

Barr Robert, Crane Stephen

# The O'Ruddy: A Romance



Robert Barr

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### CHAPTER I

My chieftain ancestors had lived at Glandore for many centuries and were very well known. Hardly a ship could pass the Old Head of Kinsale without some boats putting off to exchange the time of day with her, and our family name was on men's tongues in half the seaports of Europe, I dare say. My ancestors lived in castles which were like churches stuck on end, and they drank the best of everything amid the joyous cries of a devoted peasantry. But the good time passed away soon enough, and when I had reached the age of eighteen we had nobody on the land but a few fisher-folk and small farmers, people who were almost law-abiding, and my father came to die more from disappointment than from any other cause. Before the end he sent for me to come to his bedside.

"Tom," he said, "I brought you into existence, and God help you safe out of it; for you are not the kind of man ever to turn your hand to work, and there is only enough money to last a gentleman five more years.

"The 'Martha Bixby,' she was, out of Bristol for the West Indies, and if it hadn't been for her we would never have got along this far with plenty to eat and drink. However, I leave you, besides the money, the two swords, – the grand one that King Louis, God bless him, gave me, and the plain one that will really be of use to you if you get into a disturbance. Then here is the most important matter of all. Here are some papers which young Lord Strepp gave me to hold for him when we were comrades in France. I don't know what they are, having had very little time for reading during my life, but do you return them to him. He is now the great Earl of Westport, and he lives in London in a grand house, I hear. In the last campaign in France I had to lend him a pair of breeches or he would have gone bare. These papers are important to him, and he may reward you, but do not you depend on it, for you may get the back of his hand. I have not seen him for years. I am glad I had you taught to read. They read considerably in England, I hear. There is one more cask of the best brandy remaining, and I recommend you to leave for England as soon as it is finished. And now, one more thing, my lad, never be civil to a king's officer. Wherever you see a red coat, depend there is a rogue between the front and the back of it. I have said everything. Push the bottle near me."

Three weeks after my father's burial I resolved to set out, with no more words, to deliver the papers to the Earl of Westport. I was resolved to be prompt in obeying my father's command, for I was extremely anxious to see the world, and my feet would hardly wait for me. I put my estate into the hands of old Mickey Clancy, and told him not to trouble the tenants too much over the rent, or they probably would split his skull for him. And I bid Father Donovan look out for old Mickey Clancy, that he stole from me only what was reasonable.

I went to the Cove of Cork and took ship there for Bristol, and arrived safely after a passage amid great storms which blew us so near Glandore that I feared the enterprise of my own peasantry. Bristol, I confess, frightened me greatly. I had not imagined such a huge and teeming place. All the ships in the world seemed to lie there, and the quays were thick with sailor-men. The streets rang with noise. I suddenly found that I was a young gentleman from the country.

I followed my luggage to the best inn, and it was very splendid, fit to be a bishop's palace. It was filled with handsomely dressed people who all seemed to be yelling, "Landlord! landlord!" And there was a little fat man in a white apron who flew about as if he were being stung by bees, and he was crying, "Coming, sir! Yes, madam! At once, your ludship!" They heeded me no more than if I had been an empty glass. I stood on one leg, waiting until the little fat man should either wear himself out or attend all the people. But it was to no purpose. He did not wear out, nor did his business finish,

so finally I was obliged to plant myself in his way, but my speech was decent enough as I asked him for a chamber. Would you believe it, he stopped abruptly and stared at me with sudden suspicion. My speech had been so civil that he had thought perhaps I was a rogue. I only give you this incident to show that if later I came to bellow like a bull with the best of them, it was only through the necessity of proving to strangers that I was a gentleman. I soon learned to enter an inn as a drunken soldier goes through the breach into a surrendering city.

Having made myself as presentable as possible, I came down from my chamber to seek some supper. The supper-room was ablaze with light and well filled with persons of quality, to judge from the noise that they were making. My seat was next to a garrulous man in plum-colour, who seemed to know the affairs of the entire world. As I dropped into my chair he was saying —

"— the heir to the title, of course. Young Lord Strepp. That is he — the slim youth with light hair. Oh, of course, all in shipping. The Earl must own twenty sail that trade from Bristol. He is posting down from London, by the way, to-night."

You can well imagine how these words excited me. I half arose from my chair with the idea of going at once to the young man who had been indicated as Lord Strepp, and informing him of my errand, but I had a sudden feeling of timidity, a feeling that it was necessary to be proper with these people of high degree. I kept my seat, resolving to accost him directly after supper. I studied him with interest. He was a young man of about twenty years, with fair unpowdered hair and a face ruddy from a life in the open air. He looked generous and kindly, but just at the moment he was damning a waiter in language that would have set fire to a stone bridge. Opposite him was a clear-eyed soldierly man of about forty, whom I had heard called "Colonel," and at the Colonel's right was a proud, dark-skinned man who kept looking in all directions to make sure that people regarded him, seated thus with a lord.

They had drunk eight bottles of port, and in those days eight bottles could just put three gentlemen in pleasant humour. As the ninth bottle came on the table the Colonel cried —

"Come, Strepp, tell us that story of how your father lost his papers. Gad, that's a good story."

"No, no," said the young lord. "It isn't a good story, and besides my father never tells it at all. I misdoubt it's truth."

The Colonel pounded the table. "'Tis true. 'Tis too good a story to be false. You know the story, Forister?" said he, turning to the dark-skinned man. The latter shook his head.

"Well, when the Earl was a young man serving with the French he rather recklessly carried with him some valuable papers relating to some estates in the North, and once the noble Earl — or Lord Strepp as he was then — found it necessary, after fording a stream, to hang his breeches on a bush to dry, and then a certain blackguard of a wild Irishman in the corps came along and stole —"

But I had arisen and called loudly but with dignity up the long table, "That, sir, is a lie." The room came still with a bang, if I may be allowed that expression. Every one gaped at me, and the Colonel's face slowly went the colour of a tiled roof.

"My father never stole his lordship's breeches, for the good reason that at the time his lordship had no breeches. 'Twas the other way. My father —"

Here the two long rows of faces lining the room crackled for a moment, and then every man burst into a thunderous laugh. But I had flung to the winds my timidity of a new country, and I was not to be put down by these clowns.

"'Tis a lie against an honourable man and my father," I shouted. "And if my father hadn't provided his lordship with breeches, he would have gone bare, and there's the truth. And," said I, staring at the Colonel, "I give the lie again. We are never obliged to give it twice in my country."

The Colonel had been grinning a little, no doubt thinking, along with everybody else in the room, that I was drunk or crazy; but this last twist took the smile off his face clean enough, and he came to his feet with a bound. I awaited him. But young Lord Strepp and Forister grabbed him and began to argue. At the same time there came down upon me such a deluge of waiters and pot-boys, and, may be, hostlers, that I couldn't have done anything if I had been an elephant. They were

frightened out of their wits and painfully respectful, but all the same and all the time they were bundling me toward the door. "Sir! Sir! Sir! I beg you, sir! Think of the 'ouse, sir! Sir! Sir! Sir!" And I found myself out in the hall.

Here I addressed them calmly. "Loose me and takes yourselves off quickly, lest I grow angry and break some dozen of these wooden heads." They took me at my word and vanished like ghosts. Then the landlord came bleating, but I merely told him that I wanted to go to my chamber, and if anybody inquired for me I wished him conducted up at once.

In my chamber I had not long to wait. Presently there were steps in the corridor and a knock at my door. At my bidding the door opened and Lord Strepp entered. I arose and we bowed. He was embarrassed and rather dubious.

"Aw," he began, "I come, sir, from Colonel Royale, who begs to be informed who he has had the honour of offending, sir?"

"'Tis not a question for your father's son, my lord," I answered bluntly at last.

"You are, then, the son of The O'Ruddy?"

"No," said I. "I am The O'Ruddy. My father died a month gone and more."

"Oh!" said he. And I now saw why he was embarrassed. He had feared from the beginning that I was altogether too much in the right. "Oh!" said he again. I made up my mind that he was a good lad. "That is dif – " he began awkwardly. "I mean, Mr. O'Ruddy – oh, damn it all, you know what I mean, Mr. O'Ruddy!"

I bowed. "Perfectly, my lord!" I did not understand him, of course.

"I shall have the honour to inform Colonel Royale that Mr. O'Ruddy is entitled to every consideration," he said more collectedly. "If Mr. O'Ruddy will have the goodness to await me here?"

"Yes, my lord." He was going in order to tell the Colonel that I was a gentleman. And of course he returned quickly with the news. But he did not look as if the message was one which he could deliver with a glib tongue. "Sir," he began, and then halted. I could but courteously wait. "Sir, Colonel Royale bids me say that he is shocked to find that he has carelessly and publicly inflicted an insult upon an unknown gentleman through the memory of the gentleman's dead father. Colonel Royale bids me to say, sir, that he is overwhelmed with regret, and that far from taking an initial step himself it is his duty to express to you his feeling that his movements should coincide with any arrangements you may choose to make."

I was obliged to be silent for a considerable period in order to gather head and tail of this marvellous sentence. At last I caught it. "At daybreak I shall walk abroad," I replied, "and I have no doubt that Colonel Royale will be good enough to accompany me. I know nothing of Bristol. Any cleared space will serve."

My Lord Strepp bowed until he almost knocked his forehead on the floor. "You are most amiable, Mr. O'Ruddy. You of course will give me the name of some friend to whom I can refer minor matters?"

I found that I could lie in England as readily as ever I did in Ireland. "My friend will be on the ground with me, my lord; and as he also is a very amiable man it will not take two minutes to make everything clear and fair." Me, with not a friend in the world but Father O'Donovan and Mickey Clancy at Glandore!

Lord Strepp bowed again, the same as before. "Until the morning then, Mr. O'Ruddy," he said, and left me.

I sat me down on my bed to think. In truth I was much puzzled and amazed. These gentlemen were actually reasonable and were behaving like men of heart. Neither my books nor my father's stories – great lies, many of them, God rest him! – had taught me that the duelling gentry could think at all, and I was quite certain that they never tried. "You were looking at me, sir?" "Was I, 'faith? Well, if I care to look at you I shall look at you." And then away they would go at it, prodding at each other's bellies until somebody's flesh swallowed a foot of steel. "Sir, I do not like the colour

of your coat!" Clash! "Sir, red hair always offends me." Cling! "Sir, your fondness for rabbit-pie is not polite." Clang!

However, the minds of young Lord Strepp and Colonel Royale seemed to be capable of a process which may be termed human reflection. It was plain that the Colonel did not like the situation at all, and perhaps considered himself the victim of a peculiarly exasperating combination of circumstances. That an Irishman should turn up in Bristol and give him the lie over a French pair of breeches must have seemed astonishing to him, notably when he learned that the Irishman was quite correct, having in fact a clear title to speak authoritatively upon the matter of the breeches. And when Lord Strepp learned that I was The O'Ruddy he saw clearly that the Colonel was in the wrong, and that I had a perfect right to resent the insult to my father's memory. And so the Colonel probably said: "Look you, Strepp. I have no desire to kill this young gentleman, because I insulted his father's name. It is out of all decency. And do you go to him this second time and see what may be done in the matter of avoidance. But, mark you, if he expresses any wishes, you of course offer immediate accommodation. I will not wrong him twice." And so up came my Lord Strepp and hemmed and hawed in that way which puzzled me. A pair of thoughtful, honourable fellows, these, and I admired them greatly.

There was now no reason why I should keep my chamber, since if I now met even the Colonel himself there would be no brawling; only bows. I was not, indeed, fond of these latter, – replying to Lord Strepp had almost broken my back; but, any how, more bows were better than more loud words and another downpour of waiters and pot-boys.

But I had reckoned without the dark-skinned man, Forister. When I arrived in the lower corridor and was passing through it on my way to take the air, I found a large group of excited people talking of the quarrel and the duel that was to be fought at daybreak. I thought it was a great hubbub over a very small thing, but it seems that the mainspring of the excitement was the tongue of this black Forister. "Why, the Irish run naked through their native forests," he was crying. "Their sole weapon is the great knotted club, with which, however, they do not hesitate, when in great numbers, to attack lions and tigers. But how can this barbarian face the sword of an officer of His Majesty's army?"

Some in the group espied my approach, and there was a nudging of elbows. There was a general display of agitation, and I marvelled at the way in which many made it to appear that they had not formed part of the group at all. Only Forister was cool and insolent. He stared full at me and grinned, showing very white teeth. "Swords are very different from clubs, great knotted clubs," he said with admirable deliberation.

"Even so," rejoined I gravely. "Swords are for gentlemen, while clubs are to clout the heads of rogues – thus." I boxed his ear with my open hand, so that he fell against the wall. "I will now picture also the use of boots by kicking you into the inn yard which is adjacent." So saying I hurled him to the great front door which stood open, and then, taking a sort of hop and skip, I kicked for glory and the Saints.

I do not know that I ever kicked a man with more success. He shot out as if he had been heaved by a catapult. There was a dreadful uproar behind me, and I expected every moment to be stormed by the waiter-and-pot-boy regiment. However I could hear some of the gentlemen bystander cry:

"Well done! Well kicked! A record! A miracle!"

But my first hours on English soil contained still other festivities. Bright light streamed out from the great door, and I could plainly note what I shall call the arc or arcs described by Forister. He struck the railing once, but spun off it, and to my great astonishment went headlong and slap-crash into some sort of an upper servant who had been approaching the door with both arms loaded with cloaks, cushions, and rugs.

I suppose the poor man thought that black doom had fallen upon him from the sky. He gave a great howl as he, Forister, the cloaks, cushions, and rugs spread out grandly in one sublime confusion.

Some ladies screamed, and a bold commanding voice said: "In the devil's name what have we here?" Behind the unhappy servant had been coming two ladies and a very tall gentleman in a black cloak that reached to his heels. "What have we here?" again cried this tall man, who looked like an old eagle. He stepped up to me haughtily. I knew that I was face to face with the Earl of Westport.

But was I a man for ever in the wrong that I should always be giving down and walking away with my tail between my legs? Not I; I stood bravely to the Earl:

"If your lordship pleases, 'tis The O'Ruddy kicking a blackguard into the yard," I made answer coolly.

I could see that he had been about to shout for the landlord and more waiters and pot-boys, but at my naming myself he gave a quick stare.

"The O'Ruddy?" he repeated. "Rubbish!"

He was startled, bewildered; but I could not tell if he were glad or grieved.

"'Tis all the name I own," I said placidly. "My father left it me clear, it being something that he could not mortgage. 'Twas on his death-bed he told me of lending you the breeches, and that is why I kicked the man into the yard; and if your lordship had arrived sooner I could have avoided this duel at daybreak, and, any how, I wonder at his breeches fitting you. He was a small man."

Suddenly the Earl raised his hand. "Enough," he said sternly. "You are your father's son. Come to my chamber in the morning, O'Ruddy."

There had been little chance to see what was inside the cloaks of the ladies, but at the words of the Earl there peeped from one hood a pair of bright liquid eyes – God save us all! In a flash I was no longer a free man; I was a dazed slave; the Saints be good to us!

The contents of the other hood could not have been so interesting, for from it came the raucous voice of a bargeman with a cold:

"Why did he kick him? Whom did he kick? Had he cheated at play? Where has he gone?"

The upper servant appeared, much battered and holding his encrimsoned nose.

"My lord – " he began.

But the Earl roared at him, —

"Hold your tongue, rascal, and in future look where you are going and don't get in a gentleman's way."

The landlord, in a perfect anguish, was hovering with his squadrons on the flanks. They could not think of pouncing upon me if I was noticed at all by the great Earl; but, somewhat as a precaution perhaps, they remained in form for attack. I had no wish that the pair of bright eyes should see me buried under a heap of these wretches, so I bowed low to the ladies and to the Earl and passed out of doors. As I left, the Earl moved his hand to signify that he was now willing to endure the attendance of the landlord and his people, and in a moment the inn rang with hurried cries and rushing feet.

As I passed near the taproom window the light fell full upon a railing; just beneath and over this railing hung two men. At first I thought they were ill, but upon passing near I learned that they were simply limp and helpless with laughter, the sound of which they contrived to keep muffled. To my surprise I recognized the persons of young Lord Strepp and Colonel Royale.

## CHAPTER II

The night was growing, and as I was to fight at daybreak I needed a good rest; but I could not forget that in my pride I had told Lord Strepp that I was provided with a friend to attend me at the duel. It was on my mind. I must achieve a friend, or Colonel Royale might quite properly refuse to fight me on the usual grounds that if he killed me there would be present no adherent of my cause to declare that the fight was fair. And any how I had lied so thoroughly to Lord Strepp. I must have a friend.

But how was I to carve a friend out of this black Bristol at such short notice? My sense told me that friends could not be found in the road like pebbles, but some curious feeling kept me abroad, scanning by the light of the lanterns or the torches each face that passed me. A low dull roar came from the direction of the quay, and this was the noise of the sailor-men, being drunk. I knew that there would be none found there to suit my purpose, but my spirit led me to wander so that I could not have told why I went this way or that way.

Of a sudden I heard from a grassy bank beside me the sound of low and strenuous sobbing. I stopped dead short to listen, moved by instinctive recognition. Aye, I was right. It was Irish keening. Some son of Erin was spelling out his sorrow to the darkness with that profound and garrulous eloquence which is in the character of my people.

"Wirra, wirra! Sorrow the day I would be leaving Ireland against my own will and intention, and may the rocks go out to meet the lugger that brought me here! It's beginning to rain, too! Sure it never rains like this in Ireland! And me without a brass penny to buy a bed! If the Saints save me from England, 'tis al – "

"Come out of that, now!" said I.

The monologue ceased; there was a quick silence. Then the voice, much altered, said: "Who calls? 'Tis may be an Irish voice!"

"It is," said I. "I've swallowed as much peat smoke as any man of my years. Come out of that now, and let me have a look at you."

He came trustfully enough, knowing me to be Irish, and I examined him as well as I was able in the darkness. He was what I expected, a bedraggled vagabond with tear-stains on his dirty cheeks and a vast shock of hair which I well knew would look, in daylight, like a burning haycock. And as I examined him he just as carefully examined me. I could see his shrewd blue eyes twinkling.

"You are a red man," said I. "I know the strain; 'tis better than some. Your family must have been very inhospitable people." And then, thinking that I had spent enough time, I was about to give the fellow some coin and send him away. But here a mad project came into my empty head. I had ever been the victim of my powerful impulses, which surge up within me and sway me until I can only gasp at my own conduct. The sight of this red-headed scoundrel had thrust an idea into my head, and I was a lost man.

"Mark you!" said I to him. "You know what I am?"

"'Tis hard to see in the dark," he answered; "but I mistrust you are a gentleman, sir. McDermott of the Three Trees had a voice and a way with him like you, and Father Burk too, and he was a gentleman born if he could only remain sober."

"Well, you've hit it, in the dark or whatever," said I. "I am a gentleman. Indeed I am an O'Ruddy. Have you ever been hearing of my family?"

"Not of your honour's branch of it, sure," he made answer confidently. "But I have often been hearing of the O'Ruddys of Glandore, who are well known to be such great robbers and blackguards that their match is not to be found in all the south of Ireland. Nor in the west, neither, for that matter."

"Aye," said I, "I have heard that that branch of the family was much admired by the peasantry for their qualities. But let us have done with it and speak of other matters. I want a service of you."

"Yes, your honour," said he, dropping his voice. "May be 'twill not be the first time I've been behind a ditch; but the light to-night is very bad unless I am knowing him well, and I would never be forgetting how Tim Malone let fly in the dark of a night like this, thinking it was a bailiff, until she screamed out with the pain in her leg, the poor creature, and her beyond seventy and a good Catholic."

"Come out of it now!" said I impatiently. "You will be behind no ditch." And as we walked back to the inn I explained to my new man the part I wished him to play. He was amazed at it, and I had to explain fifty times; but when it once was established in his red head Paddy was wild with enthusiasm, and I had to forbid him telling me how well he would do it.

I had them give him some straw in the stable, and then retired to my chamber for needed rest. Before dawn I had them send Paddy to me, and by the light of a new fire I looked at him. Ye Saints! What hair! It must have been more than a foot in length, and the flaming strands radiated in all directions from an isolated and central spire which shot out straight toward the sky. I knew what to do with his tatters, but that crimson thatch dumfounded me. However there was no going back now, so I set to work upon him. Luckily my wardrobe represented three generations of O'Ruddy clothes, and there was a great plenty. I put my impostor in a suit of blue velvet with a flowered waistcoat and stockings of pink. I gave him a cocked hat and a fine cloak. I worked with success up to the sword-belt, and there I was checked. I had two swords, but only one belt. However, I slung the sword which King Louis had given my father on a long string from Paddy's neck and sternly bid him keep his cloak tight about him. We were ready.

"Now, Paddy," said I, "do you bow in this manner." I bowed as a gentleman should. But I will not say how I strove with him. I could do little in that brief space. If he remained motionless and kept his tongue still he was somewhat near his part, but the moment he moved he was astonishing. I depended on keeping him under my eye, and I told him to watch me like a cat. "Don't go thinking how grand you are, that way," I cried to him angrily. "If you make a blunder of it, the gentlemen will cudgel you, mark you that. Do you as I direct you. And the string, curse you. Mind your cloak!" The villain had bethought him of his flowered waistcoat, and with a comic air flung back his coat to display it. "Take your fingers out of your mouth. Stop scratching your shin with your foot. Leave your hair alone. 'Tis as good and as bad as you can make it. Come along now, and hold your tongue like a graven image if you would not be having me stop the duel to lather you."

We marched in good order out of the inn. We saw our two gentlemen awaiting us, wrapped in their cloaks, for the dawn was cold. They bowed politely, and as I returned their salute I said in a low, quick aside to Paddy:

"Now, for the love of God, bow for your life!"

My intense manner must have frightened the poor thing, for he ducked as swiftly as if he had been at a fair in Ireland and somebody had hove a cobble at his head.

"Come up!" I whispered, choking with rage. "Come up! You'll be breaking your nose on the road."

He straightened himself, looking somewhat bewildered, and said:

"What was it? Was I too slow? Did I do it well?"

"Oh, fine," said I. "Fine. You do it as well as that once more, and you will probably break your own neck, and 'tis not me will be buying masses for your soul, you thief. Now don't drop as if a gamekeeper had shot at you. There is no hurry in life. Be quiet and easy."

"I mistrusted I was going too fast," said he; "but for the life of me I couldn't pull up. If I had been the Dublin mail, and the road thick as fleas with highwaymen, I should have gone through them grand."

My Lord Strepp and Colonel Royale had not betrayed the slightest surprise at the appearance of my extraordinary companion. Their smooth, regular faces remained absolutely imperturbable. This I took to be very considerate of them, but I gave them just a little more than their due, as I afterward perceived when I came to understand the English character somewhat. The great reason

was that Paddy and I were foreigners. It is not to be thought that gentlemen of their position would have walked out for a duel with an Englishman in the party of so fantastic an appearance. They would have placed him at once as a person impossible and altogether out of their class. They would have told a lackey to kick this preposterous creation into the horse-pond. But since Paddy was a foreigner he was possessed of some curious license, and his grotesque ways could be explained fully in the simple phrase, "'Tis a foreigner."

So, then, we preceded my Lord Strepp and Colonel Royale through a number of narrow streets and out into some clear country. I chose a fine open bit of green turf as a goodly place for us to meet, and I warped Paddy through the gate and moved to the middle of the field. I drew my sword and saluted, and then turned away. I had told Paddy everything which a heaven-sent sense of instruction could suggest, and if he failed I could do no more than kill him.

After I had kicked him sharply he went aside with Lord Strepp, and they indulged in what sounded like a very animated discussion. Finally I was surprised to see Lord Strepp approaching me. He said:

"It is very irregular, but I seem unable to understand your friend. He has proposed to me that the man whose head is broken first – I do not perfectly understand what he could mean by that; it does not enter our anticipations that a man could possibly have his head broken – he has proposed that the man whose head may be broken first should provide 'lashings' – I feel sure that is the word – lashings of meat and drink at some good inn for the others. Lashings is a word which I do not know. We do not know how to understand you gentlemen when you speak of lashings. I am instructed to meet any terms which you may suggest, but I find that I cannot make myself clear to your friend who speaks of nothing but lashings."

"Sir," said I, as I threw coat and waistcoat on the grass, "my friend refers to a custom of his own country. You will, I feel sure, pardon his misconception of the circumstances. Pray accept my regrets, and, if you please, I am ready."

He immediately signified that his mind was now clear, and that the incident of Paddy's lashings he regarded as closed. As for that flame-headed imp of crime, if I could have got my hands upon him he would have taken a short road to his fathers. Him and his lashings! As I stood there with a black glare at him, the impudent scoundrel repeatedly winked at me with the readable information that if I only would be patient and bide a moment he would compass something very clever. As I faced Colonel Royale I was so wild with thinking of what I would do to Paddy, that, for all I knew, I might have been crossing swords with my mother.

And now as to this duel. I will not conceal that I was a very fine fencer in both the French and Italian manners. My father was in his day one of the finest blades in Paris, and had fought with some of the most skillful and impertinent gentlemen in all France. He had done his best to give me his eye and his wrist, and sometimes he would say that I was qualified to meet all but the best in the world. He commonly made fun of the gentlemen of England, saying that a dragoon was their ideal of a man with a sword; and he would add that the rapier was a weapon which did not lend itself readily to the wood-chopper's art. He was all for the French and Italian schools.

I had always thought that my father's judgment was very good, but I could not help reflecting that if it turned out to be bad I would have a grievance as well as a sword-thrust in the body. Colonel Royale came at me in a somewhat leisurely manner, and, as I said, my mind was so full of rage at Paddy that I met the first of my opponent's thrusts through sheer force of habit. But my head was clear a moment later, and I knew that I was fighting my first duel in England and for my father's honour. It was no time to think of Paddy.

Another moment later I knew that I was the Colonel's master. I could reach him where I chose. But he did not know it. He went on prodding away with a serious countenance, evidently under the impression that he had me hard put to it. He was as grave as an owl-faced parson. And now here I did a sorry thing. I became the victim of another of my mad impulses. I was seized with an ungovernable

desire to laugh. It was hideous. But laugh I did, and, of necessity, square in the Colonel's face. And to this day I regret it.

Then the real duel began. At my laugh the Colonel instantly lost his grave air, and his countenance flushed with high, angry surprise. He beset me in a perfect fury, caring no more for his guard than if he had been made of iron. Never have I seen such quick and tremendous change in a man. I had laughed at him under peculiar conditions: very well, then; he was a demon. Thrice my point pricked him to keep him off, and thrice my heart was in my mouth that he would come on regardless. The blood oozed out on his white ruffled shirt; he was panting heavily, and his eyes rolled. He was a terrible sight to face. At last I again touched him, and this time sharply and in the sword arm, and upon the instant my Lord Strepp knocked our blades apart.

"Enough," he cried sternly. "Back, Colonel! Back!"

The Colonel flung himself sobbing into his friend's arms, choking out, "O God, Strepp! I couldn't reach him. I couldn't reach him, Strepp! Oh, my God!"

At the same time I disappeared, so to speak, in the embrace of my red-headed villain, who let out an Irish howl of victory that should have been heard at Glandore. "Be quiet, rascal," I cried, flinging him off. But he went on with his howling until I was obliged forcibly to lead him to a corner of the field, where he exclaimed:

"Oh, your honour, when I seen the other gentleman, all blazing with rage, rush at you that way, and me with not so much as a tuppence for all my service to you excepting these fine clothes and the sword, although I am thinking I shall have little to do with swords if this is the way they do it, I said, 'Sorrow the day England saw me!'"

If I had a fool for a second, Colonel Royale had a fine, wise young man. Lord Strepp was dealing firmly and coolly with his maddened principal.

"I can fight with my left hand," the Colonel was screaming. "I tell you, Strepp, I am resolved! Don't bar my way! I will kill him! I will kill him!"

"You are not in condition to fight," said the undisturbed young man. "You are wounded in four places already. You are in my hands. You will fight no more to-day."

"But, Strepp!" wailed the Colonel. "Oh, my God, Strepp!"

"You fight no more to-day," said the young lord.

Then happened unexpected interruptions. Paddy told me afterward that during the duel a maid had looked over a wall and yelled, and dropped a great brown bowl at sight of our occupation. She must have been the instrument that aroused the entire county, for suddenly men came running from everywhere. And the little boys! There must have been little boys from all over England.

"What is it? What is it?"

"Two gentlemen have been fighting!"

"Oh, aye, look at him with the blood on him!"

"Well, and there is young my Lord Strepp. He'd be deep in the matter, I warrant you!"

"Look yon, Bill! Mark the gentleman with the red hair. He's not from these parts, truly. Where, think you, he comes from?"

"'Tis a great marvel to see such hair, and I doubt not he comes from Africa."

They did not come very near, for in those days there was little the people feared but a gentleman, and small wonder. However, when the little boys judged that the delay in a resumption of the fight was too prolonged, they did not hesitate to express certain unconventional opinions and commands.

"Hurry up, now!"

"Go on!"

"You're both afeared!"

"Begin! Begin!"

"Are the gentlemen in earnest?"

"Sirs, do you mean ever to fight again? Begin, begin."

But their enthusiasm waxed high after they had thoroughly comprehended Paddy and his hair.

"You're alight, sir; you're alight!"

"Water! Water!"

"Farmer Pelton will have the officers at you an you go near his hay. Water!"

Paddy understood that they were paying tribute to his importance, and he again went suddenly out of my control. He began to strut and caper and pose with the air of knowing that he was the finest gentleman in England.

"Paddy, you baboon," said I, "be quiet and don't be making yourself a laughing-stock for the whole of them."

But I could give small heed to him, for I was greatly occupied in watching Lord Strepp and the Colonel. The Colonel was listening now to his friend for the simple reason that the loss of blood had made him too weak to fight again. Of a sudden he slumped gently down through Lord Strepp's arms to the ground, and, as the young man knelt, he cast his eyes about him until they rested upon me in what I took to be mute appeal. I ran forward, and we quickly tore his fine ruffles to pieces and succeeded in quite stanching his wounds, none of which were serious. "'Tis only a little blood-letting," said my Lord Strepp with something of a smile. "'Twill cool him, perchance."

"None of them are deep," I cried hastily. "I – "

But Lord Strepp stopped me with a swift gesture. "Yes," he said, "I knew. I could see. But – " He looked at me with troubled eyes. "It is an extraordinary situation. You have spared him, and – he will not wish to be spared, I feel sure. Most remarkable case."

"Well, I won't kill him," said I bluntly, having tired of this rubbish. "Damme if I will!"

Lord Strepp laughed outright. "It is ridiculous," he said. "Do you return, O'Ruddy, and leave me the care of this business. And," added he, with embarrassed manner, "this mixture is full strange; but – I feel sure – any how, I salute you, sir." And in his bow he paid a sensible tribute to my conduct.

Afterward there was nought to do but gather in Paddy and return to the inn. I found my countryman swaggering to and fro before the crowd. Some ignoramus, or some wit, had dubbed him the King of Ireland, and he was playing to the part.

"Paddy, you red-headed scandal," said I, "come along now!"

When he heard me, he came well enough; but I could not help but feel from his manner that he had made a great concession.

"And so they would be taking me for the King of Ireland, and, sure, 'tis an advantage to be thought a king whatever, and if your honour would be easy 'tis you and me that would sleep in the finest beds in Bristol the night, and nothing to do but take the drink as it was handed and – I'll say no more."

A rabble followed us on our way to the inn, but I turned on them so fiercely from time to time that ultimately they ran off. We made direct for my chamber, where I ordered food and drink immediately to be served. Once alone there with Paddy I allowed my joy to take hold on me. "Eh, Paddy, my boy," said I, walking before him, "I have done grand. I am, indeed, one of the finest gentlemen in the world."

"Aye, that's true," he answered, "but there was a man at your back throughout who – "

To his extreme astonishment I buffeted him heavily upon the cheek. "And we'll have no more of that talk," said I.

## CHAPTER III

"Aye!" said Paddy, holding his jowl; "'tis what one gets for serving a gentleman. 'Tis the service of a good truthful blackguard I'd be looking for, and that's true for me."

"Be quiet and mind what I tell you," I cried to him. "I'm uplifted with my success in England, and I won't be hearing anything from you while I am saying that I am one of the grandest gentlemen in all the world. I came over here with papers – papers!" said I; and then I bethought me that I would take the papers and wave them in my hand. I don't know why people wish to wave important documents in their hands, but the impulse came to me. Above all things I wished to take these papers and wave them defiantly, exultantly, in the air. They were my inheritance and my land of promise; they were everything. I must wave them even to the chamber, empty save for Paddy.

When I reached for them in the proper place in my luggage they were gone. I wheeled like a tiger upon Paddy.

"Villain," I roared, grasping him at the throat, "you have them!"

He sank in full surrender to his knees.

"I have, your honour," he wailed; "but, sure, I never thought your honour would care, since one of them is badly worn at the heel, and the other is no better than no boot at all."

I was cooled by the incontestable verity of this man. I sat heavily down in a chair by the fire.

"Aye," said I stupidly, "the boots! I did not mean the boots, although when you took them passes my sense of time. I mean some papers."

"Some papers!" cried he excitedly. "Your honour never thought it would be me that would steal papers? Nothing less than good cows would do my people, and a bit of turf now and then, but papers –"

"Peace!" said I sombrely, and began to search my luggage thoroughly for my missing inheritance. But it was all to no purpose. The papers were not there. I could not have lost them. They had been stolen. I saw my always-flimsy inheritance melt away. I had been, I thought, on the edge of success, but I now had nothing but my name, a successful duel, and a few pieces of gold. I was buried in defeat.

Of a sudden a name shot through my mind. The name of this black Forister was upon me violently and yet with perfect sureness. It was he who had stolen the papers. I knew it. I felt it in every bone. He had taken the papers.

I have since been told that it is very common for people to be moved by these feelings of omen, which are invariably correct in their particulars; but at the time I thought it odd that I should be so certain that Forister had my papers. However, I had no time to waste in thinking. I grasped my pistols. "A black man – black as the devil," cried I to Paddy. "Help me catch a little black man."

"Sure!" said Paddy, and we sallied forth.

In a moment I was below and crying to the landlord in as fine a fury as any noble:

"This villain Forister! And where be he?"

The landlord looked at me with bulging eyes. "Master Forister," he stammered. "Aye – aye – he's been agone these many hours since your lordship kicked him. He took horse, he did, for Bath, he did."

"Horses!" I roared. "Horses for two gentlemen!" And the stableyard, very respectful since my duel, began to ring with cries. The landlord pleaded something about his bill, and in my impatience I hurled to him all of my gold save one piece. The horses came soon enough, and I leaped into the saddle and was away to Bath after Forister. As I galloped out of the inn yard I heard a tumult behind me, and, looking back, I saw three hostlers lifting hard at Paddy to raise him into the saddle. He gave a despairing cry when he perceived me leaving him at such speed, but my heart was hardened to my work. I must catch Forister.

It was a dark and angry morning. The rain swept across my face, and the wind flourished my cloak. The road, glistening steel and brown, was no better than an Irish bog for hard riding. Once I passed a chaise with a flogging post-boy and steaming nags. Once I overtook a farmer jogging somewhere on a fat mare. Otherwise I saw no travellers.

I was near my journey's end when I came to a portion of the road which dipped down a steep hill. At the foot of this hill was an oak-tree, and under this tree was a man masked and mounted, and in his hand was a levelled pistol.

"Stand!" he said. "Stand!"

I knew his meaning, but when a man has lost a documentary fortune and given an innkeeper all but his last guinea, he is sure to be filled with fury at the appearance of a third and completing misfortune. With a loud shout I drew my pistol and rode like a demon at the highwayman. He fired, but his bullet struck nothing but the flying tails of my cloak. As my horse crashed into him I struck at his pate with my pistol. An instant later we both came a mighty downfall, and when I could get my eyes free of stars I arose and drew my sword. The highwayman sat before me on the ground, ruefully handling his skull. Our two horses were scampering away into the mist.

I placed my point at the highwayman's throat.

"So, my fine fellow," cried I grandly, "you rob well. You are the principal knight of the road of all England, I would dare say, by the way in which an empty pistol overcomes you."

He was still ruefully handling his skull.

"Aye," he muttered sadly, more to himself than to me, "a true knight of the road with seven ballads written of me in Bristol and three in Bath. Ill betide me for not minding my mother's word and staying at home this day. 'Tis all the unhappy luck of Jem Bottles. I should have remained an honest sheep-stealer and never engaged in this dangerous and nefarious game of lifting purses."

The man's genuine sorrow touched me. "Cheer up, Jem Bottles," said I. "All may yet be well. 'Tis not one little bang on the crown that so disturbs you?"

"'Tis not one – no," he answered gloomily; "'tis two. The traveller riding to the east before you dealt me a similar blow – may hell catch the little black devil."

"Black!" cried I. "Forister, for my life!"

"He took no moment to tell me his name," responded the sullen and wounded highwayman. "He beat me out of the saddle and rode away as brisk as a bird. I know not what my mother will say. She be for ever telling me of the danger in this trade, and here come two gentlemen in one day and unhorse me without the profit of a sixpence to my store. When I became a highwayman I thought me I had profited me from the low estate of a sheep-stealer, but now I see that happiness in this life does not altogether depend upon –"

"Enough," I shouted in my impatience. "Tell me of the black man! The black man, worm!" I pricked his throat with my sword very carefully.

"He was black, and he rode like a demon, and he handled his weapons finely," said Jem Bottles. "And since I have told you all I know, please, good sir, move the point from my throat. This will be ill news for my mother."

I took thought with myself. I must on to Bath; but the two horses had long since scampered out of sight, and my pursuit of the papers would make small way afoot.

"Come, Jem Bottles," I cried, "help me to a horse in a comrade's way and for the sake of your mother. In another case I will leave you here a bloody corse. Come; there's a good fellow!"

He seemed moved to help me. "Now, if there comes a well-mounted traveller," he said, brightening, "I will gain his horse for you if I die for it."

"And if there comes no well-mounted traveller?"

"I know not, sir. But – perhaps he will come."

"'Tis a cheap rogue who has but one horse," I observed contemptuously. "You are only a footpad, a simple-minded marquis of the bludgeon."

Now, as I had hoped, this deeply cut his pride.

"Did I not speak of the ballads, sir?" he demanded with considerable spirit. "Horses? Aye, and have I not three good nags hid behind my mother's cottage, which is less than a mile from this spot?"

"Monsieur Jem Bottles," said I, not forgetting the French manners which my father had taught me, "unless you instantly show me the way to these horses I shall cut off your hands, your feet, and your head; and, ripping out your bowels, shall sprinkle them on the road for the first post-horses to mash and trample. Do you understand my intention, Monsieur Jem Bottles?"

"Sir," he begged, "think of my mother!"

"I think of the horses," I answered grimly. "'Tis for you to think of your mother. How could I think of your mother when I wouldn't know her from the Head of Kinsale, if it didn't happen that I know the Head of Kinsale too well to mistake it for anybody's mother?"

"You speak like a man from foreign parts, sir," he rejoined in a meek voice; "but I am able to see that your meaning is serious."

"'Tis so serious," said I, rapping him gently on the head with the butt of my pistol, "that if you don't instantly display a greedy activity you will display a perfect inability to move."

"The speeching is obscure," said he, "but the rap on the head is clear to me. Still, it was not kind of you to hit me on the same spot twice."

He now arose from his mournful seat on the ground, and, still rubbing his pate, he asked me to follow him. We moved from the highway into a very narrow lane, and for some time proceeded in silence.

"'Tis a regular dog's life," spoke Jem Bottles after a period of reflection.

By this time I had grown a strong sympathy for my scoundrel.

"Come, cheer yourself, Jem Bottles," said I. "I have known a lesser ruffian who was hanged until he was dry, whereas you march along the lane with nought to your discouragement but three cracks in your crown."

"'Tis not the cracks in the crown," he answered moodily. "'Tis what my mother will say."

"I had no thought that highwaymen had mothers," said I. I had resolved now to take care of his pride, for I saw that he was bound to be considered a great highwayman, and I did not wish to disturb his feelings until I gained possession of one of the horses. But now he grew as indignant as he dared.

"Mother? Mother, sir? Do you think me an illegitimate child? I say to you flat in your face, even if you kill me the next instant, that I have a mother. Perchance I am not of the lofty gentry who go about beating honest highwaymen to the earth, but I repulse with scorn any man's suggestion that I am illegitimate. In a quarter of an hour you shall see my mother for yourself."

"Peace, Jem Bottles," said I soothingly. "I took no thought of such a thing. I would be thinking only of the ballads, and how honourable it is that a gallant and dashing life should be celebrated in song. I, for certain, have never done anything to make a pothouse ring with my name, and I liken you to the knights of olden days who tilted in all simple fair bravery without being able to wager a brass farthing as to who was right and who was wrong. Admirable Jem Bottles," I cried enthusiastically, "tell me, if you will, of your glories; tell me with your own tongue, so that when I hear the ballads waxing furious with praise of you, I shall recall the time I marched with your historic person."

"My beginning was without pretence," said the highwayman. "Little Susan, daughter of Farmer Hants, was crossing the fields with a basket of eggs. I, a masked figure, sprang out at her from a thicket. I seized the basket. She screamed. There was a frightful tumult. But in the end I bore away this basket of eight eggs, creeping stealthily through the wood. The next day Farmer Hants met me. He had a long whip. There was a frightful tumult. But he little knew that he was laying with his whip the foundation of a career so illustrious. For a time I stole his sheep, but soon grew weary of this business. Once, after they had chased me almost to Bristol, I was so weary that I resolved to forego the thing entirely. Then I became a highwayman, whom you see before you. One of the ballads begins thus:

"What ho! the merry Jem!  
Not a pint he gives for them.  
All his – "

"Stop," said I, "we'll have it at Dame Bottles's fireside. Hearing songs in the night air always makes me hoarse the next morning."

"As you will," he answered without heat. "We're a'most there."

Soon a lighted window of the highwayman's humble home shone out in the darkness, and a moment later Jem Bottles was knocking at the door. It was immediately opened, and he stalked in with his blood-marks still upon his face. There was a great outcry in a feminine voice, and a large woman rushed forward and flung her arms about the highwayman.

"Oh, Jemmie, my son, my son!" she screamed, "whatever have they done to ye this time?"

"Silence, mother dear," said Bottles. "'Tis nought but a wind-broken bough fallen on my head. Have you no manners? Do you not see the gentleman waiting to enter and warm himself?"

The woman turned upon me, alarmed, but fiery and defiant. After a moment's scrutiny she demanded:

"Oh, ho, and the gentleman had nought to do of course with my Jem's broken head?"

"'Tis a priest but newly arrived from his native island of Asia," said Bottles piously; "and it ill beseems you, mother dear, to be haggling when you might be getting the holy man and I some supper."

"True, Jemmie, my own," responded Dame Bottles. "But there are so many rogues abroad that you must forgive your old mother if she grow often affrighted that her good Jemmie has been misled." She turned to me. "Pardon, my good gentleman," she said almost in tears. "Ye little know what it is to be the mother of a high-spirited boy."

"I can truthfully say that I do not, Dame Bottles," said I, with one of my father's French bows. She was immensely pleased. Any woman may fall a victim to a limber, manly, and courteous bow.

Presently we sat down to a supper of plum-stew and bread. Bottles had washed the blood from his face and now resembled an honest man.

"You may think it strange, sir," said Dame Bottles with some housewifely embarrassment, "that a highwayman of such distinction that he has had written of him in Bristol six ballads – "

"Seven," said the highwayman.

"Seven in Bristol and in Bath two."

"Three," said the highwayman.

"And three in Bath," continued the old woman. "You may think it strange, sir, that a highwayman of such distinction that he has had written of him in Bristol seven ballads, and in Bath three, is yet obliged to sit down to a supper of plum-stew and bread."

"Where is the rest of that cheese I took on last Michaelmas?" demanded Bottles suddenly.

"Jemmie," answered his mother with reproach, "you know you gave the last of it to the crippled shepherd over on the big hill."

"So I did, mother dear," assented the highwayman, "and I regret now that I let no less than three cheeses pass me on the highway because I thought we had plenty at home."

"If you let anything pass on the road because you do not lack it at the moment, you will ultimately die of starvation, Jemmie dear," quoth the mother. "How often have I told you?"

"Aye," he answered somewhat irritably, "you also often have told me to take snuff-boxes."

"And was I at fault," she retorted, "because the cheating avarice of the merchants led them to make sinful, paltry snuff-boxes that were mere pictures of the good old gold and silver? Was it my mischief? Or was it the mischief of the plotting swineherds who now find it to their interest to deal in base and imitative metals?"

"Peace, my mother," said the highwayman. "The gentleman here has not the same interest in snuff-boxes which moves us to loud speech."

"True," said Dame Bottles, "and I readily wish that my Jemmie had no reason to care if snuff-boxes were made from cabbage-leaves."

I had been turning a scheme in my mind, and here I thought I saw my opportunity to introduce it. "Dame Bottles," said I, "your words fit well with the plan which has brought me here to your house. Know you, then, that I am a nobleman – "

"Alack, poor Jemmie!" cried the woman, raising her hands.

"No," said I, "I am not a nobleman rampant. I am a nobleman in trouble, and I need the services of your son, for which I will reward him with such richness that he will not care if they make snuff-boxes out of water or wind. I am in pursuit of a man – "

"The little black man," cried the alert Bottles.

"And I want your son to ride with me to catch this thief. He need never pass through the shadow of the creeping, clanking tree. He will be on an honest hunt to recover a great property. Give him to me. Give him fourteen guineas from his store, and bid us mount his horses and away. Save your son!"

The old woman burst into tears. "Sir," she answered, "I know little of you, but, as near as I can see in the light of this one candle, you are a hangel. Take my boy! Treat him as you would your own stepson, and if snuff-boxes ever get better I will let you both hear of it."

Less than an hour later Jem Bottles and I were off for Bath, riding two very good horses.

## CHAPTER IV

Now my whole mind was really bent on finding my black Forister, but yet, as Jem Bottles and I rode toward Bath, I thought of a cloaked figure and a pair of shining eyes, and it seemed to me that I recalled the curve of sweet, proud lips. I knew that I should be thinking of my papers, my future; but a quick perversity made me dwell for a long trotting time in a dream of feminine excellence, in a dream of feminine beauty which was both ascetic and deeply sensuous. I know hardly how to say that two eyes, a vision of lips, a conception of a figure, should properly move me as I bounced along the road with Jem Bottles. But it is certain that it came upon me. The eyes of the daughter of the great Earl of Westport had put in chains the redoubtable O'Ruddy. It was true. It was clear. I admitted it to myself. The admission caused a number of reflections to occur in my mind, and the chief of these was that I was a misfortunate wretch.

Jem Bottles recalled me to the immediate business.

"'Tis the lights of Bath, sir," he said, "and if it please you, sir, I shall await you under yonder tree, since the wretched balladists have rendered me so well known in the town that I dare not venture in it for fear of a popular welcome from the people who have no snuff-boxes whatever."

"I will go and listen to the ballads," I replied, "and in the mean time do you await me here under that tree."

So saying I galloped into Bath, my soul sharp to find Forister and to take him by the neck and strangle out of him those papers which were my sole reasons for living. But the landlord of the best inn met me with an unmistakable frankness.

"Mr. Forister?" said he. "Yes, your lordship, but Mr. Forister is gone back to Bristol."

I was so pleased with his calling me "your lordship" that I hesitated a moment. But I was recalled to sense by the thought that although Jem Bottles and I had fifteen guineas between us, he had fourteen and I had the one. Thanking the landlord I galloped out of Bath.

Bottles was awaiting me under the tree. "To Bristol," I cried. "Our chase lies toward Bristol. He has doubled back."

"'Twas while we were at supper," said Bottles, as he cantered up to my shoulder. "I might have had two trials at him if I had not had the honour of meeting your worship. I warrant you, sir, he would not have escaped me twice."

"Think of his crack in your skull, and be content," I replied. "And in the mean time ride for Bristol."

Within five miles of Bristol we came upon a wayside inn in which there was progressing a great commotion. Lights flashed from window to window, and we could hear women howling. To my great surprise Bottles at once became hugely excited.

"Damme, sir," he shouted, "my sweetheart is a chambermaid here, and if she be hurted I will know it."

He spurred valiantly forward, and, after futilely calling to him to check his career, I followed. He leaped from his horse at the door of the inn and bounced into the place, pistol in hand. I was too confused to understand much, but it seemed to my ears that his entrance was hailed with a roar of relief and joy. A stable-boy, fearfully anxious, grasped my bridle, crying, "Go in, sir, in God's name. They will be killing each other." Thinking that, whatever betide, it was proper to be at the back of my friend Bottles, I too sprang from my horse and popped into the inn.

A more unexpected sight never met my experienced gaze. A fat landlady, mark you, was sobbing in the arms of my villainous friend, and a pretty maid was clinging to his arm and screaming. At the same time there were about him a dozen people of both sexes who were yelling, —

"Oh, pray, Master Bottles! Good Master Bottles, do stop them. One is a great Afric chief, red as a fire, and the other is Satan, Satan himself! Oh, pray, good Master Bottles, stop them!"

My fine highwayman was puffed out like a poisoned frog. I had no thought that he could be so grand.

"What is this disturbance?" he demanded in a bass voice.

"O good Master Bottles," clamoured the people. "Satan wishes to kill the Red Giant, who has Satan barred in the best room in the inn. And they make frightful destruction of chairs and tables. Bid them cease, O good Master Bottles!"

From overhead we could hear the sound of blows upon wood mingled with threatening talk.

"Stand aside," said the highwayman in a great gruff voice which made me marvel at him. He unhesitatingly dumped the swooning form of the landlady into another pair of arms, shook off the pretty maid, and moved sublimely upon the foot of the stairs amid exclamations of joy, wonder, admiration, even reverence.

But the voice of an unseen person hailed suddenly from the head of the stairs.

"And if ye have not said enough masses for your heathen soul," remarked the voice, "you would be better mustering the neighbours this instant to go to church for you and bid them do the best they can in a short time. You will never be coming downstairs if you once come up."

Bottles hesitated; the company shuddered out: "'Tis the Red Giant."

"And I would be having one more word with you," continued the unseen person. "I have him here, and here I keep him. 'Tis not me that wants the little black rogue, what with his hammering on the door and his calling me out of my name. 'Tis no work that I like, and I would lever go in and put my heel in his face. But I was told to catch a little black man, and I have him, and him I will keep. 'Tis not me that wished to come here and catch little black men for anybody; but here I am in this foreign country, catching little black men, and I will have no interference."

But here I gave a great call of recognition.

"Paddy!"

I saw the whole thing. This wild-headed Paddy, whom I had told to catch me a little black man, had followed after me toward Bath and somehow managed to barricade in a room the very first man he saw who was small and black. At first I wished to laugh; an instant later I was furious.

"Paddy," I thundered; "come down out of that now! What would you be doing? Come down out of that now!"

The reply was sulky, but unmistakably from Paddy. Most of it was mumbled.

"Sure I've gone and caught as little and as black a man as is in the whole world, and was keeping the scoundrel here safe, and along he comes and tells me to come down out of that now with no more gratitude than if he had given me a gold goose. And yet I fought a duel for him and managed everything so finely that he came away well enough to box me on the ear, which was mere hilarity and means nothing between friends."

Jem Bottles was still halted on the stair. He and all the others had listened to Paddy's speeches in a blank amazement which had much superstition in it.

"Shall I go up, sir?" he asked, not eagerly.

"No," said I. "Leave me to deal with it. I fear a great mistake. Give me ten minutes, and I promise to empty the inn of all uproar."

A murmur of admiration arose, and as the sound leaped about my ears I moved casually and indifferently up against Paddy. It was a grand scene.

"Paddy," I whispered as soon as I had reached a place on the stairs safe from the ears of the people below. "Paddy, you have made a great blunder. You have the wrong man."

"'Tis unlikely," replied Paddy with scorn. "You wait until you see him, and if he is not little and black, then –"

"Yes, yes," said I hastily, "but it was not any little black man at all which I wanted. It was a particular little black man."

"But," said the ruffian brightly, "it would be possible this one will serve your end. He's little and he's black."

At this moment the voice of the captive came intoning through the door of a chamber.

"When I am free I will first cut out your liver and have it grilled, and feed it to you as you are dying."

Paddy had stepped forward and placed his lips within about six inches of one of the panels.

"Come now, be easy!" he said. "You know well that if you should do as you say, I would beat your head that it would have the looks of a pudding fallen from a high window, and that's the truth."

"Open the door, rascal," called the captive, "and we shall see."

"I will be opening no doors," retorted Paddy indignantly. "Remain quiet, you little black devil, or, by the mass, I'll –"

"I'll slice your heart into pieces of paper," thundered Paddy's prisoner, kicking and pounding.

By this time I was ready to interfere. "Paddy," said I, catching him by the shoulder, "you have the wrong man. Leave it to me; mind you, leave it to me."

"He's that small and black you'd think –" he began dejectedly, but I cut him short.

Jem Bottles, unable to endure the suspense, had come up from below. He was still bristling and blustering, as if all the maids were remarking him.

"And why does this fine gentleman kick and pound on the door?" he demanded in a gruff voice loud enough to be heard in all appreciative parts of the inn. "I'll have him out and slit his nose."

The thunder on the door ceased, and the captive observed:

"Ha! another scoundrel! If my ears do not play me false, there are now three waiting for me to kick them to the hangman."

Restraining Paddy and Bottles, who each wished to reply in heroic verse to this sally, I stepped to the door.

"Sir," said I civilly, "I fear a great blunder has been done. I –"

"Why," said the captive with a sneer, "'tis the Irishman! 'Tis the king of the Irelands. Open the door, pig."

My elation knew no bounds.

"Paddy," cried I, "you have the right little black man." But there was no time for celebration. I must first answer my enemy. "You will remember that I kicked you once," said I, "and if you have a memory as long as my finger be careful I do not kick you again, else even people as far away as the French will think you are a meteor. But I would not be bandying words at long range. Paddy, unbar the door."

"If I can," muttered Paddy, fumbling with a lot of machinery so ingenious that it would require a great lack of knowledge to thoroughly understand it. In the mean time we could hear Forister move away from the door, and by the sound of a leisurely scrape of a chair on the floor I judge he had taken his seat somewhere near the centre of the room. Bottles was handling his pistol and regarding me.

"Yes," said I, "if he fires, do you pepper him fairly. Otherwise await my orders. Paddy, you slug, unbar the door."

"If I am able," said Paddy, still muttering and fumbling with his contrivances. He had no sooner mouthed the words than the door flew open as if by magic, and we discovered a room bright with the light of a fire and candles. Forister was seated negligently at a table in the centre of the room. His legs were crossed, but his naked sword lay on the table at his hand. He had the first word, because I was amazed, almost stunned, by the precipitous opening of the door.

"Ho! ho!" he observed frigidly, "'tis indeed the king of the Irelands, accompanied by the red-headed duke who has entertained me for some time, and a third party with a thief's face who handles a loaded pistol with such abandon as leads me to suppose that he once may have been a highwayman. A very pretty band."

"Use your tongue for a garter, Forister," said I. "I want my papers."

## CHAPTER V

"Your 'papers'?" said Forister. "Damn you and your papers. What would I know of your papers?"

"I mean," said I fiercely, "the papers that you stole out of my chamber in the inn at Bristol."

The man actually sank back in his chair and laughed me up to the roof.

"Papers!" he shouted. "Here's the king of the Irelands thinking that I have made off with his papers!"

"You choose a good time for laughing," said I, with more sobriety. "In a short time you will be laughing with the back of your head."

He sat up and looked at me with quick decision.

"Now, what is all this rubbish about papers?" he said sharply. "What have I to do with your filthy papers? I had one intention regarding you, – of that I am certain. I was resolved to kill you on the first occasion when we could cross swords, but – 'papers' – faugh! What do you mean?"

The hoarse voice of Jem Bottles broke in from somewhere behind me. "We might easily throw him to the earth and tie him, sir, and then make search of him."

"And you would know how to go about the business, I warrant me," laughed Forister. "You muzzle-faced rogue, you!"

To my astonishment the redoubtable highwayman gave back before the easy disdain of this superior scoundrel.

"My ways may not always have been straight and narrow, master," he rejoined, almost in a whine, "but you have no call to name me muzzle-faced."

Forister turned from him contemptuously and fixed his regard with much enthusiasm upon Paddy.

"Very red," said he. "Very red, indeed. And thick as fagots, too. A very delectable head of hair, fit to be spun into a thousand blankets for the naked savages in heathen parts. The wild forests in Ireland must indeed be dark when it requires a lantern of this measure to light the lonely traveller on his way."

But Paddy was an honest man even if he did not know it, and he at once walked to Forister and held against his ear a fist the size of a pig's hind-leg.

"I cannot throw the talk back to you," he said. "You are too fast for me, but I tell you to your face that you had better change your tongue for a lock of an old witch's hair unless you intend to be battered this moment."

"Peace," said Forister calmly. "I am a man of natural wit, and I would entertain myself. Now, there is your excellent chieftain the king of the Irelands. Him I regard as a very good specimen, whose ancestors were not very long ago swinging by their tails from the lofty palms of Ireland and playing with cocoanuts to and fro." He smiled and leaned back, well satisfied with himself.

All this time I had been silent, because I had been deep in reflection upon Forister. Now I said:

"Forister, you are a great rogue. I know you. One thing is certain. You have not my papers and never did you have them."

He looked upon me with some admiration and cried:

"Aye, the cannibal shows a glimmer of reason. No, I have not your foolish papers, and I only wish I had them in order to hurl the bundle at your damned stupid head."

"For a kicked man you have a gay spirit," I replied. "But at any rate I have no time for you now. I am off to Bristol after my papers, and I only wish for the sake of ease that I had to go no farther than this chamber. Come, Paddy! Come, Jem!"

My two henchmen were manifestly disappointed; they turned reluctantly at my word.

"Have I the leave of one crack at him, your honour?" whispered Paddy earnestly. "He said my head was a lantern."

"No," said I, "leave him to his meditations."

As we passed down the corridor we heard him laugh loudly, and he called out to me, —

"When I come to Bristol I will kill you."

I had more than a mind to go back and stuff this threat into his throat, but I better knew my business, which was to recover the papers.

"Come," said I, and we passed down stairs.

The people of the inn made way for Paddy as if he had been a falling tree, and at the same time they worshipped Jem Bottles for having performed everything. I had some wonder as to which would be able to out-strut the other. I think Jem Bottles won the match, for he had the advantage of being known as one of the most dangerous men in southwestern England, whereas Paddy had only his vanity to help him.

"'Tis all arranged," said Bottles pompously. "Your devil will come forth as quiet as a rabbit."

We ordered our horses, and a small crowd of obsequious stable-boys rushed to fetch them. I marvelled when I saw them lead out Paddy's horse. I had thought from what I perceived over my shoulder when I left Bristol that he would never be able to make half a league in the saddle. Amid the flicker of lanterns, Bottles and I mounted and then I heard Paddy calling to him all the stable-boys:

"Now, when I give the word, you heave for your lives. Stand, you beast! Cannot four of you hold him by the legs? I will be giving the word in a moment. Are you all ready? Well, now, ready again — heave!"

There was a short scuffle in the darkness, and presently Paddy appeared above the heads of the others in the *mêlée*.

"There, now," said he to them, "that was well done. One would easily be telling that I was an ex-trooper of the king." He rode out to us complacently. "'Tis a good horse, if only he steered with a tiller instead of these straps," he remarked, "and he goes well before the wind."

"To Bristol," said I. "Paddy, you must follow as best you may. I have no time to be watching you, although you are interesting."

An unhappy cry came from behind Bottles, and I spurred on, but again I could not wait for my faithful countryman. My papers were still the stake for which I played. However I hoped that Paddy would now give over his ideas about catching little black men.

As we neared Bristol Jem Bottles once more became backward. He referred to the seven ballads, and feared that the unexpected presence of such a well-known character would create an excitement which would not be easy to cool. So we made a rendezvous under another tree, and I rode on alone. Thus I was separated from both my good companions. However, before parting, I took occasion to borrow five guineas from Jem's store.

I was as weary as a dog, although I had never been told that gentlemen riding amid such adventures were ever weary. At the inn in Bristol a sleepy boy took my horse, and a sleepy landlord aroused himself as he recognized me.

"My poor inn is at your disposal, sir," he cried as he bowed. "The Earl has inquired for you to-day, or yesterday, as well as my young Lord Strepp and Colonel Royale."

"Aye?" said I carelessly. "Did they so? Show me to a chamber. I am much enwearied. I would seek a good bed and a sound sleep, for I have ridden far and done much since last I had repose."

"Yes, sir," said the landlord deferentially.

After a long hard sleep I was aroused by a constant pounding on my door. At my cry a servant entered. He was very abject. "His lordship's valet has been waiting to give you a message from his lordship, sir." I bid him let the valet enter. The man whose heroic nose had borne the brunt of Forister's swift departure from the inn when I kicked him came into my chamber with distinguished grace and

dignity and informed me that his noble master cared to see me in his chamber when it would suit my convenience.

Of course the old Earl was after his papers. And what was I to tell him, – that I was all befooled and befuddled? – that after my father had kept these papers for so many years in faithful trust I had lost them on the very brink of deliverance of them to their rightful owner? What was I to speak?

I did not wish to see the Earl of Westport, but some sudden and curious courage forced me into my clothes and out to the corridor. The Earl's valet was waiting there. "I pray you, sir, follow me," he said. I followed him to an expensive part of the inn, where he knocked upon a door. It was opened by a bending serving-man. The room was a kind of parlour, and in it, to my surprise, were Lord Strepp and Colonel Royale. They gazed at me with a surprise equivalent to mine own.

Young Lord Strepp was the first one thoroughly to collect himself. Then he advanced upon me with outstretched hand.

"Mr. O'Ruddy," he cried, "believe me, we are glad to see you. We thought you had gone for all time."

Colonel Royale was only a moment behind his friend, but as he extended his hand his face flushed painfully.

"Sir," he said somewhat formally, "not long ago I lost my temper, I fear. I know I have to thank you for great consideration and generosity. I – I – you – "

Whereupon we both began to stammer and grimace. All the time I was chocking out:

"Pray – pray – , don't speak of it – a – nothing – in truth, you kindly exaggerate – I – "

It was young Lord Strepp who brought us out of our embarrassment. "Here, you two good fellows," he cried heartily, "a glass of wine with you."

We looked gratefully at him, and in the business of filling our glasses we lost our awkwardness. "To you," said Lord Strepp; and as we drained our wine I knew that I had two more friends in England.

During the drinking the Earl's valet had been hovering near my coat-tails. Afterward he took occasion to make gentle suggestion to me:

"His lordship awaits your presence in his chamber, sir, when it pleases you."

The other gentlemen immediately deferred to my obligation, and I followed the valet into a large darkened chamber. It was some moments before my eyes could discover that the Earl was abed. Indeed, a rasping voice from beneath the canopies called to me before I knew that anybody was in the chamber but myself and the valet.

"Come hither, O'Ruddy," called the Earl. "Tompkins, get out! Is it your duty to stand there mummified? Get out!"

The servant hastily withdrew, and I walked slowly to the great man's bedside. Two shining shrewd eyes looked at me from a mass of pillows, and I had a knowledge of an aged face, half smiling and yet satirical, even malignant.

"And so this is the young fortune-hunter from Ireland," he said in a hoarse sick-man's voice. "The young fortune-hunter! Ha! With his worthless papers! Ha!"

"Worthless?" cried I, starting.

"Worthless!" cried the Earl vehemently. He tried to lift himself in his bed, in order to make more emphasis. "Worthless! Nothing but straw – straw – straw!" Then he cackled out a laugh.

And this was my inheritance! I could have sobbed my grief and anger, but I took firm hold on myself and resolved upon another way of dealing with the nobleman.

"My lord," said I coolly, "My father is dead. When he was dying he gave certain papers into my hands, – papers which he had guarded for many years, – and bade me, as his son, to deliver them into the hands of an old friend and comrade; and I come to this old friend and comrade of my father, and he lies back in his bed and cackles at me like a hen. 'Tis a small foot I would have set upon England if I had known more of you, you old skate!"

But still he laughed and cried: "Straw! Straw! Nothing but straw!"

"Well, sir," said I with icy dignity, "I may be a fool of an Irishman with no title save an older one than yours; but I would be deeply sorry if there came a day when I should throw a trust back in the teeth of a dead comrade's son."

"No," said the bright-eyed old man, comforting himself amid his pillows. "Look you, O'Ruddy! You are a rascal! You came over in an attempt to ruin me! I know it!"

I was awed by this accusation. It seemed to me to be too grand, too gorgeous for my personal consumption. I knew not what to do with this colossus. It towered above me in splendour and guilt. I had never expected to be challenged with attempting to ruin earls. My father had often ruined sea-captains, but he never in his life ruined so much as a baronet. It seemed altogether too fine for my family, but I could only blurt weakly, "Yessir." I was much like a lackey.

"Aye," said the old man, suddenly feeble from the excitement, "I see you admit it, you black Irish rogue." He sank back and applied a napkin to his mouth. It seemed to come away stained with blood. "You scoundrel!"

I had a strange cowardly inclination to fling myself upon this ancient survival and squeeze his throat until it closed like a pursel. And my inclination was so strong that I stood like a stone.

The valet opened the door. "If it please your Lordship – Lady Mary," he announced, and stood aside to let a lady pass. The Earl seemed immediately to forget my presence. He began at once to make himself uncomfortable in his bed. Then he cried fretfully: "Come, Mary, what caused you to be so long? Make me easy! Ruffle my pillows! Come, daughter."

"Yes, father," answered a soothing and sweet voice. A gracious figure passed before me and bended over the bed of the Earl. I was near blinded. It was not a natural blindness. It was an artificial blindness which came from my emotion. Was she tall? I don't know. Was she short? I don't know. But I am certain that she was exactly of the right size. She was, in all ways, perfection. She was of such glory, she was so splendid, that my heart ceased to beat. I remained standing like a stone, but my sword scabbard, reminiscent of some movement, flapped gently against my leg. I thought it was a horrible sound. I sought to stay it, but it continued to tinkle, and I remember that, standing there in the room with the old Earl and my love-'til-death, I thought most of my scabbard and its inability to lay quiet at my thigh.

She smoothed his bed and coaxed him and comforted him. Never had I seen such tenderness. It was like a vision of a classic hereafter. In a second I would have exchanged my youth for the position of this doddering old nobleman who spat blood into a napkin.

Suddenly the Earl wheeled his eyes and saw me.

"Ha, Mary!" he cried feebly, "I wish to point out a rogue. There he stands! The O'Ruddy! An Irishman and a fine robber! Mark him well, and keep stern watch of your jewels."

The beautiful young lady turned upon me an affrighted glance. And I stood like a stone.

"Aye," said the old wretch, "keep stern watch of your jewels. He is a very demon for skill. He could take a ring from your finger while you were thinking he was fluttering his hands in the air."

I bowed gallantly to the young lady. "Your rings are safe, my lady. I would ill requite the kindness shown by your father to the son of an old friend if I deprived your white fingers of a single ornament."

"Clever as ever, clever as ever," chuckled the wicked old man.

The young lady flushed and looked first at me and then at her father. I thought her eye, as it rested upon me, was not without some sympathetic feeling. I adored her. All the same I wished to kill her father. It is very curious when one wishes to kill the father of the woman one adores. But I suppose the situation was made more possible for me by the fact that it would have been extremely inexpedient to have killed the Earl in his sick bed. I even grinned at him.

"If you remember my father, your lordship," said I amiably, "despite your trying hard to forget him, you will remember that he had a certain native wit which on occasion led him to be able to

frustrate his enemies. It must have been a family trait, for I seem to have it. You are an evil old man!  
You yourself stole my papers!"

## CHAPTER VI

At first I thought that my speech had given the aged Earl a stroke. He writhed on his bed, and something appeared at his lips which was like froth. His lovely daughter sprang to him with a cry of fear and woe. But he was not dying; he was only mad with rage.

"How dare you? How dare you?" he gasped. "You whelp of Satan!"

"'Tis me that would not be fearing to dare anything," I rejoined calmly. "I would not so. I came here with a mind for fair words, but you have met me with insult and something worse. We cannot talk the thing. We must act it. The papers are yours, but you took them from me unfairly. You may destroy them. Otherwise I will have them back and discover what turned you into a great rogue near the end of your days."

"Hearken!" screamed the Earl. "Hearken! He threatens." The door into the parlour flew open, and Lord Strepp and Colonel Royale appeared on the threshold, their faces blank with wonder.

"Father," cried the young lord, stepping hastily forward, "whatever is wrong?"

"That!" screamed the Earl, pointing a palsied finger at me. "That! He comes here and threatens *me*, – a peer of England."

The Lady Mary spoke swiftly to her brother and the Colonel.

"'Tis a sick man's fancy," she said. "There have been no threats. Father has had a bad day. He is not himself. He talks wildly. He –"

"Mary!" yelled the Earl as well as he was able. "Do you betray me? Do you betray your own father? Oh, a woman Judas and my daughter!"

Lord Strepp and Colonel Royale looked as if their minds were coming apart. They stared at Lady Mary, at the Earl, at me. For my part I remained silent and stiff in a corner, keeping my eye upon the swords of the other gentlemen. I had no doubt but that presently I would be engaged in a desperate attempt to preserve my life. Lady Mary was weeping. She had never once glanced in my direction. But I was thrilling with happiness. She had flung me her feeble intercession even as a lady may fling a bun to a bear in a pit, but I had the remembrance to prize, to treasure, and if both gentlemen had set upon me and the sick Earl had advanced with the warming-pan I believe my new strength would have been able to beat them off.

In the meantime the Earl was screeching meaningless rubbish in which my name, with epithets, occurred constantly. Lady Mary, still weeping, was trying to calm him.

Young Lord Strepp at last seemed to make up his mind. He approached me and remarked:

"An inexplicable situation, Mr. O'Ruddy."

"More to me than to you," I repeated suavely.

"How?" he asked, with less consideration in his manner. "I know nought of this mummery."

"At least I know no more," I replied, still suave.

"How, Mr. O'Ruddy?" he asked, frowning. "I enter and find you wrangling with my father in his sick chamber. Is there to be no word for this?"

"I dare say you will get forty from your father; a hundred, it may be," said I, always pleasant. "But from me you will get none."

He reflected for a moment. "I dare say you understand I will brook no high-handed silence in a matter of this kind. I am accustomed to ask for the reasons for certain kinds of conduct, and of course I am somewhat prepared to see that the reasons are forthcoming."

"Well, in this case, my lord," said I with a smile, "you can accustom yourself to not getting a reason for a certain kind of conduct, because I do not intend to explain myself."

But at this moment our agreeable conversation was interrupted by the old Earl who began to bay at his son. "Arthur, Arthur, fling the rascal out; fling the rascal out! He is an impostor, a thief!" He began to fume and sputter, and threw his arms wildly; he was in some kind of convulsion; his

pillows tossed, and suddenly a packet fell from under them to the floor. As all eyes wheeled toward it, I stooped swiftly and picked it up.

"My papers!" said I.

On their part there was a breathless moment of indecision. Then the swords of Lord Strepp and the Colonel came wildly from their scabbards. Mine was whipped out no less speedily, but I took it and flung it on the floor at their feet, the hilt toward them. "No," said I, my hands empty save for the papers, "'tis only that I would be making a present to the fair Lady Mary, which I pray her to receive." With my best Irish bow I extended to the young lady the papers, my inheritance, which had caused her father so much foaming at the mouth.

She looked at me scornfully, she looked at her father, she looked at me pathetically, she looked at her father, she looked at me piteously; she took the papers.

I walked to the lowering and abashed points of the other men's swords, and picked my blade from the floor. I paid no heed to the glittering points which flashed near my eyes. I strode to the door; I turned and bowed; as I did so, I believe I saw something in Lady Mary's eyes which I wished to see there. I closed the door behind me.

But immediately there was a great clamour in the room I had left, and the door was thrown violently open again. Colonel Royale appeared in a high passion:

"No, no, O'Ruddy," he shouted, "you are a gallant gentleman. I would stake my life that you are in the right. Say the word, and I will back you to the end against ten thousand fiends."

And after him came tempestuously young Lord Strepp, white on the lips with pure rage. But he spoke with a sudden steadiness.

"Colonel Royale, it appears," he said, "thinks he has to protect my friend The O'Ruddy from some wrong of my family or of mine?"

The Colonel drew in his breath for a dangerous reply, but I quickly broke in:

"Come, come, gentlemen," said I sharply. "Are swords to flash between friends when there are so many damned scoundrels in the world to parry and pink? 'Tis wrong; 'tis very wrong. Now, mark you, let us be men of peace at least until to-morrow morning, when, by the way, I have to fight your friend Forister."

"Forister!" they cried together. Their jaws fell; their eyes bulged; they forgot everything; there was a silence.

"Well," said I, wishing to reassure them, "it may not be to-morrow morning. He only told me that he would kill me as soon as he came to Bristol, and I expect him to-night or in the morning. I would of course be expecting him to show here as quickly as possible after his grand speech; but he would not be entirely unwelcome, I am thinking, for I have a mind to see if the sword of an honest man, but no fighter, would be able to put this rogue to shame, and him with all his high talk about killing people who have never done a thing in life to him but kick him some number of feet out into the inn yard, and this need never to have happened if he had known enough to have kept his sense of humour to himself, which often happens in this world."

Reflectively, Colonel Royale murmured:

"One of the finest swordsmen in England."

For this I cared nothing.

Reflectively, Lord Strepp murmured: "My father's partner in the shipping trade."

This last made me open my eyes. "Your father's partner in the shipping trade, Lord Strepp? That little black rascal?"

The young nobleman looked sheepish.

"Aye, I doubt not he may well be called a little black rascal, O'Ruddy," he answered; "but in fact he is my father's partner in certain large – fairly large, you know – shipping interests. Of course that is a matter of no consequence to me personally – but – I believe my father likes him, and my mother and

my sister are quite fond of him, I think. I, myself, have never been able to quite – quite understand him in certain ways. He seems a trifle odd at moments. But he certainly is a friend of the family."

"Then," said I, "you will not be able to have the felicity of seeing him kill me, Lord Strepp."

"On the contrary," he rejoined considerately, "I would regard it as usual if he asked me to accompany him to the scene of the fight."

His remark, incidentally, that his sister was fond of Forister, filled me with a sudden insolent madness.

"I would hesitate to disturb any shipping trade," I said with dignity. "It is far from me to wish that the commerce of Great Britain should be hampered by sword-thrust of mine. If it would please young Lord Strepp, I could hand my apologies to Forister all tied up in blue-silk ribbon."

But the youthful nobleman only looked at me long with a sad and reproachful gaze.

"O'Ruddy," he said mournfully, "I have seen you do two fine things. You have never seen me do anything. But, know you now, once and for all, that you may not quarrel with me."

This was too much for an Irish heart. I was moved to throw myself on this lad's neck. I wished to swear to him that I was a brother in blood, I wished to cut a vein to give him everlasting strength – but perhaps his sister Mary had something to do with this feeling.

Colonel Royale had been fidgeting. Now he said suddenly:

"Strepp, I wronged you. Your pardon, Mr. O'Ruddy; but, damme, Strepp, if I didn't think you had gone wrong for the moment."

Lord Strepp took the offered hand. "You are a stupid old firebrain," he said affectionately to the Colonel.

"Well," said the Colonel jubilantly, "now everything is clear. If Mr. O'Ruddy will have me, I will go with him to meet this Forister; and you, Strepp, will accompany Forister; and we all will meet in a friendly way – ahem!"

"The situation is intimately involved," said Lord Strepp dejectedly. "It will be a ridiculous business – watching each blade lunge toward the breast of a friend. I don't know that it is proper. Royale, let us set ourselves to part these duellists. It is indecent."

"Did you note the manner in which he kicked him out of the inn?" asked the Colonel. "Do you think a few soothing words would calm the mind of one of the finest swordsmen in England?"

I began to do some profound thinking.

"Look you, Colonel," said I. "Do you mean that this wretched little liar and coward is a fine swordsman?"

"I haven't heard what you call him," said the Colonel, "but his sword-play is regular firelight on the wall. However," he added hopefully, "we may find some way to keep him from killing you. I have seen some of the greatest swordsmen lose by chance to a novice. It is something like cards. And yet you are not an ignorant player. That, I, Clarence Royale, know full well. Let us try to beat him."

I remembered Forister's parting sentence. Could it be true that a man I had kicked with such enthusiasm and success was now about to take revenge by killing me? I was really disturbed. I was a very brave youth, but I had the most advanced ideas about being killed. On occasion of great danger I could easily and tranquilly develop a philosophy of avoidance and retirement. I had no antiquated notions about going out and getting myself killed through sheer bull-headed scorn of the other fellow's hurting me. My father had taught me this discretion. As a soldier he claimed that he had run away from nine battles, and he would have run away from more, he said, only that all the others had turned out to be victories for his side. He was admittedly a brave man, but, more than this, he had a great deal of sense. I was the child of my father. It did not seem to me profitable to be killed for the sake of a sentiment which seemed weak and dispensable. This little villain! Should I allow him to gratify a furious revenge because I was afraid to take to my heels? I resolved to have the courage of my emotions. I would run away.

But of all this I said nothing. It passed through my mind like light and left me still smiling gayly at Colonel Royale's observations upon the situation.

"Wounds in the body from Forister," quoth he academically, "are almost certain to be fatal, for his wrist has a magnificent twist which reminds one of a top. I do not know where he learned this wrist movement, but almost invariably it leads him to kill his man. Last year I saw him – I digress. I must look to it that O'Ruddy has quiet, rest, and peace of mind until the morning."

Yes; I would have great peace of mind until the morning! I saw that clearly.

"Well," said I, "at any rate we will know more to-morrow. A good day to you, Lord Strepp, and I hope your principal has no more harm come to him than I care to have come to me, which is precious little, and in which case the two of us will be little hurted."

"Good-bye, O'Ruddy," said the young man.

In the corridor the Colonel slapped my shoulder in a sudden exuberant outburst.

"O'Ruddy," he cried, "the chance of your life! Probably the best-known swordsman in all England! 'Pon my word, if you should even graze him, it would almost make you a peer. If you truly pinked him, you could marry a duchess. My eye, what an opportunity for a young and ambitious man."

"And what right has he to be such a fine swordsman?" I demanded fretfully. "Damn him! 'Tis no right of a little tadpole like him to be a great cut-throat. One could never have told from the look of him, and yet it simply teaches one to be always cautious with men."

The Colonel was bubbling over with good nature, his mind full of the prospective event.

"I saw Ponsonby kill Stewart in their great fight several years agone," he cried, rubbing his hands, "but Ponsonby was no such swordsman as Forister, and I misdoubt me that Stewart was much better than you yourself."

Here was a cheerful butcher. I eyed him coldly.

"And out of this," said I slowly, "comes a vast deal of entertainment for you, and a hole between two ribs for me. I think I need a drink."

"By all means, my boy," he answered, heartily. "Come to my chamber. A quart of port under your waistcoat will cure a certain bilious desire in you to see the worst of things, which I have detected lately in your manner. With grand sport before us, how could you be otherwise than jolly? Ha, Ha!"

So saying, he affectionately took my arm and led me along the corridor.

## CHAPTER VII

When I reached my own chamber I sank heavily into a chair. My brain was in a tumult. I had fallen in love and arranged to be killed in one short day's work. I stared at my image in a mirror. Could I be The O'Ruddy? Perhaps my name was Paddy or Jem Bottles? Could I pick myself out in a crowd? Could I establish my identification? I little knew.

At first I thought of my calm friend who apparently drank blood for his breakfast. Colonel Royale to me was somewhat of a stranger, but his charming willingness to grind the bones of his friends in his teeth was now quite clear. I fight the best swordsman in England as an amusement, a show? I began to see reasons for returning to Ireland. It was doubtful if old Mickey Clancy would be able to take full care of my estate even with the assistance and prevention of Father Donovan. All properties looked better while the real owner had his eye on them. It would be a shame to waste the place at Glandore all for a bit of pride of staying in England. Never a man neglected his patrimony but that it didn't melt down to a kick in the breeches and much trouble in the courts. I perceived, in short, that my Irish lands were in danger. What could endanger them was not quite clear to my eye, but at any rate they must be saved. Moreover it was necessary to take quick measures. I started up from my chair, hastily recounting Jem Bottles's five guineas.

But I bethought me of Lady Mary. She could hardly be my good fairy. She was rather too plump to be a fairy. She was not extremely plump, but when she walked something moved within her skirts. For my part I think little of fairies, who remind me of roasted fowl's wing. Give me the less brittle beauty which is not likely to break in a man's arms.

After all, I reflected, Mickey Clancy could take care quite well of that estate at Glandore; and, if he didn't, Father Donovan would soon bring him to trouble; and, if Father Donovan couldn't, why, the place was worth very little any how. Besides, 'tis a very weak man who cannot throw an estate into the air for a pair of bright eyes.

Aye, and Lady Mary's bright eyes! That was one matter. And there was Forister's bright sword. That was another matter. But to my descendants I declare that my hesitation did not endure an instant. Forister might have an arm so supple and a sword so long that he might be able to touch the nape of his neck with his own point, but I was firm on English soil. I would meet him even if he were a *chevaux de frise*. Little it mattered to me. He might swing the ten arms of an Indian god; he might yell like a gale at sea; he might be more terrible in appearance than a volcano in its passions; still I would meet him.

There was a knock, and at my bidding a servant approached and said: "A gentleman, Mr. Forister, wishes to see you, sir."

For a moment I was privately in a panic. Should I say that I was ill, and then send for a doctor to prove that I was not ill? Should I run straightway and hide under the bed? No!

"Bid the gentleman enter," said I to the servant.

Forister came in smiling, cool and deadly. "Good day to you, Mr. O'Ruddy," he said, showing me his little teeth. "I am glad to see that you are not for the moment consorting with highwaymen and other abandoned characters who might succeed in corrupting your morals, Mr. O'Ruddy. I have decided to kill you, Mr. O'Ruddy. You may have heard that I am the finest swordsman in England, Mr. O'Ruddy?"

I replied calmly: "I have heard that you are the finest swordsman in England, Mr. Forister, whenever better swordsmen have been traveling in foreign parts, Mr. Forister, and when no visitors of fencing distinction have taken occasion to journey here, Mr. Forister."

This talk did not give him pleasure, evidently. He had entered with brave composure, but now he bit his lip and shot me a glance of hatred. "I only wished to announce," he said savagely, "that I would prefer to kill you in the morning as early as possible."

"And how may I render my small assistance to you, Mr. Forister? Have you come to request me to arise at an untimely hour?"

I was very placid; but it was not for him to be coming to my chamber with talk of killing me. Still, I thought that, inasmuch as he was there, I might do some good to myself by irritating him slightly. I continued:

"I to-day informed my friends – "

"Your friends!" said he.

"My friends," said I. "Colonel Royale in this matter."

"Colonel Royale!" said he.

"Colonel Royale," said I. "And if you are bound to talk more you had best thrust your head from the window and talk to those chimneys there, which will take far more interest in your speech than I can work up. I was telling you that to-day I informed my friends – then you interrupted me. Well, I informed them – but what the devil I informed them of you will not know very soon. I can promise you, however, it was not a thing you would care to hear with your hands tied behind you."

"Here's a cold man with a belly full of ice," said he musingly. "I have wronged him. He has a tongue on him, he has that. And here I have been judging from his appearance that he was a mere common dolt. And, what, Mr. O'Ruddy," he added, "were you pleased to say to the gentlemen which I would not care to hear with my hands tied behind me?"

"I told them why you took that sudden trip to Bristol," I answered softly.

He fairly leaped in a sudden wild rage. "You – told them?" he stuttered. "You poltroon! 'Twas a coward's work!"

"Be easy," said I, to soothe him. "'Tis no more cowardly than it is for the best swordsman in England to be fighting the worst swordsman in Ireland over a matter in which he is entirely in the wrong, although 'tis not me that cares one way or another way. Indeed, I prefer you to be in the wrong, you little black pig."

"Stop," said he, with a face as white as milk. "You told them – you told them about – about the girl at Bristol?"

"What girl at Bristol?" said I innocently. "'Tis not me to be knowing your wenches in Bristol or otherwheres."

A red flush came into the side of his neck and swelled slowly across his cheeks. "If you've told them about Nell!"

"Nell?" said I. "Nell? Yes, that's the name. Nell. Yes, Nell. And if I told them about Nell?"

"Then," he rejoined solemnly, "I shall kill you ten times if I lose my soul in everlasting hell for it."

"But after I have killed you eleven times I shall go to Bristol and have some sweet interviews with fair Nell," said I. This sting I expected to call forth a terrific outburst, but he remained scowling in dark thought. Then I saw where I had been wrong. This Nell was now more a shame than a sweetheart, and he was afraid that word had been passed by me to the brother of – Here was a chance to disturb him. "When I was making my little joke of you and your flame at Bristol," said I thoughtfully, "I believe there were no ladies present. I don't remember quite. Any how we will let that pass. 'Tis of no consequence."

And here I got him in full cry. "*God rot you!*" he shrieked. His sword sprang and whistled in the air.

"Hold," said I, as a man of peace. "'Twould be murder. My weapon is on the bed, and I am too lazy to go and fetch it. And in the mean time let me assure you that no word has crossed my lips in regard to Nell, your Bristol sweetheart, for the very excellent reason that I never knew of her existence until you yourself told me some moments ago."

Never before had he met a man like me. I thought his under-jaw would drop on the floor.

"Up to a short time ago," said I candidly, "your indecent amours were safe from my knowledge. I can be in the way of putting myself as silent as a turtle when it comes to protecting a man from his folly with a woman. In fact, I am a gentleman. But," I added sternly, "what of the child?"

"The child?" he cried jumping. "May hell swallow you! And what may you know of the child?"

I waved my hand in gentle deprecation of his excitement as I said:

"Peace, Forister; I know nothing of any child. It was only an observation by a man of natural wit who desired to entertain himself. And, pray, how old is the infant?"

He breathed heavily. "You are a fiend," he answered. Keeping his eyes on the floor, he deliberated upon his choice of conduct. Presently he sheathed his sword and turned with some of his old jauntiness toward the door. "Very good," said he. "To-morrow we shall know more of our own affairs."

"True," I replied.

"We shall learn if slyness and treachery are to be defeated by fair-going and honour."

"True," said I.

"We shall learn if a snake in the grass can with freedom bite the foot of a lion."

"True," said I.

There was a loud jovial clamour at the door, and at my cry it flew open. Colonel Royale entered precipitately, beaming with good humour.

"O'Ruddy, you rascal," he shouted, "I commanded you to take much rest, and here I find – " He halted abruptly as he perceived my other visitor. "And here I find," he repeated coldly, "here I find Mr. Forister."

Forister saluted with finished politeness. "My friend and I," he said, "were discussing the probabilities of my killing him in the morning. He seems to think that he has some small chance for his life, but I have assured him that any real betting man would not wager a grain of sand that he would see the sun go down to-morrow."

"Even so," rejoined the Colonel imperturbably.

"And I also suggested to my friend," pursued Forister, "that to-morrow I would sacrifice my ruffles for him, although I always abominate having a man's life-blood about my wrists."

"Even so," quoth the undisturbed Colonel.

"And further I suggested to my friend that if he came to the ground with a coffin on his back, it might promote expedition after the affair was over."

Colonel Royale turned away with a gesture of disgust.

I thought it was high time to play an ace at Forister and stop his babble, so I said:

"And when Mr. Forister had finished his graceful remarks we had some talk regarding Mr. Forister's affairs in Bristol, and I confess I was much interested in hearing about the little – "

Here I stopped abruptly, as if I had been interrupted by Forister; but he had given me no sign but a sickly grin.

"Eh, Forister?" said I. "What's that?"

"I was remarking that I had nothing further to say for the present," he replied, with superb insolence. "For the time I am quite willing to be silent. I bid you a good day, sirs."

## CHAPTER VIII

As the door closed upon Forister, Colonel Royale beat his hand passionately against the wall. "O'Ruddy," he cried, "if you could severely maim that cold-blooded bully, I would be willing to adopt you as my legitimate grandfather. I would indeed."

"Never fear me," said I. "I shall pink him well."

"Aye," said my friend, looking at me mournfully, "I ever feared your Irish light-heartedness. 'Twill not do to be confident. He is an evil man, but a great swordsman. Now I never liked Ponsonby, and Stewart was the most lovable of men; but in the great duel Ponsonby killed –"

"No," I interrupted, "damn the duel between Ponsonby and Stewart. I'm sick of it. This is to be the duel between The O'Ruddy and Forister, and it won't be like the other."

"Eh, well," said the Colonel good-naturedly; "make your mind easy. But I hope to God you lay him flat."

"After I have finished with him," said I in measured tones, "he will be willing to sell himself as a sailor to go to the Indies; only, poor devil, he won't be able to walk, which is always a drawback after a hard fight, since it leaves one man incapable on the ground and thus discloses strong evidence of a struggle."

I could see that Colonel Royale had no admiration for my bragging air, but how otherwise was I to keep up my spirits? With all my discouragements it seemed to me that I was privileged to do a little fine lying. Had my father been in my place, he would have lied Forister into such a corner that the man would be thinking that he had the devil for an opponent. My father knew more about such matters.

Still I could not help but be thinking how misfortunate it was that I had kicked a great swordsman out of this inn at Bristol when he might have been a harmless shoemaker if I had only decent luck. I must make the best of it, and for this my only method was to talk loudly, – to myself, if need be; to others if I could. I was not the kind that is quite unable to say a good word for itself even if I was not able to lie as well as my father in his prime. In his day he could lie the coat off a man's back, or the patches off a lady's cheek, and he could lie a good dog into howling ominously. Still it was my duty to lie as well as I was able.

After a time Lord Strepp was announced and entered. Both he and Colonel Royale immediately stiffened and decided not to perceive each other. "Sir," said Lord Strepp to me, "I have the honour to present my compliments to you, and to request that you join a friend of mine, Mr. Forister, at dawn to-morrow, in the settlement of a certain small misunderstanding."

"Sir," said I, in the same manner, "I am only too happy to have this little matter adjusted."

"And of course the arrangements, sir?"

"For them I may refer you to my friend Colonel Royale."

"Ah," said the young Lord, as if he had never before seen the Colonel.

"I am at your service, sir," said Colonel Royale as if he never in his whole life had heard of Lord Strepp.

Then these two began to salaam one another, and mouth out fool phrases, and cavort and prance and caracole, until I thought them mad. When they departed there was a dreadful scene. Each refused to go through the door before the other. There was a frightful deadlock. They each bowed and scraped and waved their hands, and surrendered the doorway back and forth, until I thought they were to be in my chamber eternally. Lord Strepp gorgeously presented the right of way to Colonel Royale, and the Colonel gorgeously presented the right of way to Lord Strepp. All this time they were bending their backs at each other.

Finally I could stand it no longer. "In God's name," I shouted, "the door is wide enough for the two of you. Take it together. You will go through like grease. Never fear the door. 'Tis a good wide door."

To my surprise, they turned to glance at me and burst into great laughter. Then they passed out amiably enough together. I was alone.

Well, the first thing I did was to think. I thought with all my force. I fancied the top of my skull was coming off. I thought myself into ten thousand intricacies. I thought myself into doom and out of it, and behind it and below it, but I could not think of anything which was of service to me. It seemed that I had come among a lot of mummies, and one of these mummies was resolved to kill me, although I had never even so much as broken his leg. But I remembered my father's word, who had told me that gentlemen should properly kill each other over a matter of one liking oranges and the other not liking oranges. It was the custom among men of position, he had said, and of course a way was not clear to changing this custom at the time. However, I determined that if I lived I would insist upon all these customs being moderated and re-directed. For my part I was willing that any man should like oranges.

I decided that I must go for a walk. To sit and gloom in my room until the time of the great affair would do me no good in any case. In fact it was likely to do me much harm. I went forth to the garden in the rear of the inn. Here spread a lawn more level than a ballroom floor. There was a summer-house and many beds of flowers. On this day there was nobody abroad in the garden but an atrocious parrot, which, balancing on its stick, called out continually raucous cries in a foreign tongue.

I paced the lawn for a time, and then took a seat in the summer-house. I had been there but a moment when I perceived Lady Mary and the Countess come into the garden. Through the leafy walls of the summer-house I watched them as they walked slowly to and fro on the grass. The mother had evidently a great deal to say to the daughter. She waved her arms and spoke with a keen excitement.

But did I overhear anything? I overheard nothing! From what I knew of the proper conduct of the really thrilling episodes of life I judged that I should have been able to overhear almost every word of this conversation. Instead, I could only see the Countess making irritated speech to Lady Mary.

Moreover it was legitimate that I should have been undetected in the summer-house. On the contrary, they were perfectly aware that there was somebody there, and so in their promenade they presented it with a distinguished isolation.

No old maid ever held her ears so wide open. But I could hear nothing but a murmur of angry argument from the Countess and a murmur of gentle objection from Lady Mary. I was in possession of an ideal place from which to overhear conversation. Almost every important conversation ever held had been overheard from a position of this kind. It seemed unfair that I, of all men in literature, should be denied this casual and usual privilege.

The Countess harangued in a low voice at great length; Lady Mary answered from time to time, admitting this and admitting that, protesting against the other. It seemed certain to me that talk related to Forister, although I had no real reason for thinking it. And I was extremely angry that the Countess of Westport and her daughter, Lady Mary Strepp, should talk of Forister.

Upon my indignant meditations the parrot interpolated:

"Ho, ho!" it cried hoarsely. "A pretty lady! A pretty lady! A pretty lady! A pretty lady! –"

Lady Mary smiled at this vacuous repetition, but her mother went into a great rage, opening her old jaws like a maddened horse. "Here, landlord! Here, waiter! Here, anybody!"

So people came running from the inn, and at their head was, truly enough, the landlord. "My lady," he cried panting.

She pointed an angry and terrible finger at the parrot. "When I walk in this garden, am I to be troubled with this wretched bird?"

The landlord almost bit the turf while the servants from the inn grovelled near him. "My lady," he cried, "the bird shall be removed at once." He ran forward. The parrot was chained by its leg to a tall perch. As the innkeeper came away with the entire business, the parrot began to shout: "Old harridan! Old harridan! Old harridan!" The innkeeper seemed to me to be about to die of wild terror.

It was a dreadful moment. One could not help but feel sorry for this poor wretch, whose sole offence was that he kept an inn and also chose to keep a parrot in his garden.

The Countess sailed grandly toward the door of the hotel. To the solemn protestations of six or seven servants she paid no heed. At the door she paused and turned for the intimate remark. "I cannot endure parrots," she said impressively. To this dictum the menials crouched.

The servants departed: the garden was now empty save for Lady Mary and me. She continued a pensive strolling. Now, I could see plainly that here fate had arranged for some kind of interview. The whole thing was set like a scene in a theatre. I was undoubtedly to emerge suddenly from the summer-house; the lovely maid would startle, blush, cast down her eyes, turn away. Then, when it came my turn, I would doff my hat to the earth and beg pardon for continuing a comparatively futile existence. Then she would slyly murmur a disclaimer of any ability to criticise my continuation of a comparatively futile existence, adding that she was but an inexperienced girl. The ice thus being broken, we would travel by easy stages into more intimate talk.

I looked down carefully at my apparel and flecked a handkerchief over it. I tilted my hat; I set my hip against my harbour. A moment of indecision, of weakness, and I was out of the summer-house. God knows how I hoped that Lady Mary would not run away.

But the moment she saw me she came swiftly to me. I almost lost my wits.

"'Tis the very gentleman I wished to see," she cried. She was blushing, it is true, but it was evident she intended to say nothing about inexperience or mere weak girls. "I wished to see you because – " she hesitated and then rapidly said: "It was about the papers. I wanted to thank you – I – you have no notion how happy the possession of the papers has made my father. It seemed to have given him new life. I – I saw you throw your sword on the floor with the hilt away from you. And – and then you gave me the papers. I knew you were a gallant gentleman."

All this time, I, in my confusion, was bobbing and murmuring pledges of service. But if I was confused, Lady Mary was soon cool enough in the presence of a simple bog-trotter like me. Her beautiful eyes looked at me reflectively.

"There is only one service I can render you, sir," said she softly. "'Tis advice which would have been useful in saving some men's lives if only they had received it. I mean – don't fight with Forister in the morning. 'Tis certain death."

It was now my turn once more. I drew myself up, and for the first time I looked squarely into her bright eyes.

"My lady," said I, with mournful dignity, "I was filled with pride when you said the good word to me. But what am I to think now? Am I, after all, such a poor stick that, to your mind, I could be advised to sell my honour for a mere fear of being killed?"

Even then I remembered my one-time decision to run away from the duel with Forister; but we will not be thinking of that now.

Tears came into Lady Mary's eyes. "Ah, now, I have blundered," she said. "'Tis what you would say, sir. 'Tis what you would do. I have only made matters worse. A woman's meddling often results in the destruction of those she – those she don't care to have killed."

One would think from the look of this last sentence, that with certain reason I could have felt somewhat elated without being altogether a fool. Lady Mary meant nothing of importance by her speech, but it was a little bit for a man who was hungry to have her think of him. But here I was assailed by a very demon of jealousy and distrust. This beautiful witch had some plan in her head which did not concern my welfare at all. Why should she, a great lady, take any trouble for a poor devil who was living at an inn on money borrowed from a highwayman. I had been highly honoured by an indifferent consideration born of a wish to be polite to a man who had eased the mind of her father. No; I would not deceive myself.

But her tears! Were they marking indifferent consideration? For a second I lost myself in a roseate impossible dream. I dreamed that she had spoken to me because she —

Oh, what folly! Even as I dreamed, she turned to me with splendid carriage, and remarked coldly:

"I did not wish you to suppose that I ever failed to pay a debt. I have paid this one. Proceed now, sir, in your glowing stupidity. I have done."

When I recovered myself she was placidly moving away from me toward the door of the inn.

## CHAPTER IX

I had better be getting to the story of the duel. I have been hanging back with it long enough, and I shall tell it at once. I remember my father saying that the most aggravating creature in life was one who would be keeping back the best part of a story through mere reasons of trickery, although I have seen himself dawdle over a tale until his friends wished to hurl the decanters at him. However, there can be no doubting of the wisdom of my father's remark. Indeed there can be little doubting of the wisdom of anything that my father said in life, for he was a very learned man. The fact that my father did not invariably defer to his own opinions does not alter the truth of those opinions in my judgment, since even the greatest of philosophers is more likely to be living a life based on the temper of his wife and the advice of his physician than on the rules laid down in his books. Nor am I certain that my father was in a regular habit of delaying a story. I only remember this one incident, wherein he was recounting a stirring tale of a fight with a lancer, and just as the lance was within an inch of the paternal breast my father was reminded, by a sight of the walnuts, that Mickey Clancy was not serving the port with his usual rapidity, and so he addressed him. I remember the words well.

"Mickey, you spalpeen," said my father, "would you be leaving the gentlemen as dry as the bottom of Moses' feet when he crossed the Red Sea? Look at O'Mahoney there! He is as thirsty as a fish in the top of a tree. And Father Donovan has had but two small quarts, and he never takes less than five. Bad luck to you, Mickey, if it was a drink for your own stomach, you would be moving faster. Are you wishing to ruin my reputation for hospitality, you rogue you?"

And my father was going on with Mickey, only that he looked about him at this time and discovered his guests all upon their feet, one with the tongs and one with the poker, others with decanters ready to throw.

"What's this?" said he.

"The lance," said they.

"What lance?" said he.

"The lance of the lancer," said they.

"And why shouldn't he have a lance?" said my father. "'Faith, 'twould be an odd lancer without a lance!"

By this time they were so angry that Mickey, seeing how things were going, and I being a mere lad, took me from the room. I never heard precisely what happened to the lancer, but he must have had the worst of it, for wasn't my father, seated there at the table, telling the story long years after?

Well, as to my duel with Forister: Colonel Royale was an extremely busy man, and almost tired my life out with a quantity of needless attentions. For my part, I thought more of Lady Mary and the fact that she considered me no more than if I had been a spud. Colonel Royale fluttered about me. I would have gruffly sent him away if it were not that everything he did was meant in kindness and generous feeling. I was already believing that he did not have more than one brain in his head, but I could not be ungrateful for his interest and enthusiasm in getting me out to be hurt correctly. I understood, long years afterward, that he and Lord Strepp were each so particular in the negotiations that no less than eighteen bottles of wine were consumed.

The morning for the duel dawned softly warm, softly wet, softly foggy. The Colonel popped into my room the moment I was dressed. To my surprise, he was now quite mournful. It was I, now, who had to do the cheering.

"Your spirits are low, Colonel?" said I banteringly.

"Aye, O'Ruddy," he answered with an effort, "I had a bad night, with the gout. Heaven help this devil from getting his sword into your bowels."

He had made the appointment with Strepp, of course, and as we walked toward the ground he looked at me very curiously out of the ends of his eyes. "You know – ah, you have the honour of the acquaintance of Lady Mary Strepp, O'Ruddy?" said he suddenly and nervously.

"I have," I answered, stiffening. Then I said: "And you?"

"Her father and I were friends before either of you were born," he said simply. "I was a cornet in his old regiment. Little Lady Mary played at the knee of the poor young subaltern."

"Oh," said I meanly, "you are, then, a kind of uncle."

"Aye," said he, "a kind of uncle. So much of an uncle," he added with more energy, "that when she gave me this note I thought much of acting like a real uncle. From what I have unfortunately overheard, I suspect that the Earl – aw – disagrees with you on certain points."

He averted his face as he handed me the note, and eagerly I tore it open. It was unsigned. It contained but three words: "God spare you!" And so I marched in a tumult of joy to a duel wherein I was expected to be killed.

I glanced at the Colonel. His countenance was deeply mournful. "'Tis for few girls I would become a dove to carry notes between lovers," he said gloomily. "Damn you for it, O'Ruddy!"

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