

Dowling Richard

Tempest-Driven: A Romance
(Vol. 3 of 3)



Richard Dowling

**Tempest-Driven: A
Romance (Vol. 3 of 3)**

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CHAPTER XXXII

SALMON AND COWS

Luncheon that day at Carlingford House was a quiet, subdued meal. Edith Paulton, who was very small and vivacious, better-looking than Madge, and distinguished by shrewd discontent rather than the amiability which radiated from her elder sister, was the only one at the table that made an effort at being sprightly. Although she was not unsympathetic, she had a much more keen appreciation of her own annoyances and troubles than those of others. She took great liberties with her good-natured father and mother, and treated her brother as if he were a useless compound of slave, fool, and magnanimous mastiff. She was by no means wanting in affection, but she hated displays of sentiment, and felt desperately inclined to laugh on grave occasions.

That day, when the two girls left the back room, they went straight to Madge's, where they talked over the arrival of Jerry O'Brien, for whom Edith strongly suspected Madge had a warmer feeling than friendship, and who, she felt morally certain, greatly to her secret delight, was over head and ears in love with Madge. The only human being in whom she had infinite faith was Madge. She did not consider any hero or conqueror of history good enough for her sister. To her mind, there was only one flaw in Madge: Madge would not worship Madge. Madge thought every one else in the world of consequence but herself. Edith thought Madge the only absolutely perfect person living, or that ever had lived-leaving out, of course, the important defect just mentioned. The younger girl had, in human affairs, a certain hardness and common-sense plainness which shocked the more sensitive sister. For instance, she could not see anything at all pathetic in Mrs. Davenport's situation.

Before the bell rang for luncheon, she said to her sister:

"I can't for the life of me see what is so terribly melancholy in Mrs. Davenport's case. I think she got out of it rather well. She didn't care anything for that dreadful old man who poisoned himself out of some horrid kind of spite. She hasn't been put in prison, and he left her a whole lot of money. So that as she isn't exactly an old maid, or a grandmother, she can marry any other horrid old man she likes. Oh, yes; I know she's very beautiful, and what you call young, Madge. She's not fifty yet, I suppose. Every woman *is* young now until she's forty or fifty; and as to men, they don't seem to grow old now at any age. As long as a man doesn't use crutches, they say he is in the full vigour of manhood-that he's not marriageable until he's gray, and bald, and deaf of one ear, or can't read even with glasses. I suppose father will make her stop for dinner. I thought I'd laugh outright when I saw him go to her and call her 'child.' Child! Fancy calling a widow *child!* If ever he calls me child again, I'll tell him, as far as I know, I have not buried any husband yet. But, Madge, if she *does* stop for dinner, I'm not going to sit there and learn the very latest thing in the manners of widows. I'll go out for a walk after luncheon. Do you know, I think Jerry O'Brien is half in love with this beautiful widow! I'll ask him to come with me, I will; and you, good-natured fool, may sit within and catch the airs and graces of early widowhood, though I don't think they'll ever be of any use to you. You're certain to die an old maid. Alfred can't keep his eyes off her. It's a pity we haven't that nice Mr. Blake here-her old sweetheart. There, Madge, I don't mean a word I say, especially about Jerry O'Brien. I know he's madly in love with me. I'm going to give him a chance of proposing this evening. We'll walk as far as the Palace, and if you get separated from us, and see me holding my umbrella out from my side on two fingers-this way-just don't come near us, and you shall be my bridesmaid, and Jerry shall give you a present of a bracelet representing a brazen widow sitting on a silver salmon. There's

the bell! Madge, love, I'm not a beast, only a brute. There! – I won't be rude again, and I'll try and rather like Mrs. Davenport. She'll be a neighbour of mine, you know, when I'm married to Jerry. I think I'll call him *Jer* then."

After luncheon, Mrs. Paulton suggested that Mrs. Davenport should lie down, as she must be quite worn out. But the latter would not consent to this. She said she felt quite refreshed, and in no need of rest, as she had slept well the previous night-although some memory of the Channel passage was in her brain, and the sound of the railway journey in her ears.

The evening was fine. Neither Mrs. Davenport nor Alfred cared for a walk when it was suggested by Edith, but Jerry said he would like it of all things; so he and the two sisters set off down the fine, broad, prosperous-looking Dulwich Road, in the direction of the Crystal Palace.

It is proverbially a small world, and the three pedestrians had not gone many hundred yards when whom should they see but Nellie Cahill, one of the firm friends and confidantes of the Paulton girls. Before the three came up with Miss Cahill, Edith gave a brief and graphic sketch of her to Jerry, who had not had the pleasure of meeting her before. She was good-looking, good-humoured, jolly, a dear old thing, mad as a March hare, true as steel, and last, though not least, interesting to him-a fellow country-woman of his, as her name betokened.

He must be introduced to her. He must like her awfully. He must love her, if it came to that, unless, indeed, that slow coach Alfred had been before him-in which case he, Jerry, was to be exceedingly obliging and deferential; for any one would rather have a nice girl like Nellie for a sister-in-law than a thousand widows.

Jerry was duly introduced, and said civil things and silly things, and the four walked on all abreast, until Edith suddenly remembered that she had to tell Nellie all about the reappearance of Mrs. Davenport, and a lot of other matters, in which two sober, steady-going, middle-aged people like Madge and Jerry could, by no stress of imagination, be supposed to take a sensible and hilarious interest. So the younger division of the party, comprised of Nellie Cahill and Edith Paulton, fell to the rear, and the other division kept the front. And thus, in spite of all Edith's designs on Jerry both for herself and Nellie, these two enterprising and eminently desirable and lovable young ladies lost all chance of his offering marriage to either that afternoon.

A long story of the detestable villainy of the Fishery Commissioners had to be first and foremost related to Madge. Considering that she did not know what a weir was, and had never seen a salmon except on the table or the marble slab of a fish-shop, and that according to her notion the appearance of a Commissioner was something between a befeater of the Tower of London and a Brighton boatman, she listened with great patience, and made remarks which caused Jerry to laugh sometimes, and plunge into profound technicalities at others. But it became quite plain that Jerry himself did not take any consuming interest in his own wrongs and the refined ruffianism of the Commissioners; for at a most bewildering description of the channel, and the draught of water, and the set of tides, and the idiosyncrasies of coal barges, he looked over his shoulder and, finding Edith and her friend a good way behind, stopped suddenly in his discourse and said:

"Madge, I've been reeling off a lot of rubbish to you just to drop the others a good bit astern. I now want to say something very serious to you. Are you listening?"

"Yes; but look at that cow! Did you ever see a more contented-looking creature in all your life?"

She kept her face turned towards the hedge.

"Confound the cow!" he cried. "Do you think I am going to give up talking of Bawn salmon and barges, and talk about Dulwich cows? Are you listening?"

"I am. But did you-now-did you ever see such a lovely cow?"

"Look here, Madge: If this is reprisal for my harangue about my miserable salmon weirs, I'll not say another word about them. Are you going to be friends with me?"

"Yes-of course."

Still the cow occupied her eyes, to judge by the way her head was turned.

"I came out expressly to have a most serious talk with you on a most important matter-"

"I am sure I was very sorry to hear about your salmon nets-"

"Nets! Nets! Good heavens, Madge! – I never said a word about nets the whole time. I'm not a cot-man. Look here: you know it's only a few of the greatest minds that can attend to two things at the one time. You can't give your soul to fish and yet devote yourself to cows at the one moment, except you are a person like Julius Cæsar. He could dictate and write completely different things at the one time."

"Could he? He must have been very clever."

"Will you give up the cow? I want to talk of another beast."

"Trout?"

"No, not trout. Trout isn't a beast. If you're clever and smart, and that kind of thing, I won't talk about my beast."

"What is your beast?"

"A fool."

"Oh!"

"Are you not curious to know who the fool is?"

"There are so many, one cannot be interested in all."

"No; but you are interested in this one."

Silence.

"I say you are interested in Alfred."

"Alfred!" She looked quickly round for the first time since the cow had attracted her attention. Her colour was vivid, and her breath came short. "Alfred a fool!"

"Yes; he's hit-badly hit."

"You don't think him ill?" – in alarm. The colour faded quickly.

"I think him very bad."

"His brain again. Oh, do tell me!" – pleadingly.

"No. He told me all in the front room to-day. It's his heart this time."

"His heart?"

"Yes. Love."

"Love! In love with whom?"

"I forget."

"You forget whom he is in love with?"

"Yes. Another matter has put it out of my head. Madge, I'm a fool too. You needn't turn away. There are no more cows, Madge. Give up the salmon and cows, Madge, and have me instead! Will you, Madge? Give me your hand... Thank you, love. Madge!"

"Yes."

"The other two have turned back. There is no one else in the road. May I kiss you?"

She looked over her shoulder on the side away from him. Then she looked at him...

"Thank you, darling. Let us turn back. I have touched the limits of my happiest road. Madge!"

"Yes."

"Yes, Jerry. Say 'Yes, Jerry.'"

"Yes, Jerry."

"That's better. I won't kiss you again until we get into the house. Do you think you can last out till then?"

"I-I think so, Jerry."

"That's right. Cultivate self-denial and obedience. You don't think it is respectable for a man to kiss his sweetheart on a public road?"

"No."

"That's right. Cultivate self-denial and obedience, but chiefly obedience. Don't you think it is the duty of woman to cultivate obedience chiefly?"

"I do."

"And if I asked it, you would, out of obedience to me, trample self-denial under foot?"

"Certainly, Jerry, if you wished it."

"I do. Oh, my Madge-my darling-my gentle love! Once more."

"But Edith has turned round and sees us... And my hat-you have knocked off my hat... Thanks. Now pick up my hair-pin. It fell with the hat. What will Edith think?"

"I'll tell her. I'll tell Edith quite plainly it was your self-restraint gave way, not mine."

CHAPTER XXXIII

A FORTUNE LOST

That day settled many things. Alfred had told O'Brien that no matter how unwise or rash it might seem, he had made up his mind to try his fate with Mrs. Davenport-not, of course, at that time, perhaps not very soon, but ultimately, and as soon as possible.

Until that day-until he had seen her moved by the sense of her own loneliness, until he had seen the tears start into her eyes-he had not said even to himself that he loved her. He told himself over and over again that he would risk his prospects, his life, his honour for her. How his prospects or life could be imperilled he did not know, did not care. He had a modest fortune of his own, and her husband had left her the bulk of his great wealth. He would have preferred her poor rather than rich. But if she would marry him, he would not allow the fact that she had money to stand in the way of his happiness. She had for a while, owing to circumstances in which no blame attached to her, found herself labouring under a hideous suspicion. From the shadow of that suspicion she had emerged without blemish. She had been cruelly ill-used by fate, but it had been shown she was blameless. Where, then, could danger to his honour lie? Her beauty was undeniable; her family unexceptionable. She had been sold to an old man by a venal lover. In this lurked no disgrace to her. What could his father or mother find in her to object to? Nothing-absolutely nothing. That day his father and mother showed great pleasure in seeing her again. His father had suggested-nay, arranged-that he should accompany her on that long journey to Ireland.

When Jerry O'Brien left Carlingford House that afternoon, he had no intention of asking Madge to be his wife. All the way from Kilbarry to London he had been assuring himself that nothing could be more injudicious than to say anything to her on the subject at present. He believed she was not indifferent to him. Little actions and words of hers had given him cause to hope. He was sure she preferred him to any other man in whose society he had ever seen her. She had smiled and coloured at his approach, and once or twice, when he had ventured to press her hand, he had suffered no reproach by word or look. All this made it only the more necessary for him to be on guard and not allow himself to be betrayed into a declaration until his affairs were settled. But the opportunity came, and he could not resist the temptation of telling her he loved her, and of hearing from her that he was loved by her. It is true no word had been said between them of an engagement even. The mere formality of speech was nothing. Practically he had asked her to be his wife, and she had plainly given him to understand she was willing to marry him.

Madge got back to the house in a state of bewildered excitement. She confided nothing to her sister, and Edith behaved very well, never showing even a trace of curiosity or slyness. She persisted in talking of the most everyday topic. She wondered whether Miss Grant, the dressmaker, would keep her word? – whether this would be as bad a year for roses as last? She was of opinion the cold weather would not return. Nellie Cahill had told her the new play at the Ben Jonson was a complete failure, in spite of all said to the contrary, and so on. Madge replied in monosyllables or vacant laughs. When the girls got home, each went to her own room, and they did not meet again until dinner time. Madge decided she had no occasion to speak to her mother, or any one else, about what occurred on the Dulwich Road. It would be time enough to speak when Jerry said something more definite to her, or when either her father or mother spoke to her.

Jerry sought Alfred, whom he found alone in the library. He had been carried beyond himself that afternoon, and did not feel in the position to administer to his friend a lecture on prudence. Alfred was of full age, and, in the way of money, independent of his father. Let him do as he pleased and take his chance, as any other man must in similar circumstances. He himself, for instance, would take advice in his love affair from neither Fishery Commissioners nor John O'Hanlon.

"How far did you go?" asked Alfred, who looked flushed, radiant. He got up and began walking slowly about the room.

"Oh, a little beyond the College. It isn't a very pleasant day out of doors. We met an old flame of yours-Miss Cahill."

"Miss Cahill an old flame of mine! Why, I never was more than civil to the girl in all my life! Who invented that story for you?"

"I don't think it was pure invention. Edith mentioned it to us."

"To us! Good heavens, you don't mean to say she said anything of the kind in Miss Cahill's presence?"

"Well, no-not exactly in her presence, but when she was near us. How did you get on since?"

Jerry's object was to keep the conversation in his own hands, and prevent Alfred asking questions. To-morrow, when they were both clear of London, he might take his friend into his confidence, but not now.

"Oh, dully enough," answered Alfred, with a look of disappointment. "My father went out, my mother is busy about the house, and Mrs. Davenport is in her room. She will, I hope, be able to come down to dinner. You don't think, Jerry," he asked, anxiously, while he paused before his friend, "that her health has suffered by all she has gone through?"

"No; but I am quite sure your peace of mind has," replied Jerry, with a dry smile.

With all his desire to be conciliatory, he could not wholly curb his tongue.

"I," laughed the other, "was never happier in all my life. Why, only to think that she is under this roof now, and that we are going on a long journey with her to-morrow, and that I am to be near her for a whole month! It's too good to be true."

"I hope not."

"Well, Jerry, I hope not too; but it seems too good. I know you are one of those men who never give way to their feelings until they know exactly whither their feelings are taking them. It isn't every one who has such complete self-command as you. I am willing to risk everything in the world for a woman. Some men are too cautious to risk anything."

"There's a good deal of truth and a good deal of rubbish in what you say," rejoined Jerry, colouring slightly, and concealing his face from his companion by going to the window and looking out at the evergreens and leafless trees in the front garden.

Alfred's last speech had not been exactly a chance shot. He more than guessed Jerry cared a good deal for Madge; but the tone of the other had exasperated him, and he made an effort to compel silence, if not sympathy, from him. Jerry was not prepared to retort. He did not want to deny or assert his own susceptibility to the unconscious arts of any woman; and, above all, he did not wish Madge's name to be introduced even casually.

At last dinner came. It was an informal, a substantial, cosy meal. No special preparations had been made for the guests. There was no display, no stint, no profusion. Jerry sat beside Madge, and Alfred between Edith and Mrs. Davenport. Jerry was the most taciturn-Madge the most demure of the party. Mr. Paulton was chatty, cordial, and particularly gracious to the widow. Mrs. Davenport was polite, impassable, absent-minded.

When they were waiting for the joint, Mr. Paulton turned to Jerry, and said:

"Are you depressed at the prospect of spending a while with an invalid? To look at you both, one would think it was you, not Alfred, who wants change of air."

"And so it is," said Jerry, stealing a look at Madge.

In order to divert attention from her, for she felt her face growing hot, she said:

"I believe the south of Ireland is very mild?"

"Oh, very!" Jerry answered, with startling vivacity. "It's the mildest climate in the world; but the people are not particularly mild: they are full of fire and fight. I have no doubt Alfred will come

back a regular Milesian. You know those who live a while in Ireland always become more Irish than the Irish."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Paulton. "He may become as Irish as he likes if he at the same time grows as well in health as we like."

"I intend coming back quite a Goliath, mother. I shall eat and drink everything I see," said Alfred gaily.

"You would find some of the things in the neighbourhood of Kilcash rather hard to chew. I think Mrs. Davenport will agree with me that it would take Goliath a long time to make a comfortable meal of the Black Rock, or to make a comfortable meal on it?"

At the name of the Rock, Mrs. Davenport looked up and shuddered visibly, and said, as she rested slightly on the back of her chair:

"The Black Rock is a hideous place."

Then, turning to Alfred: "You must not go there."

"I am altogether in the hands of this unprincipled wretch," answered Alfred, smiling and nodding at Jerry.

"Then," said Jerry, "if you are not very civil-if you show a disposition to exhibit your Goliath-like prowess on me, I shall take you to the Black Rock, and first frighten the life out of you, and then throw you into the Puffing Hole, where, except you are the ghost of your own grandfather, or something equally monstrous, you will be promptly smashed into ten billions of invisible atoms."

The rest of the dinner passed off quietly. When the dessert had been put on the table, and the servants had withdrawn, Mr. Paulton said:

"Mr. O'Brien, I have often heard you talk of this Black Rock and the Puffing Hole, but I am afraid I never had the industry to ask you for a description of either. Are they very wonderful?"

"There is nothing wonderful about the Rock, except its extent and peculiar shape and colour. But the Puffing Hole, although not unique, is curious and terrible."

"I am doubly interested in them now, since I have the pleasure of numbering Mrs. Davenport among my friends. What are the Black Rock and Puffing Hole like?" He smiled, and bent gallantly towards the widow.

"I think," said Jerry, "Mrs. Davenport herself is the best person to give you a description of either. Her house is near them, and she has lived, I may say, next door to them for years, and knows more than I do of the place. To make the matter even, if Mrs. Davenport will do the description I will do the narrative part of the tale. That is a fair division."

Mrs. Davenport trembled slightly again, and was about to speak, when Mr. Paulton said, in a tone of impetuous persuasion:

"Your house near these strange freaks of nature, Mrs. Davenport! Of course I did not know that, or I should not have dreamed of asking Mr. O'Brien for an account of them."

The old man's belief was that it would divert Mrs. Davenport's mind from wholly gloomy subjects if she were only induced to speak of matters of general interest.

She shook her head sadly.

"It is true my home was for many years at Kilcash House, which is near the Black Rock. But-

She paused, and a peculiar smile took possession of her face. All eyes were fixed on her in expectation. No one cared to speak. What could that strange break mean? Surely, to describe a scene or phenomenon of the coast with which she was most familiar could not be very distressing?

"But," she resumed, "it is my home no longer. It is true I am going back there for a little time-a few weeks; but that is only to arrange matters. I have now no home."

The voice of the woman was almost free from emotion. It was slightly tremulous towards the end; but if she had been reading aloud a passage she but dimly understood, she could have displayed no less emotion.

"No home! – no home!" said Mr. Paulton, so softly as to be only just audible. "I was under the impression you had been left Kilcash House."

"Yes, my husband left me Kilcash House and other things-other valuable things-and a large sum of money. But-

Again she paused at the ominous "but."

Again all were silent, and now even Mr. Paulton could not light on words that seemed likely to help the widow over her hesitation.

"But I cannot take anything."

Once more the old man repeated her words: "Cannot take anything! Are the conditions so extraordinary-so onerous?"

He and O'Brien thought that the principal condition must be forfeiture in case she married Blake. This would explain much of what was now incomprehensible.

"There are no conditions whatever in the will," she said in the same unmoved way.

"No conditions! And yet you have no home, although your late husband has left you a fine house?"

"Yes, and all that is necessary for the maintenance of that house; notwithstanding which, I have no home, and am a beggar."

"Mrs. Davenport," cried the old man, with genuine concern, "what you say is very shocking. I hope it is not true."

"I know this is not the time or place to talk of business. I know my business can have little or no interest for you."

"Excuse me, my dear Mrs. Davenport, there is nothing out of place about such talk now, and you really must not say we take but slight interest in your affairs. On the contrary, we are very much interested in them. I think I may answer for every member of my family, and say that beyond our own immediate circle of relatives there is no lady in whom we take so deep an interest."

The old man was solemn and emphatic.

"I am sure," said Mrs. Paulton, looking round the table, "that my husband has said nothing but the simple fact."

She turned her eyes upon the widow.

"Mrs. Davenport, I hope you will always allow me to be your friend. Your troubles have, I know, been very great, and you are now no doubt suffering so severely that you think the whole world is against you. We, at all events, are not. Anything we can do for you we will; and, believe me, Mrs. Davenport, doing anything for you will be a downright pleasure."

The widow bowed her head for a moment before speaking. It seemed as though she could not trust her voice. After a brief pause she sat up, and, resting the tips of the fingers of both hands on the table, said:

"As I told you earlier to-day, I have been alone all my life, and the notion of fellowship is terrible to me, coming now upon me when my life is over."

"Indeed you should not talk of your life being over. You are still quite young. Many a woman does not begin her life until she is older than you."

"I am thirty-four, and that is not young for one to begin life."

"But, may I ask," said Mr. Paulton, "how it is that the will becomes inoperative? How is it that you cannot avail yourself of your husband's bequests?"

"My reasons for not taking my husband's money must, for the present-I hope for ever-remain with myself. Mr. Blake has told me certain things, and I have found out others myself. I am now without money-I do not mean," she said, flushing slightly, "for the present moment, for a month or two-but I am without any money on which I can rely for my support. I shall have to begin life again-or, rather, begin it for the first time. I shall have to work for my living, just as any other widow who is left alone without provision. This is very plain speaking, but the position is simple."

"But, my dear Mrs. Davenport, you must not in this way give yourself up to despair," said Mr. Paulton, as he rose and stood beside her.

"Despair!" she cried, looking up at him with a quick glance of angry surprise. "Despair! You do not think me so poor a coward as to despair. How can one who never knew hope know despair? I am in no trouble about the future. I shall take to a line of life in which there is room and to spare for such as I."

"Do not do anything hastily, I have a good deal of influence left."

Mrs. Paulton, who saw that Mrs. Davenport was excited, over-wrought, rose and moved towards the door. The others stood up, excepting Mrs. Davenport, who, as she was excited and looking up into Mr. Paulton's face, did not hear the stir or see the move.

"I am most sincerely obliged to you, Mr. Paulton, but I greatly fear that, much as I know you would wish it, you could not aid me in my business scheme."

"May I ask what the business is?"

"The stage."

"The stage, Mrs. Davenport! You astound me."

"I have lived alone and secluded all my life. For the future I shall, if I can, live among thousands of people, whom I will *compel* to sympathise with my mimic trials, since I never had any one to sympathise with my real ones. I shall flee from an obscurity greater than a cloister's to the blaze and full publicity of the footlights. You think me mad?"

"No; ill-advised. Who suggested you should do this?"

She glanced around, and saw that the ladies were waiting for her.

"I beg your pardon," she said to them, as she rose and walked towards the door, which Alfred held open.

She turned back as she went out, and answered Mr. Paulton's question with the two words:

"Mr. Blake."

Alfred closed the door. The three men looked in amazement at one another.

"There's something devilish in her or Blake," said the old man.

"Or both," said Jerry O'Brien.

By a tremendous effort, Alfred Paulton sat down and kept still. He did not say anything aloud, but to himself he moaned:

"If I lose her, my reason will go again-this time for ever!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

A TELEGRAM FROM THE MAIL

When the men found themselves alone and somewhat calmed down after the excitement caused by Mrs. Davenport's astonishing announcement, Mr. Paulton and Jerry discussed the proposed step with great minuteness and intelligence, while Alfred sat mute and listless. He pleaded the necessity of his going to bed early on account of to-morrow's journey. In the course of the discussion between the two elder men, Jerry held that if she did take to the stage, she would make one of the most startling successes of the time.

"She has beauty enough," he said, "to make men fools, and fire enough to make them lunatics. What a Lady Macbeth she would be!"

Mr. Paulton was anything but a fogey. He did not forget that he had been once young, nor did he forget that, when young, a pretty face and a fine figure had seemed extremely bewitching things. He was liberal in all his views, except in the matter of betting. To that vice he would give no quarter whatever. He never once sought to restrain his son's reading, and Alfred had a latchkey almost as soon as he was tall enough to reach the keyhole. Although he did not smoke himself, he saw no objection to others, his son included, smoking in suitable places, and with moderation. He did not exclude shilling whist from his code, although he never played. He rarely went out after dinner now, but when he made his mind up to move, he did not think there was anything unbecoming in his visiting a theatre—the *front* of a theatre, mind you, sir. He supposed and believed there were many excellent men behind the scenes, and he did not feel himself called upon to say that the majority of the ladies were not all that could be desired; but-ah, well, he would be very sorry-it would, in fact, break his heart if either of his daughters—Madge, for instance—went upon the stage.

With the latter part of this somewhat long-winded speech Jerry heartily concurred. He felt furious and full of strength when he fancied Madge behind the curtain, subjected to dictation and uncongenial associations, not to speak of anything more disagreeable still. There were nasty draughts and nasty smells, and nasty ropes and nasty dust, and sometimes the carefully-attuned ear might catch a nasty word. It was blasphemy to think of Madge in such an atmosphere, amid such surroundings. And then fancy any "young man" of fifty-six putting his arm round Madge, and administering even a stage kiss to his darling! The thing was preposterous, and not to be entertained by any sane mind.

Coffee was sent into the dining-room, and the whole household retired early.

Alfred's reflections that night were the reverse of pleasant. He had that day seen the woman he loved. She had come before his eyes as unsought as the flowery pageant of summer. She had filled his heart with tropical heat, had set fancy dancing in his head, and restored strength and vigour to his invalid body. He had, before the moment his eyes rested on her that day, been satisfied with the hope of seeing her in weeks, months. She had come voluntarily, no doubt, without special thought of him, to their home; she had once more accepted their hospitality, and he and O'Brien were to accompany her to Ireland. They would not travel together, but he should know she was near-know she was in the same train, in the same steamboat; they should meet frequently on the journey, and, crowning thought of all, they had one common destination!

He had that day spent some delicious minutes in her company. While she was by he had forgotten his late illness, his present weakness. The immediate moment had been filled with incommunicable joy, and the future with splendid happiness.

What had befallen all this dream of enchantment? Ruin-ruin complete and irreparable! She was, owing to some secret and mysterious cause or other, no longer rich. In her own estimation she was a pauper. That was little. If that was all, it could be borne with a smile-nay, with gratitude; for riches would act as a lure to other men, and he wanted only herself and, if it might come in time, her love.

She had determined to go upon the stage. That was bad-entirely bad; but if this evil resolve stood alone, it might be combated. If she had determined merely with herself to follow the profession of an actress, she might be persuaded to abandon her design. But the unfortunate course she had made up her mind to follow had been suggested by Blake, by an old lover who years ago was dear to her, and now was absolute in her counsels. This put an end to every hope that she could ever be his.

Oh, weary day, and wearier night!

If he could, he would back out of going to Ireland; but that was now impossible. Under the pressure of his great joy, he had told O'Brien of his love for Mrs. Davenport, and all arrangements had, at his request, been made for their setting off to-morrow. She must go to-morrow. While there is life there is hope. He was hoping against hope; but accidents did happen in many cases, and might happen in this one. No man was bound to despair; in fact, despair was cowardly and unmanly. It was the duty of every man to hope, and he would hope. He would go to Ireland to-morrow; he would put his chance against Blake's. If this disappointment were to kill him or drive him mad, he might as well enjoy the pleasure of being near her until his health or mind gave way finally.

When he came to this decision he fell asleep.

Next day broke chill and dismal, and none of the folk at Carlingford House seemed lively except Edith. Mrs. Paulton was depressed because her only son was going away from home and into a country of which she had a vague and unfavourable notion. O'Brien was sulky at the thought of being torn from the side of Madge, now that he might talk freely to her of love and their prospects, and the brutal Commissioners. Mrs. Davenport was depressed by a variety of circumstances and considerations, and Alfred had much to make him anything but cheerful. Mr. Paulton's seriousness-that was the strongest word which could fairly be applied to his humour-was due to the dulness of the weather, and a depreciation in the value of some shares held by him.

During the day each of the travellers was more or less busy with preparations. Mrs. Davenport had to go to town early in order to transact business she had neglected the day before. Alfred stayed mostly in his room, and O'Brien, far from sweet-tempered, managed, through the unsought contrivance of Edith, to be a whole hour alone with Madge.

"You know," he said to her, when preliminaries had been disposed of, "it's a beastly nuisance to have to go away from you now. I'd much rather stop, I assure you."

"You are very kind."

"Don't be satirical, Madge. No woman ever yet showed to advantage when satirical. I say it's a great shame to have to go away, particularly when it's only to save appearances; for now that Blake has once more come on the scene, all is up with poor Alfred. Upon my word, Madge, I pity him."

"Do you like her, Jerry?"

"No. I like you. I like you very much. You're not a humbug."

"Is she?"

"No. But she's too awfully serious. I cannot help thinking she ought to do everything to the slow music of kettledrums."

"Why kettle-drums?"

"I don't know. I suppose it's because the concerted kettle-drum is the most bald and arid form of harmonious row. I'm afraid my language is neither select nor expressive. But one can't help one's feelings-particularly when one's feelings make one like you. I really am sorry to have to leave you."

"But you mustn't blame me for that."

"Now you are quite unreasonable. You must know that a man without a grievance is as insipid as a woman without vanity."

"Jerry, I'm not a bit vain; I never was a bit vain. What could I be vain about?"

"Ungrateful girl! Have I not laid my hand and fortune, including the bodies of the murdered Commissioners, at your feet?"

"You are silly, Jerry."

"How am I silly? In having laid my hand and fortune and the bodies-"

"No. In talking such nonsense."

"And you are not vain of having made a conquest of me?"

"Jerry, I'm very fond of you, and I don't like you to talk to me as if you thought I was only a silly girl whom you were trying to amuse with any silly things you could think of. I hope you don't believe I'm a fool?"

"No. You are right, Madge: it's a poor compliment for a man to talk mere tattle to his sweetheart. I wonder, darling, if you would give me a keepsake, now that I am going away?"

"No. I have no faith in keepsakes. I would not take any keepsake from you, because I shall need nothing to remind me of you when you are away."

"Darling, nor I of you. And if things go wrong with me?"

"They can't go wrong with you."

"I mean if I come off worse in these business affairs."

"That will not make any difference in you."

"No. Nor in you, darling?"

"No."

He held her in his arms a while, and said no more. Thus they parted.

It had been arranged that the two men should meet Mrs. Davenport at Euston. They were on the platform when she arrived. To their surprise she was not alone: Blake accompanied her. As soon as they came forward he shook hands with her, raised his hat, and retired.

O'Brien and Paulton were greatly taken aback by Blake's presence. They busied themselves about her luggage, and then took seats in the same compartment with her. They were the only passengers in the compartment.

As soon as the train was in motion she leaned forward to O'Brien, and said in a clear, distinct voice, the edge of which was not dulled by the rumble of the wheels:

"You arrived the day before yesterday from Ireland?"

"Yes," he answered, bending forward and looking into her inscrutable eyes.

"You have been at Kilcash?"

"Yes. I was there for about a month."

"Did you hear a ghost story there?"

He started and looked seriously at her.

"Yes, I did. May I ask if you have heard anything about it?"

"Yes. When I got back to Jermyn Street where I stayed, I found a letter there telling me that a ghost, the ghost of a man named Michael Fahey, had been seen in the neighbourhood of Kilcash."

"At the Black Rock. I was going to tell the story yesterday at dinner, but it slipped by."

"Do you know anything of this-apparition?"

"I saw it myself, and two others saw it."

"Where do we stop first?"

"At Rugby."

She took a note-book from her pocket, and wrote something in it. When the writing was finished, she tore out the leaf on which it was, and handed the leaf to O'Brien, saying:

"Will you be kind enough to telegraph this from Rugby for me?"

"It will have to be written on a form," he said, hesitatingly.

"Will you oblige by writing it on a form for me? There is no reason why you shouldn't read it."

When he got out at Rugby he read the message. It was addressed to Blake, and ran:

"*Mr. O'Brien saw what I told you. Follow me to Ireland at once.*"

CHAPTER XXXV

THE TRAVELLERS

It was impossible for O'Brien to tell Alfred the nature of the telegram he had just despatched to Blake. It would not be seemly to whisper or to write, and to leave the compartment with the proclaimed intention of seeking a smoking carriage would be a transparent device. There was nothing for it but to sit still and keep silent.

The three travellers settled themselves in their corners, and pretended to go to sleep. Each had thoughts of an absorbing nature, but none had anything exceptionally happy with which to beguile the dreary midnight journey. It was impossible to see if Mrs. Davenport slept or not. She had, upon settling herself after leaving Rugby, pulled down her thick veil over her face, and remained quite motionless. Young Paulton was not yet as strong as he imagined, and the monotonous sound and motion soon fatigued him, and he fell asleep.

Although O'Brien kept his eyes resolutely shut he never felt more wakeful in his life.

What on earth could this woman want with this man of most blemished reputation and desperate fortune? She had seen him lately, and he had told her something of the mysterious appearance near the Puffing Hole; but it was not until after they had started from Euston that she had made up her mind to summon him to Ireland. What could she want him for? She was, according to her own statement, now no longer rich. She was no longer young. The best years of her beauty had passed away. No doubt she was still an extremely beautiful woman, but the freshness was gone. As far as he knew, Blake was the last man in the world to marry such a woman. And yet there was some secret bond, some concealed link between them. He was not unjust to her. He did not believe she would inveigle any man into a marriage, and he could not understand why this Blake was now even tolerable to her.

However matters might go, it looked as if Alfred were certain to suffer. It was quite plain he was madly in love with her, and that she did not see, or was indifferent to his passion. She was not a coquette. She showed no desire to claim indulgence because of her sex or sorrows, and certainly exacted no privilege as a tribute to her beauty. To him she seemed hard, mechanical, cold. She had, it is true, broken down the day before, but that was under extreme pressure. Usually she was as unsympathetic, self-contained as bronze.

Jerry was not a fool or a bigot, and he allowed to himself, with perfect candour, that although he looked on Alfred's passion as infatuation, he could understand it. He himself was no more in love with her than with the black night through which they were speeding; but if she, at that moment, raised her veil and stood before him and bade him undertake something unpleasant-nay, dangerous-he would essay it. Strength gives command to a man, beauty to a woman, love to either.

At Chester the three got coffee, and once more took up their corners and affected to sleep or slept.

When they reached the boat at Holyhead, Mrs. Davenport said good-night and descended to the ladies' cabin. The two friends got on the bridge, and as soon as the steamer had started O'Brien took Paulton to the weather bulwark, and told him the substance of the telegram Mrs. Davenport had sent to London.

To O'Brien's astonishment, the younger man made nothing of the matter. It was simply a business affair, he said: nothing of any moment. From all they had heard, Blake knew more than they had supposed of the dead man's affairs; and now that Mrs. Davenport had resolved not to take the fortune her husband had left her, it was almost certain Blake could be of assistance to her.

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