm sorry for her husband's digestion, so I am, but maybe Vi'let'll be able to put some sense into her."

"I'm sure she will, Mrs. Buck," interpolated Bill.

"Yes," said the fond mother, "Vi'let's a good girl:

and a clever girl, too, in her own way. She hasn't got much head for books and things, ye know what I mean, but a cleverer hand at fryin' a steak or makin' over a blouse ye never saw. She's a nice girl, too, Mr. Rudd."

"She is. She is, Mrs. Buck. Nice. Charming. Finest girl in Rathgar, if you ask me."

"I'm proud to hear ye say so, Mr. Rudd. Poor Buck (R.I.P.) used always say the same. 'Tricksie,' he used to say, 'though she *is* me own daughter, she's the finest bit o' goods this side o' the Canal.'"

"*Either* side of it, Mrs. Buck. Either side," said Bill enthusiastically. "Finest girl in Dublin, for that matter. Oh, lord, yes!"

Mrs. Buck wiped away a maternal tear.

"I hope," she said "when Vi'let's gettin' married, that she won't throw herself away where she won't be appreciated."

"I hope not, Mrs. Buck. I sincerely hope not."

"I'm so afraid she will, Mr. Rudd."

"Oh, no! no! no! Mrs. Buck. Never! Not she! She can take her pick of the best in the land. Yes, the very best. Peerage, if she likes. Lucky fellow that gets her, that's what *I* say. That nice young chap O'Farrell, now. What would she say to him?"

"She wouldn't care for him, Mr. Rudd."

"That splendid young fellow, Colgan, then? I thought he had rather a fancy for her."

"Oh! she wouldn't look at him, Mr. Rudd."

"Indeed? I'm extremely sorry for them, Mrs. Buck. What on earth are they to do? This will cut them up dreadfully. They'll be miserable, heartbroken, desperate!"

"Ah, sure they're young, and they'll get over it," said Mrs. Buck.

"True, Mrs. Buck. True," said Bill. "They'll be over it before the year's out. Yes, yes, yes. These young fellows are so fickle. In a month or so they'll have forgotten all about her. In a week, perhaps.

They've probably forgotten her already, if you ask me. Get her somebody *solid*, Mrs. Buck. Solid, faithful and middle-aged, eh? Now what about that magnificent fellow, Kinsella?''

'' That old wretch!'' cried Mrs. Buck aghast. '' Oh, Mr. Rudd!''

'' Well, he has his faults,'' Bill admitted. '' But which of us hasn't? You have yours, Mrs. Buck, and I have mine. And, of course, he's getting on in years—ageing, if you like—but after all he's a fine figure of a man. Yes, yes. A fine figure, Mrs. Buck. Finest figure in Dublin, if you ask me. She might do worse, Mrs. Buck. She might do worse.''

'' She wouldn't have him at any price, Mr. Rudd.''

'' Dear me!'' said Bill. '' Women are strange creatures. Strange! Mysterious! Well, well, well. I'm sorry to hear it. Sorry for her. Sorry for him. What can the poor fellow do now, Mrs. Buck? Go to the bad entirely—that'll be the end of him. Well, well, well. This is terrible. Terrible! I feel it, Mrs. Buck. I do. I do really. More than I can say.''

'' Ye're an awful kind-hearted man, Mr. Rudd, to be worryin' about other people like that. Do ye never think of yerself at all?''

'' I do, Mrs. Buck. I do. Often.''

'' Ye'd want someone else, then, to be thinkin' about ye *all* the time. Did ye never think o' gettin' married, Mr. Rudd?''

'' I did, Mrs. Buck. Only a few years ago now I thought of it very seriously indeed. I met a lady at the Horse Show. Beautiful woman! Charming! Intellectual! Finest woman in Ireland, by Jove. We went about everywhere together. Riding, boating, tennis, everything. Glorious time! Turned out afterwards that she was married already. Yes, married. Queerest thing I ever heard of. Eh?''

'' Well, of course it's very wicked and all that,'' Mrs. Buck deprecated. '' But after all, if a married woman

does get struck a bit by a reel attractive man, sure she can't help it, can she?''

'' You flatter me, Mrs. Buck.''

'' I do not, Mr. Rudd. Whatever faults I have—and I don't say I haven't plenty of them, for I have, and well I know it, because I never miss goin' to Confession of a Saturda', and I do be half an hour examinin' me conscience before I dare to go into the box. But, as I was sayin', though I have me faults, flatterin's not one o' them. I do always mean what I say, and I tell ye, Mr. Rudd, ye think too little of yerself, and what's the good of remainin' lonely an' single all yer life when there's them about that'd be proud to call themselves Mrs. Rudd?''

'' Really, Mrs. Buck, I'm quite comfortable as I am.''

'' Ah, don't be talkin', Mr. Rudd. A man doesn't know what comfort is until he's married. His socks darned, and his house kept nice, and his dinner right—that's what a man wants; and who's to do it for him if he hasn't a wife?''

'' Now, Mrs. Buck, it's *you* that are thinking too little of *yourself*. I may tell you that your cookery is excellent—splendid, in fact—nothing like it anywhere. Jammet's—pooh! Jammet's an incompetent bungler beside you: a fool: a barbarian. I solemnly believe, Mrs. Buck, there isn't a chef in Paris could hold a candle to you. No. Not one. Then as to my socks—why, Miss Violet looks after them. Champion darner, Miss Violet. Wonderful! Marvellous! Very good of her, too, isn't it? I don't believe there's a kinder hearted girl in the world than Miss Violet.''

'' Ye're right there, Mr. Rudd,'' said Mrs. Buck. '' But ye needn't be ' Missing ' her. Ye knew her well enough not to stand on ceremony by this time.''

'' Well, yes, perhaps I do. But I'm an old-fashioned fellow, Mrs. Buck, and I can't get out of the old-fashioned ways. Are you sure she won't think me presumptious?''

"Galong now! Don't ye know well she's got a kind o' soft corner for ye?"

"Upon my honour, Mrs. Buck, I never dreamt it. I was afraid she regarded me as an unmitigated old buffer."

"Oh, Mr. Rudd! What a thing to say! Sure, Vi'let's reel fond of ye."

"I'm glad to hear it, Mrs. Buck. Very glad indeed. I may say I set a very high value on Miss Violet's esteem. Very!"

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Buck archly, "so that's the way things are, is it?"

"I don't quite understand you, Mrs. Buck."

"Ah, don't be talkin'. As if I didn't know all along ye were wantin' to marry her."

"Upon my word," said Bill in perfect innocence, "I'd as soon think of marrying yourself, Mrs. Buck."

"Oh, Mr. Rudd!" said the lady bashfully, but Bill was oblivious to the significance of the exclamation.

"Yes, Mrs. Buck," he said. "I mean it. I mean it. I do indeed. Every word of it."

Mrs. Buck had not foreseen this termination to the campaign, but she was quite equal to the occasion. "Oh, Bill!" she cried, throwing herself into his arms.

You can imagine the pretty tableau that was presented to the view of the unfortunate Vi'let, who had been hovering all this while at the keyhole awaiting a suitable moment to enter, and now came bursting in to retrieve the situation—too late.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Buck, pulling herself together, but keeping one fat arm firmly round Bill's neck. "Oh, Vi'let, ye gave me such a turn. I declare I don't know whether I'm on me head or me heels." With a hand on her heart she strove a moment for breath, and then continued: "Mr. Rudd here—Bill, I mean—wants to be your new father, Vi'let, and I haven't got the heart to refuse him."

CHAPTER XXXIII

A MORE OR LESS HAPPY ENDING

Mr. O'Neill met me again on another Sunday outside Rathgar Church, and asked me to go for a stroll.

"Won't your lady-love object?" I asked.

"Why should she object?" he demanded with a gesture of impatience.

"If *I* were your *fiancée,*" I said, "I should certainly object if you went about with other women."

"Unfortunately she isn't my *fiancée,*" he said gloomily. "Lord above, how long does it take a woman to make up her mind?"

"They vary, of course; but you don't seem to me to be going the right way towards helping her to make up hers."

"You mean that I shouldn't have asked you to come for this stroll?"

I nodded.

"But that's absurd," he expostulated. "I'm not the girl's property."

"How would you like it if she went about with other men?" I asked.

He made no answer to that, but presently he burst out: "Our friendship is a good thing. It's not fair to expect me to give it up. It's unreasonable. Why shouldn't I have a friend as well as a *fiancée?* You give me things that she can never give."

"What things?"

"Oh—understanding, and—well, we've had conversations I could never have with her. You have—Oh, I don't know what it is, but really I do need you, Anastasia."

"Well!" I said. "It's lucky your lady can't hear you, because if she did she'd never take you. No

woman would. Now, like a good boy, run away, and don't bring jealousy into her life so soon."

"She's no right to be jealous. She has nothing to be jealous of."

"Indeed I know that. But all the same you must go."

He sighed, and looked at me regretfully.

"I suppose I must. I'll miss you, Anastasia. Do you know that? I will, really."

"I dare say. Good-bye, now. You must leave me at this corner."

"Won't you miss me, Anastasia—just a bit?"

"For a while, I suppose. But you mustn't think you're the only pebble on the beach."

"Crushed!" he said in mock abasement to hide his real hurt. "Well, well, let's shake hands on it anyway. I won't forget *you* so easily."

And so we parted.

As I walked on towards the river I felt rather lonely somehow. Perhaps it was because Rudolf had gone back to America a few days before; or perhaps it was the season: for the leaves were already wilting in the breath of August, and there was an autumnal feeling in the air. It was sultry for the time of day, so that it was with wearily listless steps that I walked up the river-bank towards the weir. You know that weir behind Dartry, perhaps? There's a cottage just beside it, around which the path takes a curve to cross a narrow bridge over a narrower mill-race. It was in the middle of that bridge that I suddenly found myself face to face with Mr. Donovan.

I hope you haven't forgotten Mr. Donovan,—my helpless adorer of bygone years. He stood in the narrow pathway, struck motionless by surprise. As for me, I recovered quickly enough, and, holding out my hand, said: "Hello!"

He grasped my hand hard, while his eyes looked up reproachfully into mine.

"Anastasia!" he said.

"What on earth's the matter?" I asked.

"Let us have a talk," he said.

"Certainly," I conceded, and walked on, he falling into line beside me as the path widened out again.

For a long time he was silent. Then: "I feel it difficult to say what I want to say," he said slowly, keeping his eyes on the ground, and meditatively kicking pebbles. "It's so long since we met, you know, and all that."

"All what?" I inquired.

"Oh—everything. I hardly know what to say, for fear of putting my foot in it. I—— You—— Well, I rather expected to see a—a ring on your finger."

"Why, in the name of goodness?"

"Oh, *really,* Miss Rudd," he remonstrated. "I—well, really——"

"Do you mean that because you saw a man kiss me a year ago you expected to find me engaged or married to him?"

"Well, perhaps I'm rather old-fashioned," he admitted, "but there does seem to be some such connection in my mind."

"Old-fashioned isn't the word for you," I said. "You're positively pre-Adamite."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Donovan resignedly. "But I'm not ashamed of it. The old world had something that these days lack. There was a sort of chivalry. Men looked on women as—I can't quite explain what, but if you've read the novels of Mrs. Henry Wood you'll understand. . . . Anastasia, four years ago, though I loved you ardently, circumstances over which I had no control prevented me from telling you so. To speak in those circumstances would have seemed to me unchivalrous, so I resolved not to see you until I had fought and overcome them. I thought I had made my feelings as plain as a man can without the use of words, and in that belief I held myself pledged to you as

irrevocably as if I had formally plighted you my troth. I went forth to struggle against those circumstances over which I had no control; I fought them; and I overcame. And on the day of my deliverance I walked in restful mood along this very Dodder—you know the place, away up near Clonskeagh, where you and I had had so many walks together. And even as I reflected on those days and dreamt of the happiness to come, I saw—well, you know the rest. Oh, Anastasia, I had pledged myself to you, and I had kept my pledge; but I had left you free, free as the air, and——"

"Well, I like that," I cut in indignantly. I had listened to this long rigmarole with increasing curiosity and bewilderment, and with admirable patience, but this preposterous sentiment roused me to instant protest. "I like that!" I said. "Who are you to leave me free or unfree? What right have you to resent anything I choose to do?"

"No right whatever," he answered mildly, "since it is evident that my presumptions were unwarranted."

"Whether your presumptions were warranted or not," I retorted, "I should always be my own mistress. Yes, and always will be."

"You misunderstand me, Anastasia," he declared. "I should never dream of questioning your liberty in the ordinary way. But true love is always jealous."

"I loathe jealousy," I said.

"Then you don't love," he replied in gloomy tone, and we walked on in renewed silence.

"Could you not bring yourself to care for me, Anastasia?" he asked presently.

"Oh, I don't know. Why didn't you ask me years ago? What were those circumstances over which you had no control?"

"Oh, never mind that now," he cried in sudden eagerness. "You've given me new hope with that first question. If I *had* asked you years ago, would your answer have been—favourable?"

"Really, I don't know," I said. And I didn't; at least I think not.

"Well, anyway, it might have been."

"Perhaps."

"Well, that's something to go on with," he said.

"But, look here," said I, "you've made me frightfully curious about those circumstances over which you had no control. What were they?"

"Ah, Miss Rudd," he said. "Those were circumstance which I would willingly leave wrapt in mystery did not candour compel me to reveal them to your charitable eyes. In those days when first I fell a victim to your charms I had no right to foster such feelings. I was—how shall I put it? A fraud—a humbug—a charlatan—phrase it how you will. In short, Miss Rudd, I was not what I seemed."

I looked at him questioningly, taking in his appearance fully for the first time. He had changed somewhat in the lapse of years. His hair was thinner; his figure had reached that *embonpoint* towards which it had been tending; he looked more like forty than before. . . . . Like a flash his secret was revealed to me: he had been married already, and now he was a widower. I said nothing, however, but waited for him to continue.

"Do not judge me too harshly," he resumed. "I am not by nature dishonest. I care nothing for money for its own sake: but what can one do without it? For five years I had laboured for another man, driving his quills and counting his cash, and receiving what is called a living wage in return. I wanted to be my own master and attain to something more than mere existence, and so, when a way suddenly opened to this, I took it. The profession which I adopted was a fraud, and my skill in it was slight, yet I made money at it. I sold worthless goods at extravagant prices; I robbed the rich to the uttermost extent of their credulity, and the poor to the uttermost extent of their purses. I kept myself in the public eye by gross advertisements of my

skill, when by my stupidity and incompetence I was ruining the health of men and marring the beauty of women. I represented myself as an essential of civilisation, and my claim was admitted so fully that I could not cope with the numbers that sought my services. Yet I well knew that a people with any ideas on health and cleanliness would have no need of me, and that a people with common-sense would laugh at my pretensions. I was a humbug, living by the credulity of fools: in short, Miss Rudd, I was a quack dentist."

I think that at this point he expected me to faint or else to express myself in terms of loathing and contempt; for he looked at me with an expression of the gravest apprehension in his eyes. When he found I did neither, he resumed his speech.

"Miss Rudd—Anastasia—can you conceive the feelings of one who, though fundamentally honest, had been driven by force of circumstances into such a career of meanness and duplicity, when he found himself admitted to the friendship of a beautiful woman whose every word betokened candour and nobility of character?"

"Mr. Donovan," I interrupted, "please don't make me out an angel. I'm nothing of the sort, I assure you."

Mr. Donovan waved my objection aside. "Such modesty is only to be expected among your other perfections, Anastasia. But can you not picture my state of mind in the circumstances which I have described? I felt myself something altogether foul beside you. I was unworthy to touch your hand—unworthy to look into your eyes—unworthy to share the atmosphere you breathed. There were you—beautiful, sweet, candid, fearless: and here was I—mean, sordid, furtive, vile. How could I ever hope to make myself fit to associate with this peerless creature, this paragon among women? Like a flash the answer came to me: I would make myself a *real* dentist."

He paused, as if to invite comment. But I couldn't

make one. The anti-climax had taken my breath away. In a moment he resumed.

"My resolution made, I denied myself your company from thenceforward. I entered the medical school and worked at my courses like a boy of seventeen. Jacob, you may remember, laboured seven years for Rachel, but so great was his ardour that they seemed like so many days. I had to labour only four years, but so heartsick was I at the loss of you that they seemed so many centuries. But they ended at last. I passed my final with credit; I changed my quarters from the South Circular Road to Fitzwilliam Street; I put my show-case in the dustbin; and I changed my plate, so vast, so florid, so blatant in its vulgarity, for one of professional neatness and chastity. Then I went down to stroll by the Dodder and ponder on the happiness to come; and there I saw—I saw you——"

"Spooning."

"A vile word, Anastasia, but it describes it. And that was my reward for the four years I had spent in making myself a real dentist."

"Oh!" I cried. "You're the most delightful knight-errant in history. . . . I tell you what I'll do. I'll marry you if——" A cry of joy from my admirer interrupted me. "One moment, please," I insisted. "I said *If*, and it's a big If. You think I'm a paragon, don't you? Well, I propose to spend the next five minutes proving that I'm not. After that, if you ask me to, I'll marry you."

"Do you think for a moment that I won't ask you?" he demanded stoutly.

"We'll see," I said. "You think I'm all candour, sweetness, and nobility, but as a matter of fact I'm dishonest, selfish, and grasping. I've done frightfully dishonest things to raise money; I've played with a man's affections partly for amusement and partly for gain; I've lived a lie for many years out of sheer moral cowardice and human respect."

Mr. Donovan smiled incredulously.

"Yes," I said. "This white angel of yours has been guilty of exactly the same course of conduct that made you feel unworthy to touch my hand. I'm a charlatan. My profession is a gross imposture magnificently overpaid by a credulous public. I am kept in the public eye by advertisements written for fools by liars with their tongues in their cheeks. A sensible people would have no use for me, but the world I inhabit accepts me as a genius and pays me on the same scale as the other quacks that prey on it. Now what do you think of me?"

"I'm sure you're talking nonsense. What *is* this profession you're so ashamed of?"

"I'm Lucy Loveday, the novelist."

Mr. Donovan laughed his relief.

"Why!" he cried. "She's my favourite author . . . and do you know why?"

I looked interrogative.

"Because her heroines are all so like you."

Could I possibly marry him after that? All my heroines, as you may know, are little bits of fluff, fit for nothing but kisses. I was so disgusted by the comparison that I immediately compelled him to listen to the story of the Tackaberry affair in all its details; and as revelation followed revelation the scales fell from his eyes and he saw me no longer as a divinity clothed in dreams, but a flesh-and-blood young woman of whom he could not altogether approve. I think I mentioned before that he had singularly expressive eyes. They were expressing their hardest now, and I could read what they were saying as plain as print. "And it was for this," they said, "that I spent four years making myself a real dentist."

But the dear fellow was the soul of discretion. At the end of my recital he wished me a warm good-bye, and expressed a hope that we should meet again and have many pleasant chats about bygone days. Then he

went away to doctor his disillusionment by homeopathic methods.

Here ends what my biographers will probably call my Rathgar Period. Thanks to "Passionate Pauline" I was now wealthy, and able to leave the wretched little island in which I had been confined for so many years. I didn't start travelling at once, of course, because I had already started on my fifth novel, "Dorothy's Divorce," and wanted to complete it by the Autumn. As soon as it was ready I ran over to London, intending to submit it to Mr. Dunkerville; but the morning after my arrival I received a visit from Mr. Chatworthy (of Chudley, Chatworthy, Chepstowe and Browne, Ltd.), who offered me five thousand pounds advance royalties, and wrote out a cheque then and there when I demanded six. In addition, I contracted for a further six thousand to give him another novel in the Spring; so, you see, I haven't had any time for travelling yet. Later on, perhaps—— Meanwhile, as I needed quiet and leisure to carry out the work I had undertaken, I bought the pleasant little villa in the Thames valley, where I now reside. Sometimes I think a little wistfully of Dublin's shabby streets, and the popping of the guns at night, and the rustle of dead leaves in the windy avenues of Rathgar. But such dreams do not trouble me for long: cleanliness, punctuality, and order have so much to recommend them, and it is such a relief to live among people who aren't always talking.

Perhaps before I close you would like to hear what befell some of the other people to whom I have introduced you.

Mr. Sitric took the loss of his great work as befitted a philosopher.

"It's the world's loss, not mine," he said, "and not much of a loss at that."

I begged to differ.

"I only made a mirror in which the world might see itself," he argued. "It has other mirrors."

"But your fame!" I remonstrated.

"Fame!" he cried. "Pooh! Can you tell me the name of anyone who lived ten thousand years ago?"

I couldn't.

"Ten thousand years hence who will be remembered?"

Who, indeed?

"The world is a million years old," said Mr. Sitric with finality.

"So you think that nothing really matters?" I said.

"On the contrary. To the true philosopher, everything matters: but nothing matters very much."

"Even his philosophy?"

"Particularly his philosophy: for the true philosopher knows himself to be a fool."

The Carneys went to America on the money they had made out of Carhampton and Co. They quickly adapted themselves to American life, and Mr. Carney is now producing American novels which are a success, both artistically and financially. Rudolf had done even better there. He isn't yet a millionaire, but I understand he has two houses, three motors, and a yacht. Nancy and Ernie get on very well without him, especially as he sends them a cheque for a thousand dollars every quarter. One day just before leaving Dublin I met that fair lady in the street, and she stopped me for a grumble.

"Servants are such an expense these days, aren't they?" she said. "I've had to get rid of my last. Fourteen pounds a year she was getting, and asked for sixteen, if you please. Did you ever hear of such a thing? and the amount they eat, and everything! Of course I needn't tell you I don't begrudge them a good

meal, but when it comes to tea and bread and butter after a heavy dinner, well, I think it's time to put my foot down.''

'' I suppose you're hunting for a successor,'' I said.

'' Well, no,'' said Nancy. '' I've a friend of my mother's staying with me at present, and she gives me a hand. She hasn't much of an appetite, and that's a consideration. . . .''

I understand that Phyllis O'Dea and Mr. Tackaberry have entered upon one of those interminable engagements that are characteristic of Government offices. Mr. O'Farrell has joined the National Army, and Mr. Colgan was an active Irregular until a plucky postmistress whom he attempted to rob wrenched his revolver from him and marched him to the nearest barrack. Bill is still engaged to Mrs. Buck, but some day I shall try to get him out of that mess. I am in some uncertainty about the ultimate fate of Vi'let; but I append a scrap of dialogue, which may furnish a clue. I heard it through the folding-doors as I waited in the parlour for a farewell interview with Mrs. Buck (I had moved to the Shelbourne some weeks previously).

'' Don't be casting asparaguses on me character, Vi'let,'' said a facetious voice that I seemed to remember.

'' Oh, Freddie!'' cried Mrs. Buck, with a scream of laughter, '' I declare ye'll be the death of me.''

Next minute mother and daughter were shaking my hands effusively.

'' I never dreamt it was you, Miss Rudd,'' said Mrs. Buck, '' or I wouldn't have kept ye waitin'. That schoopid new girl we've got couldn't remember yer name. We've lost Maggie, ye know. She went an' got married. This other girl's a holy terror: won't wear a cap, if ye please, an' whistles about the house, an' bangs the doors somethin' awful. . . . There she goes again,'' said Mrs. Buck as a sudden crash made the window rattle.

"That's not a door bangin'," said Vi'let. "That's only a bomb."

"So 'tis," said Mrs. Buck with a laugh. "And ye're off to London to-morrow, Miss Rudd. Well, I suppose young people like a bit o' bustle and excitement. Joy de veev, as poor Buck used to say—R.I.P. Will ye come inside an' have yer tea?"

I declined the invitation, and after enduring a warm embrace from Mrs. Buck and a perfunctory one from Vi'let, I took my departure.

Well, that's the end of my story. Some day I'll make a novel out of it. I'll make myself the heroine, heightened in colour, of course, and with the discreditable parts left out. Mr. Tackaberry will be the handsome and valiant hero, whom I shall rescue, unaided, from the hands of the enemy. Mr. Donovan will be the silent, unselfish adorer who will be happy in my happiness and demand no better reward. Bill and Mrs. Buck will furnish the comic relief, and Rudolf will be a most picturesque villain. I don't yet know what part Mr. O'Neill will play. I heard lately that he's engaged to that girl. I hope she'll make him happy, for he was a dear boy.

