

Le Fanu Joseph Sheridan

The Cock and Anchor



Joseph Le Fanu

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The Cock and Anchor

CHAPTER I

THE "COCK AND ANCHOR" – TWO

HORSEMEN – AND A SUPPER BY THE INN FIRE

Some time within the first ten years of the last century, there stood in the fair city of Dublin, and in one of those sinuous and narrow streets which lay in the immediate vicinity of the Castle, a goodly and capacious hostelry, snug and sound, and withal carrying in its aspect something staid and aristocratic, and perhaps in nowise the less comfortable that it was rated, in point of fashion, somewhat obsolete. Its structure was quaint and antique; so much so, that had its counterpart presented itself within the precincts of "the Borough," it might fairly have passed itself off for the genuine old Tabard of Geoffrey Chaucer.

The front of the building, facing the street, rested upon a row of massive wooden blocks, set endwise, at intervals of some six or eight feet, and running parallel at about the same distance, to the wall of the lower story of the house, thus forming a kind of rude cloister or open corridor, running the whole length of the building.

The spaces between these rude pillars were, by a light frame-work of timber, converted into a succession of arches; and by an application of the same ornamental process, the ceiling of this extended porch was made to carry a clumsy but not unpicturesque imitation of groining. Upon this open-work of timber, as we have already said, rested the second story of the building; protruding beyond which again, and supported upon beams whose projecting ends were carved into the semblance of heads hideous as the fantastic monsters of heraldry, arose the third story, presenting a series of tall and fancifully-shaped gables, decorated, like the rest of the building, with an abundance of grotesque timber-work. A wide passage, opening under the corridor which we have described, gave admission into the inn-yard, surrounded partly by the building itself, and partly by the stables and other offices connected with it. Viewed from a little distance, the old fabric presented by no means an unsightly or ungraceful aspect: on the contrary, its very irregularities and antiquity, however in reality objectionable, gave to it an air of comfort and almost of dignity to which many of its more pretending and modern competitors might in vain have aspired. Whether it was, that from the first the substantial fabric had asserted a conscious superiority over all the minor tenements which surrounded it, or that they in modest deference had gradually conceded to it the prominence which it deserved – whether, in short, it had always stood foremost, or that the street had slightly altered its course and gradually receded, leaving it behind, an immemorial and immovable landmark by which to measure the encroachments of ages – certain it is, that at the time we speak of, the sturdy hostelry stood many feet in advance of the line of houses which flanked it on either side, narrowing the street with a most aristocratic indifference to the comforts of the pedestrian public, thus forced to shift for life and limb, as best they might, among the vehicles and horses which then thronged the city streets – no doubt, too, often by the very difficulties which it presented, entrapping the over-cautious passenger, who preferred entering the harbour which its hospitable and capacious doorway offered, to encountering all the perils involved in doubling the point.

Such as we have attempted to describe it, the old building stood more than a century since; and when the level sunbeams at eventide glinted brightly on its thousand miniature window panes, and upon the broad hanging panel, which bore, in the brightest hues and richest gilding, the portraiture of a Cock and Anchor; and when the warm, discoloured glow of sunset touched the time-worn front

of the old building with a rich and cheery blush, even the most fastidious would have allowed that the object was no unpleasing one.

A dark autumnal night had closed over the old city of Dublin, and the wind was blustering in hoarse gusts through the crowded chimney-stacks – careening desolately through the dim streets, and occasionally whirling some loose tile or fragment of plaster from the house tops. The streets were silent and deserted, except when occasionally traversed by some great man's carriage, thundering and clattering along the broken pavement, and by its passing glare and rattle making the succeeding darkness and silence but the more dreary. None stirred abroad who could avoid it; and with the exception of such rare interruptions as we have mentioned, the storm and darkness held undisputed possession of the city. Upon this ungenial night, and somewhat past the hour of ten, a well-mounted traveller rode into the narrow and sheltered yard of the "Cock and Anchor;" and having bestowed upon the groom who took the bridle of his steed such minute and anxious directions as betokened a kind and knightly tenderness for the comforts of his good beast, he forthwith entered the public room of the inn – a large and comfortable chamber, having at the far end a huge hearth overspanned by a broad and lofty mantelpiece of stone, and now sending forth a warm and ruddy glow, which penetrated in genial streams to every recess and corner of the room, tinging the dark wainscoting of the walls, glinting red and brightly upon the burnished tankards and flagons with which the cupboard was laden, and playing cheerily over the massive beams which traversed the ceiling. Groups of men, variously occupied and variously composed, embracing all the usual company of a well frequented city tavern – from the staid and sober man of business, who smokes his pipe in peace, to the loud disputatious, half-tipsy town idler, who calls for more flagons than he can well reckon, and then quarrels with mine host about the shot – were disposed, some singly, others in social clusters, in cosy and luxurious ease at the stout oak tables which occupied the expansive chamber. Among these the stranger passed leisurely to a vacant table in the neighbourhood of the good fire, and seating himself thereat, doffed his hat and cloak, thereby exhibiting a finely proportioned and graceful figure, and a face of singular nobleness and beauty. He might have seen some thirty summers – perhaps less – but his dark and expressive features bore a character of resolution and melancholy which seemed to tell of more griefs and perils overpast than men so young in the world can generally count.

The new-comer, having thrown his hat and gloves upon the table at which he had placed himself, stretched his stalwart limbs toward the fire in the full enjoyment of its genial influence, and advancing the heels of his huge jack boots nearly to the bars, he seemed for a time wholly lost in the comfortable contemplation of the red embers which flickered, glowed, and shifted before his eyes. From his quiet reverie he was soon recalled by mine host in person, who, with all courtesy, desired to know "whether his honour wished supper and a bed?" Both questions were promptly answered in the affirmative: and before many minutes the young horseman was deep in the discussion of a glorious pasty, flanked by a flagon of claret, such as he had seldom tasted before. He had scarcely concluded his meal, when another traveller, cloaked, booted, and spurred, and carrying under his arm a pair of long horse-pistols, and a heavy whip, entered the apartment, walked straight up to the fire-place, and having obtained permission of the cavalier already established there to take share of his table, he deposited thereon the formidable weapons which he carried, cast his hat, gloves, and cloak upon the floor, and threw himself luxuriously into a capacious leather-bottomed chair which confronted the cheery fire.

"A bleak night, sir, and a dark, for a ride of twenty miles," observed the stranger, addressing the younger guest.

"I can the more readily agree with you, sir," replied the latter, "seeing that I myself have ridden nigh forty, and am but just arrived."

"Whew! that beats me hollow," cried the other, with a kind of self-congratulatory shrug. "You see, sir, we never know how to thank our stars for the luck we *have* until we come to learn what luck we might have had. I rode from Wicklow – pray, sir, if it be not too bold a question, what line did you travel?"

"The Cork road."

"Ha! that's an ugly line they say to travel by night. You met with no interruption?"

"Troth, but I *did*, sir," replied the young man, "and none of the pleasantest either. I was stopped, and put in no small peril, too."

"How! stopped – stopped on the highway! By the mass, you outdo me in every point! Would you, sir, please to favour me, if 'twere not too much trouble, with the facts of the adventure – the particulars?"

"Faith, sir," rejoined the young man, "as far as my knowledge serves me, you are welcome to them all. When I was still about twelve miles from this, I was joined from a by-road by a well mounted, and (as far as I could discern) a respectable-looking traveller, who told me he rode for Dublin, and asked to join company by the way. I assented; and we jogged on pleasantly enough for some two or three miles. It was very dark – "

"As pitch," ejaculated the stranger, parenthetically.

"And what little scope of vision I might have had," continued the younger traveller, "was well nigh altogether obstructed by the constant flapping of my cloak, blown by the storm over my face and eyes. I suddenly became conscious that we had been joined by a third horseman, who, in total silence, rode at my other side."

"How and when did *he* come up with you?"

"I can't say," replied the narrator – "nor did his presence give me the smallest uneasiness. He who had joined me first, all at once called out that his stirrup strap was broken, and halloo'd to me to rein in until he should repair the accident. This I had hardly done, when some fellow, whom I had not seen, sprang from behind upon my horse, and clasped my arms so tightly to my body, that so far from making use of them, I could hardly breathe. The scoundrel who had dismounted caught my horse by the head and held him firmly, while my hitherto silent companion clapped a pistol to my ear."

"The devil!" exclaimed the elder man, "that was checkmate with a vengeance."

"Why, in truth, so it turned out," rejoined his companion; "though I confess my first impulse was to balk the gentlemen of the road at any hazard; and with this view I plied my spurs rowel deep, but the rascal who held the bridle was too old a hand to be shaken off by a plunge or two. He swung with his whole weight to the bit, and literally brought poor Rowley's nose within an inch of the road. Finding that resistance was utterly vain, and not caring to squander what little brains I have upon so paltry an adventure, I acknowledged the jurisdiction of the gentleman's pistol, and replied to his questions."

"You proved your sound sense by so doing," observed the other. "But what was their purpose?"

"As far as I could gather," replied the younger man, "they were upon the look-out for some particular person, I cannot say whom; for, either satisfied by my answers, or having otherwise discovered their mistake, they released me without taking anything from me but my sword, which, however, I regret much, for it was my father's; and having blown the priming from my pistols, they wished me the best of good luck, and so we parted, without the smallest desire on my part to renew the intimacy. And now, sir, you know just as much of the matter as I do myself."

"And a very serious matter it is, too," observed the stranger, with an emphatic nod. "Landlord! a pint of mulled claret – and spice it as I taught you – d'ye mind? A very grave matter – do you think you could possibly identify those men?"

"Identify them! how the devil could I? – it was dark as pitch – a cat could not have seen them."

"But was there no mark – no peculiarity discernible, even in the dense obscurity – nothing about any of them, such as you might know again?"

"Nothing – the very outline was indistinct. I could merely pee that they were shaped like men."

"Truly, truly, that is much to be lamented," said the elder gentleman; "though fifty to one," he added, devoutly, "they'll hang one day or another – let that console us. Meantime, here comes the claret."

So saying, the new-comer rose from his seat, coolly removed his black matted peruke from his shorn head, and replaced it by a dark velvet cap, which he drew from some mysterious nook in his breeches pocket; then, hanging the wig upon the back of his chair, he wheeled the seat round to the table, and for the first time offered to his companion an opportunity of looking him fairly in the face. If he were a believer in the influence of first impressions, he had certainly acted wisely in deferring the exhibition until the acquaintance had made some progress, for his countenance was, in sober truth, anything but attractive – a pair of grizzled brows overshadowed eyes of quick and piercing black, rather small, and unusually restless and vivid – the mouth was wide, and the jaw so much underhung as to amount almost to a deformity, giving to the lower part of the face a character of resolute ferocity which was not at all softened by the keen fiery glance of his eye; a massive projecting forehead, marked over the brow with a deep scar, and furrowed by years and thought, added not a little to the stern and commanding expression of the face. The complexion was swarthy; and altogether the countenance was one of that sinister and unpleasant kind which the imagination associates with scenes of cruelty and terror, and which might appropriately take a prominent place in the foreground of a feverish dream. The young traveller had seen too many ugly sights, in the course of a roving life of danger and adventure, to remember for a moment the impression which his new companion's visage was calculated to produce. They chatted together freely; and the elder (who, by the way, exhibited no very strong Irish peculiarities of accent or idiom, any more than did the other) when he bid his companion good-night, left him under the impression that, however forbidding his aspect might be, his physical disadvantages were more than counterbalanced by the shrewd, quick sagacity, correct judgment, and wide range of experience of which he appeared possessed.

CHAPTER II

A BED IN THE "COCK AND ANCHOR" – A LANTERN AND AN UGLY VISITOR BY THE BEDSIDE

Leaving the public room to such as chose to push their revels beyond the modesty of midnight, our young friend betook himself to his chamber; where, snugly deposited in one of the snuggest beds which the "Cock and Anchor" afforded, with the ample tapestry curtains drawn from post to post, while the rude wind buffeted the casements and moaned through the antique chimney-tops, he was soon locked in the deep, dreamless slumber of fatigue.

How long this sweet oblivion may have lasted it was not easy to say; some hours, however, had no doubt intervened, when the sleeper was startled from his repose by a noise at his chamber door. The latch was raised, and someone bearing a shaded light entered the room and cautiously closed the door again. In the belief that the intruder was some guest or domestic of the inn who either mistook the room or was not aware of its occupation, the young man coughed once or twice slightly in token of his presence, and observing that his signal had not the desired effect, he inquired rather sharply, — "Who is there?"

The only answer returned was a long "Hist!" and forthwith the steps of the unseasonable visitor were directed to the bedside. The person thus disturbed had hardly time to raise himself half upright when the curtains at one side were drawn apart, and by the imperfect light which forced its way through the horn enclosure of a lantern, he beheld the bronzed and sinister features of his fireside companion of the previous evening. The stranger was arrayed for the road, with his cloak and cocked hat on. Both parties, the visited and the visitor, for a time remained silent and in the same fixed attitude.

"Pray, sir," at length inquired the person thus abruptly intruded upon, "to what special good fortune do I owe this most unlooked-for visit?"

The elder man made no reply; but deliberately planted the large dingy lantern which he carried upon the bed in which the young man lay.

"You have tarried somewhat too long over the wine-cup," continued he, not a little provoked at the coolness of the intruder. "This, sir, is not your chamber; seek it elsewhere. I am in no mood to bandy jests. You will consult your own ease as well as mine by quitting this room with all dispatch."

"Young gentleman," replied the elder man in a low, firm tone, "I have used short ceremony in disturbing you thus. To judge from your face you are no less frank than hardy. You will not require apologies when you have heard me. When I last night sate with you I observed about you a token long since familiar to me as the light – you wear it on your finger – it is a diamond ring. That ring belonged to a dear friend of mine – an old comrade and a tried friend in a hundred griefs and perils: the owner was Richard O'Connor. I have not heard from him for ten years or more. Can you say how he fares?"

"The brave soldier and good man you have named was my father," replied the young man, mournfully.

"Was!" repeated the stranger. "Is he then no more – is he dead?"

"Even so," replied the young man, sadly.

"I knew it – I felt it. When I saw that jewel last night something smote at my heart and told me, that the hand that wore it once was cold. Ah, me! it was a friendly and a brave hand. Through all the wars of King James" (and so saying he touched his hat) "we were together, companions in arms and bosom friends. He was a comely man and a strong; no hardship tired him, no difficulty dismayed him; and the merriest fellow he was that ever trod on Irish ground. Poor O'Connor! in exile; away, far away from the country he loved so well; among foreigners too. Well, well, wheresoever they have laid thee, there moulders not a truer nor a braver heart in the fields of all the world!"

He paused, sighed deeply, and then continued, —

"Sorely, sorely are thine old comrades put to it, day by day, and night by night, for comfort and for safety – sorely vexed and pillaged. Nevertheless – over-ridden, and despised, and scattered as we are, mercenaries and beggars abroad, and landless at home – still something whispers in my ear that there will come at last a retribution, and such a one as will make this perjured, corrupt, and robbing ascendancy a warning and a wonder to all after times. Is it a common thing, think you, that all the gentlemen, all the chivalry of a whole country – the natural leaders and protectors of the people – should be stripped of their birthright, ay, even of the poor privilege of seeing in this their native country, strangers possessing the inheritances which are in *all* right their own; cast abroad upon the world; soldiers of fortune, selling their blood for a bare subsistence; many of them dying of want; and all because for honour and conscience sake they refused to break the oath which bound them to a ruined prince? Is it a slight thing, think you, to visit with pains and penalties such as these, men guilty of no crimes beyond those of fidelity and honour?"

The stranger said this with an intensity of passion, to which the low tone in which he spoke but gave an additional impressiveness. After a short pause he again spoke, —

"Young gentleman," said he, "you may have heard your father – whom the saints receive! – speak, when talking over old recollections, of one Captain O'Hanlon, who shared with him the most eventful scenes of a perilous time. He may, I say, have spoken of such a one."

"He has spoken of him," replied the young man; "often, and kindly too."

"I am that man," continued the stranger; "your father's old friend and comrade; and right glad am I, seeing that I can never hope to meet him more on this side the grave, to renew, after a kind, a friendship which I much prized, now in the person of his son. Give me your hand, young gentleman: I pledge you mine in the spirit of a tried and faithful friendship. I inquire not what has brought you to this unhappy country; I am sure it can be nothing which lies not within the eye of honour, so I ask not concerning it; but on the contrary, I will tell you of myself what may surprise you – what will, at least, show that I am ready to trust you freely. You were stopped to-night upon the Southern road, some ten miles from this. It was *I* who stopped you!"

O'Connor made a sudden but involuntary movement of menace; but without regarding it, O'Hanlon continued, —

"You are astonished, perhaps shocked – you look so; but mind you, there is some difference between *stopping* men on the highway, and *robbing* them when you have stopped them. I took you for one who we were informed would pass that way, and about the same hour – one who carried letters from a pretended friend – one whom I have long suspected, a half-faced, cold-hearted friend – carried letters, I say, from such a one to the Castle here; to that malignant, perjured reprobate and apostate, the so-called Lord Wharton – as meet an ornament for a gibbet as ever yet made a feast for the ravens. I was mistaken: here is your sword; and may you long wear it as well as he from whom it was inherited." Here he raised the weapon, the blade of which he held in his hand, and the young man saw it and the hilt flash and glitter in the dusky light. "And take the advice of an old soldier, young friend," continued O'Hanlon, "and when you are next, which I hope may not be for many a long day, overpowered by odds and at their mercy, do not by fruitless violence tempt them to disable you by a simpler and less pleasant process than that of merely taking your sword and unpriming your pistols. Many a good man has thrown away his life by such boyish foolery. Upon the table by your bed you will in the morning find your rapier, and God grant that it and you may long prove fortunate companions!" He was turning to go, but recollecting himself, he added, "One word before I go. I am known here as Mr. Dwyer – remember the name, Dwyer – I am generally to be heard of in this place. Should you at any time during your stay in this city require the assistance of a friend who has a cheerful willingness to serve you, and who is not perhaps altogether destitute of power, you have only to leave a billet in the hand of the keeper of this inn, and if I be above ground it will reach me – of course address it under the name I have last mentioned – and so, young gentleman, fare you well."

So saying, he grasped the hand of his new friend, shook it warmly, and then, turning upon his heel, strode swiftly to the door, and so departed, leaving O'Connor with so much abruptness as not to allow him time to utter a question or remark on what had passed.

The excitement of the interview speedily passed away, the fatigues of the preceding day were persuasively seconded by the soothing sound of the now abated wind and by the utter darkness of the chamber, and the young man was soon deep in the forgetfulness of sleep once more. When the broad, red light of the morning sun broke cheerily into his room, streaming through the chinks of the old shutters, and penetrating through the voluminous folds of the vast curtains of rich, faded damask which surmounted the huge hearse-like bed in which he lay, so as to make its inmate aware that the hour of repose was past and that of action come, O'Connor remembered the circumstances of the interview which had been so strangely intruded upon him but as a dream; nor was it until he saw the sword which he had believed irrecoverably lost lying safely upon the table, that he felt assured that the visit and its purport were not the creation of his slumbering fancy. In reply to his questions when he descended, he was informed by mine host of the "Cock and Anchor," that Mr. Dwyer had left the inn-yard upon his stout hack, a good hour before daybreak.

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE MAN IN BLUE AND SILVER

Among the loungers who loitered at the door of the "Cock and Anchor," as the day wore on, there appeared a personage whom it behoves us to describe. This was a small man, with a very red face and little grey eyes – he wore a cloth coat of sky blue, with here and there a piece of silver lace laid upon it without much regard to symmetry; for the scissors had evidently displaced far the greater part of the original decorations, whose primitive distribution might be traced by the greater freshness of the otherwise faded cloth which they had covered, as well as by some stray threads, which stood like stubbles here and there to mark the ravages of the sickle. One hand was buried in the deep flap pocket of a waistcoat of the same hue and material, and bearing also, in like manner, the evidences of a very decided retrenchment in the article of silver lace. These symptoms of economy, however, in no degree abated the evident admiration with which the wearer every now and then stole a glance on what remained of its pristine splendours – a glance which descended not ungraciously upon a leg in whose fascinations its owner reposed an implicit faith. His right hand held a tobacco-pipe, which, although its contents were not ignited, he carried with a luxurious nonchalance ever and anon to the corner of his mouth, where it afforded him sundry imaginary puffs – a cheap and fanciful luxury, in which my Irish readers need not be told their humbler countrymen, for lack of better, are wont to indulge. He leaned against one of the stout wooden pillars on which the front of the building was reared, and interlarded his economical pantomime of pipe-smoking with familiar and easy conversation with certain of the outdoor servants of the inn – a familiarity which argued not any sense of superiority proportionate to the pretension of his attire.

"And so," said the little man, turning with an aristocratic ease towards a stout fellow in a jerkin, with bluff visage and folded arms, who stood beside him, and addressing him in a most melodious brogue – "and so, for sartain, you have but five single gentlemen in the house – mind, I say *single* gentlemen – for, divil carry me if ever I take up with a *family* again – it doesn't answer – it don't *shoot* me – I was never made for a family, nor a family for me – I can't stand their b – y regularity; and – " with a sigh of profound sentiment, and lowering his voice, he added – "and, the maid-sarvants – no, devil a taste – they don't answer – they don't *shoot*. My disposition, Tom, is tindher – tindher to imbecility – I never see a petticoat but it flutters my heart – the short and the long of it is, I'm always falling in love – and sometimes the passion is not retaliated by the object, and more times it is – but, in both cases, I'm aiqually the victim – for my intintions is always honourable, and of course nothin' comes of it. My life was fairly frettin' away in a dhrame of passion among the housemaids – I felt myself witherin' away like a flower in autumn – I was losing my relish for everything, from bacon and table-dhrink upwards – dangers were thickening round me – I had but one way to execrate myself – I gave notice – I departed, and here I am."

Having wound up the sentence, the speaker leaned forward and spat passionately on the ground – a pause ensued, which was at length broken by the same speaker.

"Only two out of the five," said he, reflectively, "only two unprovided with sarvants."

"And neither of 'em," rejoined Tom, a blunt English groom, "very likely to want one. The one is a lawyer, with a hack as lean as himself, and more holes, I warrant, than half-pence in his breeches pocket. He's out a-looking for lodgings, I take it."

"He's not exactly what I want," rejoined the little man. "What's th'other like?"

"A gentleman, every inch, or *I'm* no judge," replied the groom. "He came last night, and as likely a bit of horseflesh under him as ever my two hands wisped down. He chucked me a crown-piece this morning, as if it had been no more nor a cockle shell – he did."

"By gorra, he'll do!" exclaimed the little man energetically. "It's a bargain – I'm his man."

"Ay, but you mayn't answer, brother; he mayn't take you," observed Tom.

"Wait a bit — *jist* wait a bit, till he sees me," replied he of the blue coat.

"Ay, wait a bit," persevered the groom, coolly – "wait a bit, and when he *does* see you, it strikes me wery possible he mayn't like your cut."

"Not like my cut!" exclaimed the little man, as soon as he had recovered breath; for the bare supposition of such an occurrence involved in his opinion so utter and astounding a contradiction of all the laws by which human antipathies and affections are supposed to be regulated, that he felt for a moment as if his whole previous existence had been a dream and an illusion. "Not like my *cut*!"

"No," rejoined the groom, with perfect imperturbability.

The little man deigned no other reply than that conveyed in a glance of the most inexpressible contempt, which, having wandered over the person and accoutrements of the unconscious Tom, at length settled upon his own lower extremities, where it gradually softened into a gaze of melancholy complacency, while he muttered, with a pitying smile, "Not like my cut – not like it!" and then, turning majestically towards the groom, he observed, with laconic dignity, —

"I humbly consave the gintleman has an eye in his head."

This rebuke had hardly been administered when the subject of their conference in person passed from the inn into the street.

"There he goes," observed Tom.

"And here *I* go after him," added the candidate for a place; and in a moment he was following O'Connor with rapid steps through the narrow streets of the town, southward. It occurred to him, as he hurried after his intended master, that it might not be amiss to defer his interview until they were out of the streets, and in some more quiet place; nor in all probability would he have disturbed himself at all to follow the young gentleman, were it not that even in the transient glimpse which he had had of the person and features of O'Connor, the little man thought, and by no means incorrectly, that he recognized the form of one whom he had often seen before.

"That's Mr. O'Connor, as sure as my name's Larry Toole," muttered the little man, half out of breath with his exertions – "an' it's himself'll be proud to get me. I wondher what he's after now. I'll soon see, at any rate."

Thus communing within himself, Larry alternately walked and trotted to keep the chase in view. He might very easily have come up with the object of his pursuit, for on reaching St. Patrick's Cathedral, O'Connor paused, and for some minutes contemplated the old building. Larry, however, did not care to commence his intended negotiation in the street; he purposed giving him rope enough, having, in truth, no peculiar object in following him at that precise moment, beyond the gratification of an idle curiosity; he therefore hung back until O'Connor was again in motion, when he once more renewed his pursuit.

O'Connor had soon passed the smoky precincts of the town, and was now walking at a slackened pace among the green fields and the trees, all clothed in the rich melancholy hues of early autumn. The evening sun was already throwing its mellow tint on all the landscape, and the lengthening shadows told how far the day was spent. In the transition from the bustle of a town to the lonely quiet of the country at eventide, and especially at that season of the year when decay begins to sadden the beauties of nature, there is something at once soothing and unutterably melancholy. Leaving behind the glare, and dust, and hubbub of the town, who has not felt in his inmost heart the still appeal of nature? The saddened beauty of sear autumn, enhanced by the rich and subdued light of gorgeous sunset – the filmy mist – the stretching shadows – the serene quiet, broken only by rural sounds, more soothing even than silence – all these, contrasted with the sounds and sights of the close, restless city, speak tenderly and solemnly to the heart of man of the beauty of creation, of the goodness of God, and, along with these, of the mournful condition of all nature – change, decay, and death. Such thoughts and feelings, stealing in succession upon the heart, touch, one by one, the springs of all our sublimest sympathies, and fill the mind with the beautiful sense of brotherhood, under God, with all

nature. Under the not unpleasing influence of such suggestions, O'Connor slackened his pace to a slow irregular walk, which sorely tried the patience of honest Larry Toole.

"After all," exclaimed that worthy, "it's nothin' more nor less than an evening walk he's takin', God bless the mark! What business have I followin' him? unless – see – sure enough he's takin' the short cut to the manor. By gorra, this is worth mindin' – I must not folly him, however – I don't want to meet the family – so here I'll plant myself until sich times as he's comin' back again."

So saying, Larry Toole clambered to the top of the grassy embankment which fenced the road, and seating himself between a pair of aged hawthorn-trees, he watched young O'Connor as he followed the wanderings of a wild bridle-road until he was at length fairly hidden from view by the intervening trees and brushwood.

CHAPTER IV

A SCARLET HOOD AMONG THE OLD TREES – THE MANOR OF MORLEY COURT – AND A PEEP INTO AN ANTIQUE CHAMBER

The path which O'Connor followed was one of those quiet and pleasant by-roads which, in defiance of what are called improvements, are still to be discovered throughout Ireland here and there, in some unsuspected region, winding their green and sequestered ways through many a varied scene of rural beauty; and, unless when explored by some chance fisherman or tourist, unknown to all except the poor peasant to whose simple conveniences they minister.

Low and uneven embankments, overgrown by a thousand kinds of weeds and wild flowers and brushwood, marked the boundaries of this rustic pathway, but in so friendly a sort, and with so little jealousy or exclusion, that they seemed designed rather to lend a soft and sheltered resting-place to the tired traveller than to check the wayward excursions of the idle rambler into the merry fields and woodlands through which it wound. On either side the tall, hoary trees, like time-worn pillars, reared their grey, moss-grown trunks and arching branches, now but thinly clothed with the discoloured foliage of autumn, and casting their long shadows in the evening sun far over the sloping and unequal sward. The scene, the hour, and the loneliness of the place, would of themselves have been enough to induce a pensive train of thought; but, beyond the silence and seclusion, and the falling of the leaves in their eternal farewell, and all the other touching signs of nature's beautiful decay, there were deep in O'Connor's breast recollections and passions with which the scene before him was more nearly associated, than with the ordinary suggestions of fantastic melancholy.

At some distance from this road, and half hidden among the trees, there stood an old and extensive building, chiefly of deep red brick, presenting many and varied fronts and quaint gables, antique-fashioned casements, and whole groups of fantastic chimneys, sending up their thin curl of smoke into the still air, and glinting tall and red in the declining sun; while the dusky hue of the old bricks was every here and there concealed under rich mantles of dark, luxuriant ivy, which, in some parts of the structure, had not only mounted to the summits of the wall, but clambered, in rich profusion, over the steep roof, and even to the very chimney tops. This antique building – rambling, massive, and picturesque in no ordinary degree – might well have attracted the observation of the passer-by, as it presented in succession, through the irregular vistas of the rich old timber, now one front, now another, alternately hidden and revealed as the point of observation was removed. But the eyes of O'Connor sought this ancient mansion, and dwelt upon its ever-varying aspects, as he pursued his way, with an interest more deep and absorbing than that of mere curiosity or admiration; and as he slowly followed the grass-grown road, a thousand emotions and remembrances came crowding upon his mind, impetuous, passionate, and wild, but all tinged with a melancholy which even the strong and sanguine heart of early manhood could not overcome. As the path proceeded, it became more closely sheltered by the wild bushes and trees, and its windings grew more wayward and frequent, when on a sudden, from behind a screen of old thorns which lay a little in advance, a noble dog, of the true old Irish wolf breed, came bounding towards him, with every token of joy and welcome.

"Rover, Rover – down, boy, down," said the stranger, as the huge animal, in his boisterous greeting, leaped upon him again and again, flinging his massive paws upon his shoulders, and thrusting his cold nose into his bosom – "down, Rover, down."

The first transport of welcome past, the noble dog waited to receive from his old friend some marks of recognition in return, and then, swinging his long tail from side to side, away he sprang, as if to carry the joyful tidings to the companion of his evening ramble.

O'Connor knew that some of those whom he should not have chosen to meet just then or there were probably within a stone's throw of the spot where he now stood, and for a moment he was strongly tempted to turn, and, if so it might be, unobserved to retrace his steps. The close screen of wild trees which overshadowed the road would have rendered this design easy of achievement; but while he was upon the point of turning to depart, a few notes of some wild and simple Irish melody, carelessly lilted by a voice of silvery sweetness, floated to his ear. Every cadence and vibration of *that* voice was to him enchantment – he could not choose but pause. The sweet sounds were interrupted by a rustling among the withered leaves which strewed the ground. Again the fine old dog made his appearance, dashing joyously along the path towards him, and following in his wake, with slow and gentle steps, came a light and graceful female form. On her shoulders rested a short mantle of scarlet cloth; the hood was thrown partially backward, so as to leave the rich dark ringlets to float freely in the light breeze of evening; the faintest flush imaginable tinged the clear paleness of her cheek, giving to her exquisitely beautiful features a lustre, whose richness did not, however, subdue their habitual and tender melancholy. The moment the full dark eyes of the girl encountered O'Connor, the song died away upon her lips – the colour fled from her cheeks, and as instantaneously the sudden paleness was succeeded by a blush of such depth and brilliancy as threw far into shade even the brightest imagery of poetic fancy.

"Edmond!" she exclaimed, in a tone so faint and low as scarcely to reach his ear, and which yet thrilled to his very heart.

"Yes, Mary – it is, indeed, Edmond O'Connor," answered he, passionately and mournfully – "come, after long years of separation, over many a mile of sea and land – unlooked-for, and, mayhap, unwished-for – come once more to see you, and, in seeing you, to be happy, were it but for a moment – come to tell you that he loves you fondly, passionately as ever – come to ask you, dear, dear Mary, if you, too, are unchanged?"

As he thus spoke, standing by her side, O'Connor gazed on the sad, sweet face of her he loved so well, and held that little hand, which he would have given worlds to call his own. The beautiful girl was too artless to disguise her agitation. She would have spoken, but the effort was vain – the tears gathered in her dark eyes, and fell faster and faster, till at length the fruitless struggle ceased, and she wept long and bitterly.

"Oh! Edmond," said she, at length, raising her eyes sorrowfully and fondly to O'Connor's face – "what has called you hither? We two should hardly have met now or thus."

"Dear Mary," answered he, with melancholy fervour, "since last I held this loved hand, years have passed away – three long years and more – in which we two have never met – in which you scarce have even heard of me. Mary, three years bring many changes – changes irreparable. Time – which has, if it were possible, made you more beautiful even than when I saw you last – may yet have altered earlier feelings, and turned your heart from me. Were it so, Mary, I would not seek to blame you. I am not so vain – your rank – your great attractions – your surpassing beauty, must have won many admirers – drawn many suitors round you; and I – I, among all these, may well have been forgotten – I, whose best merit is but in loving you beyond my life. I will not, then – I will not, Mary, ask if you love me still: but coming thus unbidden and unlooked-for, am I forgiven – am I welcome, Mary?"

The artless girl looked up in his face with such a beautiful smile of trust and love as told more in one brief moment than language could in volumes.

"Yes, Mary," said O'Connor, reading that smile aright, with swelling heart and proud devotion; "yes, Mary. I am remembered – you are still my own – my own: true, faithful, unchanged, in spite of years of time and leagues of separation; in spite of all! – my true-hearted, my adored, my own!"

He spoke; and in the fulness of their hearts they were both for a while silent, each gazing on the other in the rapt tenderness of long-tried love – in the deep, guileless joy of this chance meeting.

"Hear me," he whispered, lower almost than the murmur of the breeze through the arching boughs above them, as if fearful that even a breath would trouble the still enchantment that held them

spell-bound: "hear me, for I have much to tell. The years that have passed since I spoke to you before have brought to me their store of good and ill, of sorrow and of hope. I have many things to tell you, Mary; much that gives me hope – the cheeriest hope – even that of overcoming Sir Richard's opposition! Ay, Mary, reasonable hope; and why? Because I am no longer poor: an old friend of my father's, Mr. Audley, has taken me by the hand, adopted me, made me his heir – the heir to riches and possessions which even your father will allow to be considerable – which he well may think enough to engage his prudence in favour of our union. In this hope, dearest, I am here. I daily expect the arrival of my generous friend and benefactor; and with him I will go to your father and urge my suit once more, and with God's blessing at last prevail – but hark! some one comes."

Even while he spoke, the lovers were startled by the sound of voices in gay colloquy, approaching along the quiet by-road on which they stood.

"Leave me, Edmond, leave me," said the beautiful girl, with earnest entreaty; "they must not see you with me now."

"Farewell then, dearest, since it must be so," replied O'Connor, as he pressed her hand closely in his own; "but meet me to-morrow evening – meet me by the old gate in the beech-tree walk, at the hour when you used to walk there. Nay, refuse me not, Mary. Farewell, farewell till then!" and so saying, before she had time to frame an answer, he turned from her, and was quickly lost among the trees and underwood which skirted the pathway.

In the speakers who approached, the young lady at once recognized her brother, Henry Ashwoode, and Emily Copland, her pretty cousin. The young man was handsome alike in face and figure, slightly made, and bearing in his carriage that indescribable air of aristocratic birth and pretension which sits not ungracefully upon a handsome person; his countenance, too, bore a striking resemblance to that of his sister, and, allowing for the difference of sex, resembled it as nearly as any countenance which had never expressed a passion but such as had its aim and origin alike in *self*, could do. He was dressed in the extreme of the prevailing fashion; and altogether his outward man was in all respects such as to justify his acknowledged pretensions to be considered one of the prettiest men in the then gay city of Dublin. The young lady who accompanied him was, in all points except in that of years, as unlike her cousin, Mary Ashwoode, as one pretty girl could well be to another. She was very fair; had a quick, clear eye, which carried in its glance something more than mere mirth or vivacity; an animated face, with, however, something of a bold, and at times even of a haughty expression. Laughing and chatting in light, careless gaiety, the youthful pair approached the spot where Mary Ashwoode stood.

"So, so, fair sister," cried the young man, gaily, "alone and musing, and doubtless melancholy. Shall we venture to approach her, Emily?"

Women have keener eyes in small matters than men; and Miss Copland at a glance perceived her fair cousin's flushed cheek and embarrassed manner.

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" cried she; "the girl has certainly seen a ghost or a dragoon officer."

"Neither, I assure you, cousin," replied Miss Ashwoode, with an effort; "my evening's ramble has not extended beyond this spot; and as yet I've seen no monster more alarming than my brother's new periwig."

The young man bowed.

"Nay, nay," cried Miss Copland, "but I must hear it. There certainly is some awful mystery at the bottom of all these conscious looks; but *apropos* of awful mysteries," continued she, turning to young Ashwoode, half in pity for Mary's increasing embarrassment; "where *is* Major O'Leary? What has become of your amusing old uncle?"

"That's more than *I* can tell," replied the young man; "I wash my hands of the scapegrace. I know nothing of him. I saw him for a moment in town this morning, and he promised, with a round

dozen of oaths, to be out to dine with us to-day. Thus much *you* know, and thus much *I* know; for the rest, having sins enough of my own to carry, as I said before, I wash my hands of him and his."

"Well, now remember, Henry," continued she, "I make it a point with you to bring him out here to-morrow. In sober seriousness I can't get on without him. It is a melancholy and a terrible truth, but still one which I feel it my duty to speak boldly, that Major O'Leary is the only gallant and susceptible man in the family."

"Monstrous assertion?" exclaimed the young man; "why, not to mention myself, the acknowledged pink and perfection of everything that is irresistible, have you not the perfect command of my worthy cousin, Arthur Blake?"

"Now don't put me in a passion, Henry," exclaimed the girl. "How dare you mention that wretch – that irreclaimable, unredeemed fox-hunter. He never talks, nor thinks, nor dreams of anything but dogs and badgers, foxes and other vermin. I verily believe he never yet was seen off a horse's back, except sometimes in a stable – he is an absolute Irish centaur! And then his odious attempts at finery – his elaborate, perverse vulgarity – the perpetual pinching and mincing of his words! An off-hand, shameless brogue I can endure – a brogue that revels and riots, and defies the world like your uncle O'Leary's, I can respect and even admire – but a brogue in a strait waistcoat –"

"Well, well," rejoined the young man, laughing, "though you may not find any sprout of the *family* tree, excepting Major O'Leary, worthy to contribute to your laudable requirements; yet surely you have a very fair catalogue of young and able-bodied gentlemen among our neighbours. What say you to young Lloyd – he lives within a stone's throw. He is a most proper, pious, and punctual young gentleman; and would make, I doubt not, a most devout and exemplary '*Cavalier servente*.'"

"Worse and worse," cried the young lady despondingly; "the most domestic, stupid, affectionate, invulnerable wretch. He never flirts out of his own family, and then, for charity I believe, with the oldest and ugliest. He is the very person for whose special case the rubric provided that no man shall marry his grandmother."

"My fair cousin," replied the young man, laughing, "I see you are hard to please. Meanwhile, sweet ladies both, let me remind you that the sun has just set; we must make our way homeward – at least *I* must. By the way, can I do anything in town for you this evening, beyond a tender message to my reverend uncle?"

"Dear me," exclaimed Miss Copland, "you have not passed an evening at home this age. What *can* you want, morning, noon, and night in that smoky, dirty town?"

"Why, the fact is," replied the young man, "business must be done; I positively must attend two routs to-night."

"Whose routs – what are they?" inquired the young lady.

"One is Mrs. Tresham's, the other Lady Stukely's."

"I *guessed* that ugly old kinswoman of mine was at the bottom of it," exclaimed the young lady with great vivacity. "Lady Stukely – that pompous, old, frightful goose! – she has laid herself out to seduce you, Harry; but don't let that dismay you, for ten to one if you fall, she'll make an honest man of you in the end and marry you. Only think, Mary, what a sister you shall have," and the young lady laughed heartily, and then added, "There are some excellent, worthy, abominable people, who seem made expressly to put one in a passion – perpetual appeals to one's virtuous indignation. Now do, Henry, for goodness sake, if a matrimonial catastrophe must come, choose at least some nymph with less rouge and wrinkles than poor dear Lady Stukely."

"Kind cousin, thyself shalt choose for me," answered the young man; "but pray, suffer me to be at large for a year or two more. I would fain live and breathe a little, before I go down into the matrimonial pit and be no more seen. But let us mend our pace, the evening turns chill."

Thus chatting carelessly, they moved towards the large brick building which we have already described, embowered among the trees; where arrived, the young man forthwith applied himself to prepare for a night of dissipation, and the young ladies to get through a dull evening as best they might.

The two fair cousins sate in a large, old-fashioned drawing-room; the walls were covered with elaborately-wrought tapestry representing, in a manner sufficiently grim and alarming, certain scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; a cheerful fire blazed in the capacious hearth; and the cumbrous mantelpiece was covered with those grotesque and monstrous china figures, misnamed ornaments, which were then beginning to find favour in the eyes of fashion. Abundance of richly carved furniture was disposed variously throughout the room. The young ladies sate by a small table on which lay some books and materials for work, placed near the fire. They occupied each one of those huge, high-backed, and well-stuffed chairs in which it is a mystery how our ancestors could sit and remain awake. Both were silently occupied with their own busy reflections; and it was not until the rapid clank of the horse's hoofs upon the pavement underneath the windows, as young Ashwoode started upon his night ride to the city, rose sharp and clear, that Miss Copland, waking from her reverie, exclaimed, —

"Well, sweet coz, were ever so woebegone and desolate a pair of damsels. The only available male creature in the establishment, with the exception of Sir Richard, who has actually gone to bed, has fairly turned his back upon us."

"Dear Emily," replied her cousin, "pray be serious. I wish to tell you what has passed this evening. You observed my confusion and agitation when you and Henry overtook me."

"Why, to be sure I did," replied the young lady; "and now, like an honest coz, you are going to tell me all about it." She drew her chair nearer as she spoke. "Come, my dear, tell me everything — what was your discovery? Come, now, there's a good girl, do confess." So saying she threw one arm round her cousin's neck and laid the other in her lap, looking curiously into her face the while.

"Oh! Emily, I have seen him!" exclaimed Miss Ashwoode, with an effort.

"Seen *him*! — seen whom? — old Nick, if I may judge from your looks. Whom *have* you seen, dear?" eagerly inquired Miss Copland.

"I have seen Edmond O'Connor," answered she.

"Edmond O'Connor!" repeated the girl in unfeigned surprise, "why, I thought he was in France, eating frogs and dancing cotillons. What has brought him here? — why, he'll be taken for a spy and executed on the spot. But seriously, can you conceive anything more rash and ill-judged than his coming over just now?"

"It is indeed, I greatly fear, very rash," replied the young lady; "he is resolved to speak with my father once more."

"And your father in such a precious ill-humour just at this precise moment," exclaimed Miss Copland. "I never *was* so much afraid of Sir Richard as I have been for the last two days; he has been a perfect bruin — begging your pardon, my dear girl — but even *you* must admit, let filial piety and all the cardinal virtues say what they will, that whenever Sir Richard is recovering from a fit of the gout he is nothing short of a perfect monster. I wager my diamond cross to a thimble, that he breaks the poor young man's head the moment he comes within reach of him. But jesting apart, I fear, my dear cousin, that my uncle is in no mood just now to listen to heroics."

A sharp knocking upon the floor immediately above the chamber in which the young ladies sate, interrupted the conference at this juncture.

"There is my father's signal — he wants me," exclaimed Miss Ashwoode, and rising as she spoke, without more ado she ran to render the required attendance.

"Strange girl," exclaimed Miss Copland, as her cousin's step was heard ascending the stairs, "strange girl! — she is the veriest simpleton I ever yet encountered. All this fuss to marry a fellow who is, in plain words, little better than a beggarman — a good-looking beggarman, to be sure, but still a beggar. Oh, Mary, simple Mary! I am very much tempted to despise you — there is certainly something *wrong* about you! I hate to see people without ambition enough even to wish to keep their own natural position. The girl is full of nonsense; but what's that to me? she'll *unlearn* it all one day; but I'm much afraid, simple cousin, a little too late."

Having thus soliloquized, she called her maid, and retired for the night to her chamber.

CHAPTER V OF O'CONNOR'S MOONLIGHT WALK TO THE "COCK AND ANCHOR," AND WHAT BEFELL HIM BY THE WAY

As soon as O'Connor had made some little way from the scene of his sudden and agitating interview with Miss Ashwoode, he slackened his pace, and with slow steps began to retrace his way toward the city. So listless and interrupted was his progress, that the sun had descended, and twilight was fast melting into darkness before he reached that point in the road at which diverged the sequestered path which he had followed. As he approached the spot, he observed a small man, with a pipe in his mouth, and his person arranged in an attitude of ease and graceful negligence, admirably calculated to exhibit the symmetry and perfection of his bodily proportions. This man had planted himself in the middle of the road, so as completely to command the pass, and, as our reader need scarcely be informed, was no other than Larry Toole – the important personage to whom we have already introduced him.

As O'Connor approached, Larry advanced, with a slow and dignified motion, to receive him: and removing his pipe from his mouth with a *nonchalant* air, he compressed the lighted contents of the bowl with his finger, and then deposited the utensil in his coat pocket, at the same time, executing, in a very becoming manner, his most courtly bow. Somewhat surprised, and by no means pleasantly, at an interruption of so unlooked-for a kind, O'Connor observed, impatiently, "I have neither time nor temper, friend, to suffer delay or listen to foolery;" and observing that Larry was preparing to follow him, he added curtly, "I desire no company, sirrah, and choose to be alone."

"An' it's exactly because you wish to be alone, and likes solitude," observed the little man, "that you and me will shoot, being formed by the bountiful hand iv nature, barrin' a few small exceptions," – here he glanced complacently at his right leg, which was a little in advance of its companion – "as similiar as two eggs."

Being in no mood to tolerate, far less to encourage this annoying intrusion, O'Connor pursued his way at a quickened pace, and in obstinate silence, and in a little time exhibited a total and very mortifying forgetfulness of Mr. Toole's bodily proximity. That gentleman, however, was not so easily to be shaken off – he perseveringly followed, keeping a pace or two behind.

"It's perfectly uncontrovertible," pursued that worthy, with considerable solemnity and emphasis, "and at laste as plain as the nose on your face, that you haven't the smallest taste of a conception who it is you're spakin' too, Mr. O'Connor."

"And pray who may you be, friend?" inquired he, somewhat surprised at being thus addressed by name.

"Who else would I be, your honour," rejoined the persevering applicant – "who else *could* I be, if you had but a glimmer iv light to contemplate my forrum and fatures, but Laurence Toole – called by the men for the most part *Misthur* Toole, and (he added in a softened tone) by the girls most commonly designated Larry."

"Ha – Larry – Larry Toole!" exclaimed O'Connor, half reconciled to an intrusion up to that moment so ill endured. "Well, Larry, tell me briefly how are the family at the manor, yonder?"

"Why, plase your honour," rejoined Larry, promptly, "the ould masthur, that's Sir Richard, is much oftener gouty than good-humoured, and more's the pity. I b'lieve he's breaking down very fast, and small blame to him, for he lived hard, like a rale honourable gentleman. An' then, the young masthur, that's Masthur Henry – but you didn't know him so well – he's getting on at the devil's rate – scatt'ring guineas like small shot. They say he plays away a power of money; and he and the masthur

himself has often hard words enough between them about the way things is goin' on; but he ates and dhrinks well, an' the health he gets is as good as he wants for his purposes."

"Well – but your young mistress," suggested O'Connor – "you have not told me yet how Miss Ashwoode has been ever since. How have her health and spirits been – has she been well?"

"Mixed middlin', like belly bacon," replied Mr. Toole, with an air of profound sympathy – "shilly-shally, sir – off an' on, like an April day – sometimes atin' her victuals, sometimes lavin' them – no sartainty. I think the ould masthur's gout and crossness, and the young one's vagaries, is frettin' her; and it's sorry I am to see it. An' there's Miss Emily – that's Miss Copland – a rale jovial slip iv a young lady. I think you've seen her once or twice up at the manor; but now, since her father, the ould General, died, she is stayin' for good with the family. She's a fine lady, and" (drawing close to O'Connor, and speaking with very significant emphasis) "she has ten thousand pounds of her own – do you mind me, ten thousand – it's a good fortune – is not it, sir?"

He paused for a moment, and receiving no answer, which he interpreted as a sign that the announcement was operating as it ought, he added with a confidential wink —

"I thought I might as well put you up to it, you know, for no one knows where a blessin' may light."

"Larry," said O'Connor, after a considerable silence, somewhat abruptly and suddenly recollecting the presence of that little person – "if you have aught to say to me, speak it quickly. What may your business be?"

"Why, sir," replied he, "the long and short of it is, I left Sir Richard more than a week since. Not that I was turned away – no, Mr. O'Connor," continued Mr. Toole, with edifying majesty, "no sich thing at all in the wide world. My resignation, sir, was the fruit of my own solemn convictions – for the five years I was with the family, I had no comfort, or aise, or pace. I may as well spake plain to you, sir, for *you*, like myself, is young" – Mr. Toole was certainly at the wrong side of fifty – "you can aisily understand me, sir, when I say that I'm the victim iv romance, bad cess to it – romance, sir; my buzzam, sir, was always open to tindher impressions – impressions, sir, that came into it as natural as pigs into a pittaty garden. I could not shut them out – the short and the long iv it is, I was always fallin' in love, since I was the size iv a quart pot – eternally fallin' in love." Mr. Toole sighed, and then resumed. "I done my best to smother my emotions, but passion, sir, young and ardent passion, is impossible to be suppressed: you might as well be trying to keep strong beer in starred bottles durin' the pariod iv the dog days. But I never knew rightly what love was all out, in rale, terrible perfection, antil Mistress Betsy came to live in the family. I'll not attempt to describe her – it's enough to say she fixed my affections, and done for myself. She is own maid to the young mistress. I need not expectorate upon the progress iv my courtship – it's quite enough to observe, that for a considherable time my path was strewed with flowers, antil a young chap – an English bliggard, one Peter Clout – an' it's many's the clout he got, the Lord be thanked for that same! – a lump iv a chap ten times as ugly as the divil, and without more shapes about him than a pound of cruds – an impittant, ignorant, presumptuous, bothered, bosthoon – antil this gentleman – this Misthur Peter Clout, made his b – y appearance; then all at once the divil's delight began. Betsy – the lovely Betsy Carey – the lovely, the vartious, the beautiful, and the exalted – began to play thricks. I know she was in love with me – over head and ears, as bad as myself – but woman is a mystarious agent, an' bangs Banagher. Long as I've been larnin', I never could larn why it is they take delight in tormentin' the tindher-hearted."

This reflection was uttered in a tone of tender woe, and the speaker paused for some symptom of assent from his auditor. It is, however, hardly necessary to say that he paused in vain. O'Connor had enough to occupy his mind; and so far from listening to his companion's narrative, he was scarcely conscious that Mr. Toole, in bodily presence, was walking beside him. That "tindher-hearted" individual accordingly resumed the thread of his discourse.

"But, at any rate, she laid herself out to make me jealous of Peter Clout; and, with the blessin' iv the divil, she succeeded completly. Things were going on this way – she lettin' on to be mighty

fond iv Peter, an' me gettin' angrier an' angrier, and Mr. Clout more an' more impittent every day, antill I seen there was no use in purtendin'; so one mornin' when we were both of us – myself and Mr. Peter Clout – clainin' up the things in the pantry, I thought I might as well have a bit iv discourse with him – when I seen, do ye mind, there was no use in mortifyin' the chap with contempt, for I did not spake to him, good, bad, or indifferent, for more than a fortnight, an' he was so ignorant and unmannerly he never noticed the differ. When I seen there was no use in keepin' him at a distance, says I to him one day in the panthry – 'Mr. Clout,' says I, 'your conduct in regard iv some persons in this house,' says I, 'is iv a description that may be shuitable to the English spalpeens,' says I, 'but is about as like the conduct of a gintleman,' says I, 'as blackin' is to plate powder.' So he turns round, an' he looks at me as if I was a Pollyphamius. 'Mind your work,' says I, 'young man, an' don't be lookin' at me as if I was a hathian goddess,' says I. 'It's Mr. Toole that's speakin' to you, an' you bettther mind what he says. The long an' the short iv it is, I don't like you to be hugger-muggering with a sartain delicate famale in this establishment; an' if I catch you talkin' any more to Misthress Betsy Carey, I give you fair notice, it's at your own apparel. Beware of me – for as sure as you don't behave to my likin', you might as well be in the one panthry with a hyania,' says I, an' it was thrue for me, an' it was the same way with my father before me, an' all the Toolles up to the time of Noah's ark. In pace I'm a turtle-dove all out; but once I'm riz, I'm a rale tarin' vulture."

Here Mr. Toole paused to call up a look, and after a grim shake of the head, he resumed.

"Things went on aisy enough for a day or two, antill I happened to walk into the sarvants' hall, an' who should I see but Mr. Clout sittin' on the same stool with Misthriss Betsy, an' his arm round her waist – so when I see that, before any iv them could come between us, with the fair madness I made one jump at him, an' we both had one another by the windpipe before you'd have time to bless yourself. Well, round an' round we went, rowlin' with our heads and backs agin the walls, an' divil a spot of us but was black an' blue, antill we kem to the chimney; an' sure enough when we did, down we rowled both together, glory be to God! into the fire, an' upset a kittle iv wather on top iv us; an' with that there was sich a screechin' among the women, an' maybe a small taste from ourselves, that the masthur kem in, an' if he didn't lay on us with his walkin' stick it's no matter; but, at any rate, as soon as we recovered from the scaldin' an' the bruises. *I* retired, an' the English chap was turned away; an' that's the whole story, an' I tuk my oath that I'll never go into sarvice in a *family* again. I can't make any hand of women – they're made for desthroyin' all sorts iv pace iv mind – they're eternally triflin' with the most sarious and sacred emotions. I'll never sarve any but single gentlemen from this out, if I was to be sacrificed for it – never a bit, by the hokey!"

So saying, Mr. Toole, having, in the course of his harangue, reproduced his pipe from his pocket, with a view to flourish it in emphatic accompaniment with the cadences of his voice, smote the bowl of it upon the edge of his cocked hat, which he held in his hand, with so much passion, that the head of the pipe flew across the road, and was for ever lost among the docks and nettles. One glance he deigned to the stump which remained in his hand, and then, with an air of romantic recklessness which laughs at all sacrifices, he flung it disdainfully from him, clapped his cocked hat upon his head with a vehemence which brought it nearly to the bridge of his nose, and, planting his hands in his breeches pockets, he glanced at the stars with a scowl which, if they take any note of things terrestrial, must have filled them with alarm.

Suddenly recollecting himself, Mr. Toole perceived that his intended master, having walked on, had left him considerably behind; he therefore put himself into an easy amble, which speedily brought him up with the chase.

"Mr. O'Connor, plase your honour," he exclaimed, "sure it's not possible it's goin' to lave me behind you are, an' me so proud iv your company; an', moreover, after axin' you for a situation – that is, always supposin' you want the sarvices iv a rale dashin' young fellow, that's up to everything, an' willing to sarve you in any incapacity. An' by gorra, sir," continued he, pathetically, "it's next door to a charity to take me, for I've but one crown in the wide world left, an' I must change it to-night;

an' once I change money, the shillin's makes off with themselves like a hat full of sparrows into the elements, the Lord knows where."

With a desolate recklessness, he chucked the crown-piece into the air, caught it in his palm, and walked silently on.

"Well, well," said O'Connor, "if you choose to make so uncertain an engagement as for the term of my stay in Dublin, you are welcome to be my servant for so long."

"It's a bargain," shouted Mr. Toole – "a bargain, plase your honour, done and done on both sides. I'm your man – hurra!"

They had already entered the suburbs, and before many minutes were involved in the dark and narrow streets, threading their way, as best they might, toward the genial harbourage of the "Cock and Anchor."

CHAPTER VI

THE SOLDIER – THE NIGHT RAMBLE – AND THE WINDOW THAT LET IN MORE THAN THE MOONLIGHT

Short as had been O'Connor's sojourn, it nevertheless had been sufficiently long to satisfy mine host of the "Cock and Anchor," an acute observer in such particulars, that whatever his object might have been in avoiding the more fashionably frequented inns of the city, economy at least had no share in his motive. O'Connor, therefore, had hardly entered the public room of the inn, when a servant respectfully informed him that a private chamber was prepared for his reception, if he desired to occupy it. The proposition suited well with his temper at the minute, and with all alacrity he followed the waiter, who bowed him upstairs and through a dingy passage into a room whose claims, if not to elegance, at least to comfort, could hardly have been equalled, certainly not excelled, by the more luxurious pretensions of most modern hotels.

It was a large, capacious chamber, nearly square, wainscoted with dark shining wood, and decorated with certain dingy old pictures, which might have been, for anything to the contrary, appearing in so uncertain a light, *chefs d'œuvre* of the mighty masters of the olden time: at all events, they looked as warm and comfortable as if they were. The hearth was broad, deep, and high enough to stable a Kerry pony, and was surmounted by a massive stone mantelpiece, rudely but richly carved – abundance of old furniture – tables, at which the saintly Cromwell might have smoked and boozed, and chairs old enough to have supported Sir Walter Raleigh himself, were disposed about the room with a profuseness which argued no niggard hospitality. A pair of wax-lights burned cheerily upon a table beside the bright crackling fire which blazed in the huge cavity of the hearth; and O'Connor threw himself into one of those cumbrons, tall-backed, and well-stuffed chairs, which are in themselves more potent invitations to the sweet illusive visitings from the world of fancy and of dreams than all the drugs or weeds of eastern climes. Thus suffering all his material nature to rest in absolute repose, he loosed at once the reins of imagination and memory, and yielded up his mind luxuriously to their mingled realities and illusions.

He may have been, perhaps, for two or three hours employed thus listlessly in chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy, when his meditations were interrupted by a brisk step upon the passage leading to the apartment in which he sate, instantly succeeded by as brisk a knocking at the chamber door itself.

"Is this Mr. O'Connor's chamber?" inquired a voice of peculiar richness, intonated not unpleasingly with a certain melodious modification of the brogue, bespeaking a sort of passionate *devil-may-carishness* which they say in the good old times wrought grievous havoc among womankind. The summons was promptly answered by an invitation to enter; and forthwith the door opened, and a comely man stepped into the room. The stranger might have seen some fifty or sixty summers, or even more; for his was one of those joyous, good-humoured, rubicund visages, upon which time vainly tries to write a wrinkle. His frame was robust and upright, his stature tall, and there was in his carriage something not exactly a swagger (for with all his oddities, the stranger was evidently a gentleman), but a certain rollicking carelessness, which irresistibly conveyed the character of a reckless, head-long good-humour and daring, to which nothing could come amiss. In the hale and jolly features, which many would have pronounced handsome, were written, in characters which none could mistake, the prevailing qualities of the man – a gay and sparkling eye, in which lived the very soul of convivial jollity, harmonized right pleasantly with a smile, no less of archness than *bonhomie*, and in the brow there was a certain indescribable cock, which looked half pugnacious and

half comic. On the whole, the stranger, to judge by his outward man, was precisely the person to take his share in a spree, be the same in joke or earnest – to tell a good story – finish a good bottle – share his last guinea with you – or blow your brains out, as the occasion might require. He was arrayed in a full suit of regimentals, and taken for all in all, one need hardly have desired a better sample of the dashing, light-hearted, daredevil Irish soldier of more than a century since.

"Ah! Major O'Leary," cried O'Connor, starting from his seat, and grasping the soldier's hand, "I am truly glad to see you; you are the very man of all others I most require at this moment. I was just about to have a fit of the blue devils."

"Blue devils!" exclaimed the major; "don't talk to a youngster like me of any such infernal beings; but tell me how you are, every inch of you, and what brings you here?"

"I never was better; and as to my business," replied O'Connor, "it is too long and too dull a story to tell you just now; but in the meantime, let us have a glass of Burgundy; mine host of the 'Cock and Anchor' boasts a very peculiar cellar." So saying, O'Connor proceeded to issue the requisite order.

"That does he, by my soul!" replied the major, with alacrity; "and for that express reason I invariably make it a point to renew my friendly intimacy with its contents whenever I visit the metropolis. But I can't stay more than five minutes, so proceed to operations with all dispatch."

"And why all this hurry?" inquired O'Connor. "Where need you go at this hour?"

"Faith, I don't precisely know myself," rejoined the soldier; "but I've a strong impression that my evil genius has contrived a scheme to inveigle me into a cock-pit not a hundred miles away."

"I'm sorry for it, with all my heart, Major," replied O'Connor, "since it robs me of your company."

"Nay, you must positively come along with me," resumed the major; "I sip my Burgundy on these express conditions. Don't leave me at these years without a mentor. I rely upon your prudence and experience; if you turn me loose upon the town to-night, without a moral guide, upon my conscience, you have a great deal to answer for. I may be fleeced in a hell, or milled in a row; and if I fall in with female society, by the powers of celibacy! I can't answer for the consequences."

"Sooth to say, Major," rejoined O'Connor, "I'm in no mood for mirth."

"Come, come! never look so glum," insisted his visitor. "Remember I have arrived at years of *indiscretion*, and must be looked after. Man's life, my dear fellow, naturally divides itself into three great stages; the first is that in which the youthful disciple is carefully instructing his mind, and preparing his moral faculties, in silence, for all sorts of villainy – this is the season of youth and innocence; the second is that in which he *practises* all kinds of rascality – and this is the flower of manhood, or the prime of life; the third and last is that in which he strives to make his soul – and this is the period of dotage. Now, you see, my dear O'Connor, I have unfortunately arrived at the prime of life, while you are still in the enjoyment of youth and innocence; I am practising what you are plotting. You are, unfortunately for yourself, a degree more sober than I; you can therefore take care that I sin with due discretion – permit me to rob or murder, without being robbed or murdered in return."

Here the major filled and quaffed another glass, and then continued, —

"In short, I am – to speak in all solemnity and sobriety – so drunk, that it's a miracle how I mounted these rascally stairs without breaking my neck. I have no distinct recollection of the passage, except that I kissed some old hunks instead of the chamber-maid, and pulled his nose in revenge. I solemnly declare I can neither walk nor think without assistance; my heels and head are inclined to change places, and I can't tell the moment the body politic may be capsized. I have no respect in the world for my intellectual or physical endowments at this particular crisis; my sight is so infernally acute that I see all surrounding objects considerably augmented in number; my legs have asserted their independence, and perform 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' altogether unsolicited; and my memory and other small mental faculties have retired for the night. Under those melancholy circumstances, my dear fellow, you surely won't refuse me the consolation of your guidance."

"Had not you better, my dear Major," said O'Connor, "remain with me quietly here for the night, out of the reach of sharks and sharpers, male and female? You shall have claret or Burgundy, which you please – enough to fill a skin!"

"I can't hold more than a bottle additional," replied the major, regretfully, "if I can even do that; so you see I'm bereft of domestic resources, and must look abroad for occupation. The fact is, I expect to meet one or two fellows whom I want to see, at the place I've named; so if you can come along with me, and keep me from falling into the gutters, or any other indiscretion by the way, upon my conscience, you will confer a serious obligation on me."

O'Connor plainly perceived that although the major's statement had been somewhat overcharged, yet that his admissions were not altogether fanciful; there were in the gallant gentleman's face certain symptoms of recent conviviality which were not to be mistaken – a perceptible roll of the eye, and a slight screwing of the lips, which peculiarities, along with the faintest possible approximation to a hiccough, and a gentle see-saw vibration of his stalwart person, were indications highly corroborative of the general veracity of his confessions. Seeing that, in good earnest, the major was not precisely in a condition to be trusted with the management of anything pertaining to himself or others, O'Connor at once resolved to see him, if possible, safely through his excursion, if after the discussion of the wine which was now before them, he should persevere in his fancy for a night ramble. They therefore sate down together in harmonious fellowship, to discuss the flasks which stood upon the board.

O'Connor was about to fill his guest's glass for the tenth or twelfth time, when the major suddenly ejaculated, —

"Halt! ground arms! I can no more. Why, you hardened young reprobate, it's not to make me drunk you're trying? I must keep senses enough to behave like a Christian at the cock-fight; and, upon my soul! I've very little rationality to spare at this minute. Put on your hat, and come without delay, before I'm fairly extinguished."

O'Connor accordingly donned his hat and cloak, and yielding the major the double support of his arm on the one side, and of the banisters on the other, he conducted him safely down the stairs, and with wonderful steadiness, all things considered, they entered the street, whence, under the major's direction, they pursued their way. After a silence of a few minutes, that military functionary exclaimed, with much gravity, —

"I'm a great social philosopher, a great observer, and one who looks quite through the deeds of men. My dear boy, believe me, this country is in the process of a great moral reformation; hospitality – which I take to be the first, and the last, and the only one of all the virtues of a bishop which is fit for the practice of a gentleman – hospitality, my dear O'Connor, is rapidly approaching to a climax in this country. I remember, when I was a little boy, a gentleman might pay a visit of a week or so to another in the country, and be all the time nothing more than tipsy —*tipsy* merely. However, matters gradually improved, and that stage which philosophers technically term simple drunkenness, became the standard of hospitality. This passed away, and the sense of the country, in its silent but irresistible operation, has substituted *blind* drunkenness; and in the prophetic spirit of sublime philosophy, I foresee the arrival of that time when no man can escape the fangs of hospitality upon any conditions short of brain fever or delirium tremens."

As the major delivered this philosophic discourse, he led O'Connor through several obscure streets and narrow lanes, till at length he paused in one of the very narrowest and darkest before a dingy brick house, whose lower windows were secured with heavy bars of iron. The door, which was so incrustated with dirt and dust that the original paint was hardly anywhere discernible, stood ajar, and within burned a feeble and ominous light, so faint and murky, that it seemed fearful of disclosing the deeds and forms which itself was forced to behold. Into this dim and suspicious-looking place the major walked, closely followed by O'Connor. In the hall he was encountered by a huge savage-looking fellow, who raised his squalid form lazily from a bench which rested against the wall at the

further end, and in a low, gruff voice, like the incipient growl of a roused watch-dog, inquired what they wanted there.

"Why, Mr. Creigan, don't you know Major O'Leary?" inquired that gentleman. "I and a friend have business here."

The man muttered something in the way of apology, and opening the dingy lantern in which burned the wretched tallow candle which half lighted the place, he snuffed it with his finger and thumb, and while so doing, desired the major to proceed. Accordingly, with the precision of one who was familiar with every turn of the place, the gallant officer led O'Connor through several rooms, lighted in the same dim and shabby way, into a corridor leading directly to the rearward of the house, and connecting it with some other detached building. As they threaded this long passage, the major turned towards O'Connor, who followed him, and whispered, —

"Did you mark that ill-looking fellow in the hall? Poor Creigan! — a gentleman! — would you think it? — a *gentleman* by birth, and with a snug property, too — four hundred good pounds a year, and more — all gone, like last year's snow, chiefly here in backing mains of his own! poor dog! I remember him one of the best dressed men on town, and now he's fain to pick up a few shillings by the week in the place where he lost his thousands; this is the state of man!"

As he spoke thus, they had reached the end of the passage. The major opened the door which terminated the corridor, and thus displayed a scene which, though commonplace enough in its ingredients, was, nevertheless, in its *coup d'œil*, sufficiently striking. In the centre of a capacious and ill-finished chamber stood a circular platform, with a high ledge running round it. This arena, some fourteen feet in diameter, was surrounded by circular benches, which rose one outside the other, in parallel tiers, to the wall. Upon these seats were crowded some hundreds of men — a strange mixture; gentlemen of birth and honour sate side by side with notorious swindlers; noblemen with coalheavers; simpletons with sharks; the unkempt, greasy locks of squalid destitution mingled in the curls of the patrician periwig; aristocratic lace and embroidery were rubbed by the dusty shoulders of draymen and potboys; — all these gross and glaring contrarieties reconciled and bound together by one hellish sympathy. All sate locked in breathless suspense, every countenance fixed in the hard lines of intense, excited anxiety and vigilance; all leaned forward to gaze upon the combat whose crisis was on the point of being determined. Those who occupied the back seats had started up, and pressing forward, almost crushed those in front of them to death. Every aperture in this living pile was occupied by some eager, haggard, or ruffian face; and, spite of all the pushing, and crowding, and bustling, all were silent, as if the powers of voice and utterance were unknown among them.

The effect of this scene, so suddenly presented — the crowd of ill-looking and anxious faces, the startling glare of light, and the unexpected rush of hot air from the place — all so confounded him, that O'Connor did not for some moments direct his attention to the object upon which the gaze of the fascinated multitude was concentrated; when he did so he beheld a spectacle, abstractedly, very disproportioned in interest to the passionate anxiety of which it was the subject. Two game cocks, duly trimmed, and having the long and formidable steel weapons with which the humane ingenuity of "the fancy" supplies the natural spur of the poor biped, occupied the centre of the circular stage which we have described; one of the birds lay upon his back, beneath the other, which had actually sent his spurs through and through his opponent's neck. In this posture the wounded animal lay, with his beak open, and the blood trickling copiously through it upon the board. The victorious bird crowed loud and clear, and a buzz began to spread through the spectators, as if the battle were already determined, and suspense at an end. The "law" had just expired, and the gentlemen whose business it was to *handle* the birds were preparing to withdraw them.

"Twenty to one on the grey cock," exclaimed a large, ill-looking fellow, who sat close to the pit, clutching his arms in his brawny hands, as if actually hugging himself with glee, while he gazed with an exulting grin upon the combat, whose issue seemed now beyond the reach of chance. The challenge was, of course, unaccepted.

"Fifty to one!" exclaimed the same person, still more ecstatically. "One hundred to one —*two* hundred to one!"

"I'll give you one guinea to two hundred," exclaimed perhaps the coolest gambler in that select assembly, young Henry Ashwoode, who sat also near the front.

"Done, Mr. Ashwoode – done with *you*; it's a bet, sir," said the same ill-looking fellow.

"Done, sir," replied Ashwoode.

Again the conqueror crowed the shrill note of victory, and all seemed over, when, on a sudden, by one of those strange vicissitudes of which the annals of the cock-pit afford so many examples, the dying bird – it may be roused by the vaunting challenge of his antagonist – with one convulsive spasm, struck both his spurs through and through the head of his opponent, who dropped dead upon the table, while the wounded bird, springing to his legs, flapped his wings, as if victory had never hovered, and then as momentarily fell lifeless on the board, by this last heroic feat winning a main on which many thousands of pounds depended. A silence for a moment ensued, and then there followed the loud exulting cheers of some, and the hoarse, bitter blasphemies of others, clamorous expostulation, hoarse laughter, curses, congratulations, and invectives – all mingled with the noise occasioned by those who came in or went out, the shuffling and pounding of feet, in one torrentuous and stunning volume of sound.

Young Ashwoode having secured and settled all his bets, shouldered his way through the crowd, and with some difficulty, reached the door at which Major O'Leary and O'Connor were standing.

"How do you do, uncle? Were you in the room when I took the two hundred to one?" inquired the young man.

"By my conscience, I was, Hal, and wish you joy with all my heart. It was a sporting bet on both sides, and as game a fight as the world ever saw."

"I must be off," continued the young man. "I promised to look in at Lady Stukely's to-night; but before I go, you must know they are all affronted with you at the manor. The girls are positively outrageous, and desired me to command your presence to-morrow on pain of excommunication."

"Give my tender regards to them both," replied the major, "and assure them that I will be proud to obey them. But don't you know my friend O'Connor," he added, in a lower tone, "you are old acquaintances, I believe?"

"Unless my memory deceives me, I have had the honour of meeting Mr. O'Connor before," said the young man, with a cold bow, which was returned by O'Connor with more than equal *hauteur*. "Recollect, uncle, no excuses," added young Ashwoode, as he retreated from the chamber – "you have promised to give to-morrow to the girls. Adieu."

"There goes as finished a specimen of a mad-cap, rake-helly young devil as ever carried the name of Ashwoode or the blood of the O'Leary's," observed the uncle; "but come, we must look to the sport."

So saying, the major, exerting his formidable strength, and accompanying his turbulent progress with a large distribution of apologetic and complimentary speeches of the most high-flown kind, shoved and jostled his way to a vacant place near the front of the benches, and, seating himself there, began to give and take bets to a large amount upon the next main. Tired of the noise, and nearly stifled with the heat of the place, O'Connor, seeing that the major was resolved to act independently of him, thought that he might as well consult his own convenience as stay there to be stunned and suffocated without any prospect of expediting the major's retreat; he therefore turned about and retraced his steps through the passage which we have mentioned. The grateful coolness of the air, and the lassitude induced by the scene in which he had taken a part, though no very prominent one, induced him to pause in the first room to which the passage, as we have said, gave access; and happening to espy a bench in one of the recesses of the windows, he threw himself upon it, thoroughly to receive the visitings of the cool, hovering air. As he lay listless and silently upon this rude couch, he was suddenly disturbed by a sound of someone treading the yard beneath. A figure sprang across toward

the window; and almost instantaneously Larry Toole – for the moonlight clearly revealed the features of the intruder – was presented at the aperture, and with an energetic spring, accompanied by a no less energetic, devotional ejaculation, that worthy vaulted into the chamber, agitated, excited, and apparently at his wits' end.

CHAPTER VII

THREE GRIM FIGURES IN A LONELY LANE – TWO QUEER GUESTS RIDING TO TONY BLIGH'S – THE WATCHER IN DANGER – AND THE HIGHWAYMEN

A liberal and unsolicited attention to the affairs of other people, was one among the many amiable peculiarities of Mr. Laurence Toole: he had hardly, therefore, seen the major and O'Connor fairly beyond the threshold of the "Cock and Anchor," when he donned his cocked hat and followed their steps, allowing, however, an interval sufficiently long to secure himself against detection. Larry Toole well knew the purposes to which the squalid mansion which we have described was dedicated, and having listened for a few moments at the door, to allow his master and his companion time to reach the inner sanctuary of vice and brutality, whither it was the will of Major O'Leary to lead his reluctant friend, this faithful squire entered at the half-open door, and began to traverse the passage which we have before mentioned. He was not, however, permitted long to do so undisturbed. The grim sentinel of these unhallowed regions on a sudden upreared his towering proportions, heaving his huge shoulders with a very unpleasant appearance of preparation for an effort, and with two or three formidable strides, brought himself up with the presumptuous intruder.

"What do *you* want here – eh! you d – d scarecrow?" exclaimed the porter, in a tone which made the very walls to vibrate.

Larry was too much astounded to reply – he therefore remained mute and motionless.

"See, my good cove," observed the gaunt porter, in the same impressive accents of admonition – "make yourself scarce, d'ye mind; and if you want to see the pit, go round – we don't let potboys and pickpockets in at this side – cut and run, or I'll have to give you a lift."

Larry was no poltroon; but another glance at the colossal frame of the porter quelled effectually whatever pugnacious movements might have agitated his soul; and the little man, having deigned one look of infinite contempt, which told his antagonist, as plainly as any look could do, that he owed his personal safety solely and exclusively to the sublime and unmerited pity of Mr. Laurence Toole, that dignified individual turned on his heel, and withdrew somewhat precipitately through the door which he had just entered.

The porter grinned, rolled his quid luxuriously till it made the grand tour of his mouth, shrugged his square shoulders, and burst into a harsh chuckle. Such triumphs as the one he had just enjoyed, were the only sweet drops which mingled in the bitter cup of his savage existence. Meanwhile, our romantic friend, traversing one or two dark lanes, made his way easily enough to the more public entrance of this temple of fortune. The door which our friend Larry now approached lay at the termination of a long and narrow lane, enclosed on each side with dead walls of brick – at the far end towered the dark outline of the building, and over the arched doorway burned a faint and dingy light, without strength enough to illuminate even the bricks against which it hung, and serving only in nights of extraordinary darkness as a dim, solitary star, by which the adventurous night Rambler might shape his course. The moon, however, was now shining broad and clear into the broken lane, revealing every inequality and pile of rubbish upon its surface, and throwing one side of the enclosure into black, impenetrable shadow. Without premeditation or choice, it happened that our friend Larry was walking at the dark side of the lane, and shrouded in the deep obscurity he advanced leisurely toward the doorway. As he proceeded, his attention was arrested by a figure which presented itself at the entrance of the building, accompanied by two others, as it appeared, about to pass forth into the lane through which he himself was moving. They were engaged in animated debate as they approached – the conversation was conducted in low and earnest tones – their gestures were passionate and sudden –

their progress interrupted by many halts – and the party evinced certain sinister indications of uneasy vigilance and caution, which impressed our friend with a dark suspicion of mischief, which was strengthened by his recognition of two of the persons composing the little group. His curiosity was irresistibly piqued, and he instinctively paused, lest the sound of his advancing steps should disturb the conference, and more than half in the undefined hope that he might catch the substance of their conversation before his presence should be detected. In this object he was perfectly successful.

In the form which first offered itself, he instantly detected the well-known proportions and features of young Ashwoode's groom, who had attended his master into town; and in company with this fellow stood a person whom Larry had just as little difficulty in recognizing as a ruffian who had twice escaped the gallows by the critical interposition of fortune – once by a flaw in the indictment, and again through lack of sufficient evidence in law – each time having stood his trial on a charge of murder. It was not very wonderful, then, that this startling companionship between his old fellow-servant and Will Harris (or, as he was popularly termed, "Brimstone Bill") should have piqued the curiosity of so inquisitive a person as Larry Toole.

In company with these worthies was a third, wrapped in a heavy riding-coat, and who now and then slightly took part in the conversation. They all talked in low, earnest whispers, casting many a stealthy glance backward as they advanced through the dim avenue toward our curious friend.

As the party approached, Larry ensconced himself in the recess formed by the projection of two dilapidated brick piers, between which hung a crazy door, and in whose front there stood a mound of rubbish some three feet in height. In such a position he not unreasonably thought himself perfectly secure.

"Why, what the devil ails you now, you cursed cowardly ninny," whispered Brimstone Bill, through his set teeth – "what can happen *you*, win or lose? – turn up black, or turn up red, is it not all one to you, you *mouth*, you? *Your* carcase is safe and sound – then what do you funk for now? Rouse yourself, you d – d idiot, or I'll drive a brace of lead pellets through your brains – rouse yourself!"

Thus speaking, he shook the groom roughly by the collar.

"Stop, Bill – hands off," muttered the man, sulkily – "I'm not funkng – you know I'm not; but I don't want to see him *finished* – I don't want to see him murdered when there's no occasion for it – there's no great harm in that; we want his *ribben*, not his blood; there's no profit in taking his life."

"Booby! listen to me," replied the ruffian, in the same tone of intense impatience. "What do I want with his life any more than you do? Nothing. Do not I wish to do the thing genteelly as much as you? He shall not lose a drop of blood, nor his skin have a scratch, if he knows how to behave and be a good boy. Bah! we need but show him the *lead towels*, and the job's done. Look you, I and Jack will sit in the private room of the 'Bleeding Horse.' Old Tony's a trump, and asks no questions; so, as you pass, give the window a skelp of the whip, and we'll be out in the snapping of a flint. Leave the rest to us. You have your instructions, you *kedger*, so act up to them, and the devil himself can't spoil our sport."

"You may look out for us, then," said the servant, "in less than two hours. He never stays late at Lady Stukely's, and he must be home before two o'clock."

"Do not forget to grease the hammers," suggested the fellow in the heavy coat.

"He doesn't carry pistols to-night," replied the attendant.

"So much the better – all *my* luck," exclaimed Brimstone – "I would not swap luck with the chancellor."

"The devil's children, they say," observed the gentleman in the large coat, "have the devil's luck."

These were the last words Larry Toole could distinguish as the party moved onward. He ventured, however, although with grievous tremors, to peep out of his berth to ascertain the movements of the party. They all stopped at a distance of some twenty or thirty yards from the spot where he crouched, and for a time appeared again absorbed in earnest debate. On a sudden, however,

the fellow in the riding-coat, having frequently looked suspiciously up the lane in which they stood, stooped down, and, picking up a large stone, hurled it with his whole force in the direction of the embrasure in which Larry was lurking. The missile struck the projecting pier within a yard of that gentleman's head, with so much force that the stone burst into fragments and descended in a shower of splinters about his ears. This astounding salute was instantly followed by an occurrence still more formidable – for the ruffian, not satisfied with the test already applied, strode up in person to the doorway in which Larry had placed himself. It was well for that person that he was sheltered in front by the mass of rubbish which we have mentioned: at the foot of this he lay coiled, not daring even to breathe; every moment expecting to feel the cold point of the villain's sword poking against his ribs, and half inclined to start upon his feet and shout for help, although conscious that to do so would scarcely leave him a chance for his life. The suspicions of the wretch were, fortunately for Larry, ill-directed. He planted one foot upon the heap of loose materials which, along with the deep shadow, constituted poor Mr. Toole's only safeguard; and while the stones which his weight dislodged rolled over that prostrate person, he pushed open the door and gazed into the yard, lest any inquisitive ear or eye might have witnessed more than was consistent with the safety of the confederates of Brimstone Bill. The fellow was satisfied, and returned whistling, with affected carelessness, towards his comrades.

More dead than alive, Larry remained mute and motionless for many minutes, not daring to peep forth from his hiding-place; when at length he mustered courage to do so, he saw the two robbers still together, and again shrunk back into his retreat. Luckily for the poor wight, the fellow who had looked into the yard left the door unclosed, which, after a little time perceiving, Larry glided stealthily in on all fours, and in a twinkling sprang into the window at which his master lay, as we have already recorded.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WARNING – SHOWING HOW LARRY TOOLE FARED – WHOM HE SAW AND WHAT HE SAID – AND HOW MUCH GOOD AND HOW LITTLE HE DID – AND MOREOVER RELATING HOW SOMEBODY WAS LAID IN THE MIRE – AND HOW HENRY ASHWOODE PUT HIS FOOT IN THE STIRRUP

Flurried and frightened as Larry was, his agitation was not strong enough to overcome in him the national, instinctive abhorrence of the character of an informer. To the close interrogatories of his master, he returned but vague and evasive answers. A few dark hints he threw out as to the cause of his alarm, but preserved an impenetrable silence respecting alike its particular nature and the persons of whose participation in the scheme he was satisfied.

In language incoherent and nearly unintelligible from excitement, he implored O'Connor to allow him to absent himself for about one hour, promising the most important results, in case his request was complied with, and vowing upon his return to tell him everything about the matter from beginning to end.

Seeing the agonized earnestness of the man, though wholly uninformed of the cause of his uneasiness, which Larry constantly refused to divulge, O'Connor granted him the permission which he desired, and both left the building together. O'Connor pursued his way to the "Cock and Anchor," where, restored to his chamber and to solitude, he abandoned himself once more to the current of his wayward thoughts.

Our friend Larry, however, was no sooner disengaged from his master, than he began, at his utmost speed, to thread the narrow and complicated lanes and streets which lay between the haunt of profligacy which we have just described, and the eastern extremity of the city. After an interrupted run of nearly half an hour through pitchy dark and narrow streets, he emerged into Stephen's Green; at the eastern side of which, among other buildings of lesser note, there then stood, and perhaps (with a new face, and some slight external changes) still stands, a large and handsome mansion. Toward this building, conspicuous in the distance by the red glare of dozens of links and torches which flared and flashed outside, and by the gay light streaming from its many windows, Larry made his way. Too eager and hurried to pass along the sides of the square by the common road, he clambered over the broken wall which surrounded it, plunged through the broad trench, and ran among the deep grass and rank weeds, now heavy with the dews of night; over the broad area he pursued his way, startling the quiet cattle from their midnight slumbers, and hastening rather than abating his speed, as he drew near to the termination of his hurried mission. As he approached, the long dark train of carriages, every here and there lighted by some flaming link still unextinguished, and surrounded by crowds of idle footmen, sufficiently indicated the scene of Lady Stukely's hospitalities. In a moment Larry had again crossed the fences which enclosed the square, and passing the broad road among the carriages, chairs, and lackeys, he sprang up the steps of the house, and thundered lustily at the hall-door. It was opened by a gruff and corpulent porter with a red face and majestic demeanour, who, having learned from Larry that he had an important message for Mr. Henry Ashwoode, desired him, in as few words as possible, to step into the hall. The official then swung the massive door to, rolled himself into his well-cushioned throne, and having scanned Larry's proportions for a minute or two with one eye, which he kept half open for such purposes, he ejaculated —

"Mr. Finley, I say, Mr. Finley, here's one with a message upwards." Having thus delivered himself, he shut down his open eye, screwed his eyebrows, and became absorbed in abstruse meditation. Meanwhile, Mr. Finley, in person arrayed in a rich livery, advanced languidly toward Larry Toole, throwing into his face a dreamy and supercilious expression, while with one hand he faintly fanned himself with a white pocket handkerchief.

"Your most obedient servant to command," drawled the footman, as he advanced. "What can I do, my good soul, to *obleege* you?"

"I only want to see the young master – that's young Mr. Ashwoode," replied Larry, "for one minute, and that's all."

The footman gazed upon him for a moment with a languid smile, and observed in the same sleepy tone, "Absolutely impossible —*amposseeble*, as they say at the Pallais Royal."

"But, blur an' agers," exclaimed Larry, "it's a matther iv life an' death, robbery an' murdher."

"Bloody murder!" echoed the man in a sweet, low voice, and with a stare of fashionable abstraction.

"Well, tear an' 'oun's," cried Larry, almost beside himself with impatience, "if you won't bring him down to me, will you even as much as carry him a message?"

"To say the truth, and upon my honour," replied the man, "I can't engage to climb up stairs just now, they are so devilish fatiguing. Don't you find them so?"

The question was thrown out in that vacant, inattentive way which seems to dispense with an answer.

"By my soul!" rejoined Larry, almost crying with vexation, "it's a hard case. Do you mane to tell me, you'll neither bring him down to me nor carry him up a message?"

"You have, my excellent fellow," replied the footman, placidly, "precisely conveyed my meaning."

"By the hokey!" cried Larry, "you're fairly breaking my heart. In the divil's name, can you as much as let me stop here till he's comin' down?"

"Absolutely impossible," replied the footman, in the same dulcet and deliberate tone. "It is indeed *amposseeble*, as the Parisians have it. You *must* be aware, my good old soul, that you're in a positive pickle. You are, pardon me, my excellent friend, very dirty and very disgusting. You must therefore go out in a few moments into the fresh air." At any other moment, such a speech would have infallibly provoked Mr. Toole's righteous and most rigorous vengeance; but he was now too completely absorbed in the mission which he had undertaken to suffer personal considerations to have a place in his bosom.

"Will you, then," he ejaculated desperately, "will you as much as give him a message yourself, when he's comin' down?"

"What message?" drawled the lackey.

"Tell him, for the love of God, to take the *old* road home, by the seven sallies," replied Larry. "Will you give him that message, if it isn't too long?"

"I have a wretched memory for messages," observed the footman, as he leisurely opened the door – "a perfect sieve: but should he catch my eye as he passes, I'll endeavour, upon my honour; good night – adieu!"

As he thus spoke, Larry had reached the threshold of the door, which observing, the polished footman, with a *nonchalant* and easy air, slammed the hall-door, thereby administering upon Larry's back, shoulders, and elbows, such a bang as to cause Mr. Toole to descend the flight of steps at a pace much more marvellous to the spectators than agreeable to himself. Muttering a bitter curse upon his exquisite acquaintance, Larry took his stand among the expectants in the street; there resolved to wait and watch for young Ashwoode, and to give him the warning which so nearly concerned his safety.

Meanwhile, Lady Stukely's drawing-rooms were crowded by the gay, the fashionable, and the frivolous, of all ages. Young Ashwoode stood behind his wealthy hostess's chair, while she played

quadrille, scarce knowing whether she won or lost, for Henry Ashwoode had never been so fascinating before. Lady Stukely was a delicate, die-away lady, not very far from sixty; the natural blush upon her nose outblazoned the rouge upon her cheeks; several very long teeth – "ivory and ebon alternately" – peeped roguishly from beneath her upper lip, which her ladyship had a playful trick of screwing down, to conceal them – a trick which made her ladyship's smile rather a surprising than an attractive exhibition. It is but justice, however, to admit that she had a pair of very tolerable eyes, with which she executed the most masterly evolutions. For the rest, there having existed a very considerable disparity in years between herself and her dear deceased, Sir Charles Stukely, who had expired at the mature age of ninety, more than a year before, she conceived herself still a very young, artless, and interesting girl; and under this happy hallucination she was more than half inclined to return in good earnest the disinterested affection of Henry Ashwoode.

There, too, was old Lord Aspenly, who had, but two days before, solicited and received Sir Richard Ashwoode's permission to pay his court to his beautiful daughter, Mary. There, jerking and shrugging and grimacing, he hobbled through the rooms, all wrinkles and rappee; bandying compliments and repartees, flirting and fooling, and beyond measure enchanted with himself, while every interval in frivolity and noise was filled up with images of his approaching nuptials and intended bride, while she, poor girl, happily unconscious of all their plans, was spared, for that night, the pangs and struggles which were hereafter but too severely to try her heart.

'Twere needless to enumerate noble peers, whose very titles are now unknown – poets, who alas! were mortal – men of promise, who performed nothing – clever young men, who grew into stupid old ones – and millionaires, whose money perished with them; we shall not, therefore, weary the reader by describing Lady Stukely's guests; let it suffice to mention that Henry Ashwoode left the rooms with young Pigwiggynne, of Bolton's regiment of dragoons, and one of Lord Wharton's aides-de-camp. This circumstance is here recorded because it had an effect in producing the occurrences which we have to relate by-and-by; for young Pigwiggynne having partaken somewhat freely of Lady Stukely's wines, and being unusually exhilarated, came forth from the hall-door to assist Ashwoode in procuring a chair, which he did with a good deal more noise and blasphemy than was strictly necessary. Our friend Larry Toole, who had patiently waited the egress of his *quondam* young master, no sooner beheld him than he hastened to accost him, but Pigwiggynne being, as we have said, in high spirits and unusual good humour, cut short poor Larry's address by jocularly knocking him on the head with a heavy walking-cane – a pleasantry which laid that person senseless upon the pavement. The humorist passed on with an exhilarating crow, after the manner of a cock; and had not a matter-of-fact chairman drawn Mr. Toole from among the coach-wheels where the joke had happened to lay him, we might have been saved the trouble of recording the subsequent history of that very active member of society. Meanwhile, young Ashwoode was conveyed in a chair to a neighbouring fashionable hotel, where, having changed his suit, and again equipped himself for the road, he mounted his horse, and followed by his treacherous groom, set out at a brisk pace upon his hazardous, and as it turned out, eventful night-ride toward the manor of Morley Court.

CHAPTER IX

THE "BLEEDING HORSE" – HOLLANDS AND PIPES FOR TWO – EVERY BULLET HAS ITS BILLET

At the time in which the events that we have undertaken to record took place, there stood at the southern extremity of the city, near the point at which Camden Street now terminates, a small, old-fashioned building, something between an ale-house and an inn. It occupied the roadside by no means unpicturesquely; one gable juttied into the road, with a projecting window, which stood out from the building like a glass box held together by a massive frame of wood; and commanded by this projecting gable, and a few yards in retreat, but facing the road, was the inn door, over which hung a painted panel, representing a white horse, out of whose neck there spouted a crimson cascade, and underneath, in large letters, the traveller was informed that this was the genuine old "Bleeding Horse." Old enough, in all conscience, it appeared to be, for the tiled roof, except where the ivy clustered over it, was crowded with weeds of many kinds, and the boughs of the huge trees which embowered it had cracked and shattered one of the cumbrous chimney-stacks, and in many places it was evident that but for the timely interposition of the saw and the axe, the giant limbs of the old timber would, in the gradual increase of years, have forced their way through the roof and the masonry itself – a tendency sufficiently indicated by sundry indentures and rude repairs in those parts of the building most exposed to such casualties. Upon the night in which the events that are recorded in the immediately preceding chapters occurred, two horsemen rode up to this inn, and leisurely entering the stable yard, dismounted, and gave their horses in charge to a ragged boy who acted as hostler, directing him with a few very impressive figures of rhetoric, on no account to loosen girth or bridle, or to suffer the beasts to stir one yard from the spot where they stood. This matter settled, they entered the house. Both were muffled; the one – a large, shambling fellow – wore a capacious riding-coat; the other – a small, wiry man – was wrapped in a cloak; both wore their hats pressed down over their brows, and had drawn their mufflers up, so as to conceal the lower part of the face. The lesser of the two men, leaving his companion in the passage, opened a door, within which were a few fellows drowsily topping, and one or two asleep. In a chair by the fire sat Tony Bligh, the proprietor of the "Bleeding Horse," a middle-aged man, rather corpulent, as pale as tallow, and with a sly, ugly squint. The little man in the cloak merely introduced his head and shoulders, and beckoned with his thumb. The signal, though scarcely observed by one other of the occupants of the room, was instantly and in silence obeyed by the landlord, who, casting one uneasy glance round, glided across the floor, and was in the passage almost as soon as the gentleman in the cloak.

"Here, Tony, boy," whispered the man, as the innkeeper approached, "fetch us a pint of Hollands, a couple of pipes, and a glim; but first turn the key in this door here, and come yourself, do ye mind?"

Tony squeezed the speaker's arm in token of acquiescence, and turning a key gently in the lock, he noiselessly opened the door which Brimstone Bill had indicated, and the two cavaliers strode into the dark and vacant chamber. Brimstone walked to the window, pushed open the casement, and leaned out. The beautiful moon was shining above the old and tufted trees which lined the quiet road; he looked up and down the shaded avenue, but nothing was moving upon it, save the varying shadows as the night wind swung the branches to and fro. He listened, but no sound reached his ears, excepting the rustling and moaning of the boughs, through which the breeze was fitfully sighing.

Scarcely had he drawn back again into the room, when Tony returned with the refreshments which the gentleman had ordered, and with a dark lantern enclosing a lighted candle.

"Right, old cove," said Bill. "I see you hav'n't forgot the trick of the trade. Who are your *pals* inside?"

"Three of them sleep here to-night," replied Tony. "They're all quiet coves enough, such as doesn't hear nor see any more than they ought."

The two fellows filled a pipe each, and lighted them at the lantern.

"What mischief are you after now, Bill?" inquired the host, with a peculiar leer.

"Why should *I* be after any mischief," replied Brimstone jocularly, "any more than a sucking dove, eh? Do I look like mischief to-night, old tickle-pitcher – do I?"

He accompanied the question with a peculiar grin, which mine host answered by a prolonged wink of no less peculiar significance.

"Well, Tony boy," rejoined Bill, "maybe I *am* and maybe I *ain't*– that's the way: but mind, you did not see a stim of me, nor of *him*, to-night (glancing at his comrade), nor ever, for that matter. But you did see two ill-looking fellows not a bit like us; and I have a notion that these two chaps will manage to get into a sort of shindy before an hour's over, and then *mizzle* at once; and if all goes well, your hand shall be crossed with gold to-night."

"Bill, Bill," said the landlord, with a smile of exquisite relish, and drawing his hand coaxingly over the man's forehead, so as to smooth the curls of his periwig nearly into his eyes, "you're just the same old dodger – you are the devil's own bird – you have not cast a feather."

It is hard to say how long this tender scene might have continued, had not the other ruffian knocked his knuckles sharply on the table, and cried —

"Hist! brother —*chise* it – enough fooling – I hear a horse-shoe on the road."

All held their breath, and remained motionless for a time. The fellow was, however, mistaken. Bill again advanced to the window, and gazed intently through the long vista of trees.

"There's not a bat stirring," said he, returning to the table, and filling out successively two glasses of spirits, he emptied them both. "Meanwhile, Tony," continued he, "get back to your company. Some of the fellows may be poking their noses into this place. If you don't hear *from* me, at all events you'll hear of me before an hour. Hop the twig, boy, and keep all hard in for a bit – skip."

With a roguish grin and a shake of the fist, honest Tony, not caring to dispute the commands of his friend, of whose temper he happened to know something, stealthily withdrew from the room, where we, too, shall for a time leave these worthy gentlemen of the road vigilantly awaiting the approach of their victim.

Larry Toole had no sooner recovered his senses – which was in less than a minute – than he at once betook himself to the "Cock and Anchor," resolved, as the last resource, to inform O'Connor of the fact that an attack was meditated. Accordingly, he hastened with very little ceremony into the presence of his master, told him that young Ashwoode was to be waylaid upon the road, near the "Bleeding Horse," and implored him, without the loss of a moment, to ride in that direction, with a view, if indeed it might not already be too late, to intercept his passage, and forewarn him of the danger which awaited him.

Without waiting to ask one useless question, O'Connor, before five minutes were passed, was mounted on his trusty horse, and riding at a hard pace through the dark streets towards the point of danger.

Meanwhile, young Ashwoode, followed by his mounted attendant, proceeded at a brisk trot in the direction of the manor; his brain filled with a thousand busy thoughts and schemes, among which, not the least important, were sundry floating calculations as to the probable and possible amount of Lady Stukely's jointure, as well as some conjectures respecting the *maximum* duration of her ladyship's life. Involved in these pleasing ruminations, sometimes crossed by no less agreeable recollections, in which the triumphs of vanity and the successes of the gaming-table had their share, he had now reached that shadowy and silent part of the road at which stood the little inn, embowered in the great old trees, and peeping forth with a sort of humble and friendly aspect, but ill-according with the dangerous designs it served to shelter.

Here the servant, falling somewhat further behind, brought his horse close under the projecting window of the inn as he passed, and with a sharp cut of his whip gave the concerted signal. Before sixty seconds had elapsed, two well-mounted cavaliers were riding at a hard gallop in their wake. At this headlong pace, the foremost of the two horsemen had passed Ashwoode by some dozen yards, when, checking his horse so suddenly as to throw him back upon his haunches, he wheeled him round, and plunging the spurs deep into his flanks, with two headlong springs, he dashed him madly upon the young man's steed, hurling the beast and his rider to the earth. Tremendous as was the fall, young Ashwoode, remarkable alike for personal courage and activity, was in a moment upon his feet, with his sword drawn, ready to receive the assault of the ruffian.

"Let go your skiver – drop it, you greenhorn," cried the fellow, hoarsely, as he wheeled round his plunging horse, and drew a pistol from the holster, "or, by the eternal – , I'll blow your head into dust!"

Young Ashwoode attempted to seize the reins of the fellow's horse, and made a desperate pass at the rider.

"Take it, then," cried the fellow, thrusting the muzzle of the pistol into Ashwoode's face and drawing the trigger. Fortunately for Ashwoode, the pistol missed fire, and almost at the same moment the rapid clang of a horse's hoofs, accompanied by the loud shout of menace, broke startingly upon his ear. Happy was this interruption for Henry Ashwoode, for, stunned and dizzy from the shock, he at that moment tottered, and in the next was prostrate upon the ground. "Blowed, by – !" cried the villain, furiously, as the unwelcome sounds reached his ears, and dashing the spurs into his horse, he rode at a furious gallop down the road towards the country. This scene occupied scarce six seconds in the acting. Brimstone Bill, who had but a moment before come up to the succour of his comrade, also heard the rapid approach of the galloping hoofs upon the road; he knew that before he could count fifty seconds the new comer would have arrived. A few moments, however, he thought he could spare – important moments they turned out to be to one of the party. Bill kept his eye steadily fixed upon the point some three or four hundred yards distant at which he knew the horseman whose approach was announced must first appear.

In that brief moment, the cool-headed villain had rapidly calculated the danger of the groom's committing his accomplices through want of coolness and presence of mind, should he himself, as was not unlikely, become suspected. The groom's pistols were still loaded, and he had taken no part in the conflict. Brimstone Bill fixed a stern glance upon his companion while all these and other thoughts flashed like lightning across his brain.

"Darby," said he, hurriedly, to the man who sat half-stupefied in the saddle close beside him, "blaze off the lead towels – crack them off, I say."

Bill impatiently leaned forward, and himself drew the pistols from the groom's saddle-bow; he fired one of them in the air – he cocked the other. "This dolt will play the devil with us all," thought he, looking with a peculiar expression at the bewildered servant. With one hand he grasped him by the collar to steady his aim, and with the other, suddenly thrusting the pistol to his ear, and drawing the trigger, he blew the wretched man's head into fragments like a potsherd; and wheeling his horse's head about, he followed his comrade pell-mell, beating the sparks in showers from the stony road at every plunge.

All this occurred in fewer moments than it has taken us lines to describe it; and before our friend Brimstone Bill had secured the odds which his safety required, O'Connor was thundering at a furious gallop within less than a hundred yards of him. Bill saw that his pursuer was better mounted than he – to escape, therefore, by a fair race was out of the question. His resolution was quickly taken. By a sudden and powerful effort he reined in his horse at a single pull, and, with one rearing wheel, brought him round upon his antagonist; at the same time, drawing one of the large pistols from the saddle-bow, he rested it deliberately upon his bridle-arm, and fired at his pursuer, now within twenty yards of him. The ball passed so close to O'Connor's head that his ear rang shrilly with the sound of it for hours after. They had now closed; the highwayman drew his second pistol from the holster,

and each fired at the same instant. O'Connor's shot was well directed – it struck his opponent in the bridle-arm, a little below the shoulder, shattering the bone to splinters. With a hoarse shriek of agony, the fellow, scarce knowing what he did, forced the spurs into his horse's sides; and the animal reared, wheeled, and bore its rider at a reckless speed in the direction which his companion had followed.

It was well for him that the shot, which at the same moment he had discharged, had not been altogether misdirected. O'Connor, indeed, escaped unscathed, but the ball struck his horse between the eyes, and piercing the brain, the poor beast reared upright and fell dead upon the road. Extricating himself from the saddle, O'Connor returned to the spot where young Ashwoode and the servant still lay. Stunned and dizzy with the fall which he had had, the excitement of actual conflict was no sooner over, than Ashwoode sank back into a state of insensibility. In this condition O'Connor found him, pale as death, and apparently lifeless. Raising him against the grassy bank at the roadside, and having cast some water from a pool close by into his face, he saw him speedily recover.

"Mr. O'Connor," said Ashwoode, as soon as he was sufficiently restored, "you have saved my life – how can I thank you?"

"Spare your thanks, sir," replied O'Connor, haughtily; "for any man I would have done as much – for anyone bearing your name I would do much more. Are you hurt, sir?"

"O'Connor, I have done you much injustice," said the young man, betrayed for the moment into something like genuine feeling. "You must forget and forgive it – I know your feelings respecting others of my family – henceforward I will be your friend – do not refuse my hand."

"Henry Ashwoode," replied O'Connor, "I take your hand – gladly forgetting all past causes of resentment – but I want no vows of friendship, which to-morrow you may regret. Act with regard to me henceforward as if this night had not been – for I tell you truly again, that I would have done as much for the meanest peasant breathing as I have done to-night for you; and once more I pray you tell me, are you much hurt?"

"Nothing, nothing," replied Ashwoode – "merely a fall such as I have had a thousand times after the hounds. It has made my head swim confoundedly; but I'll soon be steady. What, in the meantime, has become of honest Darby? If I mistake not, I see his horse browsing there by the roadside."

A few steps showed them what seemed a bundle of clothes lying heaped upon the road; they approached it – it was the body of the servant.

"Get up, Darby – get up, man," cried Ashwoode, at the same time pressing the prostrate figure with his boot. It had been lying with the back uppermost, and in a half-kneeling attitude; it now, however, rolled round, and disclosed, in the bright moonlight, the hideous aspect of the murdered man – the head a mere mass of ragged flesh and bone, shapeless and blackened, and hollow as a shell. Horror-struck at the sight, they turned in silence away, and having secured the two horses, they both mounted and rode together back to the little inn, where, having procured assistance, the body of the wretched servant was deposited. Young Ashwoode and O'Connor then parted, each on his respective way.

CHAPTER X

THE MASTER OF MORLEY COURT AND THE LITTLE GENTLEMAN IN BOTTLE-GREEN – THE BARONET'S DAUGHTER – AND THE TWO CONSPIRATORS

Encounters such as those described in the last chapter were, it is needless to say, much more common a hundred and thirty years ago than they are now. In fact, it was unsafe alike in town and country to stir abroad after dark in any district affording wealth and aristocracy sufficient to tempt the enterprise of *professional* gentlemen. If London and its environs, with all their protective advantages, were, nevertheless, so infested with desperadoes as to render its very streets and most frequented ways perilous to pass through during the hours of night, it is hardly to be wondered at that Dublin, the capital of a rebellious and semi-barbarous country – haunted by hungry adventurers, who had lost everything in the revolutionary wars – with a most notoriously ineffective police, and a rash and dissolute aristocracy, with a great deal more money and a great deal less caution than usually fall to the lot of our gentry of the present day – should have been pre-eminently the scene of midnight violence and adventure. The continued frequency of such occurrences had habituated men to think very lightly of them; and the feeble condition of the civil executive almost uniformly secured the impunity of the criminal. We shall not, therefore, weary the reader by inviting his attention to the formal investigation which was forthwith instituted; it is enough for all purposes to record that, like most other investigations of the kind at that period, it ended in – just nothing.

Instead, then, of attending inquests and reading depositions, we must here request the gentle reader to accompany us for a brief space into the dressing-room of Sir Richard Ashwoode, where, upon the morning following the events which in our last we have detailed, the aristocratic invalid lay extended upon a well-cushioned sofa, arrayed in a flowered silk dressing-gown, lined with crimson, and with a velvet cap upon his head. He was apparently considerably beyond sixty – a slightly and rather an elegantly made man, with thin, anxious features, and a sallow complexion: his head rested upon his hand, and his eyes wandered with an air of discontented abstraction over the fair landscape which his window commanded. Before him was placed a small table, with all the appliances of an elegant breakfast; and two or three books and pamphlets were laid within reach of his hand. A little way from him sate his beautiful child, Mary Ashwoode, paler than usual, though not less lovely – for the past night had been to her one of fevered excitement, griefs, and fears. There she sate, with her work before her, and while her small hands plied their appointed task, her soft, dark eyes wandered often with sweet looks of affection toward the reclining form of that old haughty and selfish man, her father.

The silence had continued long, for the old man's temper might not, perhaps, have brooked an interruption of his ruminations, although, if the sour and spited expression of his face might be trusted, his thoughts were not the most pleasant in the world. The train of reflection, whatever it might have been, was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, bearing in his hand a note, with which he approached Sir Richard, but with that air of nervous caution with which one might be supposed to present a sandwich to a tiger.

"Why the devil, sirrah, do you pound the floor so!" cried Sir Richard, turning shortly upon the man as he advanced, and speaking in sharp and bitter accents. "What's that you've got? – a note? – take it back, you blockhead – I'll not touch it – it's some rascally scrap of dunning paper – get out of my sight, sirrah."

"An it please you, sir," replied the man, deferentially, "it comes from Lord Aspenly."

"Eh! oh! ah!" exclaimed Sir Richard, raising himself upon the sofa, and extending his hand with alacrity. "Here, give it to me; so you may go, sir – but stay, does a messenger wait? – ask particularly from me how his lordship does, do you mind? and let the man have refreshment; go, sirrah, go – begone!"

Sir Richard then took the note, broke the seal, and read the contents through, evidently with considerable satisfaction. Having completed the perusal of the note twice over, with a smile of unusual gratification, tintured, perhaps, with the faintest possible admixture of ridicule, Sir Richard turned toward his daughter with more real cheerfulness than she had seen him exhibit for years before.

"Mary, my good child," said he, "this note announces the arrival here, on to-morrow, of my old, or rather, my most *particular* friend, Lord Aspenly; he will pass some days with us – days which we must all endeavour to make as agreeable to him as possible. You look – you *do* look extremely well and pretty to-day; come here and kiss me, child."

Overjoyed at this unwonted manifestation of affection, the girl cast her work away, and with a beating heart and light step, she ran to her father's side, threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him again and again, in happy unconsciousness of all that was passing in the mind of him she so fondly caressed.

The door again opened, and the same servant once more presented himself.

"What do you come to plague me about *now*?" inquired the master, sharply; recovering, in an instant, his usual peevish manner – "What's this you've got? – what *is* it?"

"A card, sir," replied the man, at the same time advancing the salver on which it lay within reach of the languid hand of his master.

"Mr. Audley – Mr. Audley," repeated Sir Richard, as he read the card; "I never heard of the man before, in the course of my life; I know nothing about him – nothing – and care as little. Pray what is *he* pestering about? – what does he want here?"

"He requests permission to see you, sir," replied the man.

"Tell him, with my compliments, to go to hell!" rejoined the invalid; – "Or, stay," he added, after a moment's pause – "what does he look like? – is he well or ill-dressed? – old or young?"

"A middle-aged man, sir; rather well-dressed," answered the servant.

"He did not mention his business?" asked Sir Richard.

"No, sir," replied the man; "but he said that it was very important, and that you would be glad to see him."

"Show him up, then," said Sir Richard, decisively.

The servant accordingly bowed and departed.

"A stranger! – a gentleman! – and come to me upon important and pleasant business," muttered the baronet, musingly – "important and pleasant! – Can my old, cross-grained brother-in-law have made a favourable disposition of his property, and – and – died! – that were, indeed, news worth hearing; too much luck to happen me, though – no, no, it can't be – it can't be."

Nevertheless, he thought it *might* be; and thus believing, he awaited the entrance of his visitor with extreme impatience. This suspense, however, was not of long duration; the door opened, and the servant announced Mr. Audley – a dapper little gentleman, in grave habiliments of bottle-green cloth; in person somewhat short and stout; and in countenance rather snub-featured and rubicund, but bearing an expression in which good-humour was largely blended with self-importance. This little person strutted briskly into the room.

"Hem! – Sir Richard Ashwoode, I presume?" exclaimed the visitor, with a profound bow, which threatened to roll his little person up like an armadillo.

Sir Richard returned the salute by a slight nod and a gracious wave of the hand.

"You will excuse my not rising to receive you, Mr. Audley," said the baronet, "when I inform you that I am tied here by the gout; pray, sir, take a chair. Mary, remove your work to the room underneath, and lay the ebony wand within my reach; I will tap upon the floor when I want you."

The girl accordingly glided from the room.

"We are now alone, sir," continued Sir Richard, after a short pause. "I fear, sir – I know not why – that your business has relation to my brother; is he – is he *ill*?"

"Faith, sir," replied the little man bluntly, "I never heard of the gentleman before in my life."

"I breathe again, sir; you have relieved me extremely," said the baronet, swallowing his disappointment with a ghastly smile; "and now, sir, that you have thus considerably and expeditiously dispelled what were, thank heaven! my groundless alarms, may I ask you to what accident I am indebted for the singular good fortune of making your acquaintance – in short, sir, I would fain learn the object of your visit."

"That you shall, sir – that you shall, in a trice," replied the little gentleman in green. "I'm a plain man, my dear Sir Richard, and love to come to the point at once – ahem! The story, to be sure, is a long one, but don't be afraid, I'll abridge it – I'll abridge it." He drew his watch from his fob, and laying it upon the table before him, he continued – "It now wants, my dear sir, precisely seven minutes of eleven, by London time; I shall limit myself to half-an-hour."

"I fear, Mr. Audley, you should find me a very unsatisfactory listener to a narrative of half-an-hour's length," observed Sir Richard, drily; "in fact, I am not in a condition to make any such exertion; if you will obligingly condense what you have to say into a few minutes, you will confer a favour upon me, and lighten your own task considerably." Sir Richard then indignantly took a pinch of snuff, and muttered, almost audibly – "A vulgar, audacious, old boor."

"Well, then, we must try – we must try, my dear sir," replied the little gentleman, wiping his face with his handkerchief, by way of preparation – "I'll just sum up the leading points, and leave particulars for a more favourable opportunity; in fact, I'll hold over *all* details to our next merry meeting – our next *tête-à-tête* – when I hope we shall meet upon a pleasanter *footing* – your gouty toes, you know – d'ye take me? Ha! ha! excuse the joke – ha! ha! ha!"

Sir Richard elevated his eyebrows, and looked upon the little gentleman with a gaze of stern and petrifying severity during this burst of merriment.

"Well, my dear sir," continued Mr. Audley, again wiping his face, "to proceed to business. You have learned my name from my card, but beyond my name you know nothing about me."

"*Nothing whatever*, sir," replied Sir Richard, with profound emphasis.

"Just so; well, then, you *shall*," rejoined the little gentleman. "I have been a long time settled in France – I brought over every penny I had in the world there – in short, sir, something more than twelve thousand pounds. Well, sir, what did I do with it? There's the question. Your gay young fellows would have thrown it away at the gaming table, or squandered it on gold lace and velvets – or again, your prudent, plodding fellow would have lived quietly on the interest and left the principal to vegetate; but what did I do? Why, sir, not caring for idleness or show, I threw some of it into the wine trade, and with the rest I kept hammering at the funds, winning twice for every once I lost. In fact, sir, I prospered – the money rolled in, sir, and in due course I became rich, sir – rich – *warm*, as the phrase goes."

"Very *warm*, indeed, sir," replied Sir Richard, observing that his visitor again wiped his face – "but allow me to ask, beyond the general interest which I may be presumed to feel in the prosperity of the whole human race, how on earth does all this concern *me*?"

"Ay, ay, there's the question," replied the stranger, looking unutterably knowing – "that's the puzzle. But all in good time; you shall hear it in a twinkling. Now, being well to do in the world, you may ask me, why do not I look out for a wife? I answer you simply, that having escaped matrimony hitherto, I have no wish to be taken in the noose at these years; and now, before I go further, what do you take my age to be – how old do I look?"

The little man squared himself, cocked his head on one side, and looked inquisitively at Sir Richard from the corner of his eye. The patience of the baronet was nigh giving way outright.

"Sir," replied he, in no very gracious tones, "you may be the 'Wandering Jew,' for anything I either know or see to the contrary."

"Ha! good," rejoined the little man, with imperturbable good humour, "I see, Sir Richard, you are a wag – the Wandering Jew – ha, ha! no – not *that* quite. The fact is, sir, I am in my sixty-seventh year – you would not have thought that – eh?"

Sir Richard made no reply whatever.

"You'll acknowledge, sir, that *that* is not exactly the age at which to talk of hearts and darts, and gay gold rings," continued the communicative gentleman in the bottle-green. "I know very well that no young woman, of her own free choice, could take a liking to *me*."

"Quite impossible," with desperate emphasis, rejoined Sir Richard, upon whose ear the sentence grated unpleasantly; for Lord Aspenly's letter (in which "hearts and darts" were profusely noticed) lay before him on the table; "but once more, sir, may I implore of you to tell me the drift of all this?"

"The drift of it – to be sure I will – in due time," replied Mr. Audley. "You see, then, sir, that having no family of my own, and not having any intention of taking a wife, I have resolved to leave my money to a fine young fellow, the son of an old friend; his name is O'Connor – Edmond O'Connor – a fine, handsome, young dog, and worthy to fill any place in all the world – a high-spirited, good-hearted, dashing young rascal – you know something of him, Sir Richard?"

The baronet nodded a supercilious assent; his attention was now really enlisted.

"Well, Sir Richard," continued the visitor, "I have wormed out of him – for I have a knack of my own of getting at people's secrets, no matter how close they keep them, d'ye see – that he is over head and ears in love with your daughter – I believe the young lady who just left the room on my arrival; and indeed, if such is the case, I commend the young scoundrel's taste; the lady is truly worthy of all admiration – and – mdash;"

"Pray, sir, proceed as briefly as may be to the object of your conversation with me," interrupted Sir Richard, drily.

"Well, then, to return – I understand, sir," continued Audley, "that you, suspecting something of the kind, and believing the young fellow to be penniless, very naturally, and, indeed, I may say, very prudently, and very sensibly, opposed yourself to the thing from the commencement, and obliged the sly young dog to discontinue his visits; – well, sir, matters stood so, until *I* – cunning little *I* – step in, and change the whole posture of affairs – and how? Marry, thus, I come hither and ask your daughter's hand for *him*, upon these terms following – that I undertake to convey to him, at once, lands to the value of one thousand pounds a year, and that at my death I will leave him, with the exception of a few small legacies, sole heir to all I have; and on his wedding-day give him and his lady their choice of either of two chateaux, the worst of them a worthy residence for a nobleman."

"Are these chateaux in Spain?" inquired Sir Richard, sneeringly.

"No, no, sir," replied the little man, with perfect guilelessness; "both in Flanders."

"Well, sir," said Sir Richard Ashwoode, raising himself almost to a sitting posture, and precluding his observations with two unusually large pinches of snuff, "I have heard you very patiently throughout a statement, all of which was fatiguing, and much of which was positively disagreeable to me: and I trust that what I have now to say will render it wholly unnecessary for you and me ever again to converse upon the same topic. Of Mr. O'Connor, whom, in spite of this strange repetition of an already rejected application, I believe to be a spirited young man, I shall say nothing more than that, from the bottom of my heart I wish him every success of every kind, so long as he confines his aspirations to what is suitable to his own position in society; and, consequently, conducive to his own comfort and respectability. With respect to his very flattering vicarious proposal, I must assure you that I do not suspect Miss Ashwoode of any inclination to descend from the station to which her birth and fortune entitle her; and if I did suspect it, I should feel it to be my imperative duty to resist, by every means in my power, the indulgence of any such wayward caprice; but lest, after what I have

said, any doubt should rest upon your mind as to the value of these obstacles, it may not be amiss to add that my daughter, Miss Ashwoode, is actually promised in marriage to a gentleman of exalted rank and great fortune, and who is, in all respects, an unexceptionable connection. I have the honour, sir, to wish you good-morning."

"The devil!" exclaimed the little gentleman, as soon as his utter amazement allowed him to take breath. A long pause ensued, during which he twice inflated his cheeks to their utmost tension, and puffed the air forth with a prolonged whistle of desolate wonder. Recollecting himself, however, he hastily arose, wished Sir Richard good-day, and walked down stairs, and out of the house, all the way muttering, "God bless my body and soul – a thousand pounds a year – the devil —*can* it be? – body o' me – refuse a thousand a year – what the deuce is he looking for?" – and such other ejaculations; stamping all the while emphatically upon every stair as he descended, to give vent to his indignation, as well as impressiveness to his remarks.

Something like a smile for a moment lit up the withered features of the old baronet; he leaned back luxuriously upon his sofa, and while he listened with delighted attention to the stormy descent of his visitor, he administered to its proper receptacle, with prolonged relish, two several pinches of rappee.

"So, so," murmured he, complacently, "I suspect I have seen the last of honest Mr. Audley – a little surprised and a little angry he does appear to be – dear me! – he stamps fearfully – what a very strange creature it is."

Having made this reflection, Sir Richard continued to listen pleasantly until the sounds were lost in the distance; he then rang a small hand-bell which lay upon the table, and a servant entered.

"Tell Mistress Mary," said the baronet, "that I shall not want her just now, and desire Mr. Henry to come hither instantly – begone, sirrah."

The servant disappeared, and in a few moments young Ashwoode, looking unusually pale and haggard, and dressed in a morning suit, entered the chamber. Having saluted his father with the formality which the usages of the time prescribed, and having surveyed himself for a moment at the large mirror which stood in the room, and having adjusted thereat the tie of his lace cravat, he inquired, —

"Pray, sir, who was that piece of 'too, too solid flesh' that passed me scarce a minute since upon the stairs, pounding all the way with the emphasis of a battering ram? As far as I could judge, the thing had just been discharged from your room."

"You have happened, for once in your life, to talk with relation to the subject to which I would call your attention," said Sir Richard. "The person whom you describe with your wonted facetiousness, has just been talking with me; his name is Audley; I never saw him till this morning, and he came coolly to make proposals, in young O'Connor's name, for your sister's hand, promising to settle some scurvy chateaux, heaven knows where, upon the happy pair."

"Well, sir, and what followed?" asked the young man.

"Why simply, sir," replied his father, "that I gave him the answer which sent him stamping down stairs, as you saw him. I laughed in his face, and desired him to go about his business."

"Very good, indeed, sir," observed young Ashwoode.

"There is no occasion for commentary, sir," continued Sir Richard. "Attend to what I have to say: a nobleman of large fortune has requested my permission to make his suit to your sister —*that* I have, of course, granted; he will arrive here to-morrow, to make a stay of some days. I am resolved the thing *shall* be concluded. I ought to mention that the nobleman in question is Lord Aspenly."

The young man looked for a moment or two the very impersonation of astonishment, and then, burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Either be silent, sir, or this moment quit the room," said Sir Richard, in a tone which few would have liked to disobey – "how dare you – you – you insolent, dependent coxcomb – how dare you, sir, treat me with this audacious disrespect?"

The young man hastened to avert the storm, whose violence he had more than once bitterly felt, by a timely submission.

"I assure you, sir, nothing was further from my intention than to offend you," said he – "I am fully alive – as a man of the world, I could not be otherwise – to the immense advantages of the connection; but Lord Aspenly I have known so long, and always looked upon as a confirmed old bachelor, that on hearing his name thus suddenly, something of incongruity, and – and – and I don't exactly know what – struck me so very forcibly, that I involuntarily and very thoughtlessly began to laugh. I assure you, sir, I regret it very much, if it has offended you."

"You are a weak fool, sir, I am afraid," replied his father, shortly: "but that conviction has not come upon me by surprise; you *can*, however, be of some use in this matter, and I am determined you *shall* be. Now, sir, mark me: I suspect that this young fellow – this O'Connor, is not so indifferent to Mary as he should be to a daughter of mine, and it is more than possible that he may endeavour to maintain his interest in her affections, imaginary or real, by writing letters, sending messages, and such manœuvring. Now, you must call upon the young man, wherever he is to be found, and either procure from him a distinct pledge to the effect that he will think no more of her (the young fellow has a sense of honour, and I would rely upon his promise), or else you must have him out – in short, make him *fight* you – you attend, sir – if *you* get hurt, we can easily make the country too hot to hold him; and if, on the other hand, *you* poke *him* through the body, there's an end of the whole difficulty. This step, sir, you *must* take – you understand me – I am very much in earnest."

This was delivered with a cold deliberateness, which young Ashwoode well understood, when his father used it to imply a fixity of purpose, such as brooked no question, and halted at no obstacle.

"Sir," replied Henry Ashwoode, after an embarrassed pause of a few minutes, "you are not aware of *one* particular connected with last night's affray – you have heard that poor Darby, who rode with me, was actually brained, and that *I* escaped a like fate by the interposition of one who, at his own personal risk, saved my life – that one was the very Edmond O'Connor of whom we speak."

"What you allude to," observed Sir Richard, with very edifying coolness, "is, no doubt, very shocking and very horrible. I regret the destruction of the man, although I neither saw nor knew much about him; and for your eminently providential escape, I trust I am fully as thankful as I ought to be; and now, granting all you have said to be perfectly accurate – which I take it to be – what conclusion do you wish me to draw from it?"

"Why, sir, without pretending to any very extraordinary proclivity to gratitude," replied the young man – "for O'Connor told me plainly that he did not expect any – I must consider what the world will say, if I return what it will be pleased to regard as an obligation, by challenging the person who conferred it."

"Good, sir – good," said the baronet, calmly: and gazing upon the ceiling with elevated eyebrows and a bitter smile, he added, reflectively, "he's afraid – afraid – afraid – ay, afraid – afraid."

"You wrong me very much, sir," rejoined young Ashwoode, "if you imagine that fear has anything to do with my reluctance to act as you would have me; and no less do you wrong me, if you think I would allow any school-boy sentimentalism to stand in the way of my family's interests. My *real* objection to the thing is this – first, that I cannot see any satisfactory answer to the question, What will the world say of my conduct, in case I force a duel upon him the day after he has saved my life? – and again, I think it inevitably damages any young woman in the matrimonial market, to have low duels fought about her."

Sir Richard screwed his eyebrows reflectively, and remained silent.

"But at the same time, sir," continued his son, "I see as clearly as you could wish me to do, the importance, under present circumstances – or rather the absolute necessity – of putting a stop to O'Connor's suit; and, in short, to all communication between him and my sister, and I will undertake to do this effectually."

"And how, sir, pray?" inquired the baronet.

"I shall, as a matter of course, wait upon the young man," replied Henry Ashwoode – "his services of last night demand that I should do so. I will explain to him, in a friendly way, the hopelessness of his suit. I should not hesitate either to throw a little colouring of my own over the matter. If I can induce O'Connor once to regard me as his friend – and after all, it is but the part of a friend to put a stop to this foolish affair – I will stake my existence that the matter shall be broken off for ever and a day. If, however, the young fellow turn out foolish and pig-headed, I can easily pick a quarrel with him upon some other subject, and get him out of the way as you propose; but without mixing up my sister's name in the dispute, or giving occasion for gossip. However, I half suspect that it will require neither crafty stratagem nor shrewd blows to bring this absurd business to an end. I daresay the parties are beginning to tire heartily of waiting, and perhaps a little even of one another; and, for my part, I really do not know that the girl ever cared for him, or gave him the smallest encouragement."

"But *I* know that she *did*," replied Sir Richard. "Carey has shown me letters from her to him, and from him to her, not six months since. Carey is a very useful woman, and may do us important service. I did not choose to mention that I had seen these letters; but I sounded Mary somewhat sternly, and left her with a caution which I think must have produced a salutary effect – in short, I told her plainly, that if I had reason to suspect any correspondence or understanding between her and O'Connor, I should not scruple to resort to the sternest and most rigorous interposition of parental authority, to put an end to it peremptorily. I confess, however, that I have misgivings about this. I regard it as a very serious obstacle – one, however, which, so sure as I live, I will entirely annihilate."

There was a pause for a little while, and Sir Richard continued, —

"There is a good deal of sense in what you have suggested. We will talk it over and arrange operations systematically this evening. I presume you intend calling upon the fellow to-day; it might not be amiss if you had him to dine with you once or twice in town: you must get up a kind of confidential acquaintance with him, a thing which you can easily terminate, as soon as its object is answered. He is, I believe, what they call a frank, honest sort of fellow, and is, of course, very easily led; and – and, in short – made a *fool* of: as for the girl, I think I know something of the sex, and very few of them are so romantic as not to understand the value of a title and ten thousand a year! Depend upon it, in spite of all her sighs, and vapours, and romance, the girl will be dazzled so effectually before three weeks, as to be blind to every other object in the world; but if not, and should she dare to oppose my wishes, I'll make her cross-grained folly more terrible to her than she dreams of – but she knows me too well – she *dares* not."

Both parties remained silent and abstracted for a time, and then Sir Richard, turning sharply to his son, exclaimed, with his usual tart manner, —

"And now, sir, I must admit that I am a good deal tired of your very agreeable company. Go about your business, if you please, and be in this room this evening at half-past six o'clock. You had *better* not forget to be punctual; and, for the present, get out of my sight."

With this very affectionate leave-taking, Sir Richard put an end to the family consultation, and the young man, relieved of the presence of the only person on earth whom he really feared, gladly closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XI

THE OLD BEECH-TREE WALK AND THE IVY-GROWN GATEWAY – THE TRYSTE AND TUE CRUTCH-HANDLED CANE

In the snug old "Cock and Anchor," the morning after the exciting scenes in which O'Connor had taken so active a part, that gentleman was pacing the floor of his sitting-room in no small agitation. On the result of that interview, which he had resolved no longer to postpone, depended his happiness for years – it might be for life. Again and again he applied himself to the task of arranging clearly and concisely, and withal adroitly and with tact, the substance of what he had to say to Sir Richard Ashwoode. But, spite of all, his mind would wander to the pleasant hours he had passed with Mary Ashwoode in the quiet green wood and by the dark well's side, and through the moss-grown rocks, and by the chiming current of the wayward brook, long before the cold and worldly had suspected and repulsed that love which he knew could never die but when his heart had ceased to beat for ever. Again would he, banishing with a stoical effort these unbidden visions of memory, seek to accomplish the important task which he had proposed to himself; but still all in vain. There was she once more – there was the pale, pensive, lovely face – there the long, dark, silken tresses – there the deep, beautiful eyes – and there the smile – the artless, melancholy, enchanting smile.

"It boots not trying," exclaimed O'Connor. "I cannot collect my thoughts; and yet what use in conning over the order and the words of what, after all, will be judged merely by its meaning? Perhaps it is better that I should yield myself wholly up to the impulse of the moment, and so speak but the more directly and the more boldly. No; even in such a cause I will not accommodate myself to his cramp and crooked habits of thought and feeling. If I let him know all, it matters little how he learns it."

As O'Connor finished this sentence, his meditations were dispelled by certain sounds, which issued from the passage leading to his room.

"A young man," exclaimed a voice, interrupted by a good deal of puffing and blowing, probably caused by the steep ascent, "and a good-looking, eh? – (puff) – dark eyes, eh? – (puff, puff) – black hair and straight nose, eh? – (puff, puff) – long-limbed, tall, eh? – (puff)."

The answers to these interrogatories, whatever they may have been, were, where O'Connor stood, wholly inaudible; but the cross-examination was accompanied throughout by a stout, firm, stumping tread upon the old floor, which, along with the increasing clearness with which the noise made its way to O'Connor's door, sufficiently indicated that the speaker was approaching. The accents were familiar to him. He ran to his door, opened it; and in an instant Hugh Audley, Esquire, very hot and very much out of breath, pitched himself, with a good deal of precision, shoulders foremost, against the pit of the young man's stomach, and, embracing him a little above the hips, hugged him for some time in silence, swaying him to and fro with extraordinary energy, as if preparatory to tripping him up, and taking him off his feet altogether – then giving him a shove straight from him, and holding him at arm's length, he looked with brimful eyes, and a countenance beaming with delight, full in O'Connor's face.

"Confound the dog, how well he looks," exclaimed the old gentleman, vehemently – "devilish well, curse him!" and he gave O'Connor a shove with his knuckles, and succeeded in staggering himself – "never saw you look better in my life, nor anyone else for that matter; and how is every inch of you, and what have you been doing with yourself? Come, you young dog, account for yourself."

O'Connor had now, for the first time, an opportunity of bidding the kind old gentleman welcome, which he did to the full as cordially, if not so boisterously.

"Let me sit down and rest myself: I must take breath for a minute," exclaimed the old gentleman. "Give me a chair, you undutiful rascal. What a devil of a staircase that is, to be sure. Well, and what do you intend doing with yourself to-day?"

"To say the truth," said the young man, while a swarthier glow crossed his dark features. "I was just about to start for Morley Court, to see Sir Richard Ashwoode."

"About his daughter, I take it?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Just so, sir," replied the younger man.

"Then you may spare yourself the pains," rejoined the old gentleman, briskly. "You are better at home. You have been forestalled."

"What – how, sir? What do you mean?" asked O'Connor, in great perplexity and alarm.

"Just what I say, my boy. You have been forestalled."

"By whom, sir?"

"By me."

"By you?"

"Ay."

The old gentleman screwed his brows and pursed up his mouth until it became a Gordian involution of knots and wrinkles, threw a fierce and determined expression into his eyes, and wagged his head slightly from side to side – looking altogether very like a "Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood." At length he said, —

"I'm an old fellow, and ought to know something by this time – think I *do*, for that matter; and I say deliberately – cut the whole concern and blow them all."

Having thus delivered himself, the old gentleman resumed his sternest expression of countenance, and continued in silence to wag his head from time to time with an air of infinite defiance, leaving his young companion, if possible, more perplexed and bewildered than ever.

"And have you, then, seen Sir Richard Ashwoode?" inquired O'Connor.

"Have I seen him?" rejoined the old gentleman. "To be sure I have. The moment the boat touched the quay, and I fairly felt *terra firma*, I drove to the 'Fox in Breeches,' and donned a handsome suit" – (here the gentleman glanced cursorily at his bottle-green habiliments) – "I ordered a hack-coach – got safely to Morley Court – saw Sir Richard, laid up with the gout, looking just like an old, dried-up, cross-grained monkey. There was, of course, a long explanation, and all that sort of thing – a good deal of tact and diplomacy on my side, doubling about, neat fencing, and circumbendibus; but all would not do – an infernal *smash*. Sir Richard was all but downright uncivil – would not hear of it – said plump and plain he would never consent. The fact is, he's a sour, hard, insolent old scoundrel, and a bitter pill; and I congratulate you heartily on having escaped all connection with him and his. Don't look so down in the mouth about the matter; there's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught; and if the young woman is half such a shrew as her father is a tartar, you have had an escape to be thankful for the longest day you live."

We shall not attempt to describe the feelings with which O'Connor received this somewhat eccentric communication. He folded his arms upon the table, and for many minutes leaned his head upon them, without motion, and without uttering one word. At length he said, —

"After all, I ought to have expected this. Sir Richard is a bigoted man in his own faith – an ambitious and a worldly man, too. It was folly, mere folly, knowing all this, to look for any other answer from him. He may indeed delay our union for a little, but he cannot bar it – he *shall* not bar it. I could more easily doubt myself than Mary's constancy; and if she be but firm and true – and she is all loyalty and all truth – the world cannot part us two. Our separation cannot outlast his life; nor shall it last so long. I will overcome her scruples, combat all her doubts, satisfy her reason. She will consent – she will be mine – my own – through life and until death. No hand shall sunder us for ever," – he turned to the old man, and grasped his hand – "My dear, kind, true friend, how can I ever thank you for all your generous acts of kindness. I cannot."

"Never mind, never mind, my dear boy," said the old gentleman, blubbing in spite of himself – "never mind – what a d – d old fool I am, to be sure. Come, come, you, shall take a turn with me towards the country, and get an appetite for dinner. You'll be as well as ever in half an hour. When all's done, you stand no worse than you did yesterday; and if the girl's a good girl, as I make no doubt she is, why, you are sure of her constancy – and the devil himself shall not part you. Confound me if I don't run away with the girl for you myself if you make a pother about the matter. Come along, you dog – come along, I say."

"Nay, sir," replied O'Connor, "forgive me. I am keenly pained. I am agitated – confounded at the suddenness of this – this dreadful blow. I will go alone, pardon me, my kind and dear friend, I must go *alone*. I may chance to see the lady. I am sure she will not fail me – she will meet me. Oh! heart and brain, be still – be steady – I need your best counsels now. Farewell, sir – for a little time, farewell."

"Well, be it so – since so it *must* be," said Mr. Audley, who did not care to combat a resolution, announced with all the wild energy of despairing passion, "by all means, my dear boy, *alone* it shall be, though I scarce think you would be the worse of a staid old fellow's company in your ramble – but no matter, boys will be boys while the world goes round."

The conclusion of this sentence was a soliloquy, for O'Connor had already descended to the inn yard, where he procured a horse, and was soon, with troubled mind and swelling heart, making rapid way toward Morley Court. It was now the afternoon – the sun had made nearly half his downward course – the air was soft and fresh, and the birds sang sweetly in the dark nooks and bowers of the tall trees: it seemed almost as if summer had turned like a departing beauty, with one last look of loveliness to gladden the scene which she was regretfully leaving. So sweet and still the air – so full and mellow the thrilling chorus of merry birds among the rustling leaves, flitting from bough to bough in the clear and lofty shadow – so cloudless the golden flood of sunlight. Such was the day – so gladsome the sounds – so serene the aspect of all nature – as O'Connor, dismounting under the shadow of a tall, straggling hawthorn hedge, and knotting the bridle in one of its twisted branches, crossed a low stile, and thus entered the grounds of Morley Court. He threaded a winding path which led through a neglected wood of thorn and oak, and found himself after a few minutes in the spot he sought. The old beech walk had been once the main avenue to the house. Huge beech-trees flung their mighty boughs high in air across its long perspective – and bright as was the day, the long lane lay in shadow deep and solemn as that of some old Gothic aisle. Down this dim vista did O'Connor pace with hurried steps toward the spot where, about midway in its length, there stood the half-ruined piers and low walls of what had once been a gateway.

"Can it be that she shrinks from this meeting?" thought O'Connor, as his eye in vain sought the wished-for form of Mary Ashwoode, "will she disappoint me? – surely she who has walked with me so many lonely hours in guileless trust need not have feared to meet me here. It was not generous to deny me this boon – to her so easy – to me so rich – yet perchance she judges wisely. What boots it that I should see her? Why see again that matchless beauty – that touching smile – those eyes that looked so fondly on me? Why see her more – since mayhap we shall never meet again? She means it kindly. Her nature is all nobleness – all generosity; and yet – and yet to see her no more – to hear her voice no more – have we – have we then parted at last for ever? But no – by heavens – 'tis she – Mary!"

It was indeed Mary Ashwoode, blushing and beautiful as ever. In an instant O'Connor stood by her side.

"My own – my true-hearted Mary."

"Oh! Edmond," said she, after a brief silence, "I fear I have done wrong – have I? – in meeting you thus. I ought not – indeed I know I ought not to have come."

"Nay, Mary, do not speak thus. Dear Mary, have we not been companions in many a pleasant ramble: in those times – the times, Mary, that will never come again? Why, then, should you deny me a few minutes' mournful converse, where in other days we two have passed so many pleasant hours?"

There was in the tone in which he spoke something so unutterably melancholy – and in the recollections which his few simple words called crowding to her mind, something at once so touching, so dearly cherished, and so bitterly regretted – that the tears gathered in her full dark eyes, and fell one by one fast and unheeded.

"You do not grieve, then, Mary," said he, "that you have come here – that we have met once more: do you, Mary?"

"No, no, Edmond – no, indeed," answered she, sobbing. "God knows I do not, Edmond – no, no."

"Well, Mary," said he, "I am happy in the belief that you feel toward me just as you used to do – as happy as one so wretched can hope to be."

"Edmond, your words affright me," said she, fixing her eyes full upon him with imploring earnestness: "you look sadder – paler than you did yesterday; something has happened since then. What – what is it, Edmond? tell me – ah, tell me!"

"Yes, Mary, much has happened," answered he, taking her hand between both of his, and meeting her gaze with a look of passionate sorrow and tenderness – "yes, Mary, without my knowledge, the friend of whom I told you had arrived, and this morning saw your father, told him *all*, and was repulsed with sternness – almost with insult. Sir Richard has resolved that it shall never be; there is no more hope of bending him – none – none – none."

While O'Connor spoke, the colour in Mary's cheeks came and fled in turn with quick alternations, in answer to every throb and flutter of the poor heart within.

"See him – speak to him – yourself, Edmond, yourself. Oh! do not despair – see him – speak to him," she almost whispered, for agitation had well-nigh deprived her of voice – "see him, Edmond – yourself – for God's sake, dear Edmond – yourself – yourself" – and she grasped his arm in her tiny hand, and gazed in his pale face with such a look of agonized entreaty as cut him to the very heart.

"Yes, Mary, if it seems good to you, I will speak to him myself," said O'Connor, with deep melancholy. "I will, Mary, though my own heart – my reason – tells me it is all – all utterly in vain; but, Mary," continued he, suddenly changing his tone to one of more alacrity, "if he should still reject me – if he shall forbid our ever meeting more – if he shall declare himself unalterably resolved against our union – Mary, in such a case, would you, too, tell me to see you no more – would you, too, tell me to depart without hope, and never come again? or would you, Mary – could you – dare you – dear, dear Mary, for once – once only – disobey your stern and haughty father – dare you trust yourself with me – fly with me to France, and be at last, and after all, my own – my bride?"

"No, Edmond," said she, solemnly and sadly, while her eyes again filled with tears; and though she trembled like the leaf on the tree, yet he knew by the sound of her sad voice that her purpose could not alter – "that can never be – never, Edmond – no – no."

"Then, Mary, can it be," he answered, with an accent so desolate that despair itself seemed breathing in its tone – "can it be, after all – all we have passed and proved – all our love and constancy, and all our bright hopes, so long and fondly cherished – cherished in the midst of grief and difficulty – when we had no other stay but hope alone – are we, after all – at last, to part for ever? – is it, indeed, Mary, all – all over?"

As the two lovers stood thus in deep and melancholy converse by the ivy-grown and ruined gateway, beneath the airy shadow of the old beech-trees, they were recalled to other thoughts by the hurried patter of footsteps, and the rustling of the branches among the underwood which skirted the avenue. As fortune willed it, however, the intruder was no other than the honest dog, Rover, Mary's companion in many a silent and melancholy ramble; he came sniffing and bounding with boisterous greeting to hail his young mistress and her companion. The interruption, harmless as it was, startled Mary Ashwoode.

"Were my father to find us here, Edmond," said she, "it were fatal to all our hopes. You know his temper well. Let us then part here. Follow the by-path leading to the house. Go and see him – speak with him for my sake – for my sake, Edmond – and so – and so – farewell."

"And farewell, Mary, since it must be," said O'Connor, with a bitter struggle. "Farewell, but only for a time – only for a little time, Mary; and whatever befalls, remember – remember me. Farewell, Mary."

As he thus spoke, he raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it for the first time, it might be for the last, in his life. For a moment he stood, and gazed with sad devotion upon the loved face. Then, with an effort, he turned abruptly away, and strode rapidly in the direction she had indicated; and when he turned to look again, she was gone.

O'Connor followed the narrow path, which, diverging a little from the broad grass lane, led with many a wayward turn among the tall trees toward the house. As he thus pursued his way, a few moments of reflection satisfied him of the desperate nature of the enterprise which he had undertaken. But if lovers are often upon unreal grounds desponding, it is likewise true that they are sometimes sanguine when others would despair; and, spite of all his misgivings – of all the irresistible conclusions of stern reason – hope still beckoned him on. Thus agitated, he pursued his way, until, on turning an abrupt angle, he beheld, scarcely more than a dozen paces in advance, and moving slowly toward him in the shadowy pathway, a figure, at sight of which, thus suddenly presented, he recoiled, and stood for a moment fixed as a statue. He had encountered the object of his search. The form was that of Sir Richard Ashwoode himself, who, wrapped in his scarlet roquelaure, and leaning upon the shoulder of his Italian valet, while he limped forward slowly and painfully, appeared full before him.

"So, so, so, so," repeated the baronet, at first with unaffected astonishment, which speedily, however, deepened into intense but constrained anger – his dark, prominent eyes peering fiercely upon the young man, while, stooping forward, and clutching his crutch-handled cane hard in his lean fingers, he limped first one and then another step nearer.

"Mr. O'Connor! or my eyes deceive me."

"Yes, Sir Richard," replied O'Connor, with a haughty bow, and advancing a little toward him in turn. "I am that Edmond O'Connor whom you once knew well, and whom it would seem you still know. I ought, doubtless –"

"Nay, sir, no flowers of rhetoric, if you please," interrupted Sir Richard, bitterly – "no fustian speeches – to the point – to the point, sir. If you have ought to say to me, deliver it in six words. Your business, sir. Be brief."

"I will not indeed waste words, Sir Richard Ashwoode," replied O'Connor, firmly. "There is but one subject on which I would seek a conference with you, and that subject you well may guess."

"I *do* guess it," retorted Sir Richard. "You would renew an absurd proposal – one opened three years since, and repeated this morning by the old booby, your elected spokesman. To that proposal I have ever given one answer – no. I have not changed my mind, nor ever shall. Am I understood, sir? And least of all should I think of changing my purpose now," continued he, more pointedly, as a suspicion crossed his mind – "*now*, sir, that you have forfeited by your own act whatever regard you once seemed to me to merit. You did not seek *me* here, sir. I'm not to be fooled, sir. You did not seek me – don't assert it. I understand your purpose. You came here clandestinely to tamper like a schemer with my child. Yes, sir, a schemer!" repeated Sir Richard, with bitter emphasis, while his sharp sallow features grew sharper and more sallow still; and he struck the point of his cane at every emphatic word deep into the sod – "a mean, interested, cowardly schemer. How dare you steal into my place, you thrice-rejected, dishonourable, spiritless adventurer?"

The blood rushed to O'Connor's brow as the old man uttered this insulting invective. The fiery impulse which under other circumstances would have been uncontrollable, was, however, speedily, though with difficulty, mastered; and O'Connor replied bitterly, —

"You are an old man, Sir Richard, and *her* father – you are safe, sir. How much of chivalry or courage is shown in heaping insult upon one who *will* not retort upon you, judge for yourself. Alter what has passed, I feel that I were, indeed, the vile thing you have described, if I were again to subject myself to your unprovoked insolence: be assured, I shall never place foot of mine within your boundaries again: relieve yourself, sir, of all fears upon that score; and for your language, you know you can appreciate the respect that makes me leave you thus unanswered and unpunished."

So saying, he turned, and with long and rapid strides retraced his steps, his heart swelling with a thousand struggling emotions. Scarce knowing what he did, O'Connor rode rapidly to the "Cock and Anchor," and too much stunned and confounded by the scenes in which he had just borne a part to exchange a word with Mr. Audley, whom he found still established in his chamber, he threw himself dejectedly into a chair, and sank into gloomy and obstinate abstraction. The good-natured old gentleman did not care to interrupt his young friend's ruminations, and hours might have passed away and found them still undisturbed, were it not that the door was suddenly thrown open, and the waiter announced Mr. Ashwoode. There was a spell in the name which instantly recalled O'Connor to the scene before him. Had a viper sprung up at his feet, he could not have recoiled with a stronger antipathy. With a mixture of feelings scarcely tolerable, he awaited his arrival, and after a moment or two of suspense, Henry Ashwoode entered the room.

Mr. Audley, having heard the name, scowled fearfully from the centre of the room upon the young gentleman as he entered, stuffed his hands half-way to the elbows in his breeches pockets, and turning briskly upon his heel, marched emphatically to the window, and gazed out into the inn yard with remarkable perseverance. The obvious coldness with which he was received did not embarrass young Ashwoode in the least. With perfect ease and a graceful frankness of demeanour, he advanced to O'Connor, and after a greeting of extraordinary warmth, inquired how he had gotten home, and whether he had suffered since any inconvenience from the fall which he had. He then went on to renew his protestations of gratitude for O'Connor's services, with so much ardour and apparent heartiness, that spite of his prejudices, the old man was moved in his favour; and when Ashwoode expressed in a low voice to O'Connor his wish to be introduced to his friend, honest Mr. Audley felt his heart quite softened, and instead of merely bowing to him, absolutely shook him by the hand. The young man then, spite of O'Connor's evident reluctance, proceeded to relate to his new acquaintance the details of the adventures of the preceding night, in doing which, he took occasion to dwell, in the most glowing terms, upon his obligations to O'Connor. After sitting with them for nearly half an hour, young Ashwoode took his leave in the most affectionate manner possible, and withdrew.

"Well, that *is* a good-looking young fellow, and a warm-hearted," exclaimed the old gentleman, as soon as the visitor had disappeared – "what a pity he should be cursed with such a confounded old father."

CHAPTER XII

THE APPOINTED HOUR – THE SCHEMERS AND THE PLOT

"And here comes my dear brother," exclaimed Mary Ashwoode, joyously, as she ran to welcome the young man, now entering her father's room, in which, for more than an hour previously, she had been sitting. Throwing her arm round his neck, and looking sweetly in his face, she continued – "You *will* stay with us this evening, dear Harry – do, for my sake – you won't refuse – it is so long since we have had you;" and though she spoke with a gay look and a gladsome voice, a sense of real solitariness called a tear to her dark eye.

"No, Mary – not this evening," said the young man coldly; "I must be in town again to-night, and before I go must have some conversation upon business with my father, so that I may not see you again till morning."

"But, dear Henry," said she, still clinging affectionately to his arm, "you have been in such danger, and I knew nothing of it until after you went out this morning: are you quite well, Henry? – you were not hurt – were you?"

"No, no – nothing – nothing – I never was better," said he, impatiently.

"Well, brother —*dear* brother," she continued imploringly, "come early home to-night – do not be upon the road late – won't you promise?"

"There, there, there," said he rudely, "run away – take your work, or your book, or whatever it may be, down stairs; your father wants to speak with me alone," and so saying, he turned pettishly from her.

His habitual coldness and carelessness of manner had never before seemed so ungracious. The poor girl felt her heart swell within her, as though it would burst. She had never felt so keenly that in all this world there lived but one being upon whose love she might rely, and he separated, it might be for ever, from her: she gathered up her work, and ran quickly from the room, to hide the tears which she could not restrain.

Young Ashwoode was to the full as worldly and as unprincipled a man as was his father; and whatever reluctance he may have felt as to adopting Sir Richard's plans respecting O'Connor, the reader would grievously wrong him in attributing his unwillingness to any visitings of gratitude, or, indeed, to any other feeling than that which he had himself avowed. A few hours' reflection had satisfied the young man of the transcendent importance of securing Lord Aspenly; and by a corresponding induction he had arrived at the conclusion to which his father had already come – namely, that it was imperatively necessary by all means to put an end effectually to his sister's correspondence with O'Connor. To effect this object both were equally resolved; and with respect to the means to be employed both were equally unscrupulous. With Henry Ashwoode courage was constitutional, and art habitual. If, therefore, either duplicity or daring could ensure success, he felt that he must triumph; and, at all events, he was sufficiently impressed with the importance of the object, to resolve to leave nothing untried for its achievement.

"You *are* punctual, sir," said Sir Richard, glancing at his richly-chased watch; "sit down; I have considered your suggestions of this morning, and I am inclined to adopt them; it is most probable that Mary, like the rest of her sex, will be taken by the splendour of the proposal – fascinated – in short, as I said this morning – dazzled. Now, whether she be or not – observe me, it shall be our object to make O'Connor believe that she *is* so. You will have his ear, and through her maid, Carey, I can manage their correspondence; not a letter from either can reach the other, without first meeting my eye. I am very certain that the young fellow will lose no time in writing to her some more of those passionate epistles, of which, as I told you, I have seen a sample. I shall take care to have their letters *re-written*

for the future, before they come to hand; and it shall go hard, or between us we shall manage to give each a very moderate opinion of the other's constancy; thus the affair will – or rather must – die a natural death – after all, the most effectual kind of mortality in such cases."

"I called to-day upon the fellow," said the young man. "I made him out, and without approaching the point of nearest interest, I have, nevertheless, opened operations successfully – so far as a most auspicious re-commencement of our acquaintance may be so accounted."

"And, stranger still to say," rejoined the baronet, "I also encountered him to-day; but only for some dozen seconds."

"How! – saw O'Connor!" exclaimed young Ashwoode.

"Yes, sir, O'Connor – Edmond O'Connor," repeated Sir Richard. "He was coolly walking up to the house to see me, as it would seem; and I do believe the fellow speaks truth – he *did* see me, and that is all. I fancy he will scarcely come here again uninvited; he said so pretty plainly, and I believe the fellow has spirit enough to feel an affront."

"He did not see Mary?" inquired Henry.

"I did not ask him, and don't choose to ask her; I don't mean to allude to the subject in her presence," replied Sir Richard, quickly. "I think – indeed I *know* – I can mar their plans better by appearing never once to apprehend anything from O'Connor's pretensions. I have reasons, too, for not wishing to deal harshly with Mary *at present*; we must have no *scenes*, if possible. Were I to appear suspicious and uneasy, it would put them on their guard. And now, upon the other point, did you speak to Craven about the possibility of raising ten thousand pounds on the Glenvarlogh property?"

"He says it can be done very easily, if Mary joins you," replied the young man; "but I have been thinking that if you ask her to sign any deed, it might as well be one assigning over her interest absolutely to you. Aspenly does not want a penny with her – in fact, from what fell from him to-day, when I met him in town, I'm inclined to think he believes that she has not a penny in the world; so she may as well make it over to you, and then we can turn it all into money when and how we please. I desired Craven to work night and day at the deeds, and have them over by ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"You did quite rightly," rejoined the old gentleman. "I hardly expect any opposition from the girl – at least no more than I can easily frighten her out of. Should she prove sulky, however, I do not well know where to turn: as to asking my brother Oliver, I might as well, or *better*, ask a Jew broker; he hates me and mine with his whole heart; and to say the truth, there is not much love lost between us. No, no, there's nothing to be looked for in that quarter. I daresay we'll manage one way or another – lead or drive to get Mary to sign the deed, and if so, the ship rights again. Craven comes, you say, at ten to-morrow?"

"He engaged to be here at that hour with the deeds," repeated the young man.

"Well," said his father, yawning, "you have nothing more to say, nor I neither – oblige me by withdrawing." So parted these congenial relations.

The past day had been an agitating one to Mary Ashwoode. Still suspense was to be her doom, and the same alternations of hope and of despair were again to rob her pillow of repose; yet even thus, happy was she in comparison with what she must have been, had she but known the schemes of which she was the unconscious subject. At this juncture we shall leave the actors in this true tale, and conclude the chapter with the close of day.

CHAPTER XIII

THE INTERVIEW – THE PARCHMENT – AND THE NOBLEMAN'S COACH

Sir Richard Ashwoode had never in the whole course of his life denied himself the indulgence of any passion or of any whim. From his childhood upward he had never considered the feelings or comforts of any living being but himself alone. As he advanced in life, this selfishness had improved to a degree of hardness and coldness so intense, that if ever he had felt a kindly impulse at any moment in his existence, the very remembrance of it had entirely faded from his mind: so that generosity, compassion, and natural affection were to him not only unknown, but incredible. To him mankind seemed all either fools, or such as he himself was. Without one particle of principle of any kind, he had uniformly maintained in the world the character of an honourable man. The ordinary rules of honesty and morality he regarded as so many conventional sentiments, to which every gentleman subscribed, as a matter of course, in public, but which in private he had an unquestionable right to dispense with at his own convenience. He was imperious, fiery, and unforgiving to the uttermost; but when he conceived it advantageous to do so, he could practise as well as any man the convenient art of masking malignity, hatred, and inveteracy behind the pleasantest of all pleasant smiles. Capable of any secret meanness for the sake of the smallest advantage to be gained by it, he was yet full of fierce and overbearing pride; and although this world was all in all to him, yet there never breathed a man who could on the slightest provocation risk his life in mortal combat with more alacrity and absolute *sang froid* than Sir Richard Ashwoode. In his habits he was unboundedly luxurious – in his expenditure prodigal to recklessness. His own and his son's extravagance, which he had indulged from a kind of pride, was now, however, beginning to make itself sorely felt in formidable and rapidly accumulating pecuniary embarrassments. These had served to embitter and exasperate a temper which at the best had never been a very sweet one, and of whose ordinary pitch the reader may form an estimate, when he hears that in the short glimpses which he has had of Sir Richard, the baronet happened to be, owing to the circumstances with which we have acquainted him, in extraordinarily good humour.

Sir Richard had not married young; and when he did marry it was to pay his debts. The lady of his choice was beautiful, accomplished, and an heiress; and, won by his agreeability, and by his well-assumed devotedness and passion, she yielded to the pressure of his suit. They were married, and she gave birth successively to a son and a daughter. Sir Richard's temper, as we have hinted, was not very placid, nor his habits very domestic; nevertheless, the world thought the match (putting his money difficulties out of the question) a very suitable and a very desirable one, and took it for granted that the gay baronet and his lady were just as happy as a fashionable man and wife ought to be – and perhaps they were so; but, for all that, it happened that at the end of some four years the young wife died of a broken heart. Some strange scenes, it is said, followed between Sir Richard and the brother of the deceased lady, Oliver French. It is believed that this gentleman suspected the cause of Lady Ashwoode's death – at all events he had ascertained that she had not been kindly used, and after one or two interviews with the baronet, in which bitter words were exchanged, the matter ended in a fierce and bloodily contested duel, in which the baronet received three desperate wounds. His recovery was long doubtful; but life burns strongly in some breasts; and, contrary to the desponding predictions of his surgeons, the valuable life of Sir Richard Ashwoode was prolonged to his family and friends.

Since then, Sir Richard had by different agencies sought to bring about a reconciliation with his brother-in-law, but without the smallest success. Oliver French was a bachelor, and a very wealthy one. Moreover, he had it in his power to dispose of his lands and money just as he pleased. These circumstances had strongly impressed Sir Richard with a conviction that quarrels among relations are not only unseemly, but un-Christian. He was never in a more forgiving and forgetting mood. He

was willing even to make concessions – anything that could be reasonably asked of him, and even more, he was ready to do – but all in vain. Oliver was obdurate. He knew his man well. He saw and appreciated the baronet's motives, and hated and despised him ten thousand times more than ever.

Repulsed in his first attempt, Sir Richard resolved to give his adversary time to cool a little; and accordingly, after a lapse of twelve or fourteen years, his son Henry being then a handsome lad, he wrote to his brother-in-law a very long and touching epistle, in which he proposed to send his son down to Ardgillagh, the place where the alienated relative resided, with a portrait of his deceased lady, which, of course, with no object less sacred, and to no relative less near and respected, could he have induced himself to part. This, too, was a total failure. Oliver French, Esquire, wrote back a very succinct epistle, but one very full of unpleasant meaning. He said that the portrait would be odious to him, inasmuch as it would be necessarily associated in his mind with a marriage which had killed his sister, and with persons whom he abhorred – that therefore he would not allow it into his house. He stated, that to the motives which prompted his attention he was wide awake – that he was, however, perfectly determined that no person bearing the name or the blood of Sir Richard Ashwoode should ever have one penny of his; adding, that the baronet could leave his son, Mr. Henry Ashwoode, quite enough for a gentleman to live upon respectably; and that, at all events, in his father's virtues the young gentleman would inherit a legacy such as would insure him universal respect, and a general welcome wherever he might happen to go, excepting only one locality, called Ardgillagh.

With the failure of this last attempt, of course, disappeared every hope of success with the rich old bachelor; and the forgiving baronet was forced to content himself, in the absence of all more substantial rewards, with the consciousness of having done what was, under all the circumstances, the most Christian thing he could have done, as well as played the most knowing game, though unsuccessful, which he could have played.

Sir Richard Ashwoode limped downstairs to receive his intended son-in-law, Lord Aspenly, on the day following the events which we have detailed in our last and the preceding chapters. That nobleman had intimated his intention to be with Sir Richard about noon. It was now little more than ten, and the baronet was, nevertheless, restless and fidgety. The room he occupied was a large parlour, commanding a view of the approach to the house. Again and again he consulted his watch, and as often hobbled over, as well as he could, to the window, where he gazed in evident discontent down the long, straight avenue, with its double row of fine old giant lime-trees.

"Nearly half-past ten," muttered Sir Richard, to himself, for at his desire he had been left absolutely alone – "ay, fully half-past, and the fellow not come yet. No less than, two notes since eight this morning, both of them with gratuitous mendacity renewing the appointment for ten o'clock; and ten o'clock comes and goes, and half-an-hour more along with it, and still no sign of Mr. Craven. If I had fixed ten o'clock to pay his accursed, unconscionable bill of costs, he'd have been prowling about the grounds from sunrise, and pounced upon me before the last stroke of the clock had sounded."

While thus the baronet was engaged in muttering his discontent, and venting secret imprecations on the whole race of attorneys, a vehicle rolled up to the hall-door. The bell pealed, and the knocker thundered, and in a moment a servant entered, and announced Mr. Craven – a square-built man of low stature, wearing his own long, grizzled hair instead of a wig – having a florid complexion, hooked nose, beetle brows, and long-cut, Jewish, black eyes, set close under the bridge of his nose – who stepped with a velvet tread into the room. An unvarying smile sate upon his thin lips, and about his whole air and manner there was a certain indescribable sanctimoniousness, which was rather enhanced by the puritanical plainness of his attire.

"Sir Richard, I beg pardon – rather late, I fear," said he, in a dulcet, insinuating tone – "hard work, nevertheless, I do assure you – ninety-seven skins – splendidly engrossed – quite a treat – five of my young men up all night – I have got one of them outside to witness it along with me. Some reading in the thing, I promise you; but I hope – I *do* hope, I am not very late?"

"Not at all – not at all, my dear Mr. Craven," said Sir Richard, with his most engaging smile; for, as we have hinted, "dear Mr. Craven" had not made the science of conveyancing peculiarly cheap in practice to the baronet, who accordingly owed him more costs than it would have been quite convenient to pay upon a short notice – "I'll just, with your assistance, glance through these parchments, though to do so be but a matter of form. Pray take a chair beside me – there. Now then to business."

Accordingly to business they went. Practice, they say, makes perfect, and the baronet had had, unfortunately for himself, a great deal of it in such matters during the course of his life. He knew how to read a deed as well as the most experienced counsel at the Irish bar, and was able consequently to detect with wonderfully little rummaging and fumbling in the ninety-seven skins of closely written verbiage, the seven lines of sense which they enveloped. Little more than half-an-hour had therefore satisfied Sir Richard that the mass of parchment before him, after reciting with very considerable accuracy the deeds and process by which the lands of Glenvarlogh were settled upon his daughter, went on to state that for and in consideration of the sum of five shillings, good and lawful money, she, being past the age of twenty-one, in every possible phrase and by every word which tautology could accumulate, handed over the said lands, absolutely to her father, Sir Richard Ashwoode, Bart., of Morley Court, in the county of Dublin, to have, and to hold, and to make ducks and drakes of, to the end of time, constantly affirming at the end of every sentence that she was led to do all this for and in consideration of the sum of five shillings, good and lawful money. As soon as Sir Richard had seen all this, which was, as we have said, in little more than half-an-hour, he pulled the bell, and courteously informing Mr. Craven, the immortal author of the interesting document which he had just perused, that he would find chocolate and other refreshments in the library, and intimating that he would perhaps disturb him in about ten minutes, he consigned that gentleman to the guidance of the servant, whom he also directed to summon Miss Ashwoode to his presence.

"Her signing this deed," thought he, as he awaited her arrival, "will make her absolutely dependent upon me – it will make rebellion, resistance, murmuring, impossible; she then *must* do as I would have her, or – Ah? my dear child," exclaimed the baronet, as his daughter entered the room, addressing her in the sweetest imaginable voice, and instantaneously dismissing the sinister menace which had sat upon his countenance, and clothing it instead as suddenly with an absolute radiance of affection, "come here and kiss me and sit down by my side – are you well to-day? you look pale – you smile – well, well! it cannot be anything *very* bad. You shall run out just now with Emily. But first, I must talk with you for a little, and, strange enough, on business too." The old gentleman paused for an instant to arrange the order of his address, and then continued. "Mary, I will tell you frankly more of my affairs than I have told to almost any person breathing. In my early days, and indeed *after* my marriage, I was far, *far* too careless in money matters. I involved myself considerably, and owing to various circumstances, tiresome now to dwell upon, I have never been able to extricate myself from these difficulties. Henry too, your brother, is fearfully prodigal – fearfully; and has within the last three or four years enormously aggravated my embarrassments, and of course multiplied my anxieties most grievously, most distractingly. I feel that my spirits are gone, my health declining, and, worse than all, my temper, yes – my *temper* soured. You do not know, you cannot know, how bitterly I feel, with what intense pain, and sorrow, and contrition, and – and *remorse*, I reflect upon those bursts of ill-temper, of acrimony, of passion, to which, spite of every resistance, I am becoming every day more and more prone." Here the baronet paused to call up a look of compunctious anguish, an effort in which he was considerably assisted by an acute twinge in his great toe.

"Yes," he continued, when the pain had subsided, "I am now growing old, I am breaking very fast, sinking, I feel it – I cannot be very long a trouble to anybody – embarrassments are closing around me on all sides – I have not the means of extricating myself – despondency, despair have come upon me, and with them loss of spirits, loss of health, of strength, of everything which makes life a blessing; and, all these privations rendered more horrible, more agonizing, by the reflection that my

ill-humour, my peevish temper, are continually taxing the patience, wounding the feelings, perhaps alienating the affections of those who are nearest and dearest to me."

Here the baronet became *very* much affected; but, lest his agitation should be seen, he turned his head away, while he grasped his daughter's hand convulsively: the poor girl covered his with kisses. He had wrung her very heart.

"There is one course," continued he, "by adopting which I might extricate myself from all my difficulties" – here he raised his eyes with a haggard expression, and glared wildly along the cornice – "but I confess I have great hesitation in leaving *you*."

He wrung her hand very hard, and groaned slightly.

"Father, dear father," said she, "do not speak thus – do not – you frighten me."

"I was wrong, my dear child, to tell you of struggles of which none but myself ought to have known anything," said the baronet, gloomily. "One person indeed has the power to assist, I may say, to *save* me."

"And who is that person, father?" asked the girl.

"Yourself," replied Sir Richard, emphatically.

"How? – I!" said she, turning very pale, for a dreadful suspicion crossed her mind – "how can *I* help you, father?"

The old gentleman explained briefly; and the girl, relieved of her worst fears, started joyously from her seat, clapped her hands together with gladness, and, throwing her arms about her father's neck, exclaimed, —

"And is that all? – oh, father; why did you defer telling me so long? you ought to have known how delighted I would have been to do anything for you; indeed you ought; tell them to get the papers ready immediately."

"They *are* ready, my dear," said Sir Richard, recovering his self-possession wonderfully, and ringing the bell with a good deal of hurry – for he fully acknowledged the wisdom of the old proverb, which inculcates the expediency of striking while the iron's hot – "your brother had them prepared yesterday, I believe. Inform Mr. Craven," he continued, addressing the servant, "that I would be very glad to see him now, and say he may as well bring in the young gentleman who has accompanied him."

Mr. Craven accordingly appeared, and the "young gentleman," who had but one eye, and a very seedy coat, entered along with him. The latter personage bustled about a good deal, slapped the deeds very emphatically down on the table, and rumbled the parchments sonorously, looked about for pen and ink, set a chair before the document, and then held one side of the parchment, while Mr. Craven screwed his knuckles down upon the other, and the parties forthwith signed; whereupon Mr. Craven and the one-eyed young gentleman both sat down, and began to sign away with a great deal of scratching and flourishing on the places allotted for witnesses; after all which, Mr. Craven, raising himself with a smile, told Miss Ashwoode, facetiously, that the Chancellor could not have done so much for the deed as she had done; and the one-eyed young gentleman held his nose contemplatively between his finger and thumb, and reviewed the signatures with his solitary optic.

Miss Ashwoode then withdrew, and Mr. Craven and the "young gentleman" made their bows. Sir Richard beckoned to Mr. Craven, and he glided back and closed the door, having commanded the "young gentleman" to see if the coach was ready.

"You see, Mr. Craven," said Sir Richard, who, spite of all his philosophy, felt a little ashamed even that the attorney should have seen the transaction which had just been completed – "you see, sir, I may as well tell you candidly: my daughter, who has just signed this deed, is about immediately to be married to Lord Aspenly; *he* kindly offered to lend me some fifteen thousand pounds, or thereabouts, and I converted this offer (which I, of course, accepted), into the assignment, from his bride, that is to be, of this little property, giving, of course, to his lordship my personal security for the debt which I consider as owed to him: this arrangement his lordship preferred as the most convenient possible. I thought it right, in strict confidence, of course, to explain the real state of the case to you, as at first

sight the thing looks selfish, and I do not wish to stand worse in my friends' books than I actually deserve to do." This was spoken with Sir Richard's most engaging smile, and Mr. Craven smiled in return, most artlessly – at the same time he mentally ejaculated, "d – d sly!" "You'll bring this security, my dear Mr. Craven," continued the baronet, "into the market with all dispatch – do you think you can manage twenty thousand upon it?"

"I fear not more than fourteen, or perhaps, sixteen, with an effort. I do not think Glenvarlogh would carry much more – I fear not; but rely upon me, Sir Richard; I'll do everything that can be done – at all events, I'll lose no time about it, depend upon it – I may as well take this deed along with me – I have the rest; and title is very —*very* satisfactory – good-morning, Sir Richard," and the man of parchments withdrew, leaving Sir Richard in a more benevolent mood than he had experienced for many a long day.

The attorney had not been many seconds gone, when a second vehicle thundered up to the door, and a perfect storm of knocking and ringing announced the arrival of Lord Aspenly himself.

CHAPTER XIV

ABOUT A CERTAIN GARDEN AND A DAMSEL – AND ALSO CONCERNING A LETTER AND A RED LEATHERN BOX

Several days passed smoothly away – Lord Aspenly was a perfect paragon of politeness; but although his manner invariably assumed a peculiar tenderness whenever he approached Miss Ashwoode, yet that young lady remained in happy ignorance of his real intentions. She saw before her a grotesque old fop, who might without any extraordinary parental precocity have very easily been her grandfather, and in his airs and graces, his rappee and his rouge (for his lordship condescended to borrow a few attractions from art), and in the thousand-and-one *et ceteras* of foppery which were accumulated, with great exactitude and precision, on and about his little person, she beheld nothing more than so many indications of obstinate and inveterate celibacy, and, of course, interpreted the exquisite attentions which were meant to enchain her young heart, merely as so much of that formal target practice in love's archery, in which gallant single gentlemen of seventy, or thereabout, will sometimes indulge themselves. Emily Copland, however, at a glance, saw and understood the nature of Lord Aspenly's attentions, and she saw just as clearly the intended parts and the real position of the other actors in this somewhat ill-assorted drama, and thereupon she took counsel with herself, like a wise damsel, and arrived at the conclusion, that with some little management she might, very possibly, play her own cards to advantage among them.

We must here, however, glance for a few minutes at some of the subordinate agents in our narrative, whose interposition, nevertheless, deeply, as well as permanently, affected the destinies of more important personages.

It was the habit of the beautiful Mistress Betsy Carey, every morning, weather permitting, to enjoy a ramble in the grounds of Morley Court; and as chance (of course it was chance) would have it, this early ramble invariably led her through several quiet fields, and over a stile, into a prettily-situated, but neglected flower-garden, which was now, however, undergoing a thorough reform, according to the Dutch taste, under the presiding inspiration of Tobias Potts. Now Tobias Potts was a widower, having been in the course of his life twice disencumbered. The last Mrs. Potts had disappeared some five winters since, and Tobias was now well stricken in years; he possessed the eyes of an owl, and the complexion of a turkey-cock, and was, moreover, extremely hard of hearing, and, withal, a man of few words; he was, however, hale, upright, and burly – perfectly sound in wind and limb, and free from vice and children – had a snug domicile, consisting of two rooms and a loft, enjoyed a comfortable salary, and had, it was confidently rumoured, put by a good round sum of money somewhere or other. It therefore struck Mrs. Carey very forcibly, that to be Mrs. Potts was a position worth attaining; and accordingly, without incurring any suspicion – for the young women generally regarded Potts with awe, and the young men with contempt – she began, according to the expressive phrase in such case made and provided, to set her cap at Tobias.

In this, his usual haunt, she discovered the object of her search, busily employed in superintending the construction of a terrace walk, and issuing his orders with the brevity, decision, and clearness of a consummate gardener.

"Good-morning, Mr. Potts," said the charming Betsy. Mr. Potts did not hear. "Good-morning, Mr. Potts," repeated the damsel, raising her voice to a scream.

Tobias touched his hat with a gruff acknowledgment.

"Well, but how beautiful you are doing it," shouted the handmaid again, gazing rapturously upon the red earthen rampart, in which none but the eye of an artist could have detected the rudiments

of a terrace, "it's wonderful neat, all must allow, and indeed it puzzles my head to think how you can think of it all; it *is* now, *rally* elegant, so it is."

Tobias did not reply, and the maiden continued, with a sentimental air, and still hallooing at the top of her voice —

"Well, of all the trades that is — and big and little, there's a plenty of them — there's none I'd choose, if I was a man, before the trade of a gardener."

"No, you would not, *I'm* sure," was the laconic reply.

"Oh, but I declare and purtest *I would* though," bawled the young woman; "for gardeners, old or young, is always so good-humoured, and pleasant, and fresh-like. Oh, dear, but I would like to be a gardener."

"Not an *old* one, howsomever," growled Mr. Potts.

"Yes, but I would though, I declare and purtest to goodness gracious," persisted the nymph; "I'd rather of the two prefer to be an *old* gardener" (this was a bold stroke of oratory; but Potts did not hear it); "I'd rather be an *old* gardener," she screamed a second time; "I'd rather be an *old* gardener of the two, so I would."

"That's more than *I* would," replied Potts, very abruptly, and with an air of uncommon asperity, for he silently cherished a lingering belief in his own juvenility, and not the less obstinately that it was fast becoming desperate — a peculiarity of which, unfortunately, until that moment the damsel had never been apprised. This, therefore, was a turn which a good deal disconcerted the young woman, especially as she thought she detected a satirical leer upon the countenance of a young man in crazy inexpressibles, who was trundling a wheelbarrow in the immediate vicinity; she accordingly exclaimed not loud enough for Tobias, but quite loud enough for the young man in the infirm breeches to hear, —

"What an old fool. I purtest it's meat and drink to me to tease him — so it is;" and with a forced giggle she tripped lightly away to retrace her steps towards the house.

As she approached the stile we have mentioned, she thought she distinguished what appeared to be the inarticulate murmurings of some subterranean voice almost beneath her feet. A good deal startled at so prodigious a phenomenon, she stopped short, and immediately heard the following brief apostrophe delivered in a rich brogue: —

"Aiqually beautiful and engaging — vartuous Betsy Carey — listen to the voice of tindher emotion."

The party addressed looked with some alarm in all directions for any visible intimation of the speaker's presence, but in vain. At length, from among an unusually thick and luxuriant tuft of docks and other weeds, which grew at the edge of a ditch close by, she beheld something red emerging, which in a few moments she clearly perceived to be the classical countenance of Larry Toole.

"The Lord *purtect* us all, Mr. Toole. Why in the world do you frighten people this way?" ejaculated the nymph, rather shrilly.

"Whist! most evangelical iv women," exclaimed Larry in a low key, and looking round suspiciously — "whisht! or we are ruined."

"La! Mr. Laurence, what *are* you after?" rejoined the damsel, with a good deal of asperity. "I'll have you to know I'm not used to talk with a man that's squat in a ditch, and his head in a dock plant. That's not the way for to come up to an honest woman, sir — no more it is."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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