

DUCHESS

MRS.

GEOFFREY

Duchess
Mrs. Geoffrey

«Public Domain»

Duchess

Mrs. Geoffrey / Duchess — «Public Domain»,

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Duchess Mrs. Geoffrey

CHAPTER I HOW GEOFFREY DECLARES HIS INTENTION OF SPENDING THE AUTUMN IN IRELAND

"I don't see why I shouldn't put in a month there very comfortably," says Geoffrey, indolently, pulling the ears of a pretty, saucy little fat terrier that sits blinking at him, with brown eyes full of love, on a chair close by. "And it will be something new to go to Ireland, at all events. It is rather out of the running these times, so probably will prove interesting; and at least there is a chance that one won't meet every town acquaintance round every corner. That's the worry of going abroad, and I'm heartily sick of the whole thing."

"You will get murdered," says his mother, quite as indolently, half opening her eyes, which are gray as Geoffrey's own. "They always kill people, with things they call pikes, or burn them out of house and home, over there, without either rhyme or reason."

"They certainly must be a lively lot, if all one hears is true," says Geoffrey, with a suppressed yawn.

"You are not really going there, Geoff?"

"Yes, really."

"To what part of Ireland?"

"Somewhere beyond Bantry; you have heard of Bantry Bay?"

"Oh, I dare say! I am not sure," says Lady Rodney, pettishly, who is rather annoyed at the idea of his going to Ireland, having other plans in view for him.

"Ever heard of Botany Bay?" asks he, idly; but, this question being distinctly frivolous, she takes no notice of it. "Well, it's in Ireland," he goes on, after a slight but dignified pause. "You have heard of the Emerald Isle, I suppose? It's the country where they grow potatoes, and say 'bedad'; and Bantry is somewhere south, I think. I'm never very sure about anything: that's one of my charms."

"A very doubtful charm."

"The name of the place I mean to stay at – my own actual property – is called Coolnagurtheen," goes on Geoffrey, heedless of her censure.

"Eh?" says Lady Rodney.

"Coolnagurtheen."

"I always said you were clever," says his mother, languidly; "now I believe it. I don't think if I lived forever I should be able to pronounce such a sad word as that. Do – do the natives speak like that?"

"I'll tell you when I come back," says Geoffrey, – "if I ever do."

"So stupid of your uncle to leave you a property in such a country!" says Lady Rodney, discontentedly. "But very like him, certainly. He was never happy unless he was buying land in some uninhabitable place. There was that farm in Wallachia, – your cousin Jane nearly died of chagrin when she found it was left to her, and the lawyers told her she should take it, whether she liked it or not. Wallachia! I don't know where it is, but I am sure it is close to the Bulgarian atrocities!"

"Our 'pretty Jane,' on occasions, can talk as much nonsense as – as any woman I ever met," says Geoffrey, – the hesitation being full of filial reverence; "and that may be called, I think, unqualified praise."

"Better give up the Irish plan, dear, and come with Nichols and me to the Nugents. They are easy-going people, and will suit you."

"Free-and-easy-going would be a more appropriate term, from all I have heard."

"The shooting there is capital," says his mother, turning a deaf ear to his muttered interruption, "and I don't believe there is anything in Ireland, not even birds."

"There are landlords, at least; and very excellent shooting they are, if all accounts be true," says Geoffrey, with a grin, – "to say nothing of the partridge and grouse. Besides, it will be an experience; and a man should say 'how d'ye do?' to his tenants sometimes."

"If you are going to preach to me on that subject, of course I have nothing more to say. But I wish you would come with me to the Nugents."

"My dear mother, there is hardly anything I wouldn't do for you; but the Nugent scheme wouldn't suit at all. That girl of the Cheviots is sure to be there, – you know how fond Bessie Nugent is of her? – and I know she is bent on marrying me."

"Nonsense! Would you have me believe you are afraid of her?"

"I am afraid of her; I was never so afraid of any one before. I have made it the business of my life to avoid her ever since last New Year's Day, when some kind fellow told me it was leap-year. You know I never yet said 'No' to any one, and I shouldn't dare begin by saying it to Miss Cheviot. She has such a stony glare, and such a profusion of nose!"

"And a profusion of gold, too," says Lady Rodney, with a sigh.

"I hope she has, poor soul: she will want it," says Geoffrey, feelingly; and then he falls to whistling the "Two Obadiahs" softly, yet with a relish, beneath his breath.

"How long do you intend to banish yourself from civilized life?"

"A month, I dare say. Longer, if I like it; shorter, if I don't. By the by, you told me the other day it was the dream of your life to see me in Parliament, now that 'Old Dick' has decided on leading a sedentary existence, – a very stupid decision on his part, by the way, so clever as he is."

"He is not strong, you see: a little thing knocks him up, and he is too impressionable for a public career. But you are different."

"You think I am not impressionable? Well, time will tell. I shouldn't care about going into the House unless I went there primed and loaded with a real live grievance. Now, why should I not adopt the Irish? Consider the case as it stands: I go and see them; I come home, raving about them and their wretched condition, their cruel landlords, their noble endurance, magnificent physique, patient suffering, honest revenge, and so forth. By Jove! I feel as if I could do it already, even before I've seen them," says Mr. Rodney, with an irreverent laugh.

"Well don't go to Dublin, at all events," says her mother, plaintively. "It's wretched form."

"Is it? I always heard it was rather a jolly sort of little place, once you got into it – well."

"What a partisan you do make!" says Lady Rodney, with a faint laugh. "Perhaps after all we should consider Ireland the end and aim of all things. I dare say when you come back you will be more Irish than the Irish."

"It is a good thing to be in earnest over every matter, however trivial. As I am going to Ireland, you will advise me to study the people, would you not?"

"By all means study them, if you are really bent on this tiresome journey. It may do you good. You will at least be more ready to take my advice another time."

"What a dismal view you take of my trip! Perhaps, in spite of your forebodings, I shall enjoy myself down to the ground, and weep copiously on leaving Irish soil."

"Perhaps. I hope you won't get into a mess there, and make me more unhappy than I am. We are uncomfortable enough without that. You know you are always doing something bizarre, – something rash and uncommon!"

"How nice!" says Geoffrey, with a careless smile. "Your 'faint praise' fails 'to damn'! Why, one is nothing nowadays if not eccentric. Well," moving towards the door, with the fox-terrier at his heels, "I shall start on Monday. That will get me down in time for the 12th. Shall I send you up any birds?"

"Thanks, dear; you are always good," murmurs Lady Rodney, who has ever an eye to the main chance.

"If there are any," says Geoffrey, with a twinkle in his eye.

"If there are any," repeats she, unmoved.

CHAPTER II

HOW GEOFFREY GOES TO IRELAND AND WHAT HE SEES THERE

It is early morn. "The first low breath of waking day stirs the wide air." On bush and tree and opening flower the dew lies heavily, like diamonds glistening in the light of the round sun. Thin clouds of pearly haze float slowly o'er the sky to meet its rays; and

Envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east.

Geoffrey, with his gun upon his shoulder, trudges steadily onward rejoicing in the freshness of the morning air.

To his right lies Bantry Bay, that now is spreading itself out in all its glory to catch the delicate hues of the sky above. They rush to greet it, and, sinking deep down into its watery embrace, lie there all day rocked to and fro by the restless ocean.

From the hills the scent of the heather is wafted towards him, filling him with a subtle keen sense of youth and gladness and the absolute joy of living. His good dog is at his heels; a boy – procured from some neighboring cabin, and warranted not to wear out, however long the journey to be undertaken or how many miles to travel – carries his bag beside him.

Game as yet is not exactly plentiful: neither yesterday nor the day before could it be said that birds flock to his gun; there is, indeed, a settled uncertainty as to whether one may or may not have a good day's sport. And yet perhaps this very uncertainty gives an additional excitement to the game.

Here and there a pack is discovered, so unexpectedly as to be doubly welcome. And sometimes a friendly native will tell him of some quiet corner where "his honor" will surely find some birds, "an be able in the evenin' to show raison for his blazin'." It is a somewhat wild life, but a pleasant one, and perhaps, on the whole, Mr. Rodney finds Ireland an agreeable take-in, and the inhabitants of it by no means as eccentric or as bloodthirsty as he has been led to believe. He has read innumerable works on the Irish peasantry, calculated to raise laughter in the breasts of those who claim the Emerald Isle as their own, – works written by people who have never seen Ireland, or, having seen it, have thought it a pity to destroy the glamour time has thrown over it, and so reduce it to commonplaceness.

He is, for instance, surprised, and indeed somewhat relieved, when he discovers that the drivers of the jaunting-cars that take him on his shooting-expeditions are not all modern Joe Millers, and do not let off witty remarks, like bombshells, every two minutes.

He is perhaps disappointed in that every Irish cloak does not conceal a face beautiful as a houri's. And he learns by degrees that only one in ten says "bedad," and that "och murther?" is an expression almost extinct.

They appear a kindly, gentle, good-humored people, – easily led, no doubt (which is their undoing), but generous to the heart's core; a people who can speak English fluently (though with a rich brogue) and more grammatically than the Sassenachs themselves (of their own class), inasmuch as they respect their aspirates and never put an *h* in or leave one out in the wrong place.

The typical Irishman, in whom Lever delighted, with his knee-breeches and long-tailed coat, his pig under one arm and his shillalah under the other, is literally nowhere! The caubeen and the dhudheen which we are always hearing about may indeed be seen, but they are very usual objects in all lands, if one just alters the names, and scarcely create astonishment in the eyes of the on-looker.

The dhudheen is an institution, no doubt, but the owner of it, as a rule, is not to be found seated on a five-barred gate, with a shamrock pinned in his hat and a straw in his mouth, singing

"Rory O'More" or "Paddy O'Rafferty," as the case may be. On the contrary, poor soul, he is found by Geoffrey either digging up his potatoes or stocking his turf for winter use.

Altogether, things are very disappointing; though perhaps there is comfort in the thought that no one is waiting round a corner, or lying *perdu* in a ditch, ready to smash the first comer with a blackthorn stick, or reduce him to submission with a pike, irrespective of cause or reason.

Rodney, with the boy at his side, is covering ground in a state of blissful uncertainty. He may be a mile from home, or ten miles, for all he knows, and the boy seems none the wiser.

"Where are we now?" says Geoffrey, suddenly, stopping and facing "the boy."

"I don't know, sir."

"But you said you knew the entire locality, – couldn't be puzzled within a radius of thirty miles. How far are we from home?"

"I don't know, sir. I never was abroad before, an' I'm dead bate now, an' the bag's like lead."

"You're a nice boy, you are!" says Mr. Rodney; "Here, give me the bag! Perhaps you would like me to carry you too; but I shan't, so you needn't ask me. Are you hungry?"

"No," says the boy valiantly; but he looks hungry, and Geoffrey's heart smites him, the more in that he himself is starving likewise.

"Come a little farther," he says, gently, slinging the heavy bag across his own shoulders. "There must be a farmhouse somewhere."

There is. In the distance, imbedded in trees, lies an extensive farmstead, larger and more home-like than any he has yet seen.

"Now, then, cheer up, Paddy!" he says to the boy: "yonder lies an oasis in our howling wilderness."

Whereat the boy smiles and grins consumedly, as though charmed with his companion's metaphor, though in reality he understands it not at all.

As they draw still nearer, Geoffrey becomes aware that the farmyard before him is rich with life. Cocks are crowing, geese are cackling, and in the midst of all this life stands a girl with her back turned to the weary travellers.

"Wait here," says Geoffrey to his squire, and, going forward, rests the bag upon a low wall, and waits until the girl in question shall turn her head. When she does move he is still silent, for, behold, *she* has turned *his* head!

She is country bred, and clothed in country garments, yet her beauty is too great to be deniable. She is not "divinely tall," but rather of medium height, with an oval face, and eyes of "heaven's own blue." Their color changes too, and deepens, and darkens, and grows black and purple, as doth the dome above us. Her mouth is large, but gracious, and full of laughter mixed with truth and firmness. There is no feature that can so truly express character as the mouth. The eyes can shift and change, but the mouth retains its expression always.

She is clad in a snowy gown of simple cotton, that sits loosely to her lissom figure yet fails to disguise the beauty of it. A white kerchief lies softly on her neck. She has pulled up her sleeves, so that her arms are bare, – her round, soft, naked arms that in themselves are a perfect picture. She is standing with her head well thrown back, and her hands – full of corn – lifted high in the air, as she cries aloud, "Cooee! Cooee!" in a clear musical voice.

Presently her cry is answered. A thick cloud of pigeons – brown and white and bronze and gray – come wheeling into sight from behind the old house, and tumble down upon her in a reckless fashion. They perch upon her head, her shoulders, her white soft arms, even her hands, and one, more adventurous than the rest, has even tried to find a slippery resting-place upon her bosom.

"What greedy little things!" cries she aloud, with the merriest laugh in the world. "Sure you can't eat more than enough, can you? an' do your best! Oh, Brownie," reproachfully, "what a selfish bird you are!"

Here Geoffrey comes forward quietly, and lifts his hat to her with all the air of a man who is doing homage to a princess. It has occurred to him that perhaps this peerless being in the cotton gown will feel some natural chagrin on being discovered by one of the other sex with her sleeves tucked up. But in this instance his knowledge of human nature receives a severe shock.

Far from being disconcerted, this farmyard goddess is not even ashamed (as indeed how could she be?) of her naked arms, and, coming up to him, rests them upon the upper rung of the entrance-gate and surveys him calmly if kindly.

"What can I do for you?" she asks, gently.

"I think," says Geoffrey, slightly disconcerted by the sweet leisure of her gaze, "I have lost my way. I have been walking since sunrise, and I want you to tell me where I am."

"You are at Mangle Farm," returns she. Then, judging by the blank expression on his face that her words bring him no comfort, she continues with a smile, "That doesn't seem to help you much, does it?"

He returns her smile in full, —*very* full. "I confess it doesn't help me at all," he says. "Mangle Farm, I am sure, is the most attractive spot on earth, but it tells me nothing about latitude or longitude. Give me some further help."

"Then tell me where you come from, and perhaps I may be able." She speaks softly, but quickly, as do all the Irish, and with a brogue musical but unmistakable.

"I am staying at a shooting-lodge called Coolnagurtheen. Do you know where that is."

"Oh, of course," returns she, with a sudden accession of animation. "I have often seen it. That is where the young English gentleman is staying for the shooting."

"Quite right. And I am the young English gentleman," says Geoffrey, lifting his hat again by way of introduction.

"Indeed, are you?" asks she, raising her pretty brows. Then she smiles involuntarily, and the pink flush in her rounded cheeks grows a shade deeper. Yet she does not lower her eyes, or show the slightest touch of confusion. "I might have guessed it," she says, after a minute's survey of the tall gray-coated young man before her. "You are not a bit like the others down here."

"Am I not?" says he, humbly, putting on his carefully crestfallen air that has generally been found so highly successful. "Tell me my fault."

"I will – when I find it," returns she, with an irrepressible glance, full of native but innocent coquetry, from her beautiful eyes.

At this moment one of the pigeons – a small, pretty thing, bronze-tinged – flies to her, and, resting on her shoulder, makes a tender cooing sound, and picks at her cheek reproachfully, as though imploring more corn.

"Would you bite me?" murmurs she, fondly, as the bird flies off again alarmed at the presence of the tall stranger, who already is busy comparing most favorably the face of its mistress with the faces of all the fashionable beauties London has been raving about for eighteen months. "Every morning they torment me like this," she says, turning to Geoffrey, with a little pleasant confidential nod.

"He looked as if he wanted to eat you; and I'm sure I don't wonder at it," says Geoffrey, making the addition to his speech in a lower key.

"And have you walked from Coolnagurtheen this morning? Why, it is eight miles from this," says she, taking no notice of his last speech. "You could have had no breakfast!"

"Not yet; but I suppose there must be a village near here, and an inn, and I want you to direct me how to get to it. I am giving you a great deal of trouble," remorsefully, "but my boy knows nothing."

He points as he speaks to the ignorant Paddy, who is sitting on the ground with his knees between his hands, crooning a melancholy ditty.

"The village is two miles farther on. I think you had better come in and breakfast here. Uncle will be very glad to see you," she says, hospitably. "And you must be tired."

He hesitates. He *is* tired, and hungry too; there is no denying. Even as he hesitates, a girl coming out to the door-step puts her hand over her eyes, and shouts pleasantly from afar to her mistress, —

"Miss Mona, come in; the tay will be cold, an' the rashers all spoiled, an' the masther's callin' for ye."

"Come, hurry," says Mona, turning to Geoffrey, with a light laugh that seems to spring from her very heart. "Would you have the 'tay' get cold while you are making up your mind? I at least must go."

She moves from him.

"Then thank you, and I shall go with you, if you will allow me," says Geoffrey, hurriedly, as he sees her disappearing.

"Tell your boy to go to the kitchen," says Mona, thoughtfully, and, Paddy being disposed of, she and Geoffrey go on to the house.

They walk up a little gravelled path, on either side of which trim beds of flowers are cut, bordered with stiff box. All sorts of pretty, sweetly-smelling old wild blossoms are blooming in them, as gayly as though they have forgotten the fact that autumn is rejoicing in all its matured beauty. Crimson and white and purple asters stand calmly gazing towards the sky; here a flaming fuchsia droops its head, and there, apart from all the rest, smiles an enchanting rose.

"That like a virgin queen salutes the sun
Dew-diadem'd."

Behind the house rises a thick wood, — a "solemn wood," such as Dickens loved to write of, with its lights and shades and every-varying tints. A gentle wind is rushing through it now; the faint murmur of some "hidden brook," singing its "quiet tune," fall upon the ear; some happy birds are warbling in the thickets. It is a day whose beauty may be felt.

"I have no card but my name is Geoffrey Rodney," says the young man, turning to his companion.

"And mine is Mona Scully," returns she, with the smile that seems part of her lips, and which already has engraven itself on Mr. Rodney's heart. "Now, I suppose, we know each other."

They walk up two steps, and enter a small hall, and then he follows her into a room opening off it, in which breakfast lies prepared.

It is in Geoffrey's eyes a very curious room, unlike anything he has ever seen before; yet it possesses for him (perhaps for that very reason) a certain charm. It is uncarpeted, but the boards are white as snow, and on them lies a fine sprinkling of dry sand. In one of the windows — whose panes are diamond-shaped — two geraniums are in full flower; upon the deep seat belonging to the other lie some books and a stocking half knitted.

An old man, rugged but kindly-featured, rises on his entrance, and gazes at him expectantly. Mona, going up to him, rests her hand upon his arm, and, indicating Geoffrey by a gesture, says, in a low tone, —

"He has lost his way. He is tired, and I have asked him to have some breakfast. He is the English gentleman who is living at Coolnagurtheen."

"You're kindly welcome, sir," says the old man, bowing with the slow and heavy movement that belongs to the aged. There is dignity and warmth, however, in the salute, and Geoffrey accepts with pleasure the toil-worn hand his host presents to him a moment later. The breakfast is good, and, though composed of only country fare, is delicious to the young man, who has been walking since dawn, and whose appetite just now would have astonished those dwelling in crowded towns and living only on their excitements.

The house, is home-like, sweet, and one which might perhaps day by day grow dearer to the heart; and this girl, this pretty creature who every now and then turns her eyes on Geoffrey, as though glad in a kindly fashion to see him there, seems a necessary part of the whole, — her gracious presence

rendering it each moment sweeter and more desirable. "My precept to all who build is," says Cicero, "that the owner should be an ornament to the house, and not the house to the owner."

Mona pours out the tea – which is excellent – and puts in the cream – which is a thing to dream of – with a liberal hand. She smiles at Geoffrey across the sugar-bowl, and chatters to him over the big bowl of flowers that lies in the centre of the table. Not a hothouse bouquet faultlessly arranged, by any means, but a great, tender, happy, straggling bunch of flowers that seem to have fallen into their places of their own accord, regardless of coloring, and fill the room with their perfume.

His host going to the window when breakfast is at an end, Geoffrey follows him; and both look out upon the little garden before them that is so carefully and lovingly tended.

"It is all her doing," says the old man, – "Mona's, I mean. She loves those flowers more than anything on earth, I think. Her mother was the same; but she wasn't half the lass that Mona is. Never a mornin' in the cowld winter but she goes out there to see if the frost hasn't killed some of 'em the night before."

"There is hardly any taste so charming or so engrossing as that for flowers," says Geoffrey, making this trite little speech, that sounds like a copy-book, in his most engaging style. "My mother and cousin do a great deal of that sort of thing when at home."

"Ay, it looks pretty and gives the child something to do." There is a regretful ring in his tone that induces Geoffrey to ask the next question.

"Does she – does Miss Scully find country life unsatisfying? Has she not lived here always?"

"Law, no, sir," says the old man, with a loud and hearty laugh. "I think if ye could see the counthry girls round here, an' compare 'em with my Mona, you'd see that for yerself. She's as fine as the queen to them. Her mother, you see, was the parson's daughter down here; tiptop she was, and purty as a fairy, but mighty delicate; looked as if a march wind would blow her into heaven. Dan – he was a brother of mine, an' a solicitor in Dublin. You've been there, belike?"

"Yes; I stopped there for two or three days on my way down here. Well – and – your brother?" He cannot to himself explain the interest he feels in this story.

"Dan? He was a fine man, surely; six feet in his stockin', he was, an' eyes like a woman's. He come down here an' met her, an' she married him. Nothing would stop her, though the parson was fit to be tied about it. An' of course he was no match for her, – father bein' only a bricklayer when he began life, – but still I will say Dan was a fine man, an' one to think about; an' no two ways in him, an' *that* soft about the heart. He worshipped the ground she walked on; an' four years after their marriage she told me herself she never had an ache in her heart since she married him. That was fine tellin', sir, wasn't it? Four years, mind ye. Why, when Mary was alive (my wife, sir) we had a shindy twice a week, reg'lar as clockwork. We wouldn't have known ourselves without it; but, however, that's nayther here nor there," says Mr. Scully, pulling himself up short. "An' I ask yer pardon, sir, for pushing private matters on ye like this."

"But you have interested me," says Geoffrey, seating himself on the broad sill of the window, as though preparing for a long dissertation on matters still unknown. "Pray tell me how your brother and his lovely wife – who evidently was as wise and true as she was lovely – got on."

Mr. Rodney's face being of that rare kind that is as tender as it is manly, and by right of its beauty demands confidence, the old man (who dearly loves his own voice) is encouraged to proceed.

"They didn't get on for long," he says, mournfully, – and what voice is so full of melancholy as the Irish voice when it sinks into sadness? "When the little one – Mona – was barely five years old, they went to ground; Mount Jerome got them. Fever it was; and it carried 'em both off just while ye'd have time to look round ye. Poor souls, they went to the blessed land together. Perhaps the Holy Virgin knew they would have got on badly without each other anywhere."

"And the child, – Miss Mona?" asks Geoffrey.

"She went to live in Anthrim with her mother's sister. Later she got to Dublin, to her aunt there, – another of the parson's daughters, – who married the Provost in Thrinity; a proud sort he

was, an' awful tiresome with his Greeks an' his Romans, an' not the height of yer thumb," says Mr. Scully, with ineffable contempt. "I went to Dublin one day about cattle, and called to see me niece; an' she took to me, bless her, an' I brought her down with me for change of air, for her cheeks were whiter than a fleece of wool, an' she has stayed ever since. Dear soul! I hope she'll stay forever. She is welcome."

"She must be a great comfort to you," says Geoffrey from his heart.

"She is that. More than I can say. An' keeps things together, too. She is clever like her father, an' he was on the fair way to make a fortune. Ay, I always say it, law is the thing that pays in Ireland. A good sound fight sets them up. But I'm keeping you, sir, and your gun is waitin' for ye. If you haven't had enough of me company by this," with another jolly laugh, "I'll take ye down to a field hard by, an' show ye where I saw a fine young covey only yesternight."

"I – I should like to say good-by to Miss Mona, and thank her for all her goodness to me, before going," says the young man, rising somewhat slowly.

"Nay, you can say all that on your way back, an' get a half-shot into the bargain," says old Scully, heartily. "You'll hardly beat the potheen I can give ye." He winks knowingly, pats Rodney kindly on the shoulder, and leads the way out of the house. Yet I think Geoffrey would willingly have bartered potheen, partridge, and a good deal more, for just one last glance at Mona's beautiful face before parting. Cheered, however, by the prospect that he may see her before night falls, he follows the farmer into the open air.

CHAPTER III

HOW GEOFFREY'S HEART IS CLAIMED BY CUPID AS A TARGET, AND HOW MONA STOOPS TO CONQUER

It is ten days later. The air is growing brisker, the flowers bear no new buds. More leaves are falling on the woodland paths, and the trees are throwing out their last bright autumn tints of red and brown and richest orange, that tell all too plainly of the death that lies before them.

Great cascades of water are rushing from the high hills, tumbling, hurrying, with their own melodious music, into the rocky basins that kind nature has built to receive them. The soothing voices of the air are growing louder, more full of strength; the branches of the elms bow down before them; the gentle wind, "a sweet and passionate wooer," kisses the blushing leaf with perhaps a fiercer warmth than it did a month ago.

It is in the spring – so we have been told – that "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love;" yet it is in the autumn that *our* young man takes to this pleasing if somewhat unsatisfactory amusement.

Not that he himself is at all aware of the evil case into which he has fallen. He feels not the arrow in his heart, or the tender bands that slowly but surely are winding themselves around him, – steel bands, decked out and hidden by perfumed flowers. As yet he feels no pang; and, indeed, were any one to even hint at such a thing, he would have laughed aloud at the idea of his being what is commonly termed "in love."

That he – who has known so many seasons, and passed through the practised hands of some of the prettiest women this world can afford, heart-whole, and without a scratch – should fall a victim to the innocent wiles of a little merry Irish girl of no family whatever, seems too improbable even of belief, however lovely beyond description this girl may be (and is), with her wistful, laughing, mischievous Irish eyes, and her mobile lips, and her disposition half angelic, half full of fire and natural coquetry.

Beauty, according to Ovid, is "a favor bestowed by the gods;" Theophrastus says it is "a silent cheat;" and Shakspeare tells us it

"Is but a vain and doubtful good,
A shining gloss that fadeth suddenly,
A flower that dieth when first it 'gins to bud,
A brittle glass that's broken presently,
A doubtful good, a gloss, a glass, a flower,
Lost, faded, broken, dead within an hour."

Mere beauty of form and feature will fade indeed, but Mona's beauty lies not altogether in nose or eyes or mouth, but rather in her soul, which compels her face to express its lightest meaning. It is in her expression, which varies with each passing thought, changing from "grave to gay, from lively to severe," as the soul within speaks to it, that her chief charm dwells. She is never quite the same for two minutes running, – which is the surest safeguard against satiety. And as her soul is pure and clean, and her face is truly the index to her mind, all it betrays but endears her to and makes richer him who reads it.

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety."

Whenever these lines come to me I think of Mona.

It is midday, and Geoffrey, gun in hand, is idly stalking through the sloping wood that rises behind Mangle Farm. The shooting he has had since his arrival in Ireland, though desultory, – perhaps because of it, – has proved delightful in his sight. Here coveys come upon one unawares, rising out of fields when least expected, and therefore when discovered possess all the novelty of a gigantic surprise. Now and then he receives kindly warning of birds seen "over night" in some particular corner, and an offer to escort him to the scene of action without beat of drum.

As for instance, in the morning his man assails him with the news that Micky Brian or Dinny Collins (he has grown quite familiar with the gentry around) "is without, an' would like to spake wid him." Need I remark that he has widely hired his own particular attendant from among the gay and festive youths of Bantry?

Whereupon he goes "without," which means to his own hall-door that always stands wide open, and there acknowledges the presence of Mickey or Dinny, as the case may be, with a gracious nod. Mickey instantly removes his caubeen and tells "his honor" (regardless of the fact that his honor can tell this for himself) that "it is a gran' fine day," which as a rule is the first thing an Irish person will always say on greeting you, as though full of thankfulness to the powers above, in that sweet weather has been given.

Then follows a long-winded speech on the part of Mickey about birds in general and grouse in particular, finishing up with the announcement that he can tell where the finest covey seen this season lies hidden.

"An' the biggest birds, an' as full o' corn as iver ye see, the rogues!"

At this his honor requests Mickey to step into the hall, and with his own hands administers to him a glass of whiskey, which mightily pleases the son of Erin, though he plainly feels it his duty to make a face at it as he swallows it off neat. And then Geoffrey sallies forth and goes for the promised covey, followed closely by the excited Mickey, and, having made account of most of them, presses backsheesh into the hands of his informant, and sends him home rejoicing.

For the most part these bonnie brown birds have found their way into Miss Mona's pantry, and are eaten by that little gourmand with the rarer pleasure that in her secret heart she knows that the giver of them is not blind to the fact that her eyes are faultless and her nose pure Greek.

Just at this moment he is coming down through brake and furze, past tangling blackberry-bushes that are throwing out leaves of brilliant crimson and softest yellow, and over rustling leaves, towards the farm that holds his divinity.

Ill luck has attended his efforts to-day, or else his thoughts have been wandering in the land where love holds sway, because he is empty-handed. The bonnie brown bird has escaped him, and no gift is near to lay at Mona's shrine.

As he reaches the broad stream that divides him from the land he would reach, he pauses and tries to think of any decent excuse that may enable him to walk with a bold front up to the cottage door. But no such excuse presents itself. Memory proves false. It refuses to assist him. He is almost in despair.

He tries to persuade himself that there is nothing strange or uncommon in calling upon Wednesday to inquire with anxious solicitude about the health of a young woman whom he had seen happy and robust on Tuesday. But the trial is not successful, and he is almost on the point of flinging up the argument and going home again, when his eye lights upon a fern small but rare, and very beautiful, that growing on a high rock far above him, overhangs the stream.

It is a fern for which Mona has long been wishing. Oh! happy thought! She has expressed for it the keenest admiration. Oh! blissful remembrance! She has not one like it in all her collection. Oh! certainty full of rapture.

Now will he seize this blessed opportunity, and, laden with the spoils of war, approach her dwelling (already she is "she"), and triumphantly, albeit humbly, lay the fern at her feet, and so perchance gain the right to bask for a few minutes in the sunshine of her presence.

No sooner thought than done! Laying his gun carefully upon the ground, he looks around him to see by what means he shall gain possession of this lucky fern which is growing, deeply rooted in its native soil, far above him.

A branch of a tree overspreading the water catches his attention. It is not strong, but it suggests itself as a means to the desired end. It is indeed slim to a fault, and unsatisfactory to an alarming degree, but it must do, and Geoffrey, swinging himself up to it, tries it first, and then standing boldly upon it, leans over towards the spot where the fern can be seen.

It is rather beyond his reach, but he is determined not to be outdone. Of course by stepping into the water and climbing the slimy rock that holds the desired treasure, it can be gained; but with a lazy desire to keep his boots dry, he clings to his present position, regardless of the fact that bruised flesh (if nothing worse) will probably be the result of his daring.

He has stooped very much over indeed. His hand is on the fern; he has safely carefully extracted it, roots and all (one would think I was speaking of a tooth! but this is by the way), from its native home, when cr-r-k goes something; the branch on which he rests betrays him, and smashing hurls him head downwards into the swift but shallow stream below.

A very charming vision clad in Oxford shirting, and with a great white hat tied beneath her rounded chin with blue ribbons, – something in the style of a Sir Joshua Reynolds, – emerges from among the low-lying firs at this moment. Having watched the (seemingly) light catastrophe from afar, and being apparently amused by it, she now gives way to unmistakable mirth and laughs aloud. When Mona laughs, she does it with all her heart, the correct method of suppressing all emotion, be it of joy or sorrow, – regarding it as a recreation permitted only to the vulgar, – being as yet unlearned by her. Therefore her expression of merriment rings gayly and unchecked through the old wood.

But presently, seeing the author of her mirth does not rise from his watery resting-place, her smile fades, a little frightened look creeps into her eyes, and, hastening forward, she reaches the bank of the stream and gazes into it. Rodney is lying face downwards in the water, his head having come with some force against the sharp edge of a stone against which it is now resting.

Mona turns deadly pale, and then instinctively loosening the strings of her hat flings it from her. A touch of determination settles upon her lips, so prone to laughter at other times. Sitting on the bank, she draws off her shoes and stockings, and with the help of an alder that droops to the river's brim lowers herself into the water.

The stream, though insignificant, is swift. Placing her strong young arms, that are rounded and fair as those of any court dame, beneath Rodney, she lifts him, and, by a supreme effort, and by right of her fresh youth and perfect health, draws him herself to land.

In a minute or two the whole affair proves itself a very small thing indeed, with little that can be termed tragical about it. Geoffrey comes slowly back to life, and in the coming breathes her name. Once again he is trying to reach the distant fern; once again it eludes his grasp. He has it; no, he hasn't; yet, he has. Then at last he wakes to the fact that he has indeed *got it* in earnest, and that the blood is flowing from a slight wound in the back of his head, which is being staunched by tender fingers, and that he himself is lying in Mona's arms.

He sighs, and looks straight into the lovely frightened eyes bending over him. Then the color comes with a sudden rush back into his cheeks as he tells himself she will look upon him as nothing less than a "poor creature" to lose consciousness and behave like a silly girl for so slight a cause. And something else he feels. Above and beyond everything is a sense of utter happiness, such as he has never known before, a thrill of rapture that has in it something of peace, and that comes from the touch of the little brown hand that rests so lightly on his head.

"Do not stir. Your head is badly cut, an' it bleeds still," says Mona, with a shudder. "I cannot stop it. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Who got me out of the water?" asks he, lazily, pretending (hypocrite that he is) to be still overpowered with weakness. "And when did you come?"

"Just now," returns she, with some hesitation, and a rich accession of coloring, that renders her even prettier than she was a moment since. Because

"From every blush that kindles in her cheeks,
Ten thousand little loves and graces spring."

Her confusion, however, and the fact that no one else is near, betrays the secret she fain would hide.

"Was it you?" asks he, raising himself on his elbow to regard her earnestly, though very loath to quit the spot where late he has been tenant. "You? Oh, Mona!"

It is the first time he has ever called her by her Christian name without a prefix. The tears rise to her eyes. Feeling herself discovered, she makes her confession slowly, without looking at him, and with an air of indifference so badly assumed as to kill the idea of her ever attaining prominence upon the stage.

"Yes, it was I," she says. "And why shouldn't I? Is it to see you drown I would? I – I didn't want you to find out; but" – quickly – "I would do the same for *any one* at *any* time. You know that."

"I am sure you would," says Geoffrey, who has risen to his feet and has taken her hand. "Nevertheless, though, as you say, I am but one in the crowd, – and, of course, nothing to you, – I am very glad you did it for me."

With a little touch of wilfulness, perhaps pride, she withdraws her hand.

"I dare say," she says, carelessly, purposely mistaking his meaning: "it must have been cold lying there."

"There are things that chill one more than water," returns he, slightly offended by her tone.

"You are all wet. Do go home and change your clothes," says Mona, who is still sitting on the grass with her gown spread carefully around her. "Or perhaps" – reluctantly – "it will be better for you to go to the farm, where Bridget will look after you."

"Thank you; so I shall, if you will come with me."

"Don't mind me," says Miss Scully, hastily. "I shall follow you by and by."

"By and by will suit me down to the ground," declares he, easily. "The day is fortunately warm: damp clothes are an advantage rather than otherwise."

Silence. Mona taps the mound beside her with impatient fingers, her mind being evidently great with thought.

"I really wish," she says, presently, "you would do what I say. Go to the farm, and – stay there."

"Well, come with me, and I'll stay till you turn me out."

"I can't," faintly.

"Why not?" in a surprised tone.

"Because – I prefer staying here."

"Oh! if you mean by that you want to get rid of me, you might have said so long ago, without all this hinting," says Mr. Rodney, huffily, preparing to beat an indignant retreat.

"I didn't mean that, and I never hint," exclaims Mona, angrily; "and if you insist on the truth, if I must explain to you what I particularly desire to keep secret, you –"

"You are hurt!" interrupts he, with passionate remorse. "I see it all now. Stepping into that hateful stream to save me, you injured yourself severely. You are in pain, – you suffer; whilst I –"

"I am in no pain," says Mona, crimson with shame and mortification. "You mistake everything. I have not even a scratch on me; and – I have no shoes or stockings on me either, if you must know all!"

She turns from him wrathfully; and Geoffrey, disgusted with himself, steps back and makes no reply. With any other woman of his acquaintance he might perhaps at this juncture have made a mild request that he might be allowed to assist in the lacing or buttoning of her shoes; but with this strange little Irish girl all is different. To make such a remark would be, he feels, to offer her a deliberate insult.

"There, do go away!" says this woodland goddess. "I am sick of you and your stupidity."

"I'm sure I don't wonder," says Geoffrey, very humbly. "I beg your pardon a thousand times; and – good-by, Miss Mona."

She turns involuntarily, through the innate courtesy that belongs to her race, to return his parting salutation, and, looking at him, sees a tiny spot of blood trickling down his forehead from the wound received awhile since.

On the instant all is forgotten, – chagrin, shame, shoes and stockings, everything! Springing to her little naked feet, she goes to him, and, raising her hand, presses her handkerchief against the ugly stain.

"It has broken out again!" she says, nervously. "I am sure – I am certain – it is a worst wound than you imagine. Ah! do go home, and get it dressed."

"But I shouldn't like any one to touch it except you," says Mr. Rodney, truthfully. "Even now, as your fingers press it, I feel relief."

"Do you really?" asks Mona, earnestly.

"Honestly, I do."

"Then just turn your back for one moment," says Mona simply, "and when my shoes and stockings are on I'll go home with you an' bathe it. Now, don't turn round, for your life!"

"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" quotes Mr. Rodney; and, Mona having got into her shoes, she tells him he is at liberty to follow her across the rustic bridge lower down, that leads from the wood into Mangle Farm.

"You have spoiled your gown on my account," says Geoffrey, surveying her remorsefully; "and such a pretty gown, too. I don't think I ever saw you looking sweeter than you look to-day. And now your dress is ruined, and it is all my fault!"

"How dare you find a defect in my appearance?" says Mona, with her old gay laugh. "You compel me to retaliate. Just look at yourself. Did you ever see such a regular pickle as you are?"

In truth he is. So when he has acknowledged the melancholy fact, they both laugh, with the happy enjoyment of youth, at their own discomfiture, and go back to the cottage good friends once more.

On the middle of the rustic bridge before mentioned he stops her, to say, unexpectedly, —

"Do you know by what name I shall always call you in my thoughts?"

To which she answers, "No. How should I? But tell me."

"'Bonnie Lesley:' the poet says of her what I think of you."

"And what do you think of me?" She has grown a little pale, but her eyes have not left his.

"To see her is to love her,
And love but her forever;
For nature made her what she is,
And ne'er made sie anither,"

quotes Geoffrey, in a low tone, that has something in it almost startling, so full is it of deep and earnest feeling.

Mona is the first to recover herself.

"That is a pretty verse," she says, quietly. "But I do not know the poem. I should like to read it."

Her tone, gentle but dignified, steadies him.

"I have the book that contains it at Coolnagurtheen," he says, somewhat subdued. "Shall I bring it to you?"

"Yes. You may bring it to me – to-morrow," returns she, with the faintest hesitation, which but enhances the value of the permission, whereon his heart once more knows hope and content.

CHAPTER IV

HOW GEOFFREY AND MONA ENTER A CABIN AND SEE ONE OF THE RESULTS OF PARNELL'S ELOQUENCE

But when to-morrow comes it brings to him a very different Mona from the one he saw yesterday. A pale girl, with great large sombrous eyes and compressed lips, meets him, and places her hand in his without a word.

"What is it?" asks he, quick to notice any change in her.

"Oh! haven't you heard?" cries she. "Sure the country is ringing with it. Don't you know that they tried to shoot Mr. Moore last night?"

Mr. Moore is her landlord, and the owner of the lovely wood behind Mangle Farm where Geoffrey came to grief yesterday.

"Yes, of course; but I heard, too, how he escaped his would-be assassin."

"He did, yes; but poor Tim Maloney, the driver of the car on which he was, he was shot through the heart, instead of him! Oh, Mr. Rodney," cries the girl, passionate emotion both in her face and voice, "what can be said of those men who come down to quiet places such as this was, to inflame the minds of poor ignorant wretches, until they are driven to bring down murder on their souls! It is cruel! It is unjust! And there seems no help for us. But surely in the land where justice reigns supreme, retribution will fall upon the right heads."

"I quite forgot about the driver," says Geoffrey, beneath his breath. This remark is unfortunate. Mona turns upon him wrathfully.

"No doubt," she says scornfully. "The gentleman escaped, the man doesn't count! Perhaps, indeed, he has fulfilled his mission now he has shed his ignoble blood for his superior! Do you know it is partly such thoughts as these that have driven our people to desperation! One law for the poor, another for the rich! Friendship for the great, contempt for the needy."

She pauses, catching her breath with a little sob.

"Who is uttering seditious language now?" asks he, reproachfully. "No, you wrong me. I had, indeed, forgotten for the moment all about that unfortunate driver. You must remember I am a stranger here. The peasants are unknown to me. I cannot be expected to feel a keen interest in each one individually. In fact, had Mr. Moore been killed instead of poor Maloney, I shouldn't have felt it a bit the more, though he was the master and the other the man. I can only suffer with those I know and love."

The "poor Maloney" has done it. She forgives him; perhaps because – sweet soul – harshness is always far from her.

"It is true," she says, sadly. "I spoke in haste because my heart is sore for my country, and I fear for what we may yet live to see. But of course I could not expect you to feel with me."

This cuts him to the heart.

"I do feel with you," he says, hastily. "Do not believe otherwise." Then, as though impelled to it, he says in a low tone, though very distinctly, "I would gladly make your griefs mine, if you would make my joys yours."

This is a handsome offer, all things considered, but Mona turns a deaf ear to it. She is standing on her door-step at this moment, and now descends until she reaches the tiny gravelled path.

"Where are you going?" asks Rodney, afraid lest his last speech has offended her. She has her hat on, – a big Gainsborough hat, round which soft Indian muslin is clinging, and in which she looks nothing less than adorable.

"To see poor Kitty Maloney, his widow. Last year she was my servant. This year she married; and now – here is the end of everything – for her."

"May I go with you?" asks he, anxiously. "These are lawless times, and I dare say Maloney's cabin will be full of roughs. You will feel happier with some man beside you whom you can trust."

At the word "trust" she lifts her eyes and regards him somewhat steadfastly. It is a short look, yet a very long one, and tells more than she knows. Even while it lasts he swears to himself an oath that he never to his life's end breaks.

"Come, then," she says, slowly, "if you will. Though I am not afraid. Why should I be? Do you forget that I am one of themselves? My father and I belong to the people."

She says this steadily, and very proudly, with her head held high, but without looking at him; which permits Geoffrey to gaze at her exhaustively. There is an unconscious meaning in her words, quite clear to him. She is of "the people," he of a class that looks but coldly upon hers. A mighty river, called Caste, rolls between them, dividing him from her. But shall it? Some hazy thought like this floats through his brain. They walk on silently, scarcely exchanging a syllable one with the other, until they come within sight of a small thatched house built at the side of the road. It has a manure-heap just in front of it, and a filthy pool to its left, in which an ancient sow is wallowing, whilst grunting harmoniously.

Two people, a man and a woman, are standing together some yards from the cabin, whispering and gesticulating violently, as is "their nature to."

The man, seeing Mona, breaks from the woman, and comes up to her.

"Go back again, miss," he says, with much excitement. "They've brought him home, an' he's bad to look at. I've seed him, an' it's given me a turn I won't forget in a hurry. Go home, I tell ye. 'Tis a sight not fit for the eyes of the likes of you."

"Is he there?" asks Mona, pointing with trembling fingers to the house.

"Ay, where else?" answers the woman, sullenly who has joined them. "They brought him back to the home he will never rouse again with step or voice. 'Tis cold he is, an' silent this day."

"Is – is he covered?" murmurs Mona, with difficulty, growing pale, and shrinking backwards. Instinctively she lays her hand on Rodney's arm, as though desirous of support. He, laying his own hand upon hers, holds it in a warm and comforting clasp.

"He's covered, safe enough. They've throwed an ould sheet over him, – over what remains of him this cruel day. Och, wirra-wirra!" cries the woman, suddenly, throwing her hands high above her head, and giving way to a peculiar long, low, moaning sound, so eerie, so full of wild despair and grief past all consolation, as to make the blood in Rodney's veins run cold.

"Go back the way ye came," says the man again, with growing excitement. "This is no place for ye. There is ill luck in yonder house. His soul won't rest in peace, sent out of him like that. If ye go in now, ye'll be sorry for it. 'Tis a thing ye'll be thinkin' an' dhramin' of till you'll be wishin' the life out of yer cursed body!"

A little foam has gathered round his lips, and his eyes are wild. Geoffrey, by a slight movement, puts himself between Mona and this man, who is evidently besides himself with some inward fear and horror.

"What are ye talkin' about? Get out, ye spalpeen," says the woman, with an outward show of anger, but a warning frown meant for the man alone. "Let her do as she likes. Is it spakin' of fear ye are to Dan Scully's daughter?"

"Come home, Mona; be advised by me," says Geoffrey, gently, as the man skulks away, walking in a shambling, uncertain fashion, and with a curious trick of looking every now and then over his shoulder, as though expecting to see an unwelcome follower.

"No, no; this is not a time to forsake one in trouble," says Mona, faithfully, but with a long, shivering sigh. "I need see nothing, but I *must* speak to Kitty."

She walks deliberately forward and enters the cabin, Geoffrey closely following her.

A strange scene presents itself to their expectant gaze. Before them is a large room (if so it can be called), possessed of no flooring but the bare brown earth that Mother Nature has supplied. To their right is a huge fireplace, where, upon the hearthstone, turf lies burning dimly, emitting the strong aromatic perfume that belongs to it. Near it crouches an old woman with her blue-checked apron thrown above her head, who rocks herself to and fro in silent grief, and with every long-drawn breath – that seems to break from her breast like a stormy wave upon a desert shore – brings her old withered palms together with a gesture indicative of despair.

Opposite to her is a pig, sitting quite erect, and staring at her blankly, without the slightest regard to etiquette or nice feeling. He is plainly full of anxiety, yet without power to express it, except in so far as his tail may aid him, which is limp and prostrate, its very curl being a thing of the past. If any man has impugned the sagacity of pigs, that man has erred!

In the background partly hidden by the gathering gloom, some fifteen men, and one or two women, are all huddled together, whispering eagerly, with their faces almost touching. The women, though in a great minority, are plainly having the best of it.

But Mona's eyes see nothing but one object only.

On the right side of the fireplace, lying along the wall, is a rude stretcher, – or what appears to be such, – on which, shrouded decently in a white cloth, lies something that chills with mortal fear the heart, as it reminds it of that to which we all some day must come. Beneath the shroud the murdered man lies calmly sleeping, his face smitten into the marble smile of death.

Quite near to the poor corpse, a woman sits, young, apparently, and with a handsome figure, though now it is bent and bowed with grief. She is dressed in the ordinary garb of the Irish peasant, with a short gown well tucked up, naked feet, and the sleeves of her dress pushed upwards until they almost reach the shoulder, showing the shapely arm and the small hand that, as a rule, belong to the daughters of Erin and betray the existence of the Spanish blood that in days gone by mingled with theirs.

Her face is hidden; it is lying on her arms, and they are cast, in the utter recklessness and abandonment of her grief, across the feet of him who, only yesterday, had been her "man," – her pride and her delight.

Just as Mona crosses the threshold, a man, stepping from among the group that lies in shadow, approaching the stretcher, puts forth his hand, as though he would lift the sheet and look upon what it so carefully conceals. But the woman, springing like a tigress to her feet, turns upon him, and waves him back with an imperious gesture.

"Lave him alone!" cries she; "take yer hands off him! He's dead, as ye well know, the whole of ye. There's no more ye can do to him. Then lave his poor body to the woman whose heart is broke for the want of him!"

The man draws back hurriedly, and the woman once more sinks back into her forlorn position.

"Kitty, can I do anything for you?" asks Mona, in a gentle whisper, bending over her and taking the hand that lies in her lap between both her own, with a pressure full of gentle sympathy. "I know there is nothing I can *say* but can I *do* nothing to comfort you?"

"Thank ye, miss. Ye mane it kindly, I know," says the woman, wearily. "But the big world is too small to hold one dhrup of comfort for me. He's dead, ye see!"

The inference is full of saddest meaning. Even Geoffrey feels the tears rise unbidden to his eyes.

"Poor soul! poor soul!" says Mona, brokenly; then she drops her hand, and the woman, turning again to the lifeless body, as though in the poor cold clay lies her only solace, lets her head fall forward upon it.

Mona, turning, confronts the frightened group in the corner, both men and women, with a face changed and aged by grief and indignation.

Her eyes have grown darker; her mouth is stern. To Rodney, who is watching her anxiously, she seems positively transformed. What a terrible power lies within her slight frame to feel both good

and evil! What sad days may rest in store for this girl, whose face can whiten at a passing grievance, and whose hands can tremble at a woe in which only a dependant is concerned! Both sorrow and joy must be to her as giants, strong to raise or lower her to highest elevations or lowest depths.

"Oh, what a day is this!" cries she, with quivering lips. "See the ruin you have brought upon this home, that only yestermorn was full of life and gladness! Is this what has come of your Land League, and your Home Rulers, and your riotous meetings? Where is the soul of this poor man, who was hurried to his last account without his priest, and without a prayer for pardon on his lips? And how shall the man who slew him dare to think on his own soul?"

No one answers; the very moanings of the old crone in the chimney-corner are hushed as the clear young voice rings through the house, and then stops abruptly, as though its owner is overcome with emotion. The men move back a little, and glance uneasily and with some fear at her from under their brows.

"Oh, the shameful thought that all the world should be looking at us with horror and disgust, as a people too foul for anything but annihilation! And what is it you hope to gain by all this madness? Do you believe peace, or a blessing from the holy heavens, could fall and rest on a soil soaked in blood and red with crime? I tell you no; but rather a curse will descend, and stay with you, that even Time itself will be powerless to lift."

Again she pauses, and one of the men, shuffling his feet nervously, and with his eyes bent upon the floor, says, in a husky tone, —

"Sure, now, you're too hard on us, Miss Mona. We're innocent of it. Our hands are clean as yer own. We niver laid eyes on him since yesterday till this blessed minit. Ye should remember that, miss."

"I know what you would say; and yet I do denounce you all, both men and boys, — yes, and the women too, — because, though your own actual hands may be free of blood, yet knowing the vile assassin who did this deed, there is not one of you but would extend to him the clasp of good-fellowship and shield him to the last, — a man who, fearing to meet another face to face, must needs lie in ambush for him behind a wall, and shoot his victim without giving him one chance of escape! Mr. Moore walks through his lands day by day, unprotected and without arms: why did this man not meet him there, and fight him fairly, to the death, if, indeed, he felt that for the good of his country he should die! No! there was danger in that thought," says Mona, scornfully: "it is a safer thing to crouch out of sight and murder at one's will."

"Then why does he prosecute the poor? We can't live; yet he won't lower the rents," says a sullen voice from the background.

"He did lower them. He, too, must live; and, at all events, no persecution can excuse murder," says Mona, undaunted. "And who was so good to you as Mr. Moore last winter, when the famine raged round here? Was not his house open to you all? Were not many of your children fed by him? But that is all forgotten now; the words of a few incendiaries have blotted out the remembrance of years of steady friendship. Gratitude lies not with you. I, who am one of you, waste my time in speaking. For a very little matter you would shoot me too, no doubt!"

This last remark, being in a degree ungenerous, causes a sensation. A young man, stepping out from the confusion, says, very earnestly, —

"I don't think ye have any call to say that to us, Miss Mona. 'Tisn't fair like, when ye know in yer own heart that we love the very sight of ye, and the laste sound of yer voice!"

Mona, though still angered, is yet somewhat softened by this speech, as might any woman. Her color fades again, and heavy tears, rising rapidly, quench the fire that only a moment since made her large eyes dark and passionate.

"Perhaps you do," she says, sadly. "And I, too, — you know how dear you all are to me; and it is just that that makes my heart so sore. But it is too late to warn. The time is past when words might have availed."

Turning sorrowfully away, she drops some silver into the poor widow's lap; whereon Geoffrey, who has been standing close to her all the time, covers it with two sovereigns.

"Send down to the Farm, and I will give you some brandy," says Mona to a woman standing by, after a lengthened gaze at the prostrate form of Kitty, who makes no sign of life. "She wants it." Laying her hand on Kitty's shoulder, she shakes her gently. "Rouse yourself," she says, kindly, yet with energy. "Try to think of something, – anything except your cruel misfortune."

"I have only one thought," says the woman, sullenly, "I can't better it. An' that is, that it was a bitter day when first I saw the light."

Mona, not attempting to reason with her again, shakes her head despondingly, and leaves the cabin with Geoffrey at her side.

For a little while they are silent. He is thinking of Mona; she is wrapped in remembrance of all that has just passed. Presently, looking at her, he discovers she is crying, – bitterly, though quietly. The reaction has set in, and the tears are running quickly down her cheeks.

"Mona, it has all been too much for you," exclaims he, with deep concern.

"Yes, yes; that poor, poor woman! I cannot get her face out of my head. How forlorn! how hopeless! She has lost all she cared for; there is nothing to fall back upon. She loved him; and to have him so cruelly murdered for no crime, and to know that he will never again come in the door, or sit by her hearth, or light his pipe by her fire, – oh, it is horrible! It is enough to kill her!" says Mona, somewhat disconnectedly.

"Time will soften her grief," says Rodney, with an attempt at soothing. "And she is young; she will marry again, and form new ties."

"Indeed she will not;" says Mona indignantly. "Irish peasants very seldom do that. She will, I am sure, be faithful forever to the memory of the man she loved."

"Is that the fashion here? If – if you loved a man, would you be faithful to him forever?"

"But how could I help it?" says Mona, simply. "Oh, what a wretched state this country is in! turmoil and strife from morning till night. And yet to talk to those very people, to mix with them, they seem such courteous, honest, lovable creatures!"

"I don't think the gentleman in the flannel jacket, who spoke about the reduction of 'rints,' looked very lovable," says Mr. Rodney, without a suspicion of a smile; "and – I suppose my sight is failing – but I confess I didn't see much courtesy in his eye or his upper lip. I don't think I ever saw so much upper lip before, and now that I have seen it I don't admire it. I shouldn't single him out as a companion for a lonely road. But no doubt I wrong him."

"Larry Doolin is not a very pleasant person, I acknowledge that," says Mona, regretfully; "but he is only one among a number. And for the most part, I maintain, they are both kind and civil. Do you know," with energy, "after all I believe England is most to blame for all this evil work? We are at heart loyal: you must agree with me in this, when you remember how enthusiastically they received the queen when, years ago, she condescended to pay us a flying visit, never to be repeated. And how gladly we welcomed the Prince of Wales, and how the other day all Ireland petted and made much of the Duke of Connaught! I was in Dublin when he was there; and I know there was no feeling towards him but loyalty and affection. I am sure," earnestly, "if you asked him he would tell the same story."

"I'll ask him the very moment I see him," says Geoffrey, with *empressement*. "Nothing shall prevent me. And I'll telegraph his answer to you."

"We should be all good subjects enough, if things were on a friendlier footing," says Mona, too absorbed in her own grievance to notice Mr. Rodney's suppressed but evident enjoyment of her conversation. "But when you despise us, you lead us to hate you."

"I never heard such awful language," says Rodney. "To tell me to my face that you hate me. Oh, Miss Mona! How have I merited such a speech?"

"You know what I mean," says Mona, reproachfully. "You needn't pretend you don't. And it is quite true that England does despise us."

"What a serious accusation! and one I think slightly unfounded. We don't despise this beautiful island or its people. We even admit that you possess a charm to which we can lay no claim. The wit, the verve, the pure gayety that springs direct from the heart that belongs to you, we lack. We are a terrible prosy, heavy lot capable of only one idea at a time. How can you say we despise you?"

"Yes, you do," says Mona, with a little obstinate shake of her head. "You call us dirty, for one thing."

"Well, but is that altogether a falsehood? Pigs and smoke and live fowls and babies are, I am convinced, good things in their own way and when well at a distance. But, under the roof with one and in an apartment a few feet square, I don't think I seem to care about them, and I'm sure they can't tend towards cleanliness."

"I admit all that. But how can they help it, when they have no money and when there are always the dear children? I dare say we are dirty, but so are other nations, and no one sneers at them as they sneer at us. Are we dirtier than the canny Scots on whom your queen bestows so much of her society? Tell me that!"

There is triumph in her eye, and a malicious sparkle, and just a touch of rebellion.

"What a little patriot!" says Rodney, pretending fear and stepping back from her. "Into what dangerous company have I fallen! And with what an accent you say '*your* queen'! Do you then repudiate her? Is she not yours as well? Do you refuse to acknowledge her?"

"Why should I? She never comes near us, never takes the least notice of us. She treats us as though we were a detested branch grafted on, and causing more trouble than we are worth, yet she will not let us go."

"I don't wonder at that. If I were the queen I should not let you go either. And so you throw her over? Unhappy queen! I do not envy her, although she sits upon so great a throne. I would not be cast off by you for the wealth of all the Indies."

"Oh, you are my friend," says Mona, sweetly. Then, returning to the charge, "Perhaps after all it is not so much her fault as that of others. Evil counsellors work mischief in all ages."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" So sage a speech is wonderful from one so young. In my opinion, you ought to go into Parliament yourself, and advocate the great cause. Is it with the present government that you find fault?

"A government which, knowing not true wisdom,
Is scorned abroad, and lives on tricks at home?"

says Mr. Rodney, airing his bit of Dryden with conscious pride, in that it fits in so nicely. "At all events, you can't call it, because your part of it takes care to make itself heard."

'A council made of such as dare not speak,
And could not if they durst,'

"How I wish it didn't!" says Mona, with a sigh.

The tears are still lingering on her lashes; her mouth is sad. Yet at this instant, even as Geoffrey is gazing at her and wondering how he shall help to dispel the cloud of sorrow that sits upon her brow, her whole expression changes. A merry gleam comes into her wet eyes, her lips widen and lose their lachrymose look, and then suddenly she throws up her head and breaks into a gay little laugh.

"Did you see the pig," she says, "sitting up by the fireplace? All through I couldn't take my eyes off him. He struck me as so comical. There he sat blinking his small eyes and trying to look sympathetic. I am convinced he knew all about it. I never saw so solemn a pig."

She laughs again with fresh delight at her own thought. That pig in the cabin has come back to her, filling her with amusement. Geoffrey regards her with puzzled eyes. What a strange temperament is this, where smiles and tears can mingle!

"What a curious child you are!" he says, at length. "You are never the same for two minutes together."

"Perhaps that is what makes me so nice," retorts Miss Mona, saucily, the sense of fun still full upon her, making him a small grimace, and bestowing upon him a bewitching glance from under her long dark lashes, that lie like shadows on her cheeks.

CHAPTER V

HOW MONA BETRAYS WHAT MAKES GEOFFREY JEALOUS, AND HOW AN APPOINTMENT IS MADE THAT IS ALL MOON-SHINE

"Yes, it certainly is a charm," says Geoffrey slowly "but it puzzles me. I cannot be gay one moment and sad the next. Tell me how you manage it."

"I can't, because I don't know myself. It is my nature. However depressed I may feel at one instant, the next a passing thought may change my tears into a laugh. Perhaps that is why we are called fickle; yet it has nothing to do with it: it is a mere peculiarity of temperament, and a rather merciful gift, for which we should be grateful, because, though we return again to our troubles, still the moment or two of forgetfulness soothes us and nerves us for the conflict. I speak, of course, of only minor sorrows; such a grief as poor Kitty's admits of no alleviation. It will last for her lifetime."

"Will it?" says Geoffrey, oddly.

"Yes. One can understand that," replies she, gravely, not heeding the closeness of his regard. "Many things affect me curiously," she goes on, dreamily, – "sad pictures and poetry and the sound of sweet music."

"Do you sing?" asks he, through mere force of habit, as she pauses.

"Yes."

The answer is so downright, so unlike the usual "a little," or "oh, nothing to signify," or "just when there is nobody else," and so on, that Geoffrey is rather taken back.

"I am not a musician," she goes on, evenly, "but some people admire my singing very much. In Dublin they liked to hear me, when I was with Aunt Anastasia; and you know a Dublin audience is very critical."

"But you have no piano?"

"Yes I have: aunt gave me hers when I was leaving town. It was no use to her and I loved it. I was at school in Portarlinton for nearly three years, and when I came back from it I didn't care for Anastasia's friends, and found my only comfort in my music. I am telling you everything am I not," with a wistful smile, "and perhaps I weary you?"

"Weary me! no, indeed. That is one of the very few unkind things you have ever said to me. How could I weary of your voice? Go on; tell me where you keep this magical piano."

"In my own room. You have not seen that yet. But it belongs to myself alone, and I call it my den, because in it I keep everything that I hold most precious. Some time I will show it to you."

"Show it to me to-day," says he, with interest.

"Very well, if you wish."

"And you will sing me something?"

"If you like. Are you fond of singing!"

"Very. But for myself I have no voice worth hearing. I sing, you know, a little, which is my misfortune, not my fault; don't you think so?"

"Oh, no; because if you can sing at all – that is correctly, and without false notes – you must feel music and love it."

"Well for my part I hate people who sing a little. I always wish it was even less. I hold that they are a social nuisance, and ought to be put down by law. My eldest brother Nick sings really very well, – a charming tenor, you know, good enough to coax the birds off the bushes. He does all that sort of *dilettante* business, – paints, and reads tremendously about things dead and gone, that can't

possibly advantage anybody. Understands old china as well as most people (which isn't saying much), and I think – but as yet this statement is unsupported – I think he writes poetry."

"Does he really?" asks Mona, with eyes wide open. "I am sure if I ever meet your brother Nick I shall be dreadfully afraid of him."

"Don't betray me, at all events. He is a touchy sort of fellow, and mightn't like to think I knew that about him. Jack, my second brother, sings too. He is coming home from India directly, and is an awfully good sort, though I think I should rather have old Nick after all."

"You have two brothers older than you?" asks Mona, meditatively.

"Yes; I am that most despicable of all things, a third son."

"I have heard of it. A third son would be poor, of course, and – and worldly people would not think so much of him as of others. Is that so?"

She pauses. But for the absurdity of the thing, Mr. Rodney would swear there is hope in her tone.

"Your description is graphic," he answers, lightly, "if faintly unkind; but when is the truth civil? You are right. Younger sons, as a rule, are not run after. Mammams do not hanker after them, or give them their reserve smiles, or pull their skirts aside to make room for them upon small ottomans."

"That betrays the meanness of the world," says Mona, slowly and with indignation. "Has not Geoffrey just declared himself to be a younger son?"

"Does it? I was bred in a different belief. In my world the mighty do no wrong; and a third son is nowhere. He is shunted; handed on; if possible, scotched. The sun is not made for *him*, or the first waltz, or caviare, or the 'sweet shady side' of anything. In fact, he 'is the man of no account' with a vengeance!"

"What a shame!" says Mona, angrily. Then she changes her note, and says, with a soft, low, mocking laugh, "How I pity you!"

"Thanks. I shall try to believe you, though your mirth is somewhat out of place, and has a tendency towards heartlessness." (He is laughing too.) "Yet there have been instances," goes on Mr. Rodney, still smiling, while watching her intently, "when maiden aunts have taken a fancy to third sons, and have died leaving them lots of tin."

"Eh?" says Mona.

"Tin, – money," explains he.

"Oh, I dare say. Yes, sometimes: but – " she hesitates, and this time the expression of her face cannot be misunderstood: dejection betrays itself in every line – "but it is not so with you, is it? No aunt has left you anything?"

"No, – no aunt," returns Rodney, speaking the solemn truth, yet conveying a lie: "I have not been blessed with maiden aunts wallowing in coin."

"So I thought," exclaims Mona, with a cheerful nod, that under other circumstances should be aggravating, so full of content it is. "At first I fea – I thought you were rich, but afterwards I guessed it was your brothers' ground you were shooting over. And Bridget told me, too. She said you could not be well off, you had so many brothers. But I like you all the better for that," says Mona, in a tone that actually savors of protection, slipping her little brown hand through his arm in a kindly, friendly, lovable fashion.

"Do you?" says Rodney. He is strangely moved; he speaks quietly, but his heart is beating quickly, and Cupid's dart sinks deeper in its wound.

"Is your brother, Mr. Rodney, like you?" asks Mona presently.

He has never told her that his eldest brother is a baronet. Why he hardly knows, yet now he does not contradict her when she alludes to him as Mr. Rodney. Some inward feeling prevents him. Perhaps he understands instinctively that such knowledge will but widen the breach that already exists between him and the girl who now walks beside him with a happy smile upon her flower-like face.

"No; he is not like me," he says, abruptly: "he is a much better fellow. He is, besides, tall and rather lanky, with dark eyes and hair. He is like my father, they tell me; I am like my mother."

At this Mona turns her gaze secretly upon him. She studies his hair, his gray eyes, his irregular nose, – that ought to have known better, – and his handsome mouth, so resolute, yet so tender, that his fair moustache only half conceals. The world in general acknowledges Mr. Rodney to be a well-looking young man of ordinary merits, but in Mona's eyes he is something more than all this; and I believe the word "ordinary," as applied to him, would sound offensive in her ears.

"I think I should like your mother," she says, naively and very sweetly, lifting her eyes steadily to his. "She is handsome, of course; and is she good as she is beautiful?"

Flattery goes a long way with most men, but in this instance the subtle poison touches Mr. Rodney even more than it pleases him. He presses the hand that rests upon his arm an eighth of an inch nearer to his heart than it was before, if that be possible.

"My mother is a real good sort when you know her," he says, evasively; "but she's rather rough on strangers. However, she is always all there, you know, so far as manners go, and that."

Miss Mona looks puzzled.

"I don't think I understand you," she says, at length, gravely. "Where would the rest of her be, if she wasn't all in the same place?"

She says this in such perfect good faith that Mr. Rodney roars with laughter.

"Perhaps you may not know it," says he, "but you are simply perfection!"

"So Mr. Moore says," returns she, smiling.

Had she put out all her powers of invention with a view to routing him with slaughter, she could not have been more successful than she is with this small unpremeditated speech. Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, he could not have betrayed more thorough and complete discomfiture.

He drops her arm, and looks as though he is prepared to drop her acquaintance also, at a moment's notice.

"What has Mr. Moore to do with you?" he asks, haughtily. "Who is he, that he should so speak to you?"

"He is our landlord," says Mona, calmly, but with uplifted brows, stopping short in the middle of the road to regard him with astonishment.

"And thinks you perfection?" in an impossible tone, losing both his head and his temper completely. "He is rich, I suppose; why don't you marry him?"

Mona turns pale.

"To ask the question is a rudeness," she says, steadily, though her heart is cold and hurt. "Yet I will answer you. In our country, and in our class," with an amount of inborn pride impossible to translate, "we do not marry a man because he is 'rich,' or in other words, sell ourselves for gold."

Having said this, she turns her back upon him contemptuously, and walks towards her home.

He follows her, full of remorse and contrition. Her glance, even more than her words, has covered him with shame, and cured him of his want of generosity.

"Forgive me, Mona," he says, with deep entreaty. "I confess my fault. How could I speak to you as I did! I implore your pardon. Great sinner as I am, surely I shall not knock for forgiveness at your sweet heart in vain!"

"Do not ever speak to me like that again," says Mona, turning upon him eyes humid with disappointment, yet free from wrath of any kind. "As for Mr. Moore," with a curl of her short upper lip that it does him good to see, and a quick frown, "why, he is as old as the hills, and as fat as Tichborne, and he hasn't got a single hair on his head!"

But that Mr. Rodney is still oppressed with the fear that he has mortally offended her, he could have laughed out loud at this childish speech; but anxiety helps him to restrain his mirth. Nevertheless he feels an unholy joy as he thinks on Mr. Moore's bald pate, his "too, too solid flesh," and his "many days."

"Yet he dares to admire you?" is what he does say, after a decided pause.

"Sure they all admire me," says Miss Mona, with an exasperating smile, meant to wither.

But Mr. Rodney is determined to "have it out with her," as he himself would say, before consenting to fade away out of her sight.

"But he wants to marry you. I know he does. Tell me the truth about that," he says, with flattering vehemence.

"Certainly I shall not. It would be very mean, and I wonder at you to ask the question," says Mona, with a great show of virtuous indignation. "Besides," mischievously, "if you know, there is no necessity to tell you anything."

"Yet answer me," persists he, very earnestly.

"I can't," says Mona; "it would be very unfair; and besides," petulantly, "it is all too absurd. Why, if Mr. Moore were to ask me to marry him ten thousand times again, I should never say anything but 'no.'"

Unconsciously she has betrayed herself. He hears the word "again" with a strange sinking of the heart. Others, then, are desirous of claiming this wild flower for their own.

"Oh, Mona, do you mean that?" he says. But Mona, who is very justly incensed, declines to answer him with civility.

"I begin to think our English cousins are not famous for their veracity," she says, with some scorn. "You seem to doubt every one's word; or is it mine in particular? Yet I spoke the truth. I do not want to marry any one."

Here she turns and looks him full in the face; and something – it may be in the melancholy of his expression – so amuses her that (laughter being as natural to her lips as perfume to a flower) she breaks into a sunny smile, and holds out to him her hand in token of amity.

"How could you be so absurd about that old Moore?" she says, lightly. "Why he has got nothing to recommend him except his money; and what good," with a sigh, "does that do him, unless to get him murdered!"

"If he is as fat as you say, he will be a good mark for a bullet," says Mr. Rodney, genially, almost – I am ashamed to say – hopefully. "I should think they would easily pot him one of these dark night that are coming. By this time I suppose he feels more like a grouse than a man, eh? – 'I'll die game' should be his motto."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that," says Mona, with a shudder. "It isn't at all nice of you; and especially when you know how miserable I am about my poor country."

"It is a pity anything should be said against Ireland," says Rodney, cleverly; "it is such a lovely little spot."

"Do you really like it?" asks she, plainly delighted.

"I should rather think so. Who wouldn't? I went to Glengariffe the other day, and can hardly fancy anything more lovely than its pure waters, and its purple hills that lie continued in the depths beneath."

"I have been there. And at Killarney, but only once, though we live so near."

"That has nothing to do with it," says Rodney. "The easier one can get to a place the more one puts off going. I knew a fellow once, and he lived all his time in London, and I give you my word he had never seen the Crystal Palace. With whom did you go to Killarney?"

"With Lady Mary. She was staying at the castle there; it was last year, and she asked me to go with her. I was delighted. And it was so pleasant, and everything so – so like heaven. The lakes are delicious, so calm, so solitary, so full of thought. Lady Mary is old, but young in manner, and has read and travelled so much, and she likes me," says Mona, naively. "And I like her. Do you know her?"

"Lady Mary Crighton? Yes, I have met her. An old lady with corkscrew ringlets, patches, and hoops? She is quite *grande dame*, and witty, like all you Irish people."

"She is very seldom at home, but I think I like her better than any one I ever met."

"Do you?" says Geoffrey, in a tone that means much.

"Yes, – better than all the women I ever met," corrects Mona, but without placing the faintest emphasis upon the word "women," which omission somehow possesses its charm in Rodney's eyes.

"Well, I shall go and judge of Killarney myself some day," he says, idly.

"Oh, yes, you must indeed," says the little enthusiast, brightening. "It is more than lovely. How I wish I could go with you!"

She looks at him as she says this, fearlessly, honestly, and without a suspicion of coquetry.

"I wish you could!" says Geoffrey from his heart.

"Well, I can't, you know," with a sigh. "But no matter: you will enjoy the scenery even more by yourself."

"I don't think I shall," says Geoffrey, in a low tone.

"Well, we have both seen the bay," says Mona, cheerfully, – "Bantry Bay I mean: so we can talk about that. Yet indeed" – seriously – "you cannot be said to have seen it properly, as it is only by moonlight its full beauty can be appreciated. Then, with its light waves sparkling beneath the gleam of the stars, and the moon throwing a path across it that seems to go on and on, until it reaches heaven, it is more satisfying than a happy dream. Do you see that hill up yonder?" pointing to an elevation about a mile distant: "there I sometimes sit when the moon is full, and watch the bay below. There is a lovely view from that spot."

"I wish I could see it!" says Geoffrey, longingly.

"Well so you can," returns she, kindly. "Any night when there is a good moon come to me and I will go with you to Carrickdhuvé – that is the name of the hill – and show you the bay."

She looks at him quite calmly, as one might who sees nothing in the fact of accompanying a young man to the top of a high mountain after nightfall. And in truth she does see nothing in it. If he wishes to see the bay she loves so well, of course he must see it; and who so competent to point out to him all its beauties as herself?

"I wonder when the moon will be full," says Geoffrey, making this ordinary remark in an everyday tone that does him credit, and speaks well for his kindness and delicacy of feeling, as well as for his power of discerning character. He makes no well-turned speeches about the bay being even more enchanting under such circumstances, or any orthodox compliment that might have pleased a woman versed in the world's ways.

"We must see," says Mona, thoughtfully.

They have reached the farm again by this time, and Geoffrey, taking up the guns he had left behind the hall door, – or what old Scully is pleased to call the front door in contradistinction to the back door, through which he is in the habit of making his exits and entrances, – holds out his hand to bid her good-by.

"Come in for a little while and rest yourself," says Mona, hospitably, "while I get the brandy and send it up to poor Kitty."

It strikes Geoffrey as part of the innate sweetness and genuineness of her disposition that, after all the many changes of thought that have passed through her brain on their return journey, her first concern on entering her own doors is for the poor unhappy creature in the cabin up yonder.

"Don't be long," he says, impulsively, as she disappears down a passage.

"I won't, then. Sure you can live alone with yourself for one minute," returns she, in very fine Irish; and, with a parting smile, sweet as nectar and far more dangerous, she goes.

When she is gone, Geoffrey walks impatiently up and down the small hall, conflicting emotions robbing him of the serenity that usually attends his footsteps. He is happy, yet full of a secret gnawing uneasiness that weighs upon him daily, hourly. Near Mona – when in her presence – a gladness that amounts almost to perfect happiness is his; apart from her is unrest. Love, although he is but just awakening to the fact, has laid his chubby hands upon him, and now holds him in thrall; so that

no longer for him is that most desirable thing content, – which means indifference. Rather is he melancholy now and then, and inclined to look on life apart from Mona as a doubtful good.

For what, after all, is love, but

"A madness most discreet,
A choking gall, and a preserving sweet?"

There are, too, dispassionate periods, when he questions the wisdom of giving his heart to a girl lowly born as Mona undoubtedly is, at least on her father's side. And, indeed, the little drop of blue blood inherited from her mother is so faint in hue as to be scarcely recognizable by those inclined to cavil.

And these he knows will be many: there would be first his mother, and then Nick, with a silent tongue but brows uplifted, and after them Violet, who in the home circle is regarded as Geoffrey's "affinerty," and who last year was asked to Rodney Towers for the express purpose (though she knew it not) of laying siege to his heart and bestowing upon him in return her hand and – fortune. To do Lady Rodney justice, she was never blind to the fortune!

Yet Violet, with her pretty, slow, *trainante* voice and perfect manner, and small pale attractive face, and great eyes that seem too earnest for the fragile body to which they belong, is as naught before Mona, whose beauty is strong and undeniable, and whose charm lies as much in inward grace as in outward loveliness.

Though uncertain that she regards him with any feeling stronger than that of friendliness (because of the strange coldness that she at times affects, dreading perhaps lest he shall see too quickly into her tender heart), yet instinctively he knows that he is welcome in her sight, and that "the day grows brighter for his coming." Still, at times this strange coldness puzzles him, not understanding that

"No lesse was she in secret heart affected,
But that she masked it in modestie,
For feare she should of lightnesse be detected."

For many days he had not known "that his heart was darkened with her shadow." Only yesterday he might perhaps have denied his love for her, so strange, so uncertain, so undreamt of, is the dawning of a first great attachment. One looks upon the object that attracts, and finds the deepest joy in looking, yet hardly realizes the great truth that she has become part of one's being, not to be eradicated until death or change come to the rescue.

Perhaps Longfellow has more cleverly – and certainly more tenderly – than any other poet described the earlier approaches of the god of Love, when he says, —

"The first sound in the song of love
Scarce more than silence is, and yet a sound.
Hands of invisible spirits touch the strings
Of that mysterious instrument, the soul,
And play the prelude of our fate."

For Geoffrey the prelude has been played, and now at last he knows it. Up and down the little hall he paces, his hands behind his back, as his wont when deep in day-dreams, and asks himself many a question hitherto unthought of. Can he – shall he – go farther in this matter? Then this thought presses to the front beyond all others: – "Does she – will she – ever love me?"

"Now, hurry, Bridget," says Mona's low soft voice, – that "excellent thing in woman." "Don't be any time. Just give that to Kitty, and say one prayer, and be back in ten minutes."

"Law, Miss Mona, ye needn't tell me; sure I'm flyin' I'll be there an' back before ye'll know I'm gone." This from the agile Biddy, as (exhilarated with the knowledge that she is going to see a corpse) she rushes up the road.

"Now come and see my own room," says Mona, going up to Rodney, and, slipping her hand into his in a little trustful fashion that is one of her many, loving ways, she leads him along the hall to a door opposite the kitchen. This she opens, and with conscious pride draws him after her across its threshold. So holding him, she might at this moment have drawn him to the world's end, – wherever that may be!

It is a very curious little room they enter, – yet pretty, withal, and suggestive of care and affection, and certainly not one to be laughed at. Each object that meets the view seems replete with pleasurable memory, – seems part of its gentle mistress. There are two windows, small, and with diamond panes like the parlor, and in the far end is a piano. There are books, and some ornaments, and a huge bowl of sweetly-smelling flowers on the centre-table, and a bracket or two against the walls. Some loose music is lying on a chair.

"Now I am here, you will sing me something," says Geoffrey, presently.

"I wonder what kind of songs you like best," says Mona, dreamily, letting her fingers run noiselessly over the keys of the Collard. "If you are like me, you like sad ones."

"Then I am like you?" returns he, quickly.

"Then I will sing you a song I was sent last week," says Mona, and forthwith sings him "Years Ago," mournfully, pathetically, and with all her soul, as it should be sung. Then she gives him "London Bridge," and then "Rose-Marie," and then she takes her fingers from the piano and looks at him with a fond hope that he will see fit to praise her work.

"You are an artiste," says Geoffrey, with a deep sigh when she has finished. "Who taught you, child? But there is no use in such a question. Nobody could teach it to you: you must feel it as you sing. And yet you are scarcely to be envied. Your singing has betrayed to me one thing: if ever you suffer any great trouble it will kill you."

"I am not going to suffer," says Mona, lightly. "Sorrow only falls on every second generation; and you know poor mother was very unhappy at one time: therefore I am free. You will call that superstition, but," with a grave shake of her head, "it is quite true."

"I hope it is," says Geoffrey; "though, taking your words for gospel, it rather puts me out in the cold. My mother seems to have had rather a good time all through, devoid of anything that might be termed trouble."

"But she lost her husband," says Mona, gently.

"Well, she did. I don't remember about that, you know. I was quite a little chap, and hustled out of sight if I said 'boo.' But of course she's got over all that, and is as jolly as a sand-boy now," says Geoffrey, gayly. (If only Lady Rodney could have heard him comparing her to a "sand-boy"!)

"Poor thing!" says Mona, sympathetically, which sympathy, by the by, is utterly misplaced, as Lady Rodney thought her husband, if anything, an old bore, and three months after his death confessed to herself that she was very glad he was no more.

"Where do you get your music?" asks Geoffrey, idly, wondering how "London Bridge" has found its way to this isolated spot, as he thinks of the shops in the pretty village near, where Molloy and Adams, and their attendant sprite called Weatherley, are unknown.

"The boys send it to me. Anything new that comes out, or anything they think will suit my voice, they post to me at once."

"The boys!" repeats he, mystified.

"Yes, the students, I mean. When with aunty in Dublin I knew ever so many of them, and they were very fond of me."

"I dare say," says Mr. Rodney, with rising ire.

"Jack Foster and Terry O'Brien write to me very often," goes on Mona, unconsciously. "And indeed they all do occasionally, at Christmas, you know, and Easter and Midsummer, just to ask me how I am, and to tell me how they have got through their exams. But it is Jack and Terry, for the most part, who send me the music."

"It is very kind of them, I'm sure," says Geoffrey, unreasonably jealous, as, could he only have seen the said Terry's shock head of red hair, his fears of rivalry would forever have been laid at rest. "But they are favored friends. You can take presents from them, and yet the other day when I asked you if you would like a little gold chain to hang to your mother's watch, you answered me 'that you did not require it' in such a tone as actually froze me and made me feel I had said something unpardonably impertinent."

"Oh, no," says Mona, shocked at this interpretation of her manner. "I did not mean all that; only I really did not require it; at least" – truthfully – "not *much*. And, besides, a song is not like a gold chain; and you are quite different from them; and besides, again," – growing slightly confused, yet with a last remnant of courage, – "there is no reason why you should give me anything. Shall I" – hurriedly – "sing something else for you?"

And then she sings again, some old-world song of love and chivalry that awakes within one a quick longing for a worthier life. Her sweet voice rings through the room, now glad with triumph, now sad with a "lovely melancholy," as the words and music sway her. Her voice is clear and pure and full of pathos! She seems to follow no rule; an "f" here or a "p" there, on the page before her, she heeds not, but sings only as her heart dictates.

When she has finished, Geoffrey says "thank you" in a low tone. He is thinking of the last time when some one else sang to him, and of how different the whole scene was from this. It was at the Towers, and the hour with its dying daylight, rises before him. The subdued light of the summer eve, the open window, the perfume of the drowsy flowers, the girl at the piano with her small drooping head and her perfectly trained and very pretty voice, the room, the soft silence, his mother leaning back in her crimson velvet chair, beating time to the music with her long jewelled, fingers, – all is remembered.

It was in the boudoir they were sitting, and Violet was dressed in some soft gray dress that shone and turned into palest pearl as she moved. It was his mother's boudoir, the room she most affects, with its crimson and gray coloring and its artistic arrangements, that blend so harmoniously, and are so tremendously becoming to the complexion when the blinds are lowered. How pretty Mona would look in a gray and crimson room? how —

"What are you thinking of?" asks Mona, softly, breaking in upon his soliloquy.

"Of the last time I heard any one sing," returns he, slowly. "I was comparing that singer very unfavorably with you. Your voice is so unlike what one usually hears in drawing-rooms."

He means highest praise. She accepts his words as a kind rebuke.

"Is that a compliment?" she says, wistfully. "Is it well to be unlike all the world? Yet what you say is true, no doubt. I suppose I am different from – from all the other people you know."

This is half a question; and Geoffrey, answering it from his heart, sinks even deeper into the mire.

"You are indeed," he says, in a tone so grateful that it ought to have betrayed to her his meaning. But grief and disappointment have seized upon her.

"Yes, of course," she says, dejectedly. A cloud seems to have fallen upon her happy hour. "When did you hear that – that last singer?" she asks, in a subdued voice.

"At home," returns he. He is gazing out of the window, with his hands clasped behind his back, and does not pay so much attention to her words as is his wont.

"Is your home very beautiful?" asks she, timidly, looking at him the more earnestly in that he seems rapt in contemplation of the valley that spreads itself before him.

"Yes, very beautiful," he answers, thinking of the stately oaks and aged elms and branching beeches that go so far to make up the glory of the ivied Towers.

"How paltry this country must appear in comparison with your own!" goes on the girl, longing for a contradiction, and staring at her little brown hands, the fingers of which are twining and intertwining nervously with one another, "How glad you will be to get back to your own home!"

"Yes, very glad," returns he, hardly knowing what he says. He has gone back again to his first thoughts, – his mother's boudoir, with its old china, and its choice water-colors that line the walls, and its delicate Italian statuettes. In his own home – which is situated about fourteen miles from the Towers, and which is rather out of repair through years of disuse – there are many rooms. He is busy now trying to remember them, and to decide which of them would look best decked out in crimson and gray, or blue and silver: he hardly knows which would suit her best. Perhaps, after all —

"How strange it is!" says Mona's voice, that has now a faint shade of sadness in it. "How people come and go in one's lives, like the waves of the restless sea, now breaking at one's feet, now receding, now —"

"Only to return," interrupts he, quickly. "And – to break at your feet? to break one's heart, do you mean? I do not like your simile."

"You jest," says Mona, full of calm reproach. "I mean how strangely people fall into one's lives and then out again!" She hesitates. Perhaps something in his face warns her, perhaps it is the weariness of her own voice that frightens her, but at this moment her whole expression changes, and a laugh, forced but apparently full of gayety, comes from her lips. It is very well done indeed, yet to any one but a jealous lover her eyes would betray her. The usual softness is gone from them, and only a well-suppressed grief and a pride that cannot be suppressed take its place.

"Why should they fall out again?" says Rodney, a little angrily, hearing only her careless laugh, and – man-like – ignoring stupidly the pain in her lovely eyes. "Unless people choose to forget."

"One may choose to forget, but one may not be able to accomplish it. To forget or to remember is not in one's own power."

"That is what fickle people say. But what one feels one remembers."

"That is true, for a time, with some. *Forever* with others."

"Are you one of the others?"

She makes him no answer.

"Are *you*?" she says, at length, after a long silence.

"I think so, Mona. There is one thing I shall never get."

"Many things, I dare say," she says, nervously, turning from him.

"Why do you speak of people dropping out of your life?"

"Because, of course, you will, you must. Your world is not mine."

"You could make it yours."

"I do not understand," she says, very proudly, throwing up her head with a charming gesture. "And, talking of forgetfulness, do you know what hour it is?"

"You evidently want to get rid of me," says Rodney, discouraged, taking up his hat. He takes up her hand, too, and holds it warmly, and looks long and earnestly into her face.

"By the by," he says, once more restored to something like hope, as he notes her drooping lids and changing color and how she hides from his searching gaze her dark, blue, Irish eyes, that, as somebody has so cleverly expressed it, seem "rubbed into her head with a dirty finger," so marked lie the shadows beneath them, that enhance and heighten their beauty, – "by the by, you told me you had a miniature of your mother in your desk, and you promised to show it to me." He merely says this with a view to gaining more time, and not from any overwhelming desire to see the late Mrs. Scully.

"It is here," says Mona, rather pleased at his remembering this promise of hers, and, going to a desk, proceeds to open a secret drawer, in which lies the picture in question.

It is a very handsome picture, and Geoffrey duly admires it; then it is returned to its place, and Mona, opening the drawer next to it, shows him some exquisite ferns dried and gummed on paper.

"What a clever child you are!" says Geoffrey, with genuine admiration. "And what is here?" laying his hand on the third drawer.

"Oh, do not open that – do not!" says Mona, hastily, in an agony of fear, to judge by her eyes, laying a deterring hand upon his arm.

"And why not this or any other drawer?" says Rodney, growing pale. Again jealousy, which is a demon, rises in his breast, and thrusts out all gentler feelings. Her allusion to Mr. Moore, most innocently spoken, and, later on, her reference to the students, have served to heighten within him angry suspicion.

"Do not!" says Mona, again, as though fresh words are impossible to her, drawing her breath quickly. Her evident agitation incenses him to the last degree. Opening the drawer impulsively, he gazes at its contents.

Only a little withered bunch of heather, tied by a blade of grass! Nothing more!

Rodney's heart throbs with passionate relief, yet shame covers him; for he himself, one day, had given her that heather, tied, as he remembers, with that selfsame grass; and she, poor child, had kept it ever since. She had treasured it, and laid it aside, apart from all other objects, among her most sacred possessions, as a thing beloved and full of tender memories; and his had been the hand to ruthlessly lay bare this hidden secret of her soul.

He is overcome with contrition, and would perhaps have said something betraying his scorn of himself, but she prevents him.

"Yes," she says, with cheeks colored to a rich carmine, and flashing eyes, and lips that quiver in spite of all her efforts at control, "that is the bit of heather you gave me, and that is the grass that tied it. I kept it because it reminded me of a day when I was happy. Now," bitterly, "I no longer care for it: for the future it can only bring back to me an hour when I was grieved and wounded."

Taking up the hapless heather, she throws it on the ground, and, in a fit of childish spleen, lays her foot upon it and tramples it out of all recognition. Yet, even as she does so, the tears gather in her eyes, and, resting there unshed, transfigure her into a lovely picture that might well be termed "Beauty in Distress." For this faded flower she grieves, as though it were, indeed, a living thing that she has lost.

"Go!" she says, in a choked voice, and with a little passionate sob, pointing to the door. "You have done mischief enough." Her gesture is at once imperious and dignified. Then in a softer voice, that tells of sorrow, and with a deep sigh, "At least," she says, "I believed in your honor!"

The reproach is terrible, and cuts him to the heart. He picks up the poor little bruised flower, and holds it tenderly in his hand.

"How can I go," he says, without daring to look at her, "until, at least, I *ask* for forgiveness?" He feels more nervous, more crushed in the presence of this little wounded Irish girl with her pride and her grief, than he has ever felt in the presence of an offended fashionable beauty full of airs and caprices. "Mona, love makes one cruel: I ask you to remember that, because it is my only excuse," he says, warmly. "Don't condemn me altogether; but forgive me once more."

"I am always forgiving you, it seems to me," says Mona, coldly, turning from him with a frown. "And as for that heather," facing him again, with eyes shamed but wrathful, "I just kept it because – because – oh, because I didn't like to throw it away! That was all!"

Her meaning, in spite of her, is clear; but Geoffrey doesn't dare so much as to think about it. Yet in his heart he knows that he is glad because of her words.

"You mustn't think I supposed you kept it for any other purpose," he says, quite solemnly, and in such a depressed tone that Mona almost feels sorry for him.

He has so far recovered his courage that he has taken her hand, and is now holding it in a close grasp; and Mona, though a little frown still lingers on her low, broad forehead, lets her hand so lie without a censure.

"Mona, *do* be friends with me," he says at last, desperately, driven to simplicity of language through his very misery. There is a humility in this speech that pleases her.

"It is really hardly worth talking about," she says, grandly. "I was foolish to lay so great a stress on such a trifling matter. It doesn't signify, not in the least. But – but," the blood mounting to her brow, "if ever you speak of it again, – if ever you even *mention* the word 'heather,' – I shall *hate* you!"

"That word shall never pass my lips again in your company, – never, I swear!" says he, "until you give me leave. My darling," in a low tone, "if you could only know how vexed I am about the whole affair, and my unpardonable conduct! Yet, Mona, I will not hide from you that this little bit of senseless heather has made me happier than I have ever been before."

Stooping, he presses his lips to her hand for the first time. The caress is long and fervent.

"Say I am quite forgiven," he pleads, earnestly, his eyes on hers.

"Yes. I forgive you," she says, almost in a whisper, with a seriousness that amounts to solemnity.

Still holding her hand, as though loath to quit it, he moves towards the door; but before reaching it she slips away from him, and says "Good-by" rather coldly.

"When am I to see you again?" says Rodney, anxiously.

"Oh not for ever so long," returns she, with much and heartless unconcern. (His spirits sink to zero.) "Certainly not until Friday," she goes on, carelessly. (As this is Wednesday, his spirits once more rise into the seventh heaven.) "Or Saturday, or Sunday, or perhaps some day next week," she says, unkindly.

"If on Friday night there is a good moon," says Rodney, boldly, "will you take me, as you promised, to see the Bay?"

"Yes, if it is fine," says Mona, after a faint hesitation.

Then she accompanies him to the door, but gravely, and not with her accustomed gayety. Standing on the door-step he looks at her, and, as though impelled to ask the question because of her extreme stillness, he says, "Of what are you thinking?"

"I am thinking that the man we saw before going into Kitty's cabin is the murderer!" she says, with a strong shudder.

"I thought so all along," says Geoffrey, gravely.

CHAPTER VI

HOW THE MYSTIC MOONBEAMS THROW THEIR RAYS ON MONA; AND HOW GEOFFREY, JEALOUS OF THEIR ADMIRATION, DESIRES TO CLAIM HER AS HIS OWN

Friday is fine, and towards nightfall grows still milder, until it seems that even in the dawn of October a summer's night may be born.

The stars are coming out one by one, – slowly, tranquilly, as though haste has got no part with them. The heavens are clothed in azure. A single star, that sits apart from all the rest, is twinkling and gleaming in its blue nest, now throwing out a pale emerald ray, now a blood-red fire, and anon a touch of opal, faint and shadowy, yet more lovely in its vagueness than all the rest, until verily it resembles "a diamond in the sky."

Geoffrey coming to the farm somewhat early in the evening, Mona takes him round to the yard, where two dogs, hitherto unseen by Geoffrey, lie chained. They are two splendid bloodhounds, that, as she approaches, rise to their feet, and, lifting their massive heads, throw out into the night-air a deep hollow bay that bespeaks welcome.

"What lovely creatures!" says Geoffrey, who has a passion for animals: they seem to acknowledge him as a friend. As Mona looses them from their den, they go to him, and, sniffing round him, at last open their great jaws into a satisfied yawn, and, raising themselves, rest their paws upon his breast and rub their faces contentedly against his.

"Now you are their friend forever," says Mona, in a pleased tone. "Once they do that, they mean to tell you they have adopted you. And they like very few people: so it is a compliment."

"I feel it keenly," says Rodney, caressing the handsome creatures as they crouch at his feet. "Where did you get them?"

"From Mr. Moore." A mischievous light comes into her face as she says this, and she laughs aloud. "But, I assure you, not as a love-token. He gave them to me when they were quite babies, and I reared them myself. Are they not lovely? I call them? 'Spice' and 'Allspice,' because one has a quicker temper than the other."

"The names are original, at all events," says Geoffrey, – "which is a great charm. One gets so tired of 'Rags and Tatters,' 'Beer and Skittles,' 'Cakes and Ale,' and so forth, where pairs are in question, whether they be dogs or ponies."

"Shall we set out now?" says Mona; and she calls "Mickey, Mickey," at the top of her strong young lungs.

The man who manages the farm generally – and is a plague and a blessing at the same time to his master – appears round a corner, and declares, respectfully, that he will be ready in a "jiffy" to accompany Miss Mona, if she will just give him time to "clane himself up a bit."

And in truth the "claning" occupies a very short period, – or else Mona and Geoffrey heed not the parting moments. For sometimes

"Time, as he passes us, has a dove's wing,
Unsoiled and swift, and of a silken sound."

"I'm ready now, miss, if you are," says Mickey from the background, with the utmost *bonhomie*, and in a tone that implies he is quite willing not to be ready, if it so pleases her, for another five minutes or so, or even, if necessary, to efface himself altogether. He is a stalwart young

Hibernian, with rough hair and an honest face, and gray eyes, merry and cunning, and so many freckles that he looks like a turkey-egg.

"Oh, yes, I am quite ready," says Mona, starting somewhat guiltily. And then they pass out through the big yard-gate, with the two dogs at their heels, and their attendant squire, who brings up the rear with a soft whistle that rings through the cool night-air and tells the listening stars that the "girl he loves is his dear," and his "own, his artless Nora Creana."

Geoffrey and Mona go up the road with the serenader behind them, and, turning aside, she guiding, mount a stile, and, striking across a field, make straight for the high hill that conceals the ocean from the farm. Over many fields they travel, until at length they reach the mountain's summit and gaze down upon the beauteous scene below.

The very air is still. There is no sound, no motion, save the coming and going of their own breath as it rises quickly from their hearts, filled full of passionate admiration for the loveliness before them.

From the high hill on which they stand, steep rocks descend until they touch the water's edge, which lies sleeping beneath them, lulled into slumber by the tranquil moon as she comes forth "from the slow opening curtains of the clouds."

Far down below lies the bay, calm and placid. Not a ripple, not a sigh comes to disturb its serenity or mar the perfect beauty of the silver pathway thrown so lightly upon it by the queen of heaven. It falls there so clear, so unbroken, that almost one might deem it possible to step upon it, and so walk onwards to the sky that melts into it on the far horizon.

The whole firmament is of a soft azure, flecked here and there with snowy clouds tipped with palest gray. A little cloud – the tenderest veil of mist – hangs between earth and sky.

"The moon is up; it is the dawn of night;
Stands by her side one bold, bright, steady star,
Star of her heart.
Mother of stars! the heavens look up to thee."

Mona is looking up to it now, with a rapt, pensive gaze, her great blue eyes gleaming beneath its light. She is sitting upon the side of the hill, with her hands clasped about her knees, a thoughtful expression on her lovely face. At each side of her, sitting bolt upright on their huge haunches, are the dogs, as though bent on guarding her against all evil.

Geoffrey, although in reality deeply impressed by the grandeur of all the surroundings, yet cannot keep his eyes from Mona's face, her pretty attitude, her two mighty defenders. She reminds him in some wise of Una and the lion, though the idea is rather far-fetched; and he hardly dares speak to her, lest he shall break the spell that seems to lie upon her.

She herself destroys it presently.

"Do you like it?" she asks, gently, bringing her gaze back from the glowing heavens, to the earth, which is even more beautiful.

"The praise I heard of it, though great, was too faint," he answers her, with such extreme sincerity in his tone as touches and gladdens the heart of the little patriot at his feet. She smiles contentedly, and turns her eyes once more with lazy delight upon the sea, where each little point and rock is warmed with heavenly light. She nods softly to herself, but says nothing.

To her there is nothing strange or new, either in the hour or the place. Often does she come here in the moonlight with her faithful attendant and her two dogs, to sit and dream away a long sweet hour brimful of purest joy, whilst drinking in the plaintive charm that Nature as a rule flings over her choicest paintings.

To him, however, all is different; and the hour is fraught with a tremulous joy, and with a vague sweet longing that means love as yet untold.

"This spot always brings to my mind the thoughts of other people," says Mona, softly. "I am very fond of poetry: are you?"

"Very," returns he, surprised. He has not thought of her as one versed in lore of any kind. "What poets do you prefer?"

"I have read so few," she says, wistfully, and with hesitation. Then, shyly, "I have so few to read. I have a Longfellow, and a Shakspeare, and a Byron: that is all."

"Byron?"

"Yes. And after Shakspeare, I like him best, and then Longfellow. Why do you speak in that tone? Don't you like him?"

"I think I like no poet half so well. You mistake me," replies he, ashamed of his own surprise at her preference for his lordship beneath the calm purity of her eyes. "But – only – it seemed to me Longfellow would be more suited to you."

"Well, so I do love him. And just then it was of him I was thinking: when I looked up to the sky his words came back to me. You remember what he says about the moon rising 'over the pallid sea and the silvery mist of the meadows,' and how, —

'Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven,
Blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels,

That is so sweet, I think."

"I remember it; and I remember, too, who watched all that: do you?" he asks, his eyes fixed upon hers.

"Yes; Gabriel – poor Gabriel and Evangeline," returns she, too wrapped up in recollections of that sad and touching tale to take to heart his meaning: —

'Meanwhile, apart, in the twilight gloom of a window's embrasure
Sat the lovers, and whispered together.'

That is the part you mean, is it not? I know all that poem very nearly by heart."

He is a little disappointed by the calmness of her answer.

"Yes; it was of them I thought," he says, turning his head away, – "of the – lovers. I wonder if *their* evening was as lovely as *ours*?"

Mona makes no reply.

"Have you ever read Shelley?" asks he, presently, puzzled by the extreme serenity of her manner.

She shakes her head.

"Some of his ideas are lovely. You would like his poetry, I think."

"What does he say about the moon?" asks Mona, still with her knees in her embrace, and without lifting her eyes from the quiet waters down below.

"About the moon? Oh, many things. I was not thinking of the moon," with faint impatience; "yet, as you ask me, I can remember one thing he says about it."

"Then tell it to me," says Mona.

So at her bidding he repeats the lines slowly, and in his best manner, which is very good: —

"The cold chaste moon, the queen of heaven's bright isles,
Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles!
That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame,
Which ever is transformed, yet still the same,
And warms, but not illumines."

He finishes; but, to his amazement, and a good deal to his chagrin, on looking at Mona he finds she is wreathed in smiles, – nay, is in fact convulsed with silent laughter.

"What is amusing you?" asks he, a trifle stiffly. – To give way to recitation, and then find your listener in agonies of suppressed mirth, isn't exactly a situation one would hanker after.

"It was the last line," says Mona, in explanation, clearly ashamed of herself, yet unable wholly to subdue her merriment. "It reminded me so much of that speech about tea, that they always use at temperance meetings; they call it the beverage 'that cheers but not inebriates.' You said 'that warms but not illumines,' and it sounded exactly like it. Don't you see!"

He doesn't see.

"You aren't angry, are you?" says Mona, now really contrite. "I couldn't help it, and it *was* like it, you know."

"Angry? no!" he says, recovering himself, as he notices the penitence on the face upraised to his.

"And do say it is like it," says Mona, entreatingly.

"It is, the image of it," returns he, prepared to swear to anything she may propose. And then he laughs too, which pleases her, as it proves he no longer bears in mind her evil deed; after which, feeling she still owes him something, she suddenly intimates to him that he may sit down on the grass close beside her. He seems to find no difficulty in swiftly following up this hint, and is soon seated as near to her as circumstances will allow.

But on this picture, the beauty of which is undeniable, Mickey (the barbarian) looks with disfavor.

"If he's goin' to squat there for the night, – an' I see ivery prospect of it," says Mickey to himself, – "what on airth's goin' to become of me?"

Now, Mickey's idea of "raal grand" scenery is the kitchen fire. Bays and rocks and moonlight, and such like comfortless stuff, would be designated by him as "all my eye an' Betty Martin." He would consider the bluest water that ever rolled a poor thing if compared to the water that boiled in the big kettle, and sadly inferior to such cold water as might contain a "dhrop of the crather." So no wonder he views with dismay Mr. Rodney's evident intention of spending another half hour or so on the top of Carrick dhuve.

Patience has its limits. Mickey's limit comes quickly. When five more minutes have passed, and the two in his charge still make no sign, he coughs respectfully but very loudly behind his hand. He waits in anxious hope for the result of this telling man[oe]uvre, but not the faintest notice is taken of it. Both Mona and Geoffrey are deaf to the pathetic appeal sent straight from his bronchial tubes.

Mickey, as he grows desperate, grows bolder. He rises to speech.

"Av ye plaze, miss, will ye soon be comin'?"

"Very soon, Mickey," says Mona, without turning her head. But, though her words are satisfactory, her tone is not. There is a lazy ring in it that speaks of anything but immediate action. Mickey disbelieves in it.

"I didn't make up the mare, miss, before comin' out wid ye," he says, mildly, telling this lie without a blush.

"But it is early yet, Mickey, isn't it?" says Mona.

"Awfully early," puts in Geoffrey.

"It is, miss; I know it, sir; but if the old man comes out an' finds the mare widout her bed, there'll be all the world to pay, an' he'll be screechin' mad."

"He won't go into the stable to-night," says Mona, comfortably.

"He might, miss. It's the very time you'd wish him aisy in his mind that he gets raal troublesome. An' I feel just as if he was in the stable this blessid minit lookin' at the poor baste, an' swearin' he'll have the life uv me."

"And I feel just as if he had gone quietly to bed," says

Mona, pleasantly, turning away.

But Mickey is not to be outdone. "An' there's the pigs, miss," he begins again, presently.

"What's the matter with them?" says Mona, with some pardonable impatience.

"I didn't give them their supper yet, miss; an' it's very bad for the young ones to be left starvin'. It's on me mind, miss, so that I can't even enjoy me pipe, and it's fresh baccy I have an' all, an' it might as well be dust for what comfort I get from it. Them pigs is callin' for me now like Christians: I can a'most hear them."

"I shouldn't think deafness is in your family," says Geoffrey, genially.

"No, sir; it isn't, sir. We're none of us hard of hearin' glory be to – . Miss Mona," coaxingly, "sure, it's only a step to the house: wouldn't Mither Rodney see ye home now, just for wanst?"

"Why, yes, of course he can," says Mona, without the smallest hesitation. She says it quite naturally, and as though it was the most usual thing in the world for a young man to see a young woman home, through dewy fields and beneath "mellow moons," at half-past ten at night. It is now fully nine, and she cannot yet bear to turn her back upon the enchanting scene before her. Surely in another hour or so it will be time enough to think of home and all other such prosaic facts.

"Thin I may go, miss?" says Mickey.

"Oh, yes, you may go," says Mona. Geoffrey says nothing. He is looking at her with curiosity, in which deep love is mingled. She is so utterly unlike all other women he has ever met, with their petty affectations and mock modesties, their would-be hesitations and their final yieldings. She has no idea she is doing anything that all the world of women might not do, and can see no reason why she should distrust her friend just because he is a man.

Even as Geoffrey is looking at her, full of tender thought, one of the dogs, as though divining the fact that she is being left somewhat alone, lays its big head upon her shoulder, and looks at her with large loving eyes. Turning to him in response, she rubs her soft cheek slowly up and down against his. Geoffrey with all his heart envies the dog. How she seems to love it! how it seems to love her!

"Mickey, if you are going, I think you may as well take the dogs with you," says Mona: "they, too, will want their suppers. Go, Spice, when I desire you. Good-night, Allspice; dear darling, – see how he clings to me."

Finally the dogs are called off, and reluctantly accompany the jubilant Mickey down the hill.

"Perhaps you are tired of staying here," says Mona, with compunction, turning to Geoffrey, "and would like to go home? I suppose every one cannot love this spot as I do. Yes," rising, "I am selfish. Do come home."

"Tired!" says Geoffrey, hastily. "No, indeed. What could tire of anything so divine? If it is your wish, it is mine also, that we should stay here for a little while longer." Then, struck by the intense relief in her face, he goes on: "How you do enjoy the beauties of Nature! Do you know I have been studying you since you came here, and I could see how your whole soul was wrapped in the glory of the surrounding prospect? You had no thoughts left for other objects, – not even one for me. For the first time," softly, "I learned to be jealous of inanimate things."

"Yet I was not so wholly engrossed as you imagine," she says, seriously. "I thought of you many times. For one thing, I felt glad that you could see this place with my eyes. But I have been silent, I know; and – and –"

"How Rome and Spain would enchant you," he says watching her face intently, "and Switzerland, with its lakes and mountains!"

"Yes. But I shall never see them."

"Why not? You will go there, perhaps when you are married."

"No," with a little flickering smile, that has pain and sorrow in it; "for the simple reason that I shall never marry."

"But why?" persists he.

"Because" – the smile has died away now, and she is looking down upon him, as he lies stretched at her feet in the uncertain moonlight, with an expression sad but earnest, – "because, though I am only a farmer's niece, I cannot bear farmers, and, of course, other people would not care for me."

"That is absurd," says Rodney; "and your own words refute you. That man called Moore cared for you, and very great impertinence it was on his part."

"Why, you never even saw him," says Mona, opening her eyes.

"No; but I can fancy him, with his horrid bald head. Now, you know," holding up his hand to stop her as she is about to speak, "you know you said he hadn't a hair left on it."

"Well, he was different," says Mona, giving in ignominiously. "I couldn't care for him either; but what I said is true all the same. Other people would not like me."

"Wouldn't they?" says Rodney, leaning on his elbow as the argument waxes warmer; "then all I can say is, I never met any 'other people.'"

"You have met only them, I suppose, as you belong to them."

"Do you mean to tell me that *I* don't care for you?" says Rodney, quickly.

Mona evades a reply.

"How cold it is!" she says, rising, with a little shiver. "Let us go home."

If she had been nurtured all her life in the fashionable world, she could scarcely have made a more correct speech. Geoffrey is puzzled, nay more, discomfited. Just in this wise would a woman in his own set answer him, did she mean to repel his advances for the moment. He forgets that no tinge of worldliness lurks in Mona's nature, and feels a certain amount of chagrin that she should so reply to him.

"If you wish," he says, in a courteous tone, but one full of coldness; and so they commence their homeward journey.

"I am glad you have been pleased to-night," says Mona, shyly, abashed by his studied silence. "But," nervously, "Killarney is even more beautiful. You must go there."

"Yes; I mean to, – before I return to England."

She starts perceptibly, which is balm to his heart.

"To England!" she repeats, with a most mournful attempt at unconcern, "Will – will that be soon?"

"Not very soon. But some time, of course, I must go."

"I suppose so," she says, in a voice from which all joy has flown. "And it is only natural; you will be happier there." She is looking straight before her. There is no quiver in her tone; her lips do not tremble; yet he can see how pale she has grown beneath the vivid moonlight.

"Is that what you think?" he says, earnestly. "Then for once you are wrong. I have never been – I shall hardly be again – happier than I have been in Ireland."

There is a pause. Mona says nothing, but taking out the flower that has lain upon her bosom all night, pulls it to pieces petal by petal. And this is unlike Mona, because flowers are dear to her as sunshine is to them.

At this moment they come to a high bank, and Geoffrey, having helped Mona to mount it, jumps down at the other side, and holds out his arms to assist her to descend. As she reaches the ground, and while his arms are still round her, she says, with a sudden effort, and without lifting her eyes, "There is very good snipe-shooting here at Christmas."

The little pathetic insinuation is as perfect as it is touching.

"Is there? Then I shall certainly return for it," says Geoffrey, who is too much of a gentleman to pretend to understand all her words seem to imply. "It is really no journey from this to England."

"I should think it a long journey," says Mona, shaking her head.

"Oh, no, you won't," says Rodney, absently. In truth, his mind is wandering to that last little speech of hers, and is trying to unravel it.

Mona looks at him. How oddly he has expressed himself! "You won't," he said, instead of "you wouldn't." Does he then deem it possible she will ever be able to cross to that land that calls him son? She sighs, and, looking down at her little lean sinewy hands, clasps and unclasps them nervously.

"Why need you go until after Christmas?" she says, in a tone so low that he can barely hear her.

"Mona! Do you want me to stay?" asks he, suddenly, taking her hands in his. "Tell me the truth."

"I do," returns she, tremulously.

"But why? – why? Is it because you love me? Oh, Mona! If it is that! At times I have thought so, and yet again I have feared you do not love me as – as I love you."

"You love me?" repeats she, faintly.

"With all my heart," says Rodney, fervently. And, indeed, if this be so, she may well count herself in luck, because it is a very good and true heart of which he speaks.

"Don't say anything more," says the girl, almost passionately, drawing back from him as though afraid of herself. "Do not. The more you say now, the worse it will be for me by and by, when I have to think. And – and – it is all quite impossible."

"But why, darling? Could you not be happy as my wife?"

"Your wife?" repeats she, in soft, lingering tones, and a little tender seraphic smile creeps into her eyes and lies lightly on her lips. "But I am not fit to be that, and –"

"Look here," says Geoffrey, with decision, "I will have no 'buts,' and I prefer taking my answer from your eyes than from your lips. They are kinder. You are going to marry me, you know, and that is all about it. *I shall marry you*, whether you like it or not, so you may as well give in with a good grace. And I'll take you to see Rome and all the places we have been talking about, and we shall have a real good old time. Why don't you look up and speak to me, Mona?"

"Because I have nothing to say," murmurs the girl, in a frozen tone, – "nothing." Then passionately, "I will not be selfish. I will not do this thing."

"Do you mean you will not marry me?" asks he, letting her go, and moving back a step or two, a frown upon his forehead. "I confess I do not understand you."

"Try, *try* to understand me," entreats she, desperately, following him and laying her hand upon his arm. "It is only this. It would not make you happy, – not *afterwards*, when you could see the difference between me and the other women you have known. You are a gentleman; I am only a farmer's niece." She says this bravely, though it is agony to her proud nature to have to confess it.

"If that is all," says Geoffrey, with a light laugh, laying his hand over the small brown one that still rests upon his arm, "I think it need hardly separate us. You are, indeed, different from all the other women I have met in my life, – which makes me sorry for all the other women. You are dearer and sweeter in my eyes than any one I have ever known! Is not this enough? Mona, are you sure no other reason prevents your accepting me? Why do you hesitate?" He has grown a little pale in his turn, and is regarding her with intense and jealous earnestness. Why does she not answer him? Why does she keep her eyes – those honest telltales – so obstinately fixed upon the ground? Why does she show no smallest sign of yielding?

"Give me my answer," he says, sternly.

"I have given it," returns she, in a low tone, – so low that he has to bend to hear it. "Do not be angry with me, do not – I –"

"Who excuses himself, accuses himself," quotes Geoffrey. "I want no reasons for your rejection. It is enough that I know you do not care for me."

"Oh, no! it is not that! you must know it is not that," says Mona, in deep grief. "It is that I *cannot* marry you!"

"Will not, you mean!"

"Well, then, I *will* not," returns she, with a last effort at determination, and the most miserable face in the world.

"Oh, if you *will* not," says Mr. Rodney, wrathfully.

"I – will – not," says Mona, brokenly.

"Then I don't believe you!" breaks out Geoffrey, angrily. "I am positive you want to marry me; and just because of some wretched fad you have got into your head you are determined to make us both wretched."

"I have nothing in my head," says Mona, tearfully.

"I don't think you can have much, certainly," says Mr. Rodney, with the grossest rudeness, "when you can let a few ridiculous scruples interfere with both our happiness." Then, resentfully, "Do you hate me?"

No answer.

"Say so, if you do: it will be honester. If you don't," threateningly, "I shall of course think the contrary."

Still no answer.

She has turned away from him, grieved and frightened by his vehemence, and, having plucked a leaf from the hedge near her, is trifling absently with it as it lies upon her little trembling palm.

It is a drooping blackberry-leaf from a bush near where she is standing, that has turned from green into a warm and vivid crimson. She examines it minutely, as though lost in wonder at its excessive beauty, for beautiful exceedingly it is, clothed in the rich cloak that Autumn's generosity has flung upon it; yet I think, she for once is blind to its charms.

"I think you had better come home," says Geoffrey, deeply angered with her. "You must not stay here catching cold."

A little soft woollen shawl of plain white has slipped from her throat and fallen to the ground, unheeded by her in her great distress. Lifting it almost unwillingly, he comes close to her, and places it round her once again. In so doing he discovers that tears are running down her cheeks.

"Why, Mona, what is this?" exclaims he, his manner changing on the instant from indignation and coldness to warmth and tenderness. "You are crying? My darling girl! There, lay your head on my shoulder, and let us forget we have ever quarrelled. It is our first dispute; let it be our last. And, after all," comfortably, "it is much better to have our quarrels before marriage than after."

This last insinuation, he flatters himself, is rather cleverly introduced.

"Oh, if I could be quite, *quite* sure you would never regret it!" says Mona, wistfully.

"I shall never regret anything, as long as I have you!" says Rodney. "Be assured of that."

"I am so glad you are poor," says Mona. "If you were rich or even well off, I should never consent, – never!"

"No, of course not," says Mr. Rodney, unblushingly! "as a rule, girls nowadays can't endure men with money."

This is "sarkassum;" but Mona comprehends it not.

Presently, seeing she is again smiling and looking inexpressibly happy, for laughter comes readily to her lips, and tears, as a rule, make no long stay with her, – ashamed, perhaps, to disfigure the fair "windows of her soul," that are so "darkly, deeply, beautifully blue," – "So you will come to England with me, after all?" he says, quite gayly.

"I would go to the world's end with you," returns she, gently. "Ah! I think you knew that all along."

"Well, I didn't," says Rodney. "There were moments, indeed, when I believed in you; but five minutes ago, when you flung me over so decidedly, and refused to have anything to do with me, I lost faith in you, and began to think you a thorough-going coquette like all the rest. How I wronged you, my *dear* love! I should have known that under no circumstances could you be untruthful."

At his words, a glad light springs to life within her wonderful eyes. She is so pleased and proud that he should so speak of her.

"Do you know, Mona," says the young man, sorrowfully, "you are too good for me, – a fellow who has gone racketing all over the world for years. I'm not half worthy of you."

"Aren't you?" says Mona, in her tender fashion, that implies so kind a doubt. Raising one hand (the other is imprisoned), she draws his face down to her own. "I wouldn't have you altered in any way," she says; "not in the smallest matter. As you are, you are so dear to me you could not be dearer; and I love you now, and I shall always love you, with all my heart and soul."

"My sweet angel!" says her lover, pressing her to his heart. And when he says this he is not so far from the truth, for her tender simplicity and perfect faith and trust bring her very near to heaven!

CHAPTER VII

HOW GEOFFREY AND MONA FALL INTO STRANGE COMPANY AND HOW THEY PROFIT BY IT; AND HOW MONA, OUTSTRIPPING WICKED VENGEANCE, SAVES A LIFE

"Is it very late?" says Mona, awaking from her happy dreams with a start.

"Not very," says Geoffrey. "It seems only just now that Mickey and the dogs left us." Together they examine his watch, by the light of the moon, and see that it is quite ten o'clock.

"Oh, it is dreadfully late!" says Mona, with much compunction. "Come, let us hurry."

"Well, just one moment," says Geoffrey, detaining her, "let us finish what we were saying. Would you rather go to the East or to Rome?"

"To Rome," says Mona. "But do you mean it? Can you afford it? Italy seems so far away." Then, after a thoughtful silence, "Mr. Rodney – "

"Who on earth are you speaking to?" says Geoffrey.

"To you!" with surprise.

"I am not Mr. Rodney: Jack is that. Can't you call me anything else?"

"What else?" says Mona, shyly.

"Call me Geoffrey."

"I always think of you as Geoffrey," whispers she, with a swift, sweet, upward glance; "but to say it is so different. Well," bravely, "I'll try. Dear, dear, *dear* Geoffrey, I want to tell you I would be as happy with you in Wicklow as in Rome."

"I know that," says Geoffrey, "and the knowledge makes me more happy than I can say. But to Rome you shall go, whatever it may cost. And then we shall return to England to our own home. And then – little rebel that you are – you must begin to look upon yourself as an English subject, and accept the queen as your gracious sovereign."

"I need no queen when I have got a king," says the girl, with ready wit and great tenderness.

Geoffrey raises her hand to his lips. "*Your* king is also your slave," he says, with a fond smile.

Then they move on once more, and go down the road that leads towards the farm.

Again she has grown silent, as though oppressed with thought; and he too is mute, but all his mind is crowded with glad anticipations of what the near future is to give him. He has no regrets, no fears. At length, struck by her persistent taciturnity, he says, "What is it, Mona?"

"If ever you should be sorry afterwards," she says, miserably, still tormenting herself with unseen evils, – "if ever I should see discontent in your eyes, how would it be with me then?"

"Don't talk like a penny illustrated," says Mr. Rodney in a very superior tone. "If ever you do see all you seem to anticipate, just tell yourself I am a cur, and despise me accordingly. But I think you are paying both yourself and me very bad compliments when you talk like that. Do try to understand that you are very beautiful, and far superior to the general run of women, and that I am only pretty well so far as men go."

At this they both laugh heartily, and Mona returns no more to the lachrymose mood that has possessed her for the last five minutes.

The moon has gone behind a cloud, the road is almost wrapped in complete gloom, when a voice, coming from apparently nowhere, startles them, and brings them back from visions of impossible bliss to the present very possible world.

"Hist, Miss Mona! hist!" says this voice close at Mona's ear. She starts violently.

"Oh! Paddy," she says, as a small figure, unkempt, and only half clad, creeps through the hedge and stops short in her path.

"Don't go on, miss," says the boy, with much excitement. "Don't ye. I see ye coming', an', no matter what they do to me, I says to myself, I'll warn her surely. They're waitin' for the agint below, an' maybe they might mistake ye for some one else in the dark, an' do ye some harm."

"Who are they waiting for?" says Mona, anxiously.

"For the agint, miss. Oh, if ye tell on me now they'll kill me. Maxil, ye know; me lord's agint."

"Waiting – for what? Is it to shoot him?" asks the girl, breathlessly.

"Yes, miss. Oh, Miss Mona, if ye bethray me now 'twill be all up wid me. Fegs an' intirely, miss, they'll murdher me out uv hand."

"I won't betray you," she says. "You may trust me. Where are they stationed?"

"Down below in the hollow, miss, – jist behind the hawthorn-bush. Go home some other way, Miss Mona: they're bint on blood."

"And, if so, what are you doing here?" says Mona, reprovingly.

"On'y watchin', miss, to see what they'd do," confesses he, shifting from one foot to the other, and growing palpably confused beneath her searching gaze.

"Is it murder you want to see?" asks she slowly, in a horrified tone. "Go home, Paddy. Go home to your mother." Then, changing her censuring manner to one of entreaty, she says, softly, "Go, because I ask you."

"I'm off, miss," says the miscreant, and, true to his word, darts through the hedge again like a shaft from a bow, and, scurrying through the fields, is soon lost to sight.

"Come with me," says Mona to Rodney; and with an air of settled determination, and a hard look on her usually mobile lips, she moves deliberately towards the hawthorn-bush, that is about a quarter of a mile distant.

"Mona," says Rodney, divining her intent, "stay you here while I go and expostulate with these men. It is late, darling, and their blood is up, and they may not listen to you. Let me speak to them."

"You do not understand them," returns she, sadly. "And I do. Besides, they will not harm me. There is no fear of that. I am not at all afraid of them. And – I *must* speak to them."

He knows her sufficiently well to refrain from further expostulation, and just accompanies her silently along the lonely road.

"It is I, – Mona Scully," she calls aloud, when she is within a hundred yards of the hiding-place. "Tim Ryan, come here: I want you."

It is a mere guess on her part, – supported certainly by many tales she has heard of this Ryan of late, but a guess nevertheless. It proves, however, to be a correct one. A man, indistinct, but unmistakable, shows himself on the top of the wall, and pulls his forelock through force of habit.

"What are you doing here, Tim?" says Mona, bravely, calmly, "at this hour, and with – yes, do not seek to hide it from me – a gun! And you too, Carthy," peering into the darkness to where another man, less plucky than Ryan lies concealed. "Ah! you may well wish to shade your face, since it is evil you have in your heart this night."

"Do ye mane to inform on us?" says Ryan, slowly, who is "a man of a villanous countenance," laying his hand impulsively upon his gun, and glancing at her and Rodney alternately with murder in his eyes. It is a critical moment. Rodney, putting out his hand, tries to draw her behind him.

"No, I am not afraid," says the girl, resisting his effort to put himself before her; and when he would have spoken she puts up her hands, and warns him to keep silence.

"You should know better than to apply the word 'informer' to one of my blood," she says, coldly, speaking to Ryan, without a tremor in her voice.

"I know that," says the man, sullenly. "But what of him?" pointing to Rodney, the ruffianly look still on his face. "The Englishman, I mane. Is he sure? It's a life, for a life afther all, when everything is towld."

He handles the gun again menacingly. Mona, though still apparently calm, whitens perceptibly beneath the cold penetrating rays of the "pale-faced moon" that up above in "heaven's ebon vault, studded with stars unutterably bright," looks down upon her perhaps with love and pity.

"Tim," she says, "what have I ever done to you that you should seek to make me unhappy?"

"I have nothing to do with you. Go your ways. It is with him I have to settle," says the man, morosely.

"But *I* have to do with him," says Mona, distinctly.

At this, in spite of everything, Rodney laughs lightly, and, taking her hand in his, draws it through his arm. There is love and trust and great content in his laugh.

"Eh!" says Ryan; while the other man whom she has called Carthy – and who up to this has appeared desirous of concealing himself from view – now presses forward and regards the two with lingering scrutiny.

"Why, what have you to do with her?" says Ryan, addressing Rodney, a gleam of something that savors of amusement showing itself even in his ill-favored face. For an Irishman, under all circumstances, dearly loves "a courting, a *bon-mot*, and a broil."

"This much," says Rodney, laughing again: "I am going to marry her, with her leave."

"If that be so, she'll make you keep from splittin' on us," says the man. "So now go; we've work in hand to-night not fit for her eyes."

Mona shudders.

"Tim," she says, distractedly, "do not bring murder on your soul. Oh, Tim, think it over while there is yet time. I have heard all about it; and I would ask you to remember that it is not Mr. Maxwell's fault that Peggy Madden was evicted, but the fault of his master. If any one must be shot, it ought to be Lord Crichton" (as his lordship is at this moment safe in Constantinople, she says this boldly), "and not his paid servant."

"I dare say we'll get at the lord by an' by" says Ryan, untouched. "Go yer ways, will ye? an' quick too. Maybe if ye thry me too far, ye'll learn to rue this night."

Seeing further talk is useless, Mona slips her hand into Rodney's and leads him down the road.

But when they have turned a corner and are quite out of sight and hearing, Rodney stops short and says, hurriedly, —

"Mona, can you manage to get home by some short way by yourself? Because I must return. I must stand by this man they are going to murder. I must indeed, darling. Forgive me that I desert you here and at such an hour, but I see you are safe in the country, and five minutes will take you to the farm, and I cannot let his life be taken without striking a blow for him."

"And did you think I was content to let him die" says Mona, reproachfully. "No! There is a chance for him still, and I will explain it to you. It is early yet. He seldom passes here before eleven, and it is but a little after ten. I know the hour he usually returns, because he always goes by our gate, and often I bid him good-night in the summer-time. Come with me," excitedly. "I can lead you by a cross-path to the Ballavacky road, by which he must come, and, if we overtake him before he reaches that spot, we can save his life. Come; do not delay!"

She turns through a broken gap into a ploughed field, and breaks into a quick run.

"If we hurry we must meet his car there, and can send him back into Bantry, and so save him."

All this she breathes forth in disjointed sentences as she rushes, like a light-footed deer, across the ploughed land into the wet grass beyond.

Over one high bank, across a stile, through another broken gap, on to a wall, straight and broad, up which Rodney pulls her, carefully taking her down in his arms at the other side.

Still onward, – lightly, swiftly: now in sight of the boundless sea, now diving down into the plain, without faintness or despondency, or any other feeling but a passionate determination to save a man's life.

Rodney's breath is coming more quickly, and he is conscious of a desire to stop and pull himself together – if only for a minute – before bracing himself for a second effort. But to Mona, with her fresh and perfect health, and lithe and lissom body, and all the rich young blood that surges upward in her veins, excitement serves but to make her more elastic; and with her mind strung to its highest pitch, and her hot Irish blood aflame, she runs easily onward, until at length the road is reached that is her goal.

Springing upon the bank that skirts the road on one side, she raises her hands to her head, and listens with all her might for the sound of wheels in the distance.

But all is still.

Oh, if they should be too late! If Maxwell has passed and gone down the other road, and is perhaps now already "done to death" by the cruel treacherous enemy that lieth in wait for him!

Her blood heated by her swift run grows cold again as this thought comes to her, – forced to the front by the fact that "all the air a solemn stillness holds," and that no sound makes itself heard save the faint sighing of the night-wind in the woods up yonder, and the "lone and melancholy voice" of the sea, a mile away, as it breaks upon the silent shore.

These sounds, vague and harmonious as they are, yet full of mystery and unexplained sadness, but serve to heighten the fear that chills her heart.

Rodney, standing beside her, watches her anxiously. She throws up her head, and pushes back her hair, and strains her eyes eagerly into the darkness, that not all the moonbeams can make less than night.

Alas! alas! what foul deed may even now be doing while she stands here powerless to avert it, – her efforts all in vain! How richly shines the sweet heaven, studded with its stars! how cool, how fragrant, is the breeze! How the tiny wavelets move and sparkle in the glorious bay below. How fair a world it is to hold such depths of sin! Why should not rain and storms and howling tempest mark a night so —

But hark! What is this that greets her ear? The ring of horse's feet upon the quiet road!

The girl clasps her hands passionately, and turns her eyes on Rodney.

"Mona, it is – it must be!" says Geoffrey, taking her hand; and so they both stand, almost breathless, on the high bank, listening intently.

Now they can hear the sound of wheels; and presently a light tax-cart swings round the corner, drawn by a large, bony, bay mare, and in which sits a heavy-looking, elderly man, in a light overcoat.

"Mr. Maxwell! Mr. Maxwell!" cries Mona, as he approaches them; and the heavy man, drawing up, looks round at her with keen surprise, bending his head a little forward, as though the better to pierce the gloom.

"Miss Scully, is it you?" he says, at length; "and here at this hour?"

"Go back to Bantry," says Mona, not heeding his evident surprise, "at once, —*now*. Do not delay. There are those waiting for you on the Tullymore road who will take your life. I have run all this way to warn you. Oh, go back, while there is yet time!"

"Do you mean they want to shoot me?" says Maxwell, in a hurried tone.

"Yes; I know it! Oh, do not wait to ask questions, but go. Even now they may have suspected my purpose, and may be coming here to prevent your ever returning."

Each moment of delay only helps to increase her nervous excitement.

"But who are they? and where?" demands the agent, completely taken aback.

"I can tell you no more; I will not; and you must never ask me. It is enough that I speak the truth, and that I have been able to save your life."

"How can I thank you?" says Maxwell, "for all –"

"Some other day you can do that. Now go," says Mona, imperiously, waving her hand.

But Maxwell still lingers, looking first at her and then very intently at her companion.

"It is late," he says. "You should be at home, child. Who am I, that you should do me so great a service?" Then, turning quietly to Rodney, "I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir," he says, gravely; "but I entreat you to take Miss Scully safely back to the Farm without delay."

"You may depend upon me," says Rodney, lifting his hat, and respecting the elder man's care for the well-being of his beloved, even in the midst of his own immediate danger. Then, in another moment, Maxwell has turned his horse's head, and is soon out of sight.

The whole scene is at an end. A life has been saved. And they two, Mona and Geoffrey, are once more alone beneath the "earnest stars."

"Take me down," says Mona, wearily, turning to her lover, as the last faint ring of the horse's feet dies out on the breeze.

"You are tired," says he, tenderly.

"A little, now it is all over. Yet I must make great haste homeward. Uncle Brian will be uneasy about me if he discovers my absence, though he knew I was going to the Bay. Come, we must hurry."

So in silence, but hand in hand, they move back through the dewy meads, meeting no one until they reach the little wooden gate that leads to her home.

Here they behold the faithful Biddy, craning her long neck up and down the road, and filled with wildest anxiety.

"Oh, may I niver agin see the light," cries this excitable damsel, rushing out to Mona, "if I iver hoped to lay eyes on yer face agin! Where were ye at all, darlin'? An' I breakin' me heart wid fear for ye. Did ye know Tim Ryan was out to-night? When I heerd tell of that from that boy of the Cantys', I thought I'd have dhropped. 'Tis no good he's up to. Come in, asthore: you must be near kilt with the cowl'd."

"No; I am quite warm," says Mona, in a low, sad tone.

"'Tis I've bin prayin' for ye," says Biddy, taking her mistress's hand and kissing it fondly. "On me bended knees I was with the blessid beads for the last two hours. An' shure I've had me reward, now I see ye safe home agin. But indeed, Miss Mona, 'tis a sore time I've had uv it."

"And Uncle Brian?" asks Mona, fearfully.

"Oh, I got the ould man to bed hours ago; for I knew if he stayed up that he'd get mortal wearin', an' be the death of us if he knew ye were out so late. An' truth to say, Miss Mona," changing her tone from one of extreme joy and thankfulness to another of the deepest censure, "'twas the world an' all of bad behavior to be galavantin' out at this hour."

"The night was so lovely, – so mild," says Mona, faintly, concealment in any form being new to her, and very foreign to her truthful nature; "and I knew Mickey would tell you it was all right."

"An' what brought him home, the murdherin' scamp," says Miss Bridget, with more vehemence than politeness, "instid of stayin' wid ye to see ye came to no harm?"

"He had to see the mare made up, and the pigs fed," says Mona.

"Is that what he towld ye? Oh, the blaggard!" says Bridget. "An' nary sign did he do since his return, but sit be the fire an' smoke his dhudheen. Oh, be the powers of Moll Kelly, but I'll pay him out for his lies? He's soakin' it now, anyhow, as I sint him up to the top of the hill agin, to see what had become of ye."

"Bridget," says Mona, "will you go in and get me a cup of tea before I go to bed? I am tired."

"I will, darlin', shurely," says Bridget, who adores the ground she walks on; and then, turning, she leaves her. Mona lays her hand on Geoffrey's arm.

"Promise me you will not go back to Coolnagurtheen to-night?" she says, earnestly. "At the inn, down in the village, they will give you a bed."

"But, my dearest, why? There is not the slightest danger now, and my horse is a good one, and I sha'n't be any time getting – "

"I won't hear of it!" says Mona, interrupting him vehemently. "You would have to go up *that road* again," with a strong shudder. "I shall not go indoors until you give me your honor you will stay in the village to-night."

Seeing the poor child's terrible fear and anxiety, and that she is completely overwrought, he gives way, and lets her have the desired promise.

"Now, that is good of you," she says, gratefully, and then, as he stoops to kiss her, she throws her arms around his neck and bursts into tears.

"You are worn out, my love, my sweetheart," says Geoffrey, very tenderly, speaking to her as though she is in years the child that, in her soul, she truly is. "Come, Mona, you will not cry on this night of all others that has made me yours and you mine! If this thought made you as happy as it makes me, you *could* not cry. Now lift your head, and let me look at you. There! you have given yourself to me, darling, and there is a good life, I trust, before us; so let us dwell on that, and forget all minor evils. Together we can defy trouble!"

"Yes, that is a thought to dry all tears," she says, very sweetly, checking her sobs and raising her face, on which is dawning an adorable smile. Then, sighing heavily, – a sigh of utter exhaustion, – "You have done me good," she says. "I shall sleep now; and you my dearest, will be safe. Good-night until to-morrow!"

"How many hours there are in the night that we never count!" says Geoffrey, impatiently. "Good-night, Mona! To-morrow's dawn I shall call my dearest friend."

CHAPTER VIII

HOW GEOFFREY AND MONA PLAN A TRANSFORMATION SCENE

Time, with lovers, "flies with swallows' wings;" they neither feel nor heed it as it passes, so all too full of haste the moments seem. They are to them replete with love and happiness and sweet content. To-day is an accomplished joy, and to-morrow will dawn for no other purpose but to bring them together. So they think and so they believe.

Rodney has interviewed the old man, her uncle; has told him of his great and lasting love for this pearl among women; has described in a very few words, and without bombast, his admiration for Mona; and Brian Scully (though with sufficient national pride to suppress all undue delight at the young man's proposal) has given a hearty consent to their union, and is in reality flattered and pleased beyond measure at this match for "his girl." For, no matter how the Irish may rebel against landlordism and aristocracy in general, deep down in their hearts lies rooted an undying fealty to old blood.

To his mother, however, he has sent no word of Mona, knowing only too well how the news of his approaching marriage with this "outer barbarian" (as she will certainly deem his darling) will be received. It is not cowardice that holds his pen, as, were all the world to kneel at his feet and implore him or bribe him to renounce his love, all such pleading and bribing would be in vain. It is that, knowing argument to be useless, he puts off the evil hour that may bring pain to his mother to the last moment.

When she knows Mona she will love her, – who could help it? so he argues; and for this reason he keeps silence until such time as, his marriage being a *fait accompli*, hopeless expostulation will be of no avail, and will, therefore, be suppressed.

Meanwhile, the hours go by "laden with golden grain." Every day makes Mona dearer and more dear, her sweet and guileless nature being one calculated to create, with growing knowledge, an increasing admiration and tenderness. Indeed, each happy afternoon spent with her serves but to forge another link in the chain that binds him to her.

To-day is "so cool, so calm, so bright," that Geoffrey's heart grows glad within him as he walks along the road that leads to the farm, his gun upon his shoulder, his trusty dog at his heels.

All through the air the smell of heather, sweet and fragrant, reigns. Far down, miles away, the waves rush inland, glinting and glistening in the sunlight.

"Blue roll the waters, blue the sky

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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