A DRAMA IN MUSLIN

GEORGE MOORE

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BY
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PREFACE

My excuse for modifying the title of this book is, that *A Drama in Muslin* has long seemed to me to be the vulgar one among the titles of my many books. But to change the title of a book that has been in circulation, however precarious, for more than thirty years, is not permissible, and that is why I rejected the many titles that rose up in my mind while correcting the proofs of this new edition. In *Neophytes*, *Débutantes*, and *The Baiting of Mrs. Barton*, readers would have divined a new story, but the dropping out of the unimportant word 'drama' will not deceive the most casual follower of literature. The single word 'muslin' is enough. *Mousseline* would be more euphonious, a fuller, richer word; and *Bal Blanc*, besides being more picturesque, would convey my meaning; but a shade of meaning is not sufficient justification for the use of French titles or words, for they lessen the taste of our language; we don't get the smack, and Milord's epigrams poisoned my memory of *A Drama in Muslin*. But they cannot be omitted without much re-writing, I said, and remembering my oath never to attempt the re-writing of an old book again, I fell back on the exclusion of *A Drama in Muslin* as the only way out of the dilemma. A wavering resolution was precipitated by recollection of some disgraceful pages, but a moment after I was thinking that the omission of the book would create a hiatus. *A Drama in Muslin*, I reflected, is a link between two styles; and a book that has achieved any notoriety cannot be omitted from a collected edition, so my publishers said, and they harped on this string, until one day I flung myself out of their office and rattled down the stairs muttering, 'What a smell of shop!' But in the Strand near the Cecil Inn, the thought glided into my mind that the pages that seemed so disgraceful in memory might not seem so in print, 'and the only way to find out if this be so,' the temptation continued, 'will be to ask the next policeman the way to Charing Cross Road.' Another saw me over a dangerous crossing (London is the best policed city in Europe), a third recommended a shop 'over yonder: you've just passed it by, sir.' 'Thank you, thank you,' I cried back, and no sooner was I on the other side than, overcome by shyness, as always in these stores of dusty literature, I asked

for the *Drama in Muslin*, pronouncing the title so timidly that the bookseller guessed me at once to be the author, and began telling of the books that were doing well in first editions. 'If I had any I wanted to get rid of?' he mentioned several he would be glad to buy. Whereupon in turn I grew confidential and confided to him my present dilemma, failing, however, to dissuade him from his opinion that *A Drama in Muslin* ought to be included. 'Any corrections you make in the new edition will keep up the price of the old,' he added as he wrapped up the brown paper parcel. 'You will like the book better than you think for.' 'Thank you, thank you,' I cried after me, and hopped into a taxi, unsuspicious that I carried a delightful evening under my arm. A comedy novel, written with sprightliness and wit, I said, as I turned to the twentieth page, and it needs hardly any editing. A mere re-tying of a few bows that the effluxion of time has untied, or were never tied by the author, who, if I remember right, used to be less careful of his literary appearance than his prefacer, neglecting to examine his sentences, and to scan them as often as one might expect from an admirer, not to say disciple, of Walter Pater.

An engaging young man rose out of the pages of his book, one that Walter Pater would admire (did admire), one that life, I added, seems to have affected through his senses violently, and who was (may we say therefore) a little over anxious to possess himself of a vocabulary which would suffer him to tell all he saw, heard, smelt and touched.

Upon this sudden sympathy the book, of which I had read but twenty pages, dropped on my knees, and I sat engulfed in a reverie of the charming article I should have written about this book if it had come to me for review. 'But it couldn't have come to me,' I reflected, 'for myself and the young man that wrote it were not contemporaries.' It would be true, however, to say that our lives overlapped; but when did the author of the *Drama in Muslin* disappear from literature? His next book was *Confession of a Young Man*. It was followed by *Spring Days*; he must have died in the last pages of that story, for we find no trace of him in *Esther Waters*! And my thoughts, dropping away from the books he had written, began to take pleasure in the ridiculous appearance that the author of *A Drama in Muslin* presented in the mirrors of Dublin Castle as he tripped down the staircases in parly morning.

And a smile played round my lips as I recalled his lank yellow hair (often standing on end), his sloping shoulders and his female hands—a strange appearance which a certain vivacity of mind sometimes rendered engaging.

He was writing at that time *A Mummer's Wife* in his bedroom at the Shelbourne Hotel, and I thought how different were the two visions, *A Mummer's Wife* and *A Drama in Muslin* and how the choice of these two subjects revealed him to me. 'It was life that interested him rather than the envelope' I said. 'He sought Alice Barton's heart as eagerly as Kate Ede's;' and my heart went out to the three policemen to whose assiduities I owed this pleasant evening, all alone with my cat and my immediate ancestor; and as I sat looking into the fire I fell to wondering how it was that the critics of the 'eighties could have been blind enough to dub him an imitator of Zola. 'A soul searcher, if ever there was one,' I continued, 'whose desire to write well is apparent on every page, a headlong, eager, uncertain style (a young hound yelping at every trace of scent), but if we look beneath the style we catch sight of the young man's true self, a real interest in religious questions and a hatred as lively as Ibsen's of the social conventions that drive women into the marriage market. It seems strange,' I said, abandoning myself to recollection, 'that the critics of the 'eighties failed to notice that the theme of *A Drama in Muslin* is the same as that of the *Doll's House*; the very title should have pointed this put to them.' But they were not interested in themes; but in morality, and how they might crush a play which, if it were uncrushed by them, would succeed in undermining the foundations of society—their favourite phrase at the time, it entered into every article written about the *Doll's House*—and, looking upon themselves as the saviours of society, these master-builders kept on staying and propping the damaged construction till at length they were joined by some dramatists and story-tellers who feared with them for the 'foundations of society,' and these latter set themselves the task of devising new endings that would be likely to catch the popular taste and so mitigate the evil, the substitution of an educational motive for a carnal one. For Nora does not leave her husband for a lover, but to educate herself. The critics were used to lovers, and what we are used to is bearable, but a woman who leaves her husband and her children for school-books is unbearable, and much more immoral than the usual little wanton. So the critics thought in the 'eighties, and they thought

truly, if it be true that morality and custom are interchangeable terms. The critics were right in a way; everybody is right in a way, for nothing is wholly right and nothing wholly wrong, a truth often served up by philosophers; but the public has ever eschewed it, and perhaps our argument will be better appreciated if we dilute this truth a little, saying instead that it is the telling that makes a story true or false, and that the dramatic critics of the 'eighties were not altogether as wrong as Mr. Archer imagined them to be, but failed to express themselves.

The public is without power of expression, and it felt that it was being fooled for some purpose not very apparent and perhaps anarchical. Nor is a sudden revelation very convincing in modern times. In the space of three minutes, Nora, who has been her husband's sensual toy, and has taken pleasure in being that, and only that, leaves her husband and her children, as has been said, for school-books. A more arbitrary piece of stage craft was never devised; but it was not the stage craft the critics were accustomed to, and the admirers of Ibsen did not dare to admit that he had devised Nora to cry aloud that a woman is more than a domestic animal. It would have been fatal for an apostle or even a disciple to admit the obvious fact that Ibsen was a dramatist of moral ideas rather than of sensuous emotions; and there was nobody in the 'eighties to explain the redemption of Ibsen by his dialogue, the strongest and most condensed ever written, yet coming off the reel like silk. A wonderful thread, that never tangles in his hands. Ibsen is a magical weaver, and so closely does he weave that we are drawn along in the net like fishes.

But it is with the subject of the *Doll's House* rather than with the art with which it is woven that we are concerned here. The subject of *A Drama in Muslin* is the same as that of *A Doll's House*, and for this choice of subject I take pride in my forerunner. It was a fine thing for a young man of thirty to choose the subject instinctively that Ibsen had chosen a few years before; it is a feather in his cap surely; and I remember with pleasure that he was half through his story when Dr. Aveling read him the first translation of *A Doll's House*, a poor thing, done by a woman, that withheld him from any appreciation of the play. The fact that he was writing the same subject from an entirely different point of view prejudiced him against Ibsen; and the

making of a woman first in a sensual and afterward transferring her into an educational mould with a view to obtaining an instrument to thunder out a given theme could not be else than abhorrent to one whose art, however callow, was at least objective. In the *Doll's House* Ibsen had renounced all objectivity. It does not seem to me that further apologies are necessary for my predecessor's remark to Dr. Aveling after the reading that he was engaged in moulding a woman in one of Nature's moulds. 'A puritan,' he said, 'I am writing of, but not a sexless puritan, and if women cannot win their freedom without leaving their sex behind they had better remain slaves, for a slave with his sex is better than a free eunuch;' and he discoursed on the book he was writing, convinced that Alice Barton represented her sex better than the archetypal hieratic and clouded figure of Nora which Ibsen had dreamed so piously, allowing, he said, memories of Egyptian sculpture to mingle with his dreams.

My ancestor could not have understood the *Doll's House* while he was writing *A Drama in Muslin*, not even in Mr. Archer's translation; he was too absorbed in his craft at that time, in observing and remembering life, to be interested in moral ideas. And his portrait of Alice Barton gives me much the same kind of pleasure as a good drawing. She keeps her place in the story, moving through it with quiet dignity, commanding our sympathy and respect always, and for her failure to excite our wonder like Nora we may say that the author's design was a comedy, and that in comedy the people are not and perhaps should not be above life size. But why apologize for what needs no apology? Alice Barton is a creature of conventions and prejudices, not her mother's but her own; so far she had freed herself, and it may well be that none obtains a wider liberty. She leaves her home with the dispensary doctor, who has bought a small practice in Notting Hill, and the end seems a fulfilment of the beginning. The author conducts her to the door of womanhood, and there he leaves her with the joys and troubles, no doubt, of her new estate; but with these he apparently does not consider himself to be concerned, though he seems to have meditated at this time a sort of small *comédie humaine*—small, for he must have known that he could not withstand the strain of Balzac's shifts of fourteen hours. We are glad he was able to conquer the temptation to imitate, yet we cannot forego a regret that he did not turn to Violet Scully that was and look into

the married life of the Marchioness of Kilcamey—her grey intense eyes shining through a grey veil, and her delightful thinness—her epicene bosom and long thighs are the outward signs of a temper, constant perhaps, but not narrow. He would have been able to discover an intrigue of an engaging kind in her, and the thinking out of the predestined male would have been as agreeable a task as falls to the lot of a man of letters. And being a young man he would begin by considering the long series of poets, painters and musicians, he had read of in Balzac's novels, but as none of these would be within the harmony of Violet's perverse humour, he would turn to life, and presently a vague shaggy shape would emerge from the back of his mind, but it would refuse to condense into any recognizable face; which is as well, perhaps, else I might be tempted to pick up this forgotten flower, though I am fain to write no more long stories.

But though we regret that the author of *Muslin* did not gather this Violet for his literary buttonhole, let no one suggest that the old man should return to his Springtime to do what the young man left undone. Our gathering-time is over, and we are henceforth prefacers. *The Brook Cherith* is our last. Some may hear this decision with sorrow, but we have written eighteen books, which is at least ten too many, and none shall persuade us to pick up the burden of another long story. We swear it and close our ears to our admirers, and to escape them we plunge into consideration of Violet's soul and her aptitudes, saying, and saying well, that if polygamy thrives with Mohammedanism in the East, polyandry has settled down in the West with Christianity, and that since Nora slammed the door the practice of acquiring a share in a woman's life, rather than insisting on the whole of it, has caught such firm root in our civilization that it is no exaggeration to say that every married woman to-day will admit she could manage two men better than her husband could manage two wives. If we inquire still further, we submit, and confidently, that every woman—saint or harlot, it matters not which—would confess she would prefer to live with two men rather than share her husband with another woman. All women are of one mind on this subject; it is the one thing on which they all agree irrespective of creed or class, so these remarks barely concern them; but should male eyes fall on this page, and if in the pride of his heart he should cry out, 'This is not so,' I would have him make application to his wife or sister, and if he possess neither he may

discover the truth in his own mind. Let him ask himself if it could be otherwise, since our usage and wont is that a woman shall prepare for the reception of visitors by adorning her rooms with flowers and dressing herself in fine linen and silk attire, and be to all men alike as they come and go. She must cover all with winning glances, and beguile all with seductive eyes and foot, and talk about love, though, perhaps she would prefer to think of one who is far away. Men do not live under such restraint. A man may reserve all his thoughts for his mistress, but the moment he leaves, his mistress must begin to cajole the new-comer, however indifferent he may be to her. The habit of her life is to cajole, to please, to inspire, if possible, and if she be not a born coquette she becomes one, and takes pleasure in her art, devoting her body and mind to it, reading only books about love and lovers, singing songs of love, and seeking always new scents and colours and modes of fascination. If lovers are away and none calls, she abandons herself to dreams, and her imagination furnishes quickly a new romance. Somebody she has half-forgotten rises up in her memory, and she thinks that she could like him if he were to come into her drawing-room now. It would be happiness indeed to walk forward into his arms and to call her soul into her eyes; or, if a letter were to come from him asking her to dinner, she would accept it; and, lying back among her silken cushions, she thinks she could spend many hours in his company without weariness. She creates his rooms and his person and his conversation, and when he is exhausted a new intrigue rises up in her mind, and then another and another. Some drop away and remain for ever unfulfilled, while others 'come into their own,' as the saying is.

If this be a true analysis of a woman's life—and who will say it is not?—the dreams of the Marchioness of Kilcarney would begin in her easy-chair about the second spring after her marriage, the shaggy shape that haunts the back of my mind would hear her dreams, and the wooing that began with the daffodils would continue always, for she is a woman that could keep a lover till the end of time. At her death husband and lover would visit her grave together and talk of her perfections in the winter evenings. But if Violet did not die another vagrant male would steal through the ilex-trees, a hunter in pursuit of game, or else it might be a fisher, seated among the rocks waiting, for tunny-fish. Either might take Violet's fancy. The author of *Muslin* seems

to have entertained a thought of some such pastoral frolic in the Shelbourne Hotel—the opposition of husband and lover to the newcomer, Harding, whom it had occurred to Mrs. Barton to invite to Brookfield, and whom she would have invited had it not been for her great matrimonial projects; my forerunner, who was an artist, saw that any deflection of Mrs. Barton's thoughts would jeopardize his composition, and he allowed Mrs. Barton to remain a chaperon. He was right in this, but Violet should have been the impulse and nucleus of a new story. . . . I began to think suddenly of the blight that would fall on the twain if Violet's lover were to die, and to figure them sitting in the evenings meditating on the admirable qualities of the deceased till in their loneliness he would come to seem to them as a being more than human, touching almost on the Divine. Their ears would retain the sound of his voice, and the familiar furniture would provoke remembrances of him. Ashamed of their weakness, their eyes would seek the chair he used to sit in: it is away in a far corner, lest a casual visitor should draw it forward and defile it with his presence—a thing that happened once (the unhappy twain remember how they lacked moral courage to beg him to choose another chair). The table, laid for two, was too painful to behold, and they never enjoyed a meal, hardly could they eat, till at last it was decided that his place should be laid for him as if he had gone away on a journey, and might appear in the doorway and sit down with them and share the repast as of yore—a pretty deception the folly of which they were alive to (a little) but would not willingly be without.

His room, too, awaits him, and his clothes have not been destroyed or given to the poor, but he folded by charitable hands in the drawers kept safe from moth with orris-root and lavender. His hat hangs on its accustomed peg in the hall, and they think of it among many other things. At last the silence of these lonely meditations is broken by sudden recollections—for dinner the cook had sent up a boiled chicken instead of roast, and he had looked upon boiled chicken as a vulgar insularism always. Nor were there bananas on the table. Bananas were an acquired taste with them, they had learned to eat the fruit for love of their friend, and since he has gone they have not eaten the chicken roast nor the fruit, and it seems to them that they should have eaten of these things in memory of him. In the Spring they come upon his pruning-knife, and discourse sadly on the changes he would have advised.

Spring opens into summer, and when summer drops into the autumn Kilcarney's black passes into grey; he appears one morning in a violet tie, and the tie, picked out of a drawer with indifferent hand, causes Violet to doubt her husband's constancy. It was soon after this thoughtless act that he began, for the thousandth time, to remind her that the world might be searched in its dimmest corners and no friend again found like the one they had lost. . . . The reflection had become part of their habitual thought, and, feeling a little trite and commonplace, Violet listened, or half-listened, engulfed in retrospect.

'I met in Merrion Square,' and she mentioned a name, 'and do you know whom he seemed to be very like?' The colour died out of Kilcarney's cheek and he could but murmur, 'Oh, Violet!' and colouring at being caught up on what might be looked upon as a mental infidelity, she answered, 'of course, none is like him . . . I wish you would not seek to misunderstand me.'

The matter passed off, but next evening she sat looking at her husband, her thoughts suspended for so long that he began to fear, wrongly however, that she was about to put forward some accusation, to twit him perchance on his lack of loyalty to his dead friend. He had not eaten a banana for dinner, though he had intended to eat one. 'Of course, we shall never find anyone like him,' she said—'not if we were to search all the corners of the world. That is so, we're both agreed on that point, but I've been thinking which of all our friends and acquaintances would least unworthily fill his place in our lives.' 'Violet! Violet!' 'If you persist in misunderstanding me,' she answered, 'I have no more to say,' whereupon the Marquis tried to persuade the Marchioness out of the morose silence that had fallen upon them, and failing to move her he raised the question that had divided them. 'If you mean, Violet, that our racing friend would be a poor shift for our dead friend, meaning thereby that nobody in Dublin is comparable'—'could I have meant anything else, you old dear?' she replied; and the ice having been broken, the twain plunged at once into the waters of recollection, and coming upon a current they were borne onward, swiftly and more swiftly, till at length a decision had to be come to—they would invite their racing friend.

It was on the Marquis's lips to say a word or two in disparagement of the invited guest, but on second thoughts it seemed to him that he had better refrain; the Marchioness, too, was about to plead, she did not know exactly what, but she thought she would like to reassure the Marquis. . . . On second thoughts she decided too that it would be better (perhaps) to refrain. Well, to escape from the toils of an interesting story (for I'm no longer a story-teller but a prefacer) I will say that three nights later Sir Hugh took the Marchioness in to dinner; he sat in his predecessor's chair, knowing nothing of him, thereby startling his hosts, who, however, soon recovered their presence of mind. After dinner the Marquis said, 'Now, Sir Hugh, I hope you will excuse me if I go upstairs. I am taking the racing calendar with me, you see.'

My forerunner, the author of *Muslin*, should have written the story sketched here with a failing hand, his young wit would have allowed him to tell how the marriage that had wilted sadly after the death of Uncle Toby now renewed its youth, opening its leaves to the light again, shaking itself in the gay breezes floating by. He would have been able in this story to present three exemplars of the domestic virtues, telling how they went away to the seaside together, and returned together to their castle among tall trees in October compelling the admiration of the entire countryside. He would have shown us the Marchioness entertaining visitors while the two men talked by the fireplace, delighting in each other's company, and he would not have forgotten to put them before us in their afternoon walks, sharing between them Violet's knick-knacks, her wraps, her scarf, her fan, her parasol, her cushion. His last chapter would probably be in a ball-room, husband and lover standing by the door watching the Marchioness swinging round the room on the arm of a young subaltern. 'Other women are younger than she, Kilcarney, but who is as graceful? Have you ever seen a woman hold herself like Violet?' One of the daughters (for there have been children by this second, or shall we say by this third, marriage) comes up breathless after the dance. 'Darling Uncle Hughie, won't you take me for an ice?' and he gives her his arm affectionately, but as they pass away to the buffet Sir Hugh hears Kilcarney speaking of Lily as his daughter. Sir Hugh's face clouds suddenly, but he remembers that, after all, Kilcarney is a guardian of his wife's honour. A very ingenious story, no doubt, and if, as the young man's

ascendant—the critics of 1915 are pleased to speak of me as ascendant from the author of *Muslin*—I may be permitted to remark upon it, I would urge the very grave improbability that three people ever lived contemporaneously who were wise enough to prefer, and so consistently, happiness to the conventions.

There are still May Gould and Olive to consider, but this preface has been prolonged unduly, and it may be well to leave the reader to imagine a future for these girls, and to decide the interests that will fill Mrs. Barton's life when Lord Dungory's relations with this world have ceased.

G.M.

CHAPTER 1

The convent was situated on a hilltop, and through the green garden the white dresses of the schoolgirls fluttered like the snowy plumage of a hundred doves. Obeying a sudden impulse, a flock of little ones would race through a deluge of leaf-entangled rays towards a pet companion standing at the end of a gravel-walk examining the flower she has just picked, the sunlight glancing along her little white legs proudly and charmingly advanced. The elder girls in their longer skirts were more dignified, but when they caught sight of a favourite sister, they too ran forward, and then retreated timidly, as if afraid of committing an indiscretion.

It was prize-day in the Convent of the Holy Child, and since early morning all had been busy preparing for the arrival of the Bishop. His throne had been set at one end of the school-hall, and at the other the carpenters had erected a stage for the performance of *King Cophetua*, a musical sketch written by Miss Alice Barton for the occasion.

Alice Barton was what is commonly known as a plain girl. At home, during the holidays, she often heard that the dressmaker could not fit her; but though her shoulders were narrow and prim, her arms long and almost awkward, there was a character about the figure that commanded attention. Alice was now turned twenty; she was the eldest, the best-beloved, and the cleverest girl in the school. It was not, therefore, on account of any backwardness in her education that she had been kept so long out of society, but because Mrs. Barton thought that, as her two girls were so different in appearance, it would be well for them to come out together. Against this decision Alice said nothing, and, like a tall arum lily, she had grown in the convent from girl to womanhood. To her the little children ran to be comforted; and to walk with her in the garden was considered an honour and a pleasure that even the Reverend Mother was glad to participate in.

Lady Cecilia Cullen sat next to Alice, and her high shoulders and long face and pathetic eyes drew attention to her shoulders—they were a little wry,

the right seemingly higher than the left. Her eyes were on Alice, and it was plain that she wished the other girls away, and that her nature was delicate, sensitive, obscure, if not a little queer. At home her elder sisters complained that an ordinary look or gesture often shocked her, and so deeply that she would remain for hours sitting apart refusing all consolation; and it was true that a spot on the tablecloth or presence of one repellent to her was sufficient to extinguish a delight or an appetite.

Violet Scully occupied the other end of the garden bench. She was very thin, but withal elegantly made. Her face was neat and delicate, and it was set with light blue eyes; and when she was not changing her place restlessly, or looking round as if she fancied someone was approaching, when she was still (which was seldom), a rigidity of feature and an almost complete want of bosom gave her the appearance of a convalescent boy.

If May Gould, who stood at the back, her hand leaning affectionately on Alice's shoulder, had been three inches taller, she would have been classed a fine figure, but her features were too massive for her height. Her hair was not of an inherited red. It was the shade of red that is only seen in the children of dark-haired parents. In great coils it rolled over the dimpled cream of her neck, and with the exception of Alice, May was the cleverest girl in the school. For public inspection she made large water-coloured drawings of Swiss scenery; for private view, pen-and-ink sketches of officers sitting in conservatories with young ladies. The former were admired by the nuns, the latter occasioned some discussion among a select few.

Violet Scully and May Gould would appeal to different imaginations.

Olive, Alice's sister, was more beautiful than either, but there was danger that her corn-coloured hair, wound round a small shapely head, might fail to excite more than polite admiration. Her nose was finely chiselled, but it was high and aquiline, and though her eyes were well drawn and coloured, they lacked personal passion and conviction; but no flower could show more delicate tints than her face—rose tints fading into cream, cream rising into rose. Her ear was curved like a shell, her mouth was faint and weak as a rose, and her moods alternated between sudden discontent and sudden gaiety.

'I don't see, Alice, why you couldn't have made King Cophetua marry the Princess. Whoever heard of a King marrying a beggar-maid? Besides, I hear that lots of people are going to be present, and to be jilted before them all isn't very nice. I am sure mamma wouldn't like it.'

'But you are not jilted, my dear Olive. You don't like the King, and you show your nobleness of mind by refusing him.'

'I don't see that. Whoever refused a King?'

'Well, what do you want?' exclaimed May. 'I never saw anyone so selfish in all my life; you wouldn't be satisfied unless you played the whole piece by yourself.'

Olive would probably have made a petulant and passionate reply, but at that moment visitors were coming up the drive.

'It's papa,' cried Olive.

'And he is with mamma,' said Violet; and she tripped after Olive.

Mr. Barton, a tall, handsome man, seemed possessed of all the beauty of a cameo, and Olive had inherited his high aquiline nose and the moulding of his romantic forehead; and his colour, too. He wore a flowing beard, and his hair and beard were the colour of pale *cafe-au-lait*. Giving a hand to each daughter, he said:

'Here is learning and here is beauty. Could a father desire more? And you, Violet, and you, May, are about to break into womanhood. I used to kiss you in old times, but I suppose you are too big now. How strange—how strange! There you are, a row of brunettes and blondes, who before many days are over will be charming the hearts of all the young men in Galway. I suppose it was in talking of such things that you spent the morning?'

'Our young charges have been, I assure you, very busy all the morning. We are not as idle as you think, Mr. Barton,' said the nun in a tone of voice that showed that she thought Mr. Barton's remark ill-considered. 'We have been arranging the stage for the representation of a little play that your daughter Alice composed.'

'Oh yes, I know; she wrote to me about it. *King Cophetua* is the name, isn't it? I am very curious indeed, for I have set Tennyson's ballad to music myself. I sing it to the guitar, and if life were not so hurried I should have sent it to you. However—however, we are all going home to-morrow. I have promised to take charge of Cecilia, and Mrs. Scully is going to look after May.'

'Oh, how nice! Oh, how jolly that will be!' Olive cried; and, catching Violet by the hands, she romped with her for glee.

But the nun, taking advantage of this break in the conversation, said:

'Come, now, young ladies, it is after two o'clock; we shall never be ready in time if you don't make haste—and it won't do to keep the Bishop waiting.' Like a hen gathering her chickens, the Sister hurried away with Violet, Olive, and May.

'How happy they seem in this beautiful retreat!' said Mrs. Scully, drawing her black lace shawl about her grey-silk shoulders. 'How little they know of the troubles of the world! I am afraid it would be hard to persuade them to leave their convent if they knew the trials that await them.'

'We cannot escape our trials,' a priest said, who had just joined the group; 'they are given to us that we may overcome them.'

'I suppose so, indeed,' said Mrs. Scully; and, trying to find consolation in the remark, she sighed. Another priest, as if fearing further religious shop from his fellow-worker, informed Mr. Barton, in a cheerful tone of voice, that he had heard he was a great painter.

'I don't know—I don't know,' replied Mr. Barton; 'painting is, after all, only dreaming. I should like to be put at the head of an army, but when I am seized with an idea I have to rush to put it down.'

Finding no appropriate answer to these somewhat erratic remarks, the priest joined in a discussion that had been started concerning the action taken by the Church during the present agrarian agitation. Mr. Barton, who was weary of the subject, stepped aside, and, sitting on one of the terrace benches between Cecilia and Alice, he feasted his eyes on the colour-

changes that came over the sea, and in long-drawn-out and disconnected phrases explained his views on nature and art until the bell was rung for the children to assemble in the school-hall.

CHAPTER 2

It was a large room with six windows; these had been covered over with red cloth, and the wall opposite was decorated with plates, flowers, and wreaths woven out of branches of ilex and holly.

Chairs for the visitors had been arranged in a semicircle around the Bishop's throne—a great square chair approached by steps, and rendered still more imposing by the canopy, whose voluminous folds fell on either side like those of a corpulent woman's dress. Opposite was the stage. The footlights were turned down, but the blue mountains and brown palm-trees of the drop-curtain, painted by one of the nuns, loomed through the red obscurity of the room. Benches had been set along the walls. Between them a strip of carpet, worked with roses and lilies, down which the girls advanced when called to receive their prizes, stretched its blue and slender length.

'His Grace is coming!' a nun cried, running in, and instantly the babbling of voices ceased, and four girls hastened to the pianos placed on either side of the stage, two left-hands struck a series of chords in the bass, the treble notes replied, and, to the gallant measure of a French polka, a stately prelate entered, smiling benediction as he advanced, the soft clapping of feminine palms drowning, for a moment, the slangy strains of the polka.

When the Bishop was seated on his high throne, the back of which extended some feet above his head, and as soon as the crowd of visitors had been accommodated with chairs around him, a nun made her way through the room, seeking anxiously among the girls. She carried in her hand a basket filled with programmes, all rolled and neatly tied with pieces of different coloured ribbon. These she distributed to the ten tiniest little children she could find, and, advancing five from either side, they formed in a line and curtsied to the Bishop. One little dot, whose hair hung about her head like a golden mist, nearly lost her balance; she was, however, saved from falling by a companion, and then, like a group of kittens, they tripped down the strip of blue carpet and handed the programmes to the guests, who leaned forward as if anxious to touch their hands, to stroke their shining hair.

The play was now ready to begin, and Alice felt she was going from hot to cold, for when the announcement printed on the programme, that she was the author of the comedy of *King Cophetua* had been read, all eyes were fixed upon her; the Bishop, after eyeing her intently, bent towards the Reverend Mother and whispered to her. Cecilia clasped Alice's hand and said: 'You must not be afraid, dear; I know it will be all right.'

And the little play was as charming as it was guileless. The old legend had been arranged—as might have been expected from a schoolgirl—simply and unaffectedly. The scene opened in a room in the palace of the King, and when a chorus, supposed to be sung by the townspeople, was over, a Minister entered hurriedly. The little children uttered a cry of delight; they did not recognize their companion in her strange disguise. A large wig, with brown curls hanging over the shoulders, almost hid the face, that had been made to look quite aged by a few clever touches of the pencil about the eyes and mouth. She was dressed in a long garment, something between an ulster and a dressing-gown. It fell just below her knees, for it had been decided by the Reverend Mother that it were better that there should be a slight display of ankles than the least suspicion of trousers. The subject was a delicate one, and for some weeks past a look of alarm had not left the face of the nun in charge of the wardrobe. But these considerations only amused the girls, and now, delighted at the novelty of her garments, the Minister strutted about the stage complaining of the temper of the Dowager Queen. 'Who could help it if the King wouldn't marry? Who could make him leave his poetry and music for a pretty face if he didn't care to do so? He had already refused blue eyes, black eyes, brown eyes. However, the new Princess was a very beautiful person, and ought, all things considered, to be accepted by the King. She must be passing through the city at the moment.'

On this the Queen entered. The first words she spoke were inaudible, but, gathering courage, she trailed her white satin, with its large brocaded pattern, in true queenly fashion, and questioned the Minister as to his opinion of the looks of the new Princess. But she gave no point to her words. The scene was, fortunately, a short one, and no sooner had they disappeared than a young man entered. He held a lute in his left hand, and with his right he twanged the strings idly. He was King Cophetua, and many

times during rehearsal Alice had warned May that her reading of the character was not right; but May did not seem able to accommodate herself to the author's view of the character, and, after a few minutes, fell back into her old swagger; and now, excited by the presence of an audience, by the footlights, by the long coat under which she knew her large, well-shaped legs could be seen, she forgot her promises, and strolled about like a man, as she had seen young Scully saunter about the stable-yard at home. She looked, no doubt, very handsome, and, conscious of the fact, she addressed her speeches to a group of young men, who, for no ostensible reason except to get as far away as possible from the Bishop, had crowded into the left-hand corner of the hall.

And so great was May's misreading of the character, that Alice could hardly realize that she was listening to her own play. Instead of speaking the sentence, 'My dear mother, I could not marry anyone I did not love; besides, am I not already wedded to music and poetry?' slowly, dreamily, May emphasized the words so jauntily, that they seemed to be poetic equivalents for wine and tobacco. There was no doubt that things were going too far; the Reverend Mother frowned, and shifted her position in her chair uneasily; the Bishop crossed his legs and took snuff methodically.

But at this moment the attention of the audience was diverted by the entrance of the Princess. May's misbehaviour was forgotten, and a murmur of admiration rose through the red twilight. Dressed in a tight-fitting gown of pale blue, opening in front, and finishing in a train held up by the smallest child in the school, Olive moved across the stage like a beautiful bird. Taking a wreath of white roses from her hair, she presented them to the King. He had then to kiss her hand, and lead her to a chair. In the scene that followed, Alice had striven to be intensely pathetic. She had intended that the King, by a series of kindly put questions, should gradually win the Princess's confidence, and induce her to tell the truth—that her affections had already been won by a knight at her father's Court; that she could love none other.

KING. But if this knight did not exist; if you had never seen him, you would, I suppose, have accepted my hand?

PRINCESS. You will not be offended if I tell you the truth?

KING. No; my word on it.

PRINCESS. I could never have listened to your love.

KING (*rising hastily*). Am I then so ugly, so horrible, so vile, that even if your heart were not engaged elsewhere you could not have listened to me?

PRINCESS. You are neither horrible nor vile, King Cophetua; but again promise me secrecy, and I will tell you the whole truth.

KING. I promise.

PRINCESS. You are loved by a maiden far more beautiful than I; she is dying of love for your sake! She has suffered much for her love; she is suffering still.

KING. Who is this maiden?

PRINCESS. Ah! She is but a beggar-maid; she lives on charity, the songs she sings, and the flowers she sells in the streets. And now she is poorer than ever, for your royal mother has caused her to be driven out of the city.

Here the King weeps—he is supposed to be deeply touched by the Princess's account of the wrongs done to the beggar-maid—and it is finally arranged between him and the Princess that they shall pretend to have come to some violent misunderstanding, and that, in their war of words, they shall insult each other's parents so grossly that all possibilities of a marriage will be for ever at an end. Throwing aside a chair so as to bring the Queen within ear-shot, the King declares that his royal neighbour is an old dunce, and that there is not enough money in his treasury to pay the Court boot-maker; the Princess retaliates by saying that the royal mother of the crowned head she is addressing is an old cat, who paints her face and beats her maids-of-honour.

The play that up to this point had been considered a little tedious now engaged the attention of the audience, and when the Queen entered she was greeted with roars of laughter. The applause was deafening. Olive played her part better than had been expected, and all the white frocks trembled with excitement. The youths in the left-hand corner craned their heads forward so as not to lose a syllable of what was coming; the Bishop

recrossed his legs in a manner that betokened his entire satisfaction; and, delighted, the mammas and papas whispered together. But the faces of the nuns betrayed the anxiety they felt. Inquiring glances passed beneath the black hoods; all the sleek faces grew alive and alarmed. May was now alone on the stage, and there was no saying what indiscretion she might not be guilty of.

The Reverend Mother, however, had anticipated the danger of the scene, and had sent round word to the nun in charge of the back of the stage to tell Miss Gould that she was to set the crown straight on her head, and to take her hands out of her pockets. The effect of receiving such instructions from the wings was that May forgot one-half her words, and spoke the other half so incorrectly that the passage Alice had counted on so much—'At last, thank Heaven, that tiresome trouble is over, and I am free to return to music and poetry'—was rendered into nonsense, and the attention of the audience lost. Nor were matters set straight until a high soprano voice was heard singing:

'Buy, buy, who will buy roses of me?
Roses to weave in your hair.
A penny, only a penny for three,
Roses a queen might wear!
Roses! I gathered them far away
In gardens, white and red.
Roses! Make presents of roses to-day
And help me to earn my bread.'

The King divined that this must be the ballad-singer—the beggar-maid who loved him, who, by some secret emissaries of the Queen, had been driven away from the city, homeless and outcast; and, snatching his lute from the wall, he sang a few plaintive verses in response. The strain was instantly taken up, and then, on the current of a plain religious melody, the two voices were united, and, as two perfumes, they seemed to blend and become one.

Alice would have preferred something less ethereal, for the exigencies of the situation demanded that the King should get out of the window and

claim the hand of the beggar-maid in the public street. But the nun who had composed the music could not be brought to see this, and, after a comic scene between the Queen and the Chancellor, the King, followed by his Court and suite, entered, leading the beggar-maid by the hand. In a short speech he told how her sweetness, her devotion, and, above all, her beautiful voice, had won his heart, and that he intended to make her his Queen. A back cloth went up, and it disclosed a double throne, and as the young bride ascended the steps to take her place by the side of her royal husband, a joyful chorus was sung, in which allusion was made to a long reign and happy days.

Everyone was enchanted but Alice, who had wished to show how a man, in the trouble and bitterness of life, must yearn for the consoling sympathy of a woman, and how he may find the dove his heart is sighing for in the lowliest bracken; and, having found her, and having recognized that she is the one, he should place her in his bosom, confident that her plumes are as fair and immaculate as those that glitter in the sunlight about the steps and terraces of the palace. Instead of this, she had seen a King who seemed to regard life as a sensual gratification; and a beggar-maid, who looked upon her lover, not timidly, as a new-born flower upon the sun, but as a clever huckstress at a customer who had bought her goods at her valuing. But the audience did not see below the surface, and, in answer to clapping of hands and cries of *Encore*, the curtain was raised once more, and King Cophetua, seated on his throne by the side of his beggar-maid, was shown to them again.

The excitement did not begin to calm until the *tableaux vivants* were ready. For, notwithstanding the worldliness of the day, it was thought that Heaven should not be forgotten. The convent being that of the Holy Child, something illustrative of the birth of Christ naturally suggested itself. No more touching or edifying subject than that of the Annunciation could be found. Violet's thin, elegant face seemed representative of an intelligent virginity, and in a long, white dress she knelt at the *prie-dieu.* Olive, with a pair of wings obtained from the local theatre, and her hair, blonde as an August harvesting, lying along her back, took the part of the Angel. She wore a star on her forehead, and after an interval that allowed the company

to recover their composure, and the carpenter to prepare the stage, the curtain was again raised. This time the scene was a stable. At the back, in the right-hand corner, there was a manger to which was attached a stuffed donkey; Violet sat on a low stool and held the new-born Divinity in her arms; May, who for the part of Joseph had been permitted to wear a false beard, held a staff, and tried to assume the facial expression of a man who had just been blessed with a son. In the foreground knelt the three wise men from the East; with outstretched hands they held forth their offerings of frankincense and myrrh. The picture of the world's Redemption was depicted with such taste that a murmur of pious admiration sighed throughout the hall.

Soon after a distribution of prizes began, and when the different awards had been distributed, and the Bishop had made a speech, there was benediction in the convent-church.

CHAPTER 3

'And to think,' said Alice, 'that this is the very last evening we shall ever pass here!'

'I don't see why you should be so very sorry for that,' replied May; 'I should have thought that you must have had enough of the place. Why, you have been here nearly ten years! I never would have consented to remain so long as that.'

'I didn't mind; we have been very happy here, and to say good-bye, and for ever, to friends we have known so long, and who have been so good to us, seems very sad—at least, it does to me.'

'It is all very well for you,' said Olive; 'I dare say you have been happy here, you have always been the petted and spoilt child of the school. Nothing was ever too good for Alice; no matter who was wrong or what was done, Alice was sure to be right.'

'I never knew anyone so unreasonable,' said Cecilia. 'You grumble at everything, and you are always dying of jealousy of your sister.'

'That's not true, and you haven't much to talk of; after beating your brains out you only just got the prize for composition. Besides, if you like the convent as much as I dare say you do, although you aren't a Catholic, you had better stop here with my sister.'

'Oh, Olive! how can you speak to Cecilia in that horrid way? I am ashamed of you.'

'So you are going to turn against me, Alice; but that's your way. I shan't stay here.'

The retreating figure of the young girl stood out in beautiful distinctness in the pale light; behind her the soft evening swept the sea, effacing with azure the brown sails of the fishing-boats; in front of her the dresses of the girls flitted white through the sombre green of the garden.

'I am sorry,' said Cecilia, 'you spoke to her. She is put out because she didn't get a prize, and Sister Agnes told her that she nearly spoilt the play by the stupid way she played the Princess.'

'She will find that that temper of hers will stand in her way if she doesn't learn to control it,' Violet said; 'but, now she is gone, tell me, Alice, how do you think she played her part? As far as I can judge she didn't seem to put any life into it. You meant the Princess to be a sharp, cunning woman of the world, didn't you?'

'No, not exactly; but I agree with you that Olive didn't put life into it.'

'Well, anyhow, the play was a great success, and you got, dear Alice, the handsomest prize that has ever been given in the school.'

'And how do you think I did the King? Did I make him look like a man? I tried to walk just as Fred Scully does when he goes down to the stables.'

'You did the part very well, May; but I think I should like him to have been more sentimental.'

'I don't think men are sentimental—at least, not as you think they are. I tried to copy Fred Scully.'

'My part was a mere nothing. You must write me a something, Alice, one of these days—a coquettish girl, you know, who could twist a man round her fingers. A lot of *bavardage* in it.'

'I suppose you'll never be able to speak English again, now you've got the prize for French conversation.'

'Sour grapes! You would like to have got it yourself. I worked hard for it. I was determined to get it, for ma says it is of great advantage in society for a girl to speak French well.'

'Jealous! I should like to know why I should be jealous. Of what? I got all I tried for. Besides, the truth about your French prize is that you may consider yourself very fortunate, for if' (she mentioned the name of one of her schoolfellows) 'hadn't been so shy and timid, you'd have come off second best.'

The rudeness of this retort drew a sharp answer from Violet; and then, in turn, but more often simultaneously, the girls discussed the justice of the distribution. The names of an infinite number of girls were mentioned; but when, in the babbling flow of convent-gossip, a favourite nun was spoken of, one of the chatterers would sigh, and for a moment be silent.

The violet waters of the bay had darkened, and, like the separating banners of a homeward-moving procession, the colours of the sky went east and west. The girdle of rubies had melted, had become the pale red lining of a falling mantle; the large spaces of gold grew dim; orange and yellow streamers blended; lilac and blue pennons faded to deep greys; dark hoods and dark veils were drawn closer; purple was gathered like garments about the loins; the night fell, and the sky, now decorated with a crescent moon and a few stars, was filled with stillness and adoration. The day's death was exquisite, even human; and as she gazed on the beautiful corpse lowered amid the fumes of a thousand censers into an under-world, even Violet's egotism began to dream.

'The evening is lovely. I am glad; it is the last we shall pass here,' said the girl pensively, 'and all good-byes are sad.'

'Yes, we have been happy,' said May, 'and I too am sorry to leave; but then we couldn't spend our lives here. There are plenty of things to be done at home; and I suppose we shall all get married one of these days? And there will be balls and parties before we get married. I don't think that I'd care to get married all at once. Would you, Violet?'

'I don't know. Perhaps not, unless it was to someone very grand indeed.'

'Oh, would you do that? I don't think I could marry a man unless I loved him,' said May.

'Yes, but you might love someone who was very grand as well as someone who wasn't.'

'That's true enough; but then—' and May stopped, striving to readjust her ideas, which Violet's remark had suddenly disarranged. After a pause she said:

'But does your mother intend to bring you to Dublin for the season? Are you going to be presented this year?'

'I hope so. Mamma said I should be, last vacation.'

'I shall take good care that I am. The best part of the hunting will be over, and I wouldn't miss the Castle balls for anything. Do you like officers?'

The crudity of the question startled Alice, and it was with difficulty she answered she didn't know—that she had not thought about the matter.

May and Violet continued the conversation; and over the lingering waste of yellow, all that remained to tell where the sun had set, the night fell like a heavy, blinding dust, sadly and regretfully, as the last handful of earth thrown upon a young girl's grave.

CHAPTER 4

In the tiny cornfields the reapers rose from their work to watch the carriage. Mr. Barton commented on the disturbed state of the country. Olive asked if Mr. Parnell was good-looking. A railway-bridge was passed and a pine-wood aglow with the sunset, and a footman stepped down from the box to open a swinging iron gate.

This was Brookfield. Sheep grazed on the lawn, at the end of which, beneath some chestnut-trees, was the house. It had been built by the late Mr. Barton out of a farmhouse, but the present man, having travelled in Italy and been attracted by the picturesque, had built a verandah; and for the same reason had insisted on calling his daughter Olive.

'Oh there, mamma!' cried Olive, looking out of the carriage window; and the two girls watched their mother, a pretty woman of forty, coming across the greensward to meet them.

She moved over the greensward in a skirt that seemed a little too long—a black silk skirt trimmed with jet. As she came forward her daughters noticed that their mother dyed her hair in places where it might be suspected of turning grey. It was parted in the middle and she wore it drawn back over her ears and slightly puffed on either side in accordance with the fashion that had come in with the Empress Eugenie. Even in a photograph she was like a last-century beauty sketched by Romney in pastel—brown, languid, almond-shaped eyes, a thin figure a little bent. Even in youth it had probably resembled Alice's rather than Olive's, but neither had inherited her mother's hands—the most beautiful hands ever seen—and while they trifled with the newly bought *foulards* a warbling voice inquired if Olive was sure she was not tired.

'Five hours in the train! And you, Alice? You must be starving, my dear, and I'm afraid the saffron buns are cold. Milord brought us over such a large packet to-day. We must have some heated up. They won't be a minute.'

'Oh, mamma, I assure you I am not in the least hungry!' cried Olive.

'*La beauté n'a jamais faim, elle se nourrit d'elle même,*' replied Lord Dungory, who had just returned from the pleasure-ground whither he had gone for a little walk with Arthur.

'You will find Milord the same as ever—*toujours galant*; always thinking of *la beauté, et les femmes*.'

Lord Dungory was the kind of man that is often seen with the Mrs. Barton type of woman. An elderly beau verging on the sixties, who, like Mrs. Barton, suggested a period. His period was very early Victorian, but he no longer wore a silk hat in the country. A high silk hat in Galway would have called attention to his age, so the difficulty of costume was ingeniously compromised by a tall felt, a cross between a pot and a chimney-pot. For collars, a balance had been struck between the jaw-scrapers of old time and the nearest modern equivalent; and in the tying of the large cravat there was a reminiscence, but nothing more, of the past generation.

He had modelled himself, consciously or unconsciously, on Lord Palmerston, and in the course of conversation one gathered that he was on terms of intimacy with the chiefs of the Liberal party, such as Lord Granville and Lord Hartington, and if the listener was credited with any erudition, allusion was made to the most celebrated artists and authors, and to their works. There was a celebrated Boucher in Dungory Castle, which Milord, it was hinted, had bought for some very small sum many years ago on the Continent; there was also a cabinet by Buhl and a statue supposed to be a Jean Gougon, and the proofs of their authenticity were sometimes spoken of after a set dinner-party. His speech was urbane, and, on all questions of taste, Lord Dungory's opinion was eagerly sought for. He gave a tone to the ideas put forward in the surrounding country houses, and it was through him that Mr. Barton held the title of a genius born out of due time. If Arthur, he said, had lived two centuries ago, when the gift of imagination was considered indispensable in the artist, he would have achieved high distinction. His subjects—*The Bridal of Triermain* and *Julius Cæsar overturning the Altars of the Druids*—would have been envied, perhaps stolen, by the Venetian painters. And this tribute to Arthur's genius, so generously expressed, enabled him to maintain the amenities of his life at Brookfield. He never forgot to knock at Arthur's studio-door, and the moment his eyes fell on a

new composition, he spoke of it with respect; and he never failed to allude to it at lunch. He lunched at Brookfield every day. At half-past one his carriage was at the door. In the afternoons he went out to drive with Mrs. Barton or sat in the drawing-room with her. Four times in the week he remained to dinner, and did not return home until close on midnight.

Whether he ever made any return to Mrs. Barton for her hospitalities, and, if so, in what form he repaid his obligations to her, was, when friends drew together, a favourite topic of conversation in the county of Galway. It had been remarked that the Bartons never dined at Dungory Castle except on state occasions; and it was well-known that the Ladies Cullen hated Mrs. Barton with a hatred as venomous as the poison hid in the fangs of adders.

But Lord Dungory knew how to charm his tame snakes. For fortune they had but five thousand pounds each, and, although freedom and a London lodging were often dreamed of, the flesh-pots of Dungory Castle continued to be purchased at the price of smiles and civil words exchanged with Mrs. Barton. Besides, as they grew old and ugly, the Ladies Cullen had developed an inordinate passion for the conversion of souls. They had started a school of their own in opposition to the National school, which was under the direction of the priest, and to persuade the peasants to read the Bible and to eat bacon on Friday, were good works that could not be undertaken without funds; and these were obtained, it was said, by the visits of the Ladies Cullen to Brookfield.

Mrs. Gould declared she could estimate to a fraction the prosperity of Protestantism in the parish by the bows these ladies exchanged with Mrs. Barton when their carriages crossed on the roads.

'Here are the saffron buns at last, my dear children;' and Mrs. Barton pressed them upon her girls, saying that Milord had brought them from Dungory Castle especially for them. 'Take a bottom piece, Olive, and Alice, you really must. . . Well, if you won't eat, tell Milord about your play of King Cophetua and the beggar-maid. Arthur, tell me, how did you like the play, and how did the nuns like it? To think of my daughter, so prim and demure, writing a play, and on such a subject.'

'But, mamma, what is there odd in the subject? We all know the old ballad.'

'Yes, we all know the ballad,' Arthur answered; 'I sing stanzas of it to the guitar myself.' He began to chant to himself, and Mrs. Barton listened, her face slanted in the pose of the picture of Lady Hamilton; and Milord rejoiced in the interlude, for it gave him opportunity to meditate. Anna (Mrs. Barton) seemed to him more charming and attractive than he had ever seen her, as she sat in the quiet shadow of the verandah: beyond the verandah, behind her, the autumn sunshine fell across the shelving meadows. A quiet harmony reigned over Brookfield. The rooks came flapping home through the sunlight, and when Arthur had ceased humming Mrs. Barton said:

'And now, my dear children, if you have finished your tea, come, and I will show you your room.'

She did not leave the verandah, however, without paying a pretty compliment to Milord, one that set him thinking how miserable his life would have been with his three disagreeable daughters if he had not fallen in with this enchantment. He remembered that it had lasted for nearly twenty years, and it was as potent as ever. In what did it consist, he asked himself. He sometimes thought her laughter too abundant, sometimes it verged on merriment. He did not like to think of Anna as a merry woman; he preferred to think that wherever she went she brought happiness with her. He had known her sad, but never melancholy, for she was never without a smile even when she was melancholy.

Awakening from his reverie he drew his chair closer to Arthur's, and, with a certain parade of interest, asked him if he had been to the Academy.

'Did you see anything, Arthur, that in design approached your picture of *Julius Cæsar Overturning the Altars of the Druids*?'

'There were some beautiful bits of painting there,' replied Arthur, whose modesty forbade him to answer the question directly. 'I saw some lovely landscapes, and there were some babies' frocks,' he added satirically. 'In one of these pictures I saw a rattle painted to perfection.'

'Ah, yes, yes! You don't like the pettiness of family feeling dragged into art; but if you only condescend to take a little more notice of the craft—the craft is, after all—'

'I am carried along too rapidly by my feelings. I feel that I must get my idea on canvas. But when I was in London I saw such a lovely woman—one of the most exquisite creatures possible to imagine! Oh, so sweet, and so feminine! I have it all in my head. I shall do something like her to-morrow.'

Here he began to sketch with his stick in the dust, and from his face it might be judged he was satisfied with the invisible result. At last he said:

'You needn't say anything about it, but she sent me some songs, with accompaniments written for the guitar. You shall hear some of the songs to-night. . . . Ah, there is the dinner-bell!'

Olive was placed next to Milord, and the compliments paid to her by the old courtier delighted her. She pretended to understand when he said: '*La femme est comme une ombre: si vous la suives, elle vous fuit; si vous fuyez, elle vous poursuit*.' A little later the champagne she had drunk set her laughing hysterically, and she begged him to translate (he had just whispered to her mother, '*L'amour est la conscience du plaisir donné et reçu, la certitude de donner et de recevoir*'); and he would have complied with her request, but Mrs. Barton forbade him. Alice, who had understood, found herself obliged to say that she had not understood, which little fib begot a little annoyance in her against her mother; and Milord, as if he thought that he had been guilty of a slight indiscretion, said, addressing himself to both girls: '*Gardez bien vos illusions, mon enfant, car les illusions sont le miroir de l'amour.*'

'Ah! *mais il ne faut pas couvrir trop l'abîme avec des fleurs*,' said Mrs. Barton, as a sailor from his point of vantage might cry, 'Rocks ahead!'

Arthur only joined occasionally in the conversation; he gazed long and ardently on his daughter, and then sketched with his thumb-nail on the cloth, and when they arose from the table, Mrs. Barton said:

'Now, now, I am not going to allow you gentlemen to spend any more time over your wine. This is our first evening together; come into the drawing-room with us, and we shall have some music.'

Like most men of an unevenly balanced mind, Arthur loved an eccentric costume, and soon after he appeared in a long-tasselled cap and a strangely coloured smoking jacket; he wore a pair of high-heeled brocaded slippers,

and, twanging a guitar, hummed to himself plaintively. Then, when he thought he had been sufficiently admired, he sang *A che la morte, Il Balen*, and several other Italian airs, in which frequent allusion was made to the inconstancy of woman's and the truth of man's affection. At every pause in the music these sentiments were laughingly contested by Mrs. Barton. She appealed to Milord. He never had had anything to complain of. Was it not well known that the poor woman had been only too true to him? Finally, it was arranged there should be a little dancing.

As Mrs. Barton said, it was of great importance to know if Olive knew the right step, and who could put her up to all the latest fashions as well as Milord? The old gentleman replied in French, and settled his waistcoat, fearing the garment was doing him an injustice.

'But who is to play?' asked the poetical-looking Arthur, who, on the highest point of the sofa, hummed and tuned his guitar after true troubadour fashion.

'Alice will play us a waltz,' said Mrs. Barton winningly.

'Oh yes, Alice dear, play us a waltz,' cried Olive.

'You know how stupid I am; I can't play a note without my music, and it is all locked up in my trunk upstairs.'

'It won't take you a minute to get it out,' said Mrs. Barton; and moving, as if she were on wheels, towards her daughter, she whispered: 'Do as I tell you—run upstairs at once and get your music.'

She looked questioningly at her mother and hesitated. But Mrs. Barton had a way of compelling obedience, and the girl went upstairs, to return soon after with a roll of music. At the best of times she had little love of the art, but now, sick with disappointment, and weary from a long railway journey, to spell through the rhythm of the *My Queen Waltz* and the jangle of *L'Esprit Français* was to her an odious and, when the object of it was considered, an abominable duty to perform. She had to keep her whole attention fixed on the page before her, but when she raised her eyes the picture she saw engraved itself on her mind. It was a long time before she could forget Olive's blond, cameo-like profile seen leaning over the old beau's fat

shoulder. Mrs. Barton laughed and laughed again, declaring the while that it was *la grâce et la beauté réunies.* Mr. Barton shouted and twanged in measure, the excitement gaining on him until he rushed at his wife, and, seizing her round the waist, whirled her and whirled her, holding his guitar above her head. At last they bumped against Milord, and shot the old man and his burden on to the nearest sofa. Then Alice, who thought her mission at the piano was over, rose to go, but Mrs. Barton ordered her to resume her seat, and the dancing was continued till the carriage came up the gravel sweep to fetch Milord away. This was generally about half-past eleven, and as he muffled himself up in overcoats, the girls were told to cram his pockets with cigarettes and bon-bons.

'Bedad, I think it is revolvers and policemen you ought to be givin' me, not swatemates,' he said, affecting a brogue.

'Oh yes, is it not dreadful?' exclaimed Mrs. Barton. 'I don't know what we shall do if the Government don't put down the Land League; we shall all be shot in our beds some night. Did you hear of that murder the other day?'

'And it is said there will be no rents collected this year,' said Mr. Barton, as he tightened one of the strings of his guitar.

'Oh, do cease that noise!' said Mrs. Barton. 'And tell me, Lord Dungory, will the Government refuse us soldiers and police to put the people out?'

'If we go to the Castle, we shall want more money to buy dresses,' said Olive.

'*La mer a toujours son écume pour habiller ses déesses,*' replied Milord; and he got into his carriage amid pearly peals of laughter from Mrs. Barton, intermingled with a few high notes from Olive, who had already taken to mimicking her mother.

CHAPTER 5

Mr. Barton, or Arthur, as he was usually called, always returned to his studio immediately after breakfast, and, as Mrs. Barton had domestic duties to attend to, the girls were left to themselves to appreciate their return home from school and look forward to their entry into the life of the world.

The two girls descended the stairs with their summer hats and sunshades, and Alice stopped at the door of the schoolroom. It was here that, only a few years ago, she had interceded with the dear old governess, and aided Olive to master the difficulties against which the light brain could not contend singly—the hardships of striving to recall the number of continents the world possesses, the impossibility of learning to say definitely if seven times four made twenty-eight or thirty.

At the end of the passage under the stairs the children used to play for hours, building strange houses out of boxes of bricks, or dressing dolls in fantastic costumes. Olive had forgotten, but Alice remembered, and her thoughts wandered through the land of toys. The box of bricks had come from an aunt that was now dead; the big doll mother had brought from Dublin when she went to see the oculist about her eyes; and then there were other toys that suggested nothing, and whose history was entirely forgotten. But the clock that stood in the passage was well remembered, and Alice thought how this old-fashioned timepiece used to be the regulator and confidant of all their joys and hopes. She saw herself again listening, amid her sums, for the welcome voice that would call her away; she saw herself again examining its grave face and striving to calculate, with childish eagerness, if she would have time to build another Tower of Babel or put another tack in the doll's frock before the ruthless iron tongue struck the fatal hour.

'Olive, is it possible you don't remember how we used to listen to the dear old clock when we were children?'

'You are a funny girl, Alice; you remember everything. Fancy thinking of that old clock! I hated it, for it brought me to lessons when it struck eleven.'

'Yes, but it brought you out to play when it struck twelve. See! the hands are just on the hour; let us wait to hear it strike.'

The girls listened vainly for a sound; and Alice felt as if she had been apprised of the loss of a tried friend when one of the servants told them the clock had been broken some years ago.

The kitchen windows looked on a street made by a line of buildings parallel with the house. These were the stables and outhouses, and they formed one of the walls of the garden that lay behind, sheltered on the north side by a thin curtain of beeches, filled every evening with noisy rooks; and, coming round to the front of the house, the girls lingered beneath the chestnut-trees, and in the rosary, where a little fountain played when visitors were present, and then stood leaning over the wooden paling that defended the pleasure-ground from the cows that grazed in the generous expanse of grass extending up to the trees of the Lawler domain. Brookfield was therefore without pretensions—it could hardly be called 'a place'—but, manifolded in dreams past and present, it extended indefinitely before Alice's eyes, and, absorbed by the sad sweetness of retrospection, she lingered while Olive ran through the rosary from the stables and back again, calling to her sister, making the sunlight ring with her light laughter. She refrained, therefore, from reminding her that it was here they used to play with Nell, the old setter, and that it was there they gave bread to the blind beggar; Olive had no heart for these things, and when she admired the sleek carriage-horses that had lately been bought to take them to balls and tennis-parties, Alice thought of the old brown mare that used to take them for such delightful drives.

Suddenly Mrs. Barton's voice was heard calling. Milord had arrived: they were to go into the garden and pick a few flowers to make a buttonhole for him. Olive darted off at once to execute the commission, and soon returned with a rose set round with stephanotis. The old lord, seated in the dining-room, in an arm-chair which Mrs. Barton had drawn up to the window so

that he might enjoy the air, sipped his sherry, and Alice, as she entered the room, heard him say:

'*Quand on aime on est toujours bien portant*.'

She stopped abruptly, and Mrs. Barton, who already suspected her of secret criticism, whispered, as she glided across the room:

'Now, my dear girl, go and talk to Milord and make yourself agreeable.'

The girl felt she was incapable of this, and it pained her to listen to her sister's facile hilarity, and her mother's coaxing observations. Milord did not, however, neglect her; he made suitable remarks concerning her school successes, and asked appropriate questions anent her little play of *King Cophetua*. But whatever interest the subject possessed was found in the fact that Olive had taken the part of the Princess; and, re-arranging the story a little, Mrs. Barton declared, with a shower of little laughs, and many waves of the white hands, that 'my lady there had refused a King; a nice beginning, indeed, and a pleasant future for her chaperon.'

The few books the house possessed lay on the drawing-room table, or were piled, in dusty confusion, in the bookcase in Mr. Barton's studio; and, thinking of them, Alice determined she would pay her father a visit in his studio.

At her knock he ceased singing *Il Balen*, and cried, 'Come in!'

'I beg your pardon, papa; I'm afraid I am interrupting you.'

'Not at all—not at all, I assure you; come in. I will have a cigarette; there is nothing like reconsidering one's work through the smoke of a cigarette. The most beautiful pictures I have ever seen I have seen in the smoke of a cigarette; nothing can beat those, particularly if you are lying back looking up at a dirty ceiling.'

War and women were the two poles of Arthur's mind. *Cain shielding his Wife from Wild Beasts* had often been painted, numberless *Bridals of Triermain*; and as for the *Rape of the Sabines*, it seemed as if it could never be sufficiently accomplished. Opposite the door was a huge design representing Samson and Delilah; opposite the fireplace, *Julius Caesar*

overturning the Altars of the Druids occupied nearly the entire wall. Nymphs and tigers were scattered in between; canvases were also propped against almost every piece of furniture.

At last Alice's eyes were suddenly caught by a picture representing three women bathing. It was a very rough sketch, but, before she had time to examine it, Arthur turned it against the wall. Why he hid two pictures from her she could not help wondering. It could not be for propriety's sake, for there were nudities on every side of her.

Then, lying upon the sofa, he explained how So-and-so had told him, when he was a boy in London, that no one since Michael Angelo had been able to design as he could; how he had modelled a colossal statue of Lucifer before he was sixteen, how he had painted a picture of the Battle of Arbela, forty feet by twenty, before he was eighteen; but that was of no use, the world nowadays only cared for execution, and he could not wait until he had got the bit of ribbon in Delilah's hair to look exactly like silk.

Alice listened to her father babbling, her heart and her mind at variance. A want of knowledge of painting might blind her to the effects of his pictures (there was in them all a certain crude merit of design), but it was impossible not to see that they were lacking in something, in what she could not say, having no knowledge of painting.

Nor was she sure that her father believed in his pictures, though he had just declared they had all the beauties of Raphael and other beauties besides. He had a trick of never appearing to thoroughly believe in them and in himself. She listened interested and amused, not knowing how to take him. She had been away at school for nearly ten years, coming home for rare holidays, and was, therefore, without any real knowledge of her parents. She understood her father even less than her mother; but she was certain that if he were not a great genius he might have been one, and she resolved to find out Lord Dungory's opinions on her father.

But the opportunity for five minutes quiet chat behind her mother's back did not present itself. As soon as he arrived her mother sent her out of the room on some pretext more or less valid, and at the end of the week the gowns that had been ordered in Dublin arrived: ecstasy consumed the

house, and she heard him say that he would give a great dinner-party to show them off.

CHAPTER 6

Arthur, who rarely dined out, handed the ladies into the carriage.

Mrs. Barton was beautifully dressed in black satin; Olive was lost in a mass of tulle; Alice wore a black silk trimmed with passementerie and red ribbons. Behind the Clare mountains the pale transitory colours of the hour faded, and the women, their bodies and their thoughts swayed together by the motion of the vehicle, listened to the irritating barking of the cottage-dog. Surlily a peasant, returning from his work, his frieze coat swung over one shoulder, stepped aside. A bare-legged woman, surrounded by her half-naked children, leaving the potato she was peeling in front of her door, gazed, like her husband, after the rolling vision of elegance that went by her, and her obtuse brain probably summed up the implacable decrees of Destiny in the phrase:

'Shure there misht be a gathering at the big house this evening.'

'But tell me, mamma,' said Olive, after a long silence, 'how much champagne ought I to drink at dinner? You know, it is a long time since I have tasted it. Indeed, I don't remember that I ever did taste it.'

Mrs. Barton laughed softly:

'Well, my dear, I don't think that two glasses could do you any harm; but I would not advise you to drink any more.'

'And what shall I say to the man who takes me down to dinner? Shall I have to begin the conversation, or will he?'

'He will be sure to say something; you need not trouble yourself about that. I think we shall meet some nice men to-night. Captain Hibbert will be there. He is very handsome and well-connected. I hope he will take you down. Then there will be the Honourable Mr. Burke. He is a nice little man, but there's not much in him, and he hasn't a penny. His brother is Lord Kilcarney, a confirmed bachelor. Then there will be Mr. Adair; he is very well off. He has at least four thousand a year in the country; but it would seem that he

doesn't care for women. He is very clever; he writes pamphlets. He used to sympathize with the Land League, but the outrages went against his conscience. You never know what he really does think. He admires Gladstone, and Gladstone says he can't do without him.'

They had now passed the lodge-gates, and were driving through the park. Herds of fallow deer moved away, but the broad bluff forms of the red deer gazed steadfastly as lions from the crest of a hill.

'Did you ever meet Lady Dungory, mamma?' asked Alice. 'Is she dead?'

'No, dear, she is not dead; but it would be better, perhaps, if she were. She behaved very badly. Lord Dungory had to get a separation. No one ever speaks of her now. Mind, you are warned!'

At this moment the carriage stopped before a modern house, built between two massive Irish towers entirely covered with huge ivy.

'I am afraid we are a little late,' said Mrs. Barton to the servant, as he relieved them of their *sorties de bal*.

'Eight o'clock has just struck, ma'am.'

'The two old things will make faces at us, I know,' murmured Mrs. Barton, as she ascended the steps.

On either side there were cases of stuffed birds; a fox lay in wait for a pheasant on the right; an otter devoured a trout on the left. These attested the sporting tastes of a former generation. The white marble statues of nymphs sleeping in the shadows of the different landings and the Oriental draperies with which each cabinet was hung suggested the dilettantism of the present owner.

Mrs. Barton walked on in front; the girls drew together like birds. They were amazed at the stateliness of the library, and they marvelled at the richness of the chandeliers and the curiously assorted pictures. The company was assembled in a small room at the end of the suite.

Two tall, bony, high-nosed women advanced and shook hands menacingly with Mrs. Barton. They were dressed alike in beautiful gowns of gold-brown plush.

With a cutting stare and a few cold conventional words, they welcomed Olive and Alice home to the country again. Lord Dungory whispered something to Mrs. Barton. Olive passed across the room; the black coats gave way, and, as a white rose in a blood-coloured glass, her shoulders rose out of the red tulle. Captain Hibbert twisted his brown-gold moustache, and, with the critical gaze of the connoisseur, examined the undulating lines of the arms, the delicate waist, and the sloping hips: her skirts seemed to fall before his looks.

Immediately after, the roaring of a gong was heard, and the form of the stately butler was seen approaching. Lord Dungory and Lady Jane exchanged looks. The former offered his arm to Mrs. Gould; the latter, her finger on her lips, in a movement expressive of profound meditation, said:

'Mr. Ryan, will you take down Mrs. Barton; Mr. Scully, will you take Miss Olive Barton; Mr. Adair, will you take Miss Gould; Mr. Lynch, will you take Miss Alice Barton; Mr. Burke, will you take my sister?' Then, smiling at the thought that she had checkmated her father, who had ordered that Olive Barton should go down with Captain Hibbert, she took Captain Hibbert's arm, and followed the dinner-party. About the marble statues and stuffed birds on the staircase flowed a murmur of amiability, and, during a pause, skirts were settled amid the chairs, which the powdered footmen drew back ceremoniously to make way for the guests to pass.

A copy of Murillo's *Madonna presenting the Divine Child to St. Joseph* hung over the fireplace; between the windows another Madonna stood on a half-moon, and when Lord Dungory said, 'For what we are going to receive, the Lord make us truly thankful,' these pictures helped the company to realize a suitable, although momentary emotion.

Turtle soup was handed round. The soft steaming fragrance mixed with the fresh perfume of the roses that bloomed in a silver vase beneath the light of the red-shaded wax candles. A tree covered with azaleas spread notes of

delicate colour over the gold screen that hid the door by which the servants came and went.

'Oh, Lady Sarah,' exclaimed Mrs. Gould, 'I do not know how you have such beautiful flowers—and in this wretched climate!'

'Yes, it is very trying; but then we have a great deal of glass.'

'Which do you prefer, roses or azaleas?' asked Mrs. Barton.

'*Les roses sont les fleurs en corsage, mais les azalées sont les fleurs en peignoir*.'

Lady Sarah and Lady Jane, who had both overheard the remark, levelled indignant glances at their father, scornful looks at Mrs. Barton, and, to avoid further amatory allusions, Lady Sarah said:

'I do not think we shall soon have bread, much less flowers, to place on our tables, if the Government do not step in and put down the revolution that is going on in this country.'

Everyone, except the young girls, looked questioningly at each other, and the mutuality of their interests on this point became at once apparent.

'Ah, Lord Dungory! do you think we shall be able to collect our rents this year? What reduction do you intend to give?'

Lord Dungory, who had no intention of showing his hand, said:

'The Land League has, I believe, advised the people to pay no more than Griffith's valuation. I do not know if your lands are let very much above it?'

'If you have not seen the *Evening Mail* you have probably not heard of the last terrible outrage,' said Captain Hibbert; and, amid a profound silence, he continued: 'I do not know if anybody here is acquainted with a Mr. Macnamara; he lives in Meath.'

'Oh! you don't say anything has happened to him? I knew his cousin,' exclaimed Mrs. Gould.

Captain Hibbert looked round with his bland, good-looking stare, and, as no nearer relative appeared to be present, he resumed his story:

'He was, it seems, sitting smoking after dinner, when suddenly two shots were fired through the windows.'

At this moment a champagne-cork slipped through the butler's fingers and went off with a bang.

'Oh, goodness me! what's that?' exclaimed Mrs. Gould; and, to pass off their own fears, everyone was glad to laugh at the old lady. It was not until Captain Hibbert told that Mr. Macnamara had been so severely wounded that his life was despaired of, that the chewing faces became grave again.

'And I hear that Macnamara had the foinest harses in Mathe,' said Mr. Ryan; 'I very nearly sold him one last year at the harse show.'

Mr. Ryan was the laughing-stock of the country, and a list of the grotesque sayings he was supposed, on different occasions, to have been guilty of, was constantly in progress of development. He lived with his cousin, Mr. Lynch, and, in conjunction, they farmed large tracts of land. Mr. Ryan was short and thick; Mr. Lynch was taller and larger, and a pair of mutton-chop whiskers made his bloated face look bigger still. On either side of the white tablecloth their dirty hands fumbled at their shirt-studs, that constantly threatened to fall through the worn buttonholes. They were, nevertheless, received everywhere, and Pathre, as Mr. Ryan was called by his friends, was permitted the licences that are usually granted to the buffoon.

'Arrah!' he said, 'I wouldn't moind the lague being hard on them who lives out of the counthry, spendin' their cash on liquor and theatres in London; but what can they have agin us who stops at home, mindin' our properties and riding our harses?'

This criticism of justice, as administered by the league, did not, however, seem to meet with the entire approval of those present. Mr. Adair looked grave; he evidently thought it was based on a superficial notion of political economy. Mr. Burke, a very young man with a tiny red moustache and a curious habit of wriggling his long weak neck, feeling his amusements were being unfairly attacked, broke the silence he had till then preserved, and said:

'I haven't an acre of land in the world, but if my brother chooses to live in London, I don't see why he should be deprived of his rents. For my part, I like the Gaiety Theatre, and so does my brother. Have you seen the *Forty Thieves*, Lady Jane? Capital piece—I saw it twenty times.'

'I think what Pathre, me cousin, means to say,' said Mr. Lynch, declining the venison the servant offered him, 'is that there are many in the country who don't deserve much consideration. I am alluding to those who acquired their property in the land courts, and the Cromwellians, and the—I mean the rack-renters.'

The sudden remembrance that Lord Dungory dated from the time of James so upset Mr. Lynch that he called back the servant and accepted the venison, which he failed, however, to eat.

'I do not see,' said Lord Dungory, with the air of a man whose words are conclusive, 'why we should go back to the time of Cromwell to discuss the rights of property rather than to that of the early Kings of Ireland. If there is to be a returning, why not at once put in a claim on the part of the Irish Elk? No! there must be some finality in human affairs.' And on this phrase the conversation came to a pause.

But if the opinions of those present were not in accord concerning the rights of property, their tastes in conversation certainly differed as widely. Olive's white face twitched from time to time with nervous annoyance. Alice looked up in a sort of mild despair as she strove to answer Mr. Lynch's questions; May had fallen into a state of morose lassitude. If Mr. Adair would only cease to explain to her how successfully he had employed concrete in the construction of his farm-buildings! She felt that if he started again on the saw-mill she must faint, and Olive's senses, too, were swimming, but just as she thought she was going off Captain Hibbert looked so admiringly at her that she recovered herself; and at the same time Mr. Scully succeeded in making May understand that he would infinitely prefer to be near her than Lady Sarah. In return for this expression of feeling the young lady determined to risk a remark across the table; but she was cut short by Mrs. Gould, who pithily summed up the political situation in the words:

'The way I look at it is like this: Will the Government help us to get our rents, or will it not? Mr. Forster's Act does not seem to be able to do that. There's May there who has been talking all the morning of Castle seasons, and London seasons, and I don't know what; really I don't see how it is to be done if the Land League—'

'And Mr. Parnell's a gentleman, too. I wonder how he can ally himself with such blackguards,' gently insinuated Mrs. Barton, who saw a husband lost in the politician.

But the difficulty the Government find themselves in is that the Land League is apparently a legal organization,' said Lord Dungory in the midst of a profound silence.

'A society legal, that exists and holds its power through an organized system of outrage! Mind you, as I have always said, the landlords have brought all their misfortunes upon themselves; they have often behaved disgracefully—but I would, nevertheless, put down the outrages; yes, I would put down the outrages, and at any cost.'

'And what would yer do?' asked Mr. Ryan. 'De yer know that the herds are being coerced now? we'd get on well enough were it not for that.'

'In the beginning of this year Mr. Forster asked Parliament for special powers. How has he used those powers? Without trial, five hundred people have been thrown into prison, and each fresh arrest is answered by a fresh outrage; and when the warrant is issued, and I suppose it will be issued sooner or later, for the arrest of Mr. Parnell, I should not be surprised to hear of a general strike being made against rent. The consequences of such an event will be terrific; but let these consequences, I say, rest on Mr. Forster's head. I shall have no word of pity for him. His government is a disgrace to Liberalism, and I fear he has done much to prejudice our ideal in the eyes of the world.'

Lord Dungory and Lady Jane exchanged smiles; and poor crotchety Mr. Adair leaned forward his large, bald brow, obscured by many obscure ideals. After a pause he continued:

'But I was speaking of Flanders. From the time of Charles the Fifth the most severe laws were enacted to put down the outrages, but there was an undercurrent of sympathy with the outrage-monger which kept the system alive until 1840. Then the Government took the matter in hand, and treated outrage-mongering as what it is—an act of war; and quartered troops on the inhabitants and stamped the disease out in a few years. Of course I could not, and would not, advocate the employment of such drastic measures in Ireland; but I would put down the outrages with a firm hand, and I would render them impossible in the future by the creation of peasant-proprietors.'

Then, amid the juicy odours of cut pineapple, and the tepid flavours of Burgundy, Mr. Adair warmed to his subject, and proceeded to explain that absolute property did not exist in land in Ireland before 1600, and, illustrating his arguments with quotations from Arthur Young, he spoke of the plantation of Ulster, the leases of the eighteenth century, the Protestants in the North, the employment of labour; until, at last, inebriated with theory, he asked the company what was the end of government?

This was too much, and, seeing the weary faces about him, Lord Dungory determined to change the subject of conversation:

'The end of government?' he said; 'I am afraid that you would get many different answers to that question. Ask these young ladies; they will tell you, probably, that it is to have *des beaux amants et des joyeuses amours*, and I am not sure that they are not right.'

Mrs. Barton's coaxing laugh was heard, and then reference was made to the detachment of the Connaught Rangers stationed at Galway, and the possibility of their giving a dance was eagerly discussed. Mr. Ryan had a word to say anent the hunting prospect, and, when May Gould declared she was going to ride straight and not miss a meet, she completed the conquest of Mr. Scully, and encouraging glances were exchanged between them until Lady Sarah looked inquiringly round the table—then she pushed back her chair. All rose, and a moment after, through the twilight of the drawing-room, colour and nudity were scattered in picturesque confusion.

Every mind was occupied by one thought—how the pleasure of the dinner-party had been spoiled by that horrible Land League discussion. All wondered who had introduced the subject, and the blame was fixed upon Mr. Adair. Mrs. Gould, in her homely way, came to the point at once:

'People say he is so clever, but I am sure I can't see it. He has spent a fortune in building farmyards in concrete, and his saw-mill, I hear, costs him twenty pounds a month dead loss, and he is always writing letters to the papers. I never can think much of a man who writes to the papers.'

'A most superior man,' said Lady Sarah, who, notwithstanding her thirty-five years, had not entirely given up hope. 'He took honours at Trinity.'

Then Mr. Burke and Lord Kilcarney were spoken of, and some new anecdotes were told of Mr. Ryan. The famous one—how he had asked a lady to show him her docket at the Galway ball, when she told him that she was engaged for all the dances—excited, as it never failed to do, a good deal of laughter. Mrs. Barton did not, however, join in the conversation. She knew, if she did, that the Ladies Cullen would be as rude as the absence of Milord, and the fact that she was a guest in their house would allow them to be. Mrs. Barton's mind was now occupied with one thought, and, leaning back in her chair, she yielded herself entirely to it. Although the dinner-party had been spoiled by Mr. Adair's uncontrollable desire to impart information, she had, nevertheless, noticed that Captain Hibbert had been very much struck with Olive's beauty. She was aware that her daughter was a beautiful girl, but whether men would want to marry her Mrs. Barton did not know. Captain Hibbert's conduct would help her to arrive at a decision. She certainly dreamed of a title for Olive. Lord Kilcarney was, alas! not to be thought of. Ah! if Mr. Burke were only Lord Kilcarney! But he was not. However, Captain Hibbert would be a fairly good match. He was of excellent family, had two thousand a year, and a place in the country and in England too. But why snatch up the very first fish that came by? There was no saying whom they would meet at the Castle. Still, to encourage a flirtation could be no harm. If they met anything better, it could be broken off; if they did not, it would be a very nice match indeed. Besides, there was no denying that Olive was a little too *naïve* in her manner. Captain Hibbert's society would

brush that off, and Olive would go up to the Castle with the reputation of having made a conquest.

Such were Mrs. Barton's thoughts as she sat, her hands laid like china ornaments on her lap; her feet were tucked under the black-pleated skirt, and she sometimes raised her Greuze-like eyes and looked at her daughter.

The girls were grouped around a small table, on which stood a feather-shaded lamp. In clear voices and clear laughs they were talking of each other's dresses. May had just stood up to show off her skirt. She was a superb specimen of a fat girl, and in a glow of orange ribbons and red hair she commanded admiration.

'And to think she is going to waste her time with that dissipated young man, Mr. Scully!' thought Mrs. Barton. Then Olive stood up. She was all rose, and when, laughing, with a delicious movement of the arms, she hitched back her bustle, she lost her original air, and looked as might have done the Fornarina when not sitting in immortality. It was the battle of blonde tints: Olive with primroses and corn, May with a cadmium yellow and red gold.

'And now, Alice, get up and let's see you!' she cried, catching hold of her sister's arm.

Still resisting, Alice rose to her feet, and May, who was full of good nature, made some judicious observations.

'And how different we all look from what we did at the convent! Do you remember our white frocks?'

Alice's face lit up with a sudden remembrance, and she said:

'But why, Lady Sarah, haven't we seen Cecilia? I've been thinking of her during dinner. I hope she is not ill?'

'Oh, dear me, no! But poor Cecilia does not care to come down when there is company.'

'But can I not see her?'

'Oh, certainly! You will find her in her room. But you do not know the way; I will ring for my maid, she will show you.'

At this moment men's voices were heard on the staircase. The ladies all looked up, the light defining the corner of a forehead, the outline of a nose and chin, bathing a neck in warm shadow, modelling a shoulder with grey tints, sending a thousand rays flashing through the diamonds on the bosom, touching the finger-rings, and lastly dying away amid the folds of the dresses that trailed on the soft carpet. Mr. Ryan, walking with his habitual roll and his hands in his pockets, entered. His tie was under his left ear. Mr. Lynch, haunted by the idea that he had not made himself agreeable to Alice during dinner, sat down beside her. Mr. Scully made a rush for May. Tall, handsome Captain Hibbert, with his air of conventional high style, quitted Lord Dungory, and asked Olive what they had been saying since they left the dining-room. Mr. Burke tried to join in the conversation, but Mr. Ryan, thinking it would be as well not to let the occasion slip of speaking of a certain 'bay harse who'd jump anythin',' took him confidentially by the sleeve.

'Now, look here, will yer,' he began. The rest of his remarks were lost in the hum of the conversation, and by well-bred transitions observations were made on the dancing and hunting prospects of the season. Mr. Adair took no interest in such subjects, and to everyone's relief he remained silent. May and Fred Scully had withdrawn to a corner of the room where they could talk more at their ease; Captain Hibbert was conscious of nothing but Olive and her laughter, which rippled and tinkled through an odour of coffee.

Little by little she was gaining the attention of the room. Mr. Adair ceased to listen to Lord Dungory, who was explaining why Leonardo da Vinci was a greater painter than Titian. Mr. Lynch left off talking to Alice; the little blonde honourable looked sillier and sillier as his admiration grew upon him. Mrs. Barton, to hide her emotion, engaged in an ardent discussion concerning the rearing of calves with Mrs. Gould. Lady Sarah bit her lip, and, unable to endure her enemy's triumph any longer, she said in her most mellifluous tone:

'Won't you sing us something, Captain Hibbert?'

'Well, really, Lady Sarah, I should be very glad, but I don't think, you know—I am not sure I could manage without my music.'

'I shall be very glad to accompany you. I think I know *In the Gloaming*, and I have heard you sing that.'

Olive, at a sign from her mother, entreated, and when the gallant Captain rolled from under the brown-gold moustache the phrase, 'Oh, my darling!' all strove not to look at her, and when he dropped his voice to a whisper, and sang of his aching heart, a feeling prevailed that all were guilty of an indiscretion in listening to such an intimate avowal. Then he sang two songs more, equally filled with reference to tears, blighted love, and the possibility of meeting in other years, and Olive hung down her head, overcome by the fine sentiments which she felt were addressed to her.

Meanwhile Alice became aware that her sister was the object of all eyes and thoughts; that she was gaining the triumph that men are agreed may be desired by women without impropriety. Alice was a healthy-bodied girl; her blood flowed as warm as in her sister. The men about her did not correspond with her ideal, but this scarcely rendered the fact that they neglected her less bitter. She asked Lady Sarah again if she might go upstairs and see Cecilia.

She found the little cripple leaning over the banisters listening to the sound of voices.

'Oh, my dear! Is it you? I expected you to come to see me when you left the gentlemen in the dining-room.'

'I couldn't come before, dear,' said Alice, kissing her friend. 'Just as I was asking Lady Sarah the way to your room, we heard them coming.'

'And how did you like the party? Which of the men did you think the nicest?'

'I did not care for any of them; and oh, that odious Mr. Lynch!'

Cecilia's eyes flashed with a momentary gleam of satisfaction, and spoke of a little excursion—a walk to the Brennans, who lived two miles distant—that she had been planning for the last few days.

CHAPTER 7

The girls had given each other rendezvous at the gate of Dungory Castle. Lover was never more anxious to meet mistress than this little deformed girl to see her friend; and Alice could see her walking hurriedly up and down the gravel-sweep in front of the massive grey-stone lodge.

'She will see me next time she turns,' thought Alice; and immediately after Cecilia uttered a joyful cry and ran forward.

'Oh, so it is you, Alice! I am so glad! I thought you were going to disappoint me.'

'And why, dear, did you think I was going to disappoint you?' said Alice, stooping to kiss the wan, wistful face.

'I don't know—I can't say—but I fancied something would happen;' and the great brown eyes began to melt with tears of delight. 'I had, you know, set my heart on this walk with you.'

'I am sure the pleasure is as much mine as yours; and now, whither lies our way?'

'Through the deer-park, through the oakwood, across the fields into the highroad, and then you are at the gate,'

'Won't that be too far for you?'

'Oh, not at all! It is not more than a mile and a half; but for you, you had to come another mile and a half. It is fully that from here to Brookfield. But tell me, dear,' said Cecilia, clinging to her friend's arm, 'why have you not been over to see me before? It is not kind of you; we have been home from school now over a fortnight, and, except on the night of the dinner-party, I haven't seen you once.'

'I was coming over to see you last week, dear; but, to tell you the truth, mamma prevented me. I cannot think why, but somehow she does not

seem to care that I should go to Dungory Castle. But for the matter of that, why did you not come to see me? I've been expecting you every day.'

'I couldn't come either. My sisters advised me—I mean, insisted on my stopping at home.'

'And why?'

'I really can't say,' replied Cecilia.

And now Alice knew that the Ladies Cullen hated Mrs. Barton for her intimacy with Lord Dungory. She longed to talk the matter out, but dared not; while Cecilia regretted she had spoken; for, with the quickness of the deformed, she knew that Alice had divined the truth of the family feud.

The sun fell like lead upon the short grass of the deer-park and the frizzled heads of the hawthorns. On the right the green masses of the oakwood shut in the view, and the stately red deer, lolling their high necks, marched away through the hillocks, as if offended at their solitude being disturbed. One poor crippled hind walked with a wretched sidling movement, and Alice hoped Cecilia would not notice it, lest it should remind her of her own misfortune.

'I am sure,' she said, 'we never knew finer weather than this in England. I don't think there could be finer weather, and still they say the tenants are worse off than ever; that no rent at all, at least nothing above Griffith's valuation, will be paid.'

'Do they speak much of Griffith's valuation at Dungory Castle?'

'Oh! they never cease, and—and—I don't know whether I ought to say, but it won't matter with you, I suppose?—mind, you must not breathe a word of this at Brookfield—the fact is my sisters' school—you know they have a school, and go in for trying to convert the people—well, this has got papa into a great deal of trouble. The Bishop has sent down another priest—I think they call it a mission—and we are going to be preached against, and papa received a threatening letter this morning. He is going, I believe, to apply for police.'

'And is this on account of the proselytizing?'

'Oh! no, not entirely; he has refused to give his tenants Griffith's valuation; but it makes one very unpopular to be denounced by the priest. I assure you, papa is very angry. He told Sarah and Jane this morning at breakfast that he'd have no more of it; that they had no right to go into the poor people's houses and pull the children from under the beds, and ask why they were not at school; that he didn't care of what religion they were as long as they paid the rent; and that he wasn't going to have his life endangered for such nonsense. There was an awful row at home this morning. For my own part, I must say I sympathize with papa. Besides the school, Sarah has, you know, a shop, where she sells bacon, sugar, and tea at cost price, and it is well-known that those who send their children to the school will never be asked to pay their bills. She wanted me to come and help to weigh out the meal, Jane being confined to her room with a sick headache, but I got out of it. I would not, if I could, convert those poor people. You know, I often fancy—I mean fear—I often sympathize too much with your creed. It was only at service last Sunday I was thinking of it; our religion seems so cold, so cheerless compared to yours. You remember the convent-church at St. Leonard's—the incense, the vestments, the white-veiled congregation—oh, how beautiful it was; we shall never be so happy again!'

'Yes, indeed; and how cross we used to think those dear nuns. You remember Sister Mary, how she used to lecture Violet for getting up to look out of the windows. What used she to say? 'Do you want, miss, to be taken for a housemaid or scullery-maid, staring at people in that way as they pass?''

'Yes, yes; that's exactly how she used to speak,' exclaimed Cecilia, laughing. And, as the girls advanced through the oakwood, they helped each other through the briers and over the trunks of fallen trees, talking, the while, of their past life, which now seemed to them but one long, sweet joy. A reference to how May Gould used to gallop the pony round and round the field at the back of the convent was interrupted by the terrifying sound of a cock-pheasant getting up from some bracken under their very feet; and, amid the scurrying of rabbits in couples and half-dozens, modest allusion was made to the girls who had been expelled in '75. Absorbed in the

sweetness of the past, the girls mused, until they emerged from the shade of the woods into the glare and dust of the highroad. Then came a view of rocky country, with harvesters working in tiny fields, and then the great blue background of the Clare Mountains was suddenly unfolded. A line and a bunch of trees indicated the Brennan domain. The gate-lodge was in ruins, and the weed-grown avenue was covered with cow-dung.

'Which of the girls do you like best?' said Alice, who wished to cease thinking of the poverty in which the spinsters lived.

'Emily, I think; she doesn't say much, but she is more sensible than the other two. Gladys wearies me with her absurd affectations; Zoe is well enough, but what names!'

'Yes, Emily has certainly the best of the names,' Alice replied, laughing.

'Are the Miss Brennans at home?' said Cecilia, when the maid opened the hall-door.

'Yes, miss—I mean your ladyship—will you walk in?'

'You'll see, they'll keep us waiting a good half-hour while they put on their best frocks,' said Cecilia, as she sat down in a faded arm-chair in the middle of the room. A piano was rolled close against the wall, the two rosewood cabinets were symmetrically placed on either side of the farther window; from brass rods the thick, green curtains hung in stiff folds, and, since the hanging of some water-colours, done by Zoe before leaving school, no alterations, except the removal of the linen covers from the furniture when visitors were expected, had been made in the arrangement of the room.

The Brennan family consisted of three girls—Gladys, Zoe, and Emily. Thirty-three, thirty-one, and thirty were their respective ages. Their father and mother, dead some ten or a dozen years, had left them joint proprietors of a small property that gossip had magnified to three thousand. They were known as the heiresses of Kinvarra; snub noses and blue eyes betrayed their Celtic blood; and every year they went to spend a month at the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin, returning home with quite a little trousseau. Gladys and Zoe always dressed alike, from the bow round the neck to the bow on the little

shoe that they so artlessly with drew when in the presence of *gentlemen*. Gladys' formula for receiving visitors never varied:

'Oh, how do you do—it is really too kind of you to give yourself all this trouble to come and see us.'

Immediately after Zoe put out her hand. Her manner was more jocose:

'How d'ye do? We are, I am sure, delighted to see you. Will you have a cup of tea? I know you will.'

Emily, being considered too shy and silent, did not often come down to receive company. On her devolved the entire management of the house and servants; the two elder sisters killed time in the way they thought would give least offence to their neighbours.

Being all St. Leonard's girls, the conversation immediately turned on convent-life. 'Was Madam this there? Had Madam that left?' Garden chapel, school, hall, dormitory, refectory were visited; every nun was passed in review, and, in the lightness and gaiety of the memories invoked, even these maiden ladies flushed and looked fresh again, the conversation came to a pause, and then allusion was made to the disturbed state of the country, and to a gentleman who, it was reported, was going to be married. But, as Alice did not know the person whose antecedents were being called into question, she took an early opportunity of asking Gladys if she cared for riding? 'No, they never went to ride now: they used to, but they came in so fatigued that they could not talk to Emily; so they had given up riding.' Did they care for driving? 'Yes, pretty well; but there was no place to drive to except into Gort, and as people had been unjust enough to say that they were always to be seen in Gort, they had given up driving—unless, of course, they went to call on friends.' Then tea was brought in; and, apropos of a casual reference to conventual buttered toast, the five girls talked, until nearly six o'clock, of their girlhood—of things that would never have any further influence in their lives, of happiness they would never experience again. At last Alice and Cecilia pleaded that they must be going home.

As they walked across the fields the girls only spoke occasionally. Alice strove to see clear, but her thoughts were clouded, scattered, diffused.

Force herself as she would, still no conclusion seemed possible; all was vague and contradictory. She had talked to these Brennans, seen how they lived, could guess what their past was, what their future must be. In that neat little house their uneventful life dribbled away in maiden idleness; neither hope nor despair broke the triviality of their days—and yet, was it their fault? No; for what could they do if no one would marry them?—a woman could do nothing without a husband.

There is a reason for the existence of a pack-horse, but none for that of an unmarried woman. She can achieve nothing—she has no duty but, by blotting herself out, to shield herself from the attacks of ever-slandering friends. Alice had looked forward to a husband and a home as the certain accomplishment of years; now she saw that a woman, independently of her own will, may remain single.

'I wonder,' she said, forgetting for the moment she was speaking to Cecilia, 'I wonder none of those Brennans married; you can't call them ugly girls, and they have some money. How dreadfully lonely they must be living there by themselves!'

'I think they are far happier as they are,' said Cecilia, and her brown eyes set in liquid blue looked strangely at Alice as she helped her over the low wall. The girls walked in silence through the stillness of the silver firs, their thoughts as sharp as the needles that scratched the pale sky.

'It may seem odd of me to say so—of course I would not say this to anyone but you—but I assure you, even if I were as tall as you are, dear, nothing would induce me to marry. I never took the slightest pleasure in any man's conversation. Do you? But I know you do,' she said, breaking off suddenly—'I know you like men; I feel you do. Don't you?'

'Well, since you put it so plainly, I confess I should like to know nice men. I don't care for those I have met hitherto, particularly those I saw at dinner the other night; but I believe there are nice men in the world.'

'Oh! no there aren't.'

'Well, Cecilia, I don't see how you can speak so positively as that; you have seen, as yet, very little of the world.'

'Ah, yes, but I know it; I can guess it all, I know it instinctively, and I hate it.'

'There is nothing else, so we must make the best of it.'

'But there is something else—there is God, and the love of beautiful things. I spent all day yesterday playing Bach's Passion Music, and the hours passed like a dream until my sisters came in from walking and began to talk about marriage and men. It made me feel sick—it was horrible; and it is such things that make me hate life—and I do hate it; it is the way we are brought back to earth, and forced to realize how vile and degraded we are. Society seems to me no better than a pigsty; but in the beautiful convent—that we shall, alas! never see again—it was not so. There, at least, life was pure—yes, and beautiful. Do you not remember that beautiful white church with all its white pillars and statues, and the dark-robed nuns, and the white-veiled girls, their veils falling from their bent heads? They often seemed to me like angels. I am sure that Heaven must be very much like that—pure, desireless, contemplative.'

Amazed, Alice looked at her friend questioningly, for she had never heard her speak like this before. But Cecilia did not see her; the prominent eyes of the mystic were veiled with strange glamour, and, with divine *gourmandise*, she savoured the ineffable sweetness of the vision, and, after a long silence, she said:

'I often wonder, Alice, how you can think as you do; and, strange to say, no one suspects you are an unbeliever; you're so good in all except that one point.'

'But surely, dear, it isn't a merit to believe; it is hardly a thing that we can call into existence.'

'You should pray for faith.'

'I don't see how I can pray if I haven't faith.'

'You're too clever; but I would ask you, Alice—you never told me—did you never believe in God, I mean when you were a little child?'

'I suppose I must have, but, as well as I can remember, it was only in a very half-hearted way. I could never quite bring myself to credit that there was a

Being far away, sitting behind a cloud, who kept his eye on all the different worlds, and looked after them just as a stationmaster looks after the arrival and departure of trains from some great terminus.'

'Alice! how can you talk so? Aren't you afraid that something awful might happen to you for talking of the Creator of all things in that way?'

'Why should I be afraid, and why should that Being, if he exists, be angry with me for my sincerity? If he be all-powerful, it rests with himself to make me believe.'

They had now accomplished the greater part of their journey, and, a little tired, had sat down to rest on a portion of a tree left by the woodcutters. Gold rays slanted through the glades, enveloping and rounding off the tall smooth trunks that rose branchless to a height of thirty, even forty, feet; and the pink clouds, seen through the arching dome of green, were vague as the picture on some dim cathedral-roof.

'In places like these, I wonder you don't feel God's presence.'

'On the contrary, the charm of nature is broken when we introduce a ruling official.'

'Alice! how can you—you who are so good—speak in that way?' At that moment a dead leaf rustled through the silence—'And do you think that we shall die like that leaf? That, like it, we shall become a part of the earth and be forgotten as utterly?'

'I am afraid I do. That dead, fluttering thing was once a bud; it lived the summer-life of a leaf; now it will decay through the winter, and perhaps the next, until it finally becomes part of the earth. Everything in nature I see pursuing the same course; why should I imagine myself an exception to the general rule?'

'What, then, is the meaning of life?'

'That I'm afraid we shall never learn from listening to the rustling of leaves.'

The short sharp cry of a bird broke the mild calm of the woods, and Alice said:

'Perhaps the same thought that troubles us is troubling that bird.'

The girls walked on in silence, and when they came to the end of the path and their parting was inevitable, there was something of the passion of the lover in Cecilia's voice: 'Promise me you will come to see me soon again. You'll not leave me so long; you will write; I shall not be able to live if I don't hear from you.'

The sound of hooves was heard, and a pair of cream-coloured ponies, with a florid woman driving determinedly, came sweeping round the corner.

'What a strange person!' said Alice, watching the blue veil and the brightly dyed hair.

'Don't you know who she is?' said Cecilia; 'that is your neighbour, Mrs. Lawler.'

'Oh! is it really? I have been so long at school that I know nobody—I have been anxious to see her. Why, I wonder, do people speak of her so mysteriously?'

'You must have heard that she isn't visited?'

'Well, yes; but I didn't quite understand. Your father was saying something the other day about Mr. Lawler's shooting-parties; then mamma looked at him; he laughed and spoke of "*les colombes de Cythère.*" I intended to ask mamma what he meant, but somehow I forgot.'

'She was one of those women that walk about the streets by night.'

'Oh! really!' said Alice; and the conversation came to a sudden pause. They had never spoken upon such a subject before, and the presence of the deformed girl rendered it a doubly painful one. In her embarrassment, Alice said:

'Then I wonder Mr. Lawler married her. Was it his fault that—'

'Oh! I don't think so,' Cecilia replied, scornfully: 'but what does it matter?—she was quite good enough for him.'

At every moment a new Cecilia was revealing herself, the existence of whom Alice had not even suspected in the old; and as she hurried home she wondered if the minds of the other girls were the same as they were at school. Olive? She could see but little change in her sister; and May she had scarcely spoken to since they left school; Violet she hadn't met since they parted at Athenry for their different homes. But Cecilia—She entered the house still thinking of her, and heard Olive telling her mother that Captain Hibbert had admired her new hat.

'He told me that I'd be the handsomest girl at the Drawing-Room.'

'And what did you say, dear?'

'I asked him how he knew. Was that right?'

'Quite right; and what did he say then?'

'He said, because he had never seen anybody so handsome, and as he had seen everybody in London, he supposed—I forget the exact words, but they were very nice; I am sure he admired my new hat; but you—you haven't told me how you liked it. Do you think I should wear it down on my eyes, or a bit back?'

'I think it very becoming as it is; but tell me more about Captain Hibbert.'

'He told me he was coming to meet us at Mass. You know he is a Roman Catholic?'

'I know he is, dear, and am very glad.'

'If he weren't, he wouldn't be able to meet us at Mass.'

CHAPTER 8

According to old-established custom, on the arrival of his family Arthur had turned his nudities to the wall, and now sitting, one leg tucked under him, on the sofa, throwing back from time to time his long blond locks, he hummed an Italian air.

'How tired you look, Alice dear! Will you have a cup of tea? It will freshen you up; you have been walking yourself to death.'

'Thanks, mamma, I will have a cup of tea; Cecilia and I went to see the Brennans.'

'And are any of them going to be married yet?' said Olive.

'I really don't know; I didn't ask them.'

'Well, they ought to be doing something with themselves; they have been trying it on long enough. They have been going up to the Shelbourne for the last ten years. Did they show you the dresses they brought down this season? They haven't worn them yet—they keep them wrapped up in silver paper.'

'And how did you hear all that?' she asked.

'Oh, one hears everything! I don't live with my nose buried in a book like you. That was all very well in the convent.'

'But what have I done that you should speak to me in that way?'

'Now, Alice dear,' said Mrs. Barton coaxingly, 'don't get angry. I assure you Olive means nothing.'

'No, indeed, I didn't!' Olive exclaimed, and she forced her sister back into the chair.

Arthur's attention had been too deeply absorbed in the serenade in *Don Pasquale* to give heed to the feminine bickering with which his studio was

ringing, until he was startled suddenly from his musical dreaming by an angry exclamation from his wife.

The picture of the bathers, which Alice had seen begun, had been only partially turned to the wall, and, after examining it for a few moments, Mrs. Barton got up and turned the picture round. The two naked creatures who were taking a dip in the quiet, sunlit pool were Olive and Mrs. Barton; and so grotesque were the likenesses that Alice could not refrain from laughing.

'This is monstrous! This is disgraceful, sir! How often have I forbidden you to paint my face on any of your shameless pictures? And your daughter, too—and just as she is coming out! Do you want to ruin us? I should like to know what anyone would think if—' And, unable to complete her sentence, either mentally or aloud, Mrs. Barton wheeled the easel, on which a large picture stood, into the full light of the window.

If Arthur had wounded the susceptibilities of his family before, he had outraged them now. The great woman, who had gathered to her bosom one of the doves her naked son, Cupid, had shot out of the trees with his bow and arrow, was Olive. The white face and its high nose, beautiful as a head by Canova is beautiful; the corn-like tresses, piled on the top of the absurdly small head, were, beyond mistaking, Olive. Mrs. Barton stammered for words; Olive burst into tears.

'Oh, papa! how could you disgrace me in that way? Oh, I am disgraced! There's no use in my going to the Drawing-Room now.'

'My dear, my dear, I assure you I can change it with a flick of the brush. Admiration carried away by idea. I promise you I'll change it.'

'Come away. Olive—come away!' said Mrs. Barton, casting a look of burning indignation at her husband. 'If you cry like that, Olive, you won't be fit to be looked at, and Captain Hibbert is coming here to-night.'

When they had left the room Arthur looked inquiringly at Alice.

'This is very disagreeable,' he said; 'I really didn't think the likeness was so marked as all that; I assure you I didn't. I must do something to alter it—I might change the colour of the hair; but no, I can't do that, the entire

scheme of colour depends upon that. It is a great pity, for it is one of my best things; the features I might alter, and yet it is very hard to do so, without losing the character. I wonder if I were to make the nose straighter. Alice, dear, would you mind turning your head this way?'

'Oh! no, no, no, papa dear! You aren't going to put my face upon it!'
And she ran from the room smothered with laughter.

When this little quarrel was over and done, and Olive had ceased to consider herself a disgraced girl, the allusion that had been made to Mass as a means of meeting Captain Hibbert remained like a sting in Alice's memory. It surprised her at all sorts of odd moments, and often forced her, under many different impulses of mind, to reconsider the religious problem more passionately and intensely than she had ever done before. She asked herself if she had ever believed? Perhaps in very early youth, in a sort of vague, half-hearted way, she had taken for granted the usual traditional ideas of heaven and hell, but even then, she remembered, she used to wonder how it was that time was found for everything else but God. If He existed, it seemed to her that monks and nuns, or puritans of the sternest type, were alone in the right. And yet she couldn't quite feel that they were right. She had always been intensely conscious of the grotesque contrast between a creed like that of the Christian, and having dancing and French lessons, and going to garden-parties—yes, and making wreaths and decorations for churches at Christmas-time. If one only believed, and had but a shilling, surely the only logical way of spending it was to give it to the poor, or a missionary—and yet nobody seemed to think so. Priests and bishops did not do so, she herself did not want to do so; still, so long as Alice believed, she was unable to get rid of the idea. Teachers might say what they pleased, but the creed they taught spoke for itself, and prescribed an impossible ideal—an unsatisfactory ideal which aspired to no more than saving oneself after all.

Lies and all kinds of subterfuge were strictly against her character. But it was impossible for her to do or say anything when by so doing she knew she might cause suffering or give pain to anyone, even an enemy; and this defect in her character forced her to live up to what she deemed a lie. She had longed to tell the truth and thereby be saved the mummery of attending at Mass; but when she realized the consternation, the agony of

mind, it would cause the nuns she loved, she held back the word. But since she had left the convent she had begun to feel that her life must correspond to her ideas and she had determined to speak to her mother on this (for her) all-important subject—the conformity of her outer life to her inner life. The power to prevail upon herself to do what she thought wrong merely because she did not wish to wound other people's feelings was dying in her. Sooner or later she would have to break away; and as the hour approached when they should go to Mass to meet Captain Hibbert, the desire to be allowed to stay away became almost irresistible; and at the last moment it was only a foolish fear that such a declaration might interfere with her sister's prospects that stayed the words as they rose to her lips. She picked up her gloves, and a moment after found herself in the brougham—packed into it, watching the expressionless church-going faces of her family.

From afar the clanging of a high-swinging bell was heard, and the harsh reverberations, travelling over the rocky town-lands, summoned the cottagers to God. The peasants stepped aside to let the carriage pass. Peasants and landlords were going to worship in the same chapel, but it would seem from the proclamations pasted on the gate-posts that the house of prayer had gone over into the possession of the tenantry.

'Now, Arthur—do you hear?—you mustn't look at those horrid papers!' Mrs. Barton whispered to her husband. 'We must pretend not to see them. I wonder how Father Shannon can allow such a thing, making the house of God into—into I don't know what, for the purpose of preaching robbery and murder. Just look at the country-people—how sour and wicked they look! Don't they, Alice?'

'Goodness me!' said Olive, 'who in the world can those people be in our pew?'

Mrs. Barton trembled a little. Had the peasants seized the religious possessions of their oppressors? Dismissing the suspicion, she examined the backs indicated by Olive.

'Why, my dear, it is the Goulds; what can have brought them all this way?'

The expected boredom of the service was forgotten, and Olive shook hands warmly with Mrs. Gould and May.

'Why, you must have driven fifteen miles; where are your horses?'

'We took the liberty of sending the carriage on to Brookfield, and we are coming on to lunch with you—that is to say, if you will let us?' cried May.

'Of course, of course; but how nice of you!'

'Oh! we have such news; but it was courageous of us to come all this way. Have you seen those terrible proclamations?'

'Indeed we have. Just fancy a priest allowing his chapel to be turned into a political—political what shall I call it?'

'Bear-garden,' suggested May.

'And Father Shannon is going to take the chair at the meeting; he wouldn't get his dues if he didn't.'

'Hush, hush! they may hear you; but you were saying something about news.'

'Oh! don't ask me,' said Mrs. Gould; 'that's May's affair—such work!'

'Say quickly! what is it, May?'

'Look here, girls, I can't explain everything now; but we are going to give a ball—that is to say, all the young girls are going to subscribe. It will only cost us about three pounds apiece—that is to say, if we can get forty subscribers; we have got twenty already, and we hope you will join us. It is going to be called the Spinsters' Ball. But there is such a lot to be done: the supper to be got together, the decorations of the room—splendid room, the old schoolhouse, you know. We are going to ask you to let us take Alice away with us.'

The conversation was here interrupted by the appearance of the priest, a large fat man, whose new, thick-soled boots creaked as he ascended the steps of the altar. He was preceded by two boys dressed in white and black surplices, who rang little brass bells furiously; a great trampling of feet was

heard, and the peasants came into the church, coughing and grunting with monotonous, animal-like voices; and the sour odour of cabin-smoked frieze arose—it was almost visible in the great beams of light that poured through the eastern windows; whiffs of unclean leather, mingled with a smell of a sick child; and Olive and May, exchanging looks of disgust, drew forth cambric pocket-handkerchiefs, and in unison the perfumes of white rose and eau d'opoponax evaporated softly.

Just behind Alice a man groaned and cleared his throat with loud guffaws; she listened to hear the saliva fall: it splashed on the earthen floor. Farther away a circle of dried and yellowing faces bespoke centuries of damp cabins; they moaned and sighed, a prey to the gross superstition of the moment. One man, bent double, beat a ragged shirt with a clenched fist; the women of forty, with cloaks drawn over their foreheads and trailing on the ground in long black folds, crouched until only the lean, hard-worked hands that held the rosary were seen over the bench-rail.

The sermon came in the middle of Mass, and was a violent denunciation of the Ladies Cullen, who, it was stated, had pursued one poor boy until he took refuge in an empty house, the door of which he was fortunately enabled to fasten against them; they had sent a sick woman blankets, in which they had not neglected to enclose some tracts; amateur shopkeeping, winter clothing, wood, turf, presents of meal, wine, and potatoes were all vigorously attacked as the wiles of the Evil One to lead the faithful from the true Church.

CHAPTER 9

As they returned from church, a horseman was seen riding rapidly towards them. It was Captain Hibbert. The movement of his shoulders, as he reined in his mettlesome bay, was picturesque, and he was coaxingly and gushingly upbraided for neglect of his religious duties.

During lunch, curiosity rendered May and Mrs. Gould nearly speechless; but their carriage had not turned into the highroad, on its way home, when the latter melted into a shower of laudatory words and phrases:

'What a charming man Captain Hibbert is! No wonder you young ladies like the military. He is so good-looking—and such good manners. Don't you think so, Alice dear?'

'I think the Captain a very handsome man—indeed, I believe that there are not two opinions on the subject.'

'And Olive—I do not remember that I ever saw a more beautiful girl. Such hair! and her figure so sylph-like! I do not know what the young ladies will do—she will cut everybody out at the Castle!'

'I don't know about that,' said May jauntily; 'what one man will turn his nose up at, another will go wild after.'

Mrs. Gould did not answer; but her lips twitched, and Alice guessed she was annoyed that May could not express herself less emphatically. In a few moments the conversation was continued:

'At any rate, Captain Hibbert seems to think there is no one like Olive; and they'd make a handsome couple. What do you think, Alice? Is there any chance of there being a match?'

'I really can't tell you, Mrs. Gould. Olive, as you say, is a very beautiful girl, and I suppose Captain Hibbert admires her; but I don't think that either has, up to the present, thought of the matter more seriously.'

'You must admit, Alice, that he seems a bit gone on her,' said May, with a direct determination to annoy her mother.

'May, dear, you shouldn't talk in that slangy way; you never used to; you have picked it up from Mr. Scully. Do you know Mr. Scully, Alice? Violet's brother.'

'Yes, I met him the night we dined at Lord Dungory's.'

'Oh, of course you did. Well, I admit I don't like him; but May does. They go out training horses together. I don't mind that; but I wish she wouldn't imitate his way of talking. He has been a very wild young man.'

'Now, mother dear, I wish you would leave off abusing Fred. I have repeatedly told you that I don't like it.'

The acerbity of this remark was softened by May's manner, and, throwing her arms on her mother's shoulders, she commenced to coax and cajole her.

The Goulds were of an excellent county family. They had for certainly three generations lived in comfortable idleness, watching from their big square house the different collections of hamlets toiling and moiling, and paying their rents every gale day. It was said that some ancestor, whose portrait still existed, had gone to India and come back with the money that had purchased the greater part of the property. But, be this as it may, in Galway three generations of landlordism are considered sufficient repentance for shopkeeping in Gort, not to speak of Calcutta. Since then the family history had been stainless. Father and son had in turn put their horses out to grass in April, had begun to train them again in August, had boasted at the Dublin horse-show of having been out cub-hunting, had ridden and drunk hard from the age of twenty to seventy. But, by dying at fifty-five, the late squire had deviated slightly from the regular line, and the son and heir being only twelve, a pause had come in the hereditary life of the Goulds. In the interim, however, May had apparently resolved to keep up the traditions so far as her sex was supposed to allow her.

They lived in one of those box-like mansions, so many of which were built in Ireland under the Georges. On either side trees had been planted, and they stretched to the right and left like the wings of a theatre. In front there was

a green lawn; at the back a sloppy stableyard. The latter was May's especial delight, and when Mr. Scully was with them, it seemed impossible to induce her to leave it. He frequently rode over to Beechgrove, and towards the end of the afternoon it became easy to persuade him to stay to dinner. And, as the night darkened and the rain began to fall, the inhospitality of turning him out was insisted on by May, and Mrs. Gould sent up word that a room was to be prepared for him. Next morning he sent home for a change of things, and thus it was not infrequent for him to protract his visit to the extent of three or four days.

His great friend, Mrs. Manly—a lady who had jumped five feet, four months before the birth of her sixth child—had said that his was a 'wasted life,' and the phrase, summing up what most people thought of him, gained currency, and was now generally used whenever his conduct was criticized or impeached. After having been in London, where he spent some years in certain vague employments, and having contracted as much debt as his creditors would permit, and more than his father would pay, he had gone through the Bankruptcy Court, and returned home to drag through life wearily, through days and weeks so appallingly idle, that he often feared to get out of bed in the morning. At first his father had tried to make use of him in his agency business, and it was principally owing to Mr. Fred's bullying and insolent manners that Mr. Scully was now unable to leave his house unless accompanied by police.

Fred was about thirty years of age. His legs were long, his hands were bony, and 'stableyard' was written in capital letters on his face. He carried a *Sportsman* under his arm, a penny and a half-crown jingled in his pocket; and as he walked he lashed the trousers and boot, whose elegance was an echo of the old Regent Street days, with an ash-plant.

Such was the physiology of this being, and from it the psychology is easy to surmise: a complete powerlessness to understand that there was anything in life worth seeking except pleasure—and pleasure to Fred meant horses and women. Of earthly honour the greatest was to be well known in an English hunting country; and he was not averse to speaking of certain ladies of title, with whom he had been on intimate terms, and with whom, it was

said, he corresponded. On occasions he would read or recite poems, cut from the pages of the Society Journals, to his lady friends.

May, however, saw nothing but the outside. The already peeling-off varnish of a few years of London life satisfied her. Given a certain versatility in turning a complimentary phrase, the abundant ease with which he explained his tastes, which, although few, were pronounced, add to these the remnant of fashion that still lingered in his wardrobe—scarfs from the Burlington Arcade, scent from Bond Street, cracked patent-leather shoes and mended silk stockings—and it will be understood how May built something that did duty for an ideal out of this broken-down swell.

She was a girl of violent blood, and, excited by the air of the hunting-field, she followed Fred's lead fearlessly; to feel the life of the horse throbbing underneath her passioned and fevered her flesh until her mental exaltation reached the rushing of delirium. Then his evening manners fascinated her, and, as he leaned back smoking in the dining-room arm-chair, his patent-leather shoes propped up against the mantelpiece, he showed her glimpses of a wider world than she knew of—and the girl's eyes softened as she listened to his accounts of the great life he had led, the county-houses he had visited, and the legendary runs he had held his own in. She sympathized with him when he explained how hardly fate had dealt with him in not giving him £5,000 a year, to be spent in London and Northamptonshire.

He cursed Ireland as the most hideous hole under the sun; he frightened Mrs. Gould by reiterated assurances that the Land League would leave them all beggars; and, having established this point, he proceeded to develop his plan for buying young horses, training them, and disposing of them in the English market. Eventually he dismissed his audience by taking up the newspaper and falling asleep with the stump of a burned-out cigarette between his lips. After breakfast he was seen slouching through the laurels on his way to the stables. From the kitchen and the larder—where the girls were immersed in calculations anent the number of hams, tongues, and sirloins of beef that would be required—he could be seen passing; and as May stood on no ceremony with Alice, whistling to her dogs, and sticking both hands into the pockets of her blue dress, she rushed after him, the mud of the yard oozing through the loose, broken boots which she insisted

on wearing. Behind the stables there was a small field that had lately been converted into an exercise-ground, and there the two would stand for hours, watching a couple of goat-like colts, mounted by country lads—still in corduroy and hobnails—walking round and round.

Mrs. Gould was clearly troubled by this very plain conduct. Once or twice she allowed a word of regret to escape her, and Alice could see that she lived in awe of her daughter. And May, there was no doubt, was a little lawless when Fred was about her skirts; but when he was gone she returned to her old, glad, affectionate ways and to her work.

The girls delighted in each other's society, and the arrangements for their ball were henceforth a continual occupation. The number of letters that had to be written was endless. Sitting at either end of the table in the drawing-room, their pens scratched and their tongues rattled together; and, penetrated with the intimacy of home, all kinds of stories were told, and the whole country was passed in review.

'And do you know,' said May, raising her eyes from the letter she was writing, 'when this affair was first started mamma was afraid to go in for it; she said we'd find it hard to hunt up fifty spinsters in Galway.'

'I said fifty who would subscribe—a very different thing indeed.'

'Oh no, you didn't, mamma; you said there weren't fifty spinsters in Galway—a jolly lucky thing it would be if there weren't; wouldn't it, Alice?'

Alice was busy trying to disentangle a difficult sentence. Her startled face made May laugh.

'It isn't cheering, is it?'

'I didn't hear what you were saying,' she answered, a little vexed at being misunderstood. 'But fifty, surely, is a great number. Are there so many unmarried women in Galway?'

'I should think there are,' replied May, as if glorying in the fact. 'Who are there down your side of the country? Let's count. To begin with, there are

the Brennans—there are three of them, and all three are out of the running, distanced.'

'Now, May, how can you talk like that?' said Mrs. Gould, and she pulled up her skirt so that she could roast her fat thick legs more comfortably before the fire. There being no man present, she undid a button or two of her dress.

'You said so yourself the other day, mother.'

'No, I didn't, May, and I wish you wouldn't vex me. What I say I stand by, and I merely wondered why girls with good fortunes like the Brennans didn't get married.'

'You said the fact was there was no one to marry.'

'May, I will not allow you to contradict me!' exclaimed Mrs. Gould; and she grew purple to the roots of her white hair. 'I said the Brennans looked too high, that they wanted gentlemen, eldest sons of county families; but if they'd been content to marry in their own position of life they would have been married long ago.'

'Well, mother dear, there's no use being angry about it; let the thing pass. You know the Brennans, Alice; they are neighbours of yours.'

'Yes, Cecilia and I walked over to see them the other day; we had tea with them.'

'Their great hunting-ground is the Shelbourne Hotel—they take it in turns, a couple of them go up every six months.'

'How can you say such things, May? I will not suffer it.'

'I say it! I know nothing about it. I've only just come back from school; it is you who tell me these things when we are sitting here alone of an evening.'

Mrs. Gould's face again became purple, and she protested vehemently: 'I shall leave the room, May. I will not suffer it one moment longer. I can't think how it is you dare speak to me in that way; and, what is worse, attribute to me such ill-natured remarks.'

'Now, mother dear, don't bother, perhaps I did exaggerate. I am very sorry. But, there's a dear, sit down, and we won't say any more about it.'

'You do annoy one, May, and I believe you do it on purpose. And you know exactly what will be disagreeable to say, and you say it,' replied Mrs. Gould; and she raised her skirt so as to let the heat of the fire into her petticoats.

'Thank God that's over,' May whispered to Alice; 'but what were we talking about?'

'I think you were making out a list of the Galway spinsters,' said Alice, who could not help feeling a little amused, though she was sorry for Mrs. Gould.

'So we were,' cried May; 'we were speaking of the Brennans. Do you know their friends the Duffys? There are five of them. That's a nice little covey of love-birds; I don't think they would fly away if they saw a sportsman coming into the field.'

'I never heard a girl talk like that,' murmured Mrs. Gould, without raising her face from the fire, 'that wasn't punished for it. Perhaps, my lady, you will find it hard enough to suit yourself. Wait until you have done two or three Castle seasons. We'll see how you'll speak then.'

Without paying any attention to these maternal forebodings, May continued:

'Then there are Lord Rosshill's seven daughters; they are all maidens, and are likely to remain so.'

'Are they all unmarried?' asked Alice.

'Of course they are!' exclaimed Mrs. Gould; 'how could they be anything else? Didn't they all want to marry people in their father's position? And that wasn't possible. There're seven Honourable Miss Gores, and one Lord Rosshill—so they all remained in single blessedness.'

'Who's making ill-natured remarks now?' exclaimed May triumphantly.

'I am not making ill-natured remarks; I am only saying what's true. My advice to young girls is that they should be glad to have those who will take them. If they can't make a good marriage let them make a bad marriage; for,

believe me, it is far better to be minding your own children than your sister's or your brother's children. And I can assure you, in these days of competition, it is no easy matter to get settled.'

'It is the same now as ever it was, and there are plenty of nice young men. It doesn't prove, because a whole lot of old sticks of things can't get married, that I shan't.'

'I didn't say you wouldn't get married, May; I am sure that any man would be only too glad to have you; but what I say is that these grand matches that girls dream of aren't possible nowadays. Nice young men! I dare say; and plenty of them, I know them; young scamps without a shilling, who amuse themselves with a girl until they are tired of her, and then, off they go. Now, then, let's count up the good matches that are going in the county—'

At this moment the servant was heard at the door bringing in the tea.

'Oh! bother!' exclaimed Mrs. Gould, settling her dress hurriedly. The interval was full of secret irritation; and the three women watched the methodical butler place the urn on the table, turn up the lamp that was burning low, and bring chairs forward from the farthest corners.

'On your side of the county,' said Mrs. Gould, as soon as the door was closed, 'there is our brace of baronets, as they are called. But poor Sir Richard—I am afraid he is a bad case—and yet he never took to drink until he was five-and-thirty; and as for Sir Charles—of course there are great advantages, he has a very fine property; but still many girls might—and I can quite understand their not liking to marry him.'

'Why, Mrs. Gould, what is wrong with him?' Alice asked innocently.

'Don't you know?' said May, winking. 'Haven't you heard? But I forgot, he isn't your side of the county. He's married already; at least, so they say.'

'It is very sad, very sad, indeed,' murmured Mrs. Gould; 'he'd have been a great match.'

'And to whom is he married?' said Alice, whose curiosity was awakened by the air of mystery with which the baronet was surrounded.

'Well, he's not exactly married,' replied May, laughing; 'but he has a large family.'

'May, I will not allow it; it is very wrong of you, indeed, to talk like that—'

'Now, mother dear, don't get into a passion; where's the harm? The whole country knows it; Violet was talking of it to me only the other day. There isn't a man within a mile of us, so we needn't be on our P's and Q's.'

'And who is the mother of all these children?' Alice asked.

'A country-woman with whom he lives,' said May. 'Just fancy marrying a man with a little dirty crowd of illegitimate children running about the stable-yard!'

'The usual thing in such cases is to emigrate them,' said Mrs. Gould philosophically; and she again distended herself before the fire.

'Emigrate them!' cried May; 'if he emigrated them to the moon, I wouldn't marry such a man; would you, Alice?'

'I certainly wouldn't like to,' and her sense of humour being now tickled by the conversation, she added slyly: 'but you were counting up the good matches in the county.'

'Ah! so we were,' said the old lady. 'Well, there is Mr. Adair. I am sure no girl would wish for a better husband.'

'Oh, the old frump! why he must be forty if he's a day. You remember, Alice, it was he who took me down to dinner at Lord Dungory's. And he talked all the time of his pamphlet on the Amalgamation of the Unions, which was then in the hands of the printer; and the other in which he had pulled Mr. Parnell's ears, *Ireland under the Land League*, and the series of letters he was thinking of contributing to the *Irish Times* on high-farming *versus* peasant proprietors. Just fancy, Alice, living with such a man as that!'

'Well, I don't know what you girls think,' said Mrs. Gould, whose opinions were moods of mind rather than convictions, 'but I assure you he passes for being the cleverest man in the county; and it is said that Gladstone is only

waiting to give him a chance. But as you like; he won't do, so let him pass. Then there is Mr. Ryan, he ought to be well off; he farms thousands of acres.'

'One might as well marry a herdsman at once. Did you ever hear what he once said to a lady at a ball; you know, about the docket?'

Alice said that she had heard the story, and the conversation turned on Mr. Lynch. Mrs. Gould admitted that he was the worser of the two.

'He smells so dreadfully of whiskey,' said Alice timidly.

'Ah! you see she is coming out of her shell at last,' exclaimed May. 'I saw you weren't having a very good time of it when he took you down to dinner at Dungory Castle. I wonder they were asked. Fred told me that he had never heard of their having been there before.'

'It is very difficult to make up a number sometimes,' suggested Mrs. Gould; 'but they are certainly very coarse. I hear, when Mr. Ryan and Mr. Lynch go to fairs, that they sleep with their herdsman, and in Mayo there is a bachelor's house where they have fine times—whiskey-drinking and dancing until three o'clock in the morning.'

'And where do the ladies come from, May?' asked Alice, for she now looked on the girl as an inexhaustible fund of information.

'Plenty of ladies in the village,' replied Mrs. Gould, rubbing her shins complacently; 'that's what I used to hear of in my day, and I believe the custom isn't even yet quite extinct.'

'And are there no other beaux in the county? Does that exhaust the list?'

'Oh! no; but there's something against them all. There are a few landlords who live away, and of whom nobody knows anything. Then there are some boys at school; but they are too young; there is Mr. Reed, the dispensary doctor. Mr. Burke has only two hundred a year; but if his brother were to die he would be the Marquis of Kilcarney. He'd be a great match then, in point of position; but I hear the estates are terribly encumbered.'

'Has the present Marquis no children?' said Alice.

'He's not married,' said Mrs. Gould; 'he's a confirmed old bachelor. Just fancy, there's twenty years between the brothers. I remember, in old times, the present Marquis used to be the great beau at the Castle. I don't believe there was a girl in Dublin who didn't have a try at him. Then who else is there? I suppose I daren't mention the name of Mr. Fred Scully, or May will fly at me.'

'No, mother dear, I won't fly at you; but what is the use of abusing Fred?—we have known him all our lives. If he has spent his money he has done no worse than a hundred other young men. I know I can't marry him, and I am not in love with him; but I must amuse myself with something. I can't sit here all day listening to you lamenting over the Land League; and, after a certain number of hours, conjecturing whether Mickey Moran will or will not pay his rent becomes monotonous.'

'Now don't vex me, May; for I won't stand it,' said Mrs. Gould, getting angry. 'When you ask me for a new dress you don't think of what you are saying now. It was only the other day you were speaking to me of refurnishing this room. I should like to know how that's to be done if there was no one to look after Mickey Moran's rent?'

The girls looked round the large, dull room. Emaciated forms of narrow, antique sofas were seen dimly in the musty-smelling twilight. Screens worked in red and green wools stood in the vicinity of the fireplace, the walls were lined with black pictures, and the floor, hidden in dark shadow and sunken in places, conveyed an instant idea of damp and mildew.

'I think that something ought to be done,' said May. 'Just look at these limp curtains! Did you ever see anything so dreary? Are they brown, or red, or chocolate?'

'They satisfied your betters,' said Mrs. Gould, as she lighted her bedroom candle. 'Goodness me!' she added, glancing at the gilt clock that stood on the high, stucco, white-painted chimney-piece, amid a profusion of jingling glass candelabra, 'it is really half-past twelve o'clock!'

'Gracious me! there's another evening wasted; we must really try and be more industrious. It is too late to do anything further to-night,' said May. 'Come on, Alice, it is time to go to bed.'

CHAPTER 10

During the whole of the next week, until the very night of the ball, the girls hadn't a moment they could call their own. It was impossible to say how time went. There were so many things to think of—to remind each other of. Nobody knew what they had done last, or what they should do next. The principle on which the ball had been arranged was this: the forty-five spinsters who had agreed to bear the expense, which it was guaranteed would not exceed £3 10s. apiece, were supplied each with five tickets to be distributed among their friends. To save money, the supper had been provided by the Goulds and Manlys, and day after day the rich smells of roast beef and the salt vapours of boiling hams trailed along the passages, and ascended through the banisters of the staircases in Beech Grove and Manly Park. Fifty chickens had been killed; presents of woodcock and snipe were received from all sides; salmon had arrived from Galway; cases of champagne from Dublin. As a wit said, 'Circe has prepared a banquet and is calling us in.'

After much hesitation, a grammar-school, built by an enterprising landlord for an inappreciative population that had declined to support it, was selected as the most suitable location for the festivities. It lay about a mile from the town, and this was in itself an advantage. To the decoration of the rooms May and Fred diligently applied themselves. Away they went every morning, the carriage filled with yards of red cloth, branches of evergreen, oak and holly, flags and Chinese lanterns. You see them: Fred mounted on a high ladder, May and the maid striving to hand him a long garland which is to be hung between the windows. You see them leaning over the counter of a hardware shop, explaining how oblong and semicircular pieces of tin are to be provided with places for candles (the illumination of the room had remained an unsolved problem until ingenious Fred had hit upon this plan); you see them running up the narrow staircases, losing themselves in the twisty passages, calling for the housekeeper; you see them trying to decide which is the gentlemen's cloakroom, which the ladies', and wondering if

they will be able to hire enough furniture in the town to arrange a sitting-room for the chaperons.

As May said, 'We shall have them hanging about our heels the whole evening if we don't try to make them comfortable.'

At last the evening of the ball arrived, and, as the clocks were striking eight, dressed and ready to start, Alice knocked at May's door.

'What! dressed already?' said May, as she leaned towards the glass, illuminated on either side with wax candles, and looked into the whiteness of her bosom. She wore a costume of Prussian-blue velvet and silk; the bodice (entirely of velvet) was pointed back and front, and a berthe of moresque lace softened the contrast between it and the cream tints of the skin. These and the flame-coloured hair were the spirits of the shadowy bedchamber; whereas Alice, in her white corded-silk, her clear candid eyes, was the truer Madonna whose ancient and inferior prototype stood on her bracket in a forgotten corner.

'Oh! how nice you look!' exclaimed May; 'I don't think I ever saw anyone look so pure.'

Alice smiled; and, interpreting the smile, May said:

'I am afraid you don't think so much of me.'

'I am sure, May, you look very nice indeed, and just as you would like to look.'

To May's excitable mind it was not difficult to suggest a new train of thought, and she immediately proceeded to explain why she had chosen her present dress.

'I knew that you, and Olive, and Violet, and Lord knows how many others would be in white, and, as we shall all have to wear white at the Drawing-Room, I thought I'd appear in this. But isn't the whole thing delightful? I am engaged already for several dances, and I have been practising the step all day with Fred.' Then, singing to herself, she waltzed in front of the glass at the immediate risk of falling into the bath:

'"Five-and-forty spinsters baked in a pie!
When the pie was opened the maids began to sing,
Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the King!"

'Oh, dear, there's my garter coming down!' and, dropping on to the sofa, the girl hitched up the treacherous article of dress. 'And tell me what you think of my legs,' she said, advancing a pair of stately calves. 'Violet says they are too large.'

'They seem to me to be all right; but, May dear, you haven't got a petticoat on.'

'You can't wear petticoats with these tight dresses; one can't move one's legs as it is.'

'But don't you think you'll feel cold—catch cold?'

'Not a bit of it; no danger of cold when you have shammy-leather drawers.'

Then, overcome by her exuberant feelings, May began to sing: 'Five-and-forty spinsters baked in a pie,' etc. 'Five-and-forty,' she said, breaking off, 'have subscribed. I wonder how many will be married by this time next year? You know, I shouldn't care to be married all at once; I'd want to see the world a bit first. Even if I liked a man, I shouldn't care to marry him now; time enough in about three years' time, when one is beginning to get tired of flirtations and parties. I have often wondered what it must be like. Just fancy waking up and seeing a man's face on the pillow, or for—'

'No, no, May; I will not; you must not. I will not listen to these improper conversations!'

'Now, don't get angry, there's a dear, nice girl; you're worse than Violet, 'pon my word you are; but we must be off. It is a good half-hour's drive, and we shall want to be there before nine. The people will begin to come in about that time.'

Mrs. Gould was asleep in the drawing-room, and, as they awoke her, the sound of wheels was heard on the gravel outside. The girls hopped into the carriage. Mrs. Gould pulled herself in, and, blotted out in a far corner, thought vaguely of asking May not to dance more than three times with

Fred Scully; May chattered to Alice or looked impatiently through the misted windows for the familiar signs; the shadow of a tree on the sky, or the obscure outline of a farm-building that would tell how near they were to their destination. Suddenly the carriage turned to the right, and entered a sort of crescent. There were hedges on both sides, through which vague forms were seen scrambling, but May humorously explained that as no very unpopular landlord was going to be present, it was not thought that an attempt would be made to blow up the building; and, conscious of the beautiful night which hung like a blue mysterious flower above them, they passed through a narrow doorway draped with red-striped canvas.

'Now, mother, what do you think of the decorations? Do say a word of praise.'

'I've always said, May, that you have excellent taste.'

The school-hall and refectory had been transformed into ball and supper rooms, and the narrow passages intervening were hung with red cloth and green garlands of oak and holly. On crossing threads Chinese lanterns were wafted luminously.

'What taste Fred has!' said May, pointing to the huge arrangement that covered the end wall. 'And haven't my tin candelabra turned out a success? There will be no grease, and the room couldn't be better lighted.'

'But look!' said Alice, 'look at all those poor people staring in at the window. Isn't it dreadful that they, in the dark and cold, should be watching us dancing in our beautiful dresses, and in our warm bright room?'

'You don't want to ask them in, do you?'

'Of course not, but it seems very sinister; doesn't it seem so to you?'

'I don't know what you mean by its being sinister; but sinister or not sinister, it couldn't be helped; for if we had nailed up every window we should have simply died of heat.'

'I hope you won't think of opening the windows too soon,' said Mrs. Gould. 'You must think of us poor chaperons, who will be sitting still all night.'

Then, in the gaping silence, the three ladies listened to the melancholy harper and the lachrymose fiddlers who, on the *estrade* in the far corner, sat tuning their instruments. At last the people began to come in. The first were a few stray blackcoats, then feminine voices were heard in the passages, and necks and arms, green toilettes and white satin shoes, were seen passing and taking seats. Two Miss Duffys, the fattest of the four, were with their famous sister Bertha. Bertha was rarely seen in Galway; she lived with an aunt in Dublin, where her terrible tongue was dreaded by the *débutantes* at the Castle. In a yellow dress as loud and as hard as her voice, she stood explaining that she had come down expressly for the ball. Opposite, the Honourable Miss Gores made a group of five; and a few men who preferred consideration to amusement made their way towards them. The Brennans—Gladys and Zoe—as soon as they saw Alice, asked after Lord Dungory; and all the girls were anxious to see Violet, who they feared would seem thin in a low dress.

Hers was the charm of an infinite fragility. The bosom, whose curves were so faint that they were epicene, was set in a bodice of white *broché*, joining a skirt of white satin, with an overskirt of tulle, and the only touch of colour was a bunch of pink and white azaleas worn on the left shoulder. And how irresistibly suggestive of an Indian carved ivory were the wee foot, the thin arm, the slender cheek!

'How sweet you look, Violet,' said Alice, with frank admiration in her eyes.

'Thanks for saying so; 'tisn't often we girls pay each other compliments. But you, you do look ever so nice in that white silk. It becomes you perfectly.' And then, her thoughts straying suddenly from Alice's dress, she said:

'Do you see Mr. Burke over there? If his brother died he would be a marquis. Do you know him?'

'Yes; I met him at dinner at Dungory Castle.'

'Well, introduce him to me if you get a chance.'

'I am afraid you will find him stupid.'

'Oh, that doesn't matter; 'tis good form to be seen dancing with an Honourable. Do you know many men in the room?'

Alice admitted she knew no one, and, lapsing into silence, the girls scanned the ranks for possible partners. Poor Sir Richard, already very drunk, his necktie twisted under his right ear, was vainly attempting to say something to those whom he knew, or fancied he knew. Sir Charles, forgetful of the family at home, was flirting with a young girl whose mother was probably formulating the details of a new emigration scheme. Dirty Mr. Ryan, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his baggy trousers, whispered words of counsel to Mr. Lynch: a rumour had gone abroad that Captain Hibbert was going to hunt that season in Galway, and would want a couple of horses. Mr. Adair was making grotesque attempts to talk to a lady of dancing. On every side voices were heard speaking of the distances they had achieved: some had driven twenty, some thirty miles.

Already the first notes of the waltz had been shrieked out by the cornet, and Mr. Fred Scully, with May's red tresses on his shoulder, was about to start, when Mrs. Barton and Olive entered. Olive, in white silk, so tightly drawn back that every line of her supple thighs, and every plumpness of her superb haunches was seen; and the double garland of geraniums that encircled the tulle veiling seemed like flowers of blood scattered on virgin snow. Her beauty imposed admiration; and, murmuring assent, the dancers involuntarily drew into lines, and this pale, uncoloured loveliness, her high nose seen, and her silly laugh heard, by the side of her sharp, brown-eyed mother, passed down the room. Lord Dungory and Lord Rosshill advanced to meet them; a moment after Captain Hibbert and Mr. Burke came up to ask for dances; a waltz was promised to each. A circling crowd of black-coats instantly absorbed the triumphant picture; the violinist scraped, and the harper twanged intermittently; a band of fox-hunters arrived; girls had been chosen, and in the small space of floor that remained the white skirts and red tail coats passed and repassed, borne along Strauss's indomitable rhythms.

An hour passed: perspiration had begun to loosen the work of curling-tongs; dust had thickened the voices, but the joy of exercise was in every head and limb. A couple would rush off for a cup of tea, or an ice, and then, pale and

breathless, return to the fray. Mrs. Manly was the gayest. Pushing her children out of her skirts, she called upon May:

'Now then, May, have you a partner? We are going to have a real romp—we are going to have Kitchen Lancers. I'll undertake to see everybody through them.'

A select few, by signs, winks, and natural instinct, were drawn towards this convivial circle; but, notwithstanding all her efforts to make herself understood, Mrs. Manly was sadly hampered by the presence of a tub-like old lady who, with a small boy, was seeking a *vis-à-vis.*

'My dear May, we can't have her here, we are going to romp; anyone can see that. Tell her we are going to dance Kitchen Lancers.'

But the old lady could not be made to understand, and it was with difficulty that she was disentangled from the sixteen. At that moment the appearance of a waiter with a telegram caused the dancers to pause. Mr. Burke's name was whispered in front of the messenger; but he who, until that evening, had been Mr. Burke, was now the Marquis of Kilearney. The smiling mouth drooped to an expression of fear as he tore open the envelope. One glance was enough; he looked about the room like one dazed. Then, as his eyes fell upon the vague faces seen looking through the wet November pane, he muttered: 'Oh! you brutes, you brutes! so you have shot my brother!'

Unchecked, the harper twanged and the fiddler scraped out the tune of their Lancers. Few really knew what had happened, and the newly-made marquis had to fight his way through women who, in skin-tight dresses, danced with wantoning movements of the hips, and threw themselves into the arms of men, to be, in true kitchen-fashion, whirled round and round with prodigious violence.

Nevertheless, Lord Dungory and Lord Rosshill could not conceal their annoyance; both felt keenly that they had compromised themselves by remaining in the room after the news of so dreadful a catastrophe. But, as Mrs. Barton was anxious that her daughter's success should not be interfered with, nothing could be done but to express sympathy in

appropriate words. Nobody, Lord Dungory declared, could regret the dastardly outrage that had been committed more than he. He had known Lord Kilcarney many years, and he had always found him a man whom no one could fail to esteem. The earldom was one of the oldest in Ireland, but the marquisate did not go back farther than the last few years. Beaconsfield had given him a step in the peerage; no one knew why. A very curious man—most retiring—hated society. Then Lord Rosshill related an anecdote concerning an enormous water-jump that he and Lord Kilcarney had taken together; and he also spoke of the late Marquis's aversion to matrimony, and hinted that he had once refused a match which would have relieved the estates of all debt. But he could not be persuaded; indeed, he had never been known to pay any woman the slightest attention.

'It is to be hoped the present Marquis won't prove so difficult to please,' said Mrs. Gould. The remark was an unfortunate one, and the chaperons present resented this violation of their secret thoughts. Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Scully suddenly withdrew their eyes, which till then had been gently following their daughters through the figures of the dance, and, forgetting what they foresaw would be the cause of future enmity, united in condemning Mrs. Gould. Obeying a glance of the Lady Hamilton eyes, Lord Dungory said:

'*On cherche l'amour dans les boudoirs, non pas dans les cimetières, madame*.' Then he added (but this time only for the private ear of Mrs. Barton), '*La mer ne rend pas ses morts, mais la tombe nous donne souvent les écussons*.'

'Ha! ha! ha!' laughed Mrs. Barton, '*ce Milord, il trouve l'esprit partout*;' and her light coaxing laugh dissipated this moment of ball-room gloom.

And Alice? Although conscious of her deficiency in the *trois temps*, determined not to give in without an effort, she had suffered May to introduce her to a couple of officers; but to execute the step she knew theoretically, or to talk to her partner when he had dragged her, breathless, out of the bumping dances, she found to be difficult, so ignorant was she of hunting and of London theatres, and having read only one book of Ouida's, it would be vain for her to hope to interest her partner in literature. The other girls seemed more at home with their partners, and while she walked

with hers, wondering what she should say next, she noticed behind screens, under staircases, at the end of dark passages, girls whom she had known at St. Leonards incapable of learning, or even understanding the simplest lessons, suddenly transformed as if by magic into bright, clever, agreeable girls—capable of fulfilling that only duty which falls to the lot of women: of amusing men. But she could not do this, and must, therefore, resign herself to an aimless life of idleness, and be content in a few years to take a place amid the Miss Brennans, the Ladies Cullen, the Miss Duffys, the Honourable Miss Gores, those whom she saw sitting round the walls 'waiting to be asked,' as did the women in the old Babylonian Temple.

Such was her criticism of life as she sat wearily answering Mrs. Gould's tiresome questions, not daring to approach her mother, who was laughing with Olive, Captain Hibbert, and Lord Dungory. Waltz after waltz had been played, and her ears reeked with their crying strain. One or two men had asked her 'if they might have the pleasure'; but she was determined to try dancing no more, and had refused them. At last, at the earnest request of Mrs. Gould, she had allowed Dr. Reed to take her in to supper. He was an earnest-eyed, stout, commonplace man, and looked some years over thirty. Alice, however, found she could talk to him better than with her other partners, and when they left the clattering supper-room, where plates were being broken and champagne was being drunk by the gallon, sitting on the stairs, he talked to her till voices were heard calling for his services. A dancer had been thrown and had broken his leg. Alice saw something carried towards her, and, rushing towards May, whom she saw in the doorway, she asked for an explanation.

'Oh, nothing, nothing! he slipped down—has broken or sprained his ankle—that's all. Why aren't you dancing? Greatest fun in the world—just beginning to get noisy—and we are going it. Come on, Fred; come on!'

To the rowdy tune of the *Posthorn Polka* the different couples were dashing to and fro—all a little drunk with emotion and champagne; and, as if fascinated, Alice's eyes followed the shoulders of a tall, florid-faced man. Doing the *deux temps*, he traversed the room in two or three prodigious jumps. His partner, a tiny creature, looked a crushed bird within the circle of his terrible arm. Like a collier labouring in a heavy sea, a county doctor

lurched from side to side, overpowered by the fattest of the Miss Duffys. A thin, trim youth, with bright eyes glancing hither and thither, executed a complex step, and glided with surprising dexterity in and out, and through this rushing mad mass of light toilettes and flying coat-tails. Marks, too, of conflict were visible. Mr. Ryan had lost some portion of his garment in an obscure misunderstanding in the supper-room. All Mr. Lynch's studs had gone, and his shirt was in a precarious state; drunken Sir Richard had not been carried out of the room before strewing the floor with his necktie and fragments of his gloves. But these details were forgotten in the excitement. The harper twanged still more violently at his strings, the fiddler rasped out the agonizing tune more screechingly than ever; and as the delirium of the dance fevered this horde of well-bred people the desire to exercise, their animal force grew irresistible, and they charged, intent on each other's overthrow. In the onset, the vast shoulders and the *deux temps* were especially successful. One couple had gone down splendidly before him, another had fallen over the prostrate ones; and in a moment, in positions more or less recumbent, eight people were on the floor. Fears were expressed for the tight dresses, and Violet had shown more of her thin ankles than was desirable; but the climax was not reached until a young man, whose unsteady legs forbade him this part of the fun, established himself in a safe corner, and commenced to push the people over as they passed him. This was the signal for the flight of the chaperons.

'Now come along, Miss Barton,' cried Mrs. Barton, catching sight of Alice; 'and will you, Lord Dungory, look after Olive?'

Lord Rosshill collected the five Honourable Miss Gores, the Miss Brennans drew around Mrs. Scully, who, without taking the least notice of them, steered her way.

And so ended, at least so far as they were concerned, the ball given by the spinsters of the county of Galway. But the real end? On this subject much curiosity was evinced.

The secret was kept for a time, but eventually the story leaked out that, overcome by the recollections of still pleasanter evenings spent under the hospitable roof of the Mayo bachelor, Mr. Ryan, Mr. Lynch and Sir Charles

had brought in the maid-servants, and that, with jigs for waltzes, and whiskey for champagne, the gaiety had not been allowed to die until the day was well begun. Bit by bit and fragment by fragment the story was pieced together, and, in the secrecy of their bedrooms, with little smothered fits of laughter, the young ladies told each other how Sir Charles had danced with the big housemaid, how every time he did the cross-over he had slapped her on the belly; and then, with more laughter, they related how she had said: 'Now don't, Sir Charles, I forbid you to take such liberties.' And it also became part of the story that, when they were tired of even such pleasures as these, the gentlemen had gone upstairs to where the poor man with the broken leg was lying, and had, with whiskey and song, relieved his sufferings until the Galway train rolled into Ballinasloe.

CHAPTER 11

'Goodness me! Alice; how can you remain up here all alone, and by that smouldering fire? Why don't you come downstairs? Papa says he is quite satisfied with the first part of the tune, but the second won't come right; and, as mamma had a lot to say to Lord Dungory, I and Captain Hibbert sat out in the passage together. He told me he liked the way I arrange my hair. Do tell me, dear, if you think it suits me?'

'Very well, indeed; but what else did Captain Hibbert say to you?'

'Well, I'll tell you something,' replied Olive, suddenly turning from the glass. 'But first promise not to tell anyone. I don't know what I should do if you did. You promise?'

'Yes, I promise.'

'If you look as serious as that I shall never be able to tell you. It is very wicked, I know, but I couldn't help myself. He put his arm round my waist and kissed me. Now don't scold, I won't be scolded,' the girl said, as she watched the cloud gathering on her sister's face. 'Oh! you don't know how angry I was. I cried, I assure you I did, and I told him he had disgraced me. I couldn't say more than that, could I, now? and he promised never to do it again. It was the first time a man ever kissed me—I was awfully ashamed. No one ever attempted to kiss you, I suppose; nor can I fancy their trying, for your cross face would soon frighten them; but I can't look serious.'

'And did he ask you to marry him?'

'Oh! of course, but I haven't told mamma, for she is always talking to me about Lord Kilcarney—the little marquis, as she calls him; but I couldn't have him. Just fancy giving up dear Edward! I assure you I believe he would kill himself if I did. He has often told me I am the only thing worth living for.'

Alice looked at her beautiful sister questioningly, her good sense telling her that, if Olive was not intended for him, it was wrong to allow her to continue her flirtation. But for the moment the consideration of her own misfortunes

absorbed her. Was there nothing in life for a girl but marriage, and was marriage no more than a sensual gratification; did a man seek nothing but a beautiful body that he could kiss and enjoy? Did a man's desires never turn to mating with one who could sympathize with his hopes, comfort him in his fears, and united by that most profound and penetrating of all unions—that of the soul—be collaborator in life's work? 'Could no man love as she did?' She was ready to allow that marriage owned a material as well as a spiritual aspect, and that neither could be overlooked. Some, therefore, though their souls were as beautiful as the day, were, from purely physical causes, incapacitated from entering into the marriage state. Cecilia was such a one.

'Now what are you thinking about, Alice?'

'I do not know, nothing in particular; one doesn't know always of what one is thinking! Tell me what they are saying downstairs.'

'But I have told you; that Captain Hibbert preferred my hair like this, and I asked you if you thought he was right, but you hardly looked.'

'Yes, I did, Olive; I think the fashion suits you.'

'You won't tell anybody that I told you he kissed me? Oh, I had forgotten about Lord Rosshill; he has been fired at. Lord Dungory returned from Dublin, and he brought the evening paper with him. It is full of bad news.'

'What news?' Alice asked, with a view to escaping from wearying questions; and Olive told her a bailiff's house had been broken into by an armed gang. 'They dragged him out of his bed and shot him in the legs before his own door. And an attempt has been made to blow up a landlord's house with dynamite. And in Queen's County shots have been fired through a dining-room window—now, what else? I am telling you a lot; I don't often remember what is in the paper. No end of hayricks were burnt last week, and some cattle have had their tails cut off, and a great many people have been beaten. Lord Dungory says he doesn't know how it will all end unless the Government bring in a Coercion Act. What do you think, Alice?'

Alice dropped some formal remarks, and Olive hoped that the state of the country would not affect the Castle's season. She didn't know which of the St. Leonard girls would be married first. She asked Alice to guess. Alice said

she couldn't guess, and fell to thinking that nobody would ever want to marry her. It was as if some instinct had told her, and she could not drive the word 'celibacy' out of her ears. It seemed to her that she was *fichue à jamais*, as that odious Lord Dungory would say. She did not remember that she had ever been so unhappy before, and it seemed to her that she would always be unhappy, *fichue à jamais*.

But to her surprise she awoke in a more cheerful mood, and when she came down to breakfast Mr. Barton raised his head from the newspaper and asked her if she had heard that Lord Rosshill had been fired at.

'Yes, father. Olive told me so overnight;' and the conversation turned on her headache, and then on the state of Ireland.

Mrs. Barton asked if this last outrage would prove sufficient to force the Government to pass a new Coercion Bill.

'I wish they would put me at the head of an army,' Mr. Barton said, whose thoughts had gone back to his picture—*Julius Caesar overturning the Altars of the Druids*.

'Papa would look fine leading the landlords against the tenants dressed in Julius Caesar's big red cloak!' cried Mrs. Barton, turning back as she glided out of the room, already deep in consideration of what Milord would like to eat for luncheon and the gown she would wear that afternoon. Mr. Barton threw the newspaper aside and returned to his studio; and in the girls' room Olive and Barnes, the bland, soft smiling maid, began their morning gossip. Whatever subject was started it generally wound round to Captain Hibbert. Alice had wearied of his name, but this morning she pricked up her ears. She was surprised to hear her sister say she had forbidden him ever to visit the Lawlers. At that moment the dull sound of distant firing broke the stillness of the snow.

'I took good care to make Captain Hibbert promise not to go to this shooting-party the last time I saw him.'

'And what harm was there in his going to this shooting-party?' said Alice.

'What harm? I suppose, miss, you have heard what kind of woman Mrs. Lawler is? Ask Barnes,'

'You shouldn't talk in this way, Olive. We know well enough that Mrs. Lawler was not a lady before she married; but nothing can be said against her since.'

'Oh! can't there, indeed? You never heard the story about her and her steward? Ask Barnes.'

'Oh! don't miss; you shouldn't really!' said the maid. 'What will Miss Alice think?'

'Never mind what she thinks; you tell her about the steward and all the officers from Gort.'

And then Mrs. Lawler's flirtations were talked of until the bell rang for lunch. Milord and Mrs. Barton had just passed into the dining-room, and Alice noticed that his eyes often wandered in the direction of the policemen walking up and down the terrace. He returned more frequently than was necessary to the attempt made on Lord Rosshill's life, and it was a long time before Mrs. Barton could persuade him to drop a French epigram. At last, in answer to her allusions to knights of old and *la galanterie*, the old lord could only say: '*L'amour est comme l'hirondelle; quand l'heure sonne, en dépit du danger, tous les deux partent pour les rivages célestes.*' A pretty conceit; but Milord was not *en veine* that morning. The Land League had thrown its shadow over him, and it mattered little how joyously a conversation might begin, too soon a reference was made to Griffith's valuation, or the possibility of a new Coercion Act.

In the course of the afternoon, however, much to the astonishment of Milord and Mrs. Barton in the drawing-room and the young ladies who were sitting upstairs doing a little needlework, a large family carriage, hung with grey trappings and drawn by two powerful bay horses, drove up to the hall-door.

A gorgeous footman opened the door, and, with a momentary display of exquisite ankle, a slim young girl stepped out.

'I wonder,' said Mrs. Barton, 'that Mrs. Scully condescends to come out with anything less than four horses and outriders.'

'*Elle veut acheter la distinction comme elle vendait du jambon—à faux poids*,' said Lord Dungory.

'Yes, indeed; and to think that the woman we now receive as an equal once sold bacon and eggs behind a counter in Galway!'

'No, it was not she; it was her mother.'

'Well, she was hanging on to her mother's apron-strings at the time. You may depend upon it, this visit is not for nothing; something's in the wind.'

A moment after, looking more large and stately than ever, Mrs. Scully sailed into the room. Mrs. Barton was delighted to see her. It was so good of her to come, and in such weather as this; and, after having refused lunch and referred to the snow and the horses' feet, Mrs. Scully consented to lay aside her muff and boa. The young ladies withdrew, when the conversation turned on the state of the county and Lord Rosshill's fortunate escape. As they ascended the stairs they stopped to listen to Mr. Barton, who was singing *A che la morte*.

'The Land League doesn't seem to affect Mr. Barton's spirits,' said Violet. 'What a beautiful voice he has!'

'Yes, and nobody designs pictures like papa; but he wouldn't study when he was young, and he says he hasn't time now on account of—'

'Now, Alice, for goodness' sake don't begin. I am sick of that Land League. From morning till night it is nothing but coercion and Griffith's valuation.'

Violet and Alice laughed at Olive's petulance, and, opening a door, the latter said:

'This is our room, and it is the only one in the house where tenants, land, and rent are never spoken of.'

'That's something to know,' said Violet. 'I agree with Olive. If things are bad, talking of them won't make them any better.'

Barnes rose from her seat.

'Now don't go, Barnes. Violet, this is Barnes, our maid.'

There was about Barnes a false air of homeliness; but in a few moments it became apparent that her life had been spent amid muslins, confidences, and illicit conversations. Now, with motherly care she removed a tulle skirt from the table, and Violet, with quick, nervous glances, examined the room. In the middle of the floor stood the large work-table, covered with a red cloth. There was a stand with shelves, filled on one side with railway novels, on the other with worsted work, cardboard-boxes, and rags of all kinds. A canary-cage stood on the top, and the conversation was frequently interrupted by the piercing trilling of the little yellow bird.

'You're very comfortable. I should like to come and work here with you. I am sick of Fred's perpetual talk about horses; and if he isn't talking of them his conversation is so improper that I can't listen to it.'

'Why, what does he say?' said Olive, glancing at Barnes, who smiled benignly in the background.

'Oh, I couldn't repeat what he says! it's too dreadful. I have to fly from him. But he's always at the Goulds' now; he and May are having a great "case".'

'Oh yes, I know!' said Olive; 'they never left each other at our ball. Don't you remember?'

'Of course I do. And what a jolly ball that was! I never amused myself so much in my life. If the balls at the Castle are as good, they will do. But wasn't it sad, you know, about poor Lord Kilcarney receiving the news of his brother's murder just at that moment? I can see him now, rushing out of the room.'

Violet's manner did not betoken in the least that she thought it sad, and after a pause she said:

'But you haven't shown me your dresses. I loved the one you wore at the ball.'

'Yes, yes: I must show you my cream-coloured dinner-dress, and my ruby dress, too. You haven't seen that either,' cried Olive. 'Come along, Barnes, come along.'

'But I see you use your bedroom, too, as a sitting-room?' she said, as she glanced at the illustrations in a volume of Dickens and threw down a volume of Shelley's poetry.

'Oh, that's this lady, here!' cried Olive. 'She says she cannot read in our room on account of my chattering, so she comes in here to continue her schooling. I should've thought that she had had enough of it; and she makes the place in such a mess with bits of paper. Barnes is always tidying up after her.'

Alice laughed constrainedly, and taking the cream-coloured dress out of the maid's hands, Olive explained why it suited her. Violet had much to say concerning the pink trimming, and the maid referred to her late mistress's wardrobes. The ruby dress, however, drew forth many little cries of admiration. Then an argument was started concerning the colour of hair, and, before the glass with hairpins and lithe movements of the back and loins, the girls explained their favourite coiffures.

'But, Alice, you haven't opened your lips, and you haven't shown me your dresses.'

'Barnes will show you my dinner-frocks, but I don't think as much about what I wear as Olive does.'

Violet quickly understood, but, with clever dissimulation, she examined and praised the black silk trimmed with red ribbons. 'She's angry because we didn't look at her dresses first,' Olive interjected; and Violet came to Alice's rescue with a question: 'Had they heard lately of Lord Kilcarney?' Olive protested that she would sooner die than accept such a little red-haired thing as that for a husband, and Violet laughed delightedly.

'Anyway, you haven't those faults to find with a certain officer, now stationed at Gort, who, if report speaks truly, is constantly seen riding towards Brookfield.'

'Well, what harm is there in that?' said Olive, for she did not feel quite sure in her mind if she should resent or accept the gracious insinuation.

'None whatever; I only wish such luck were mine. What with the weather, and papa's difficulties with his herdsmen and his tenants, we haven't seen a soul for the last month. I wish a handsome young officer would come galloping up our avenue some day.'

Deceived, Olive abandoned herself to the plausive charm of Violet's manner, and at different times she spoke of her flirtation, and told many little incidents concerning it—what he had said to her, how she had answered him, and how, the last time they had met, he had expressed his sorrow at being unable to call to see her until the end of the week.

'He is shooting to-day at the Lawlers',' said Violet.

'That I'm sure he's not,' said Olive, with a triumphant toss of her fair head; 'for I forbade him to go there.'

Violet smiled, and Olive insisted on an explanation being given.

'Well,' exclaimed the girl, more bluntly than she had yet spoken, 'because as we were coming here we saw him walking along one of the covers. There were a lot of gentlemen, and, just fancy, that dreadful woman, Mrs. Lawler, was with them, marching along, just like a man, and a gun under her arm.'

'I don't believe you; you only say that to annoy me,' cried Olive, trembling with passion.

'I am not in the habit of telling lies, and don't know why you should think I care to annoy you,' Violet replied, a little too definitely; and, unable to control her feelings any longer, Olive walked out of the room. Barnes folded up and put away the dresses, and Alice sought for words that would attenuate the unpleasantness of the scene. But Violet was the quicker with her tongue, and she poured out her excuses. 'I am so sorry,' she said, 'but how could I know that she objected to Captain Hibbert's shooting at the Lawlers', or that he had promised her not to go there? I am very sorry, indeed.'

'Oh I it doesn't matter,' said Alice hesitatingly. 'You know how excitable Olive is. I don't think she cares more about Captain Hibbert than anyone else; she was only a little piqued, you know—the surprise, and she particularly dislikes the Lawlers. Of course, it is very unpleasant for us to live so near without being able to visit them.'

'Yes, I understand. I am very sorry. Do you know where she is gone? I shouldn't like to go away without seeing her.'

'I am afraid she has shut herself up in her room. Next time you meet, she'll have forgotten all about it.'

Elated, but at the same time a little vexed, Violet followed Alice down to the drawing-room.

'My dear child, what a time you have been! I thought you were never coming downstairs again,' said Mrs. Scully. 'Now, my dear Mrs. Barton, we really must. We shall meet again, if not before, at the Castle.'

Then stout mother and thin daughter took their leave; but the large carriage, with its sumptuous grey trappings, had not reached the crest of the hill when, swiftly unlocking her door, Olive rushed to Barnes for sympathy.

'Oh the spiteful little cat!' she exclaimed. 'I know why she said that; she's jealous of me. You heard her say she hadn't a lover. I don't believe she saw Edward at all, but she wanted to annoy me. Don't you think so, Barnes?'

'I'm sure she wanted to annoy you, miss. I could see it in her eyes. She has dreadful eyes—those cold, grey, glittering things. I could never trust them. And she hasn't a bit on her bones. I don't know if you noticed, miss, that when you were counting your petticoats she was ashamed of her legs? There isn't a bit on them; and I saw her look at yours, miss.'

'Did you really? She's like a rail; and as spiteful as she's lean. At school nothing made her so angry as when anyone else was praised; and you may be sure that jealousy brought her here. She heard how Captain Hibbert admired me, and so came on purpose to annoy me.'

'You may be sure it was that, miss,' said Barnes, as she bustled about, shutting and opening a variety of cardboard boxes.

For a moment the quarrel looked as if it were going to end here; but in Olive's brain thoughts leaped as quickly back as forward, and she startled Barnes by declaring wildly that, if Edward had broken his promise to her, she would never speak to him again.

'I don't believe that Violet would have dared to say that she saw him if it weren't true.'

'Well, miss, a shooting-party's but a shooting-party, and there was a temptation, you know. A gentleman who is fond of sport—'

'Yes; but it isn't for the shooting he is gone. 'Tis for Mrs. Lawler. I know it is.'

'Not it, miss. Always admitting that he is there, how could he think of Mrs. Lawler when he's always thinking of you? And, besides, out in the snow, too. Now, I wouldn't say anything if the weather was fine—like we had last June—and they giving each other meetings out in the park—'

'But what did you tell me about the steward, and how Mrs. Lawler fell in love with all the young men who come to her house? And what did the housemaid tell you of the walking about the passages at night and into each other's rooms? Oh, I must know if he's there!'

'I'll find out in the morning, miss. The coachman is sure to know who was at the shooting-party.'

'In the morning! It will be too late then! I must know this evening!' exclaimed Olive, as she walked about the room, her light brain now flown with jealousy and suspicion. 'I'll write him a letter,' she said suddenly, 'and you must get someone to take it over.'

'But there's nobody about. Why, it is nearly seven o'clock,' said Barnes, who had begun to realize the disagreeableness and danger of the adventure she was being rapidly drawn into.

'If you can't, I shall go myself,' cried Olive, as she seized some paper and a pencil belonging to Alice, and sat down to write a note:

'DEAR CAPTAIN HIBBERT,
'If you have broken your promise to me about not going to the Lawlers' I shall never be able to forgive you!' (Then, as through her perturbed mind the thought gleamed that this was perhaps a little definite, she added): 'Anyhow, I wish to see you. Come at once, and explain that what I have heard about you is not true. I cannot believe it.

'Yours ever and anxiously,
'OLIVE BARTON.'

'Now somebody must take this over at once to the Lawlers.'

'But, miss, really at this hour of night, too, I don't know of anyone to send! Just think, miss, what would your ma say?'

'I don't care what mamma says. It would kill me to wait till morning! Somebody must go. Why can't you go yourself? It isn't more than half a mile across the fields. You won't refuse me, will you? Put on your hat, and go at once.'

'And what will the Lawlers say when they hear of it, miss? and I am sure that if Mrs. Barton ever hears of it she will—'

'No, no, she won't! for I could not do without you, Barnes. You have only to ask if Captain Hibbert is there, and, if he is there, send the letter up, and wait for an answer. Now, there's a dear! now do go at once. If you don't, I shall go mad! Now, say you will go, or give me the letter. Yes, give it to me, and I'll go myself. Yes, I prefer to go myself.'

CHAPTER 12

The result of this missive was that next morning the servants whispered that someone had been about the house on the preceding evening. Olive and Barnes sat talking for hours; and one day, unable to keep her counsel any longer, Olive told her sister what had happened. The letter that Barnes had taken across the field for her had, she declared, frightened Edward out of his senses; he had come rushing through the snow, and had spoken with her for full five minutes under her window. He loved her to distraction; and the next day she had received a long letter, full of references to his colonel, explaining how entirely against his will and desire he had been forced to accept the invitation to go and shoot at the Lawlers'. Alice listened quietly; as if she doubted whether Captain Hibbert would have died of consumption or heartache if Olive had acted otherwise, and then advised her sister quietly; and, convinced that her duty was to tell her mother everything, she waited for an occasion to speak. Mr. Barton was passing down the passage to his studio, Olive was racing upstairs to Barnes, Mrs. Barton had her hand on the drawing-room door; and she looked round surprised when she saw that her daughter was following her.

'I want to speak to you, mamma.'

'Come in, dear.'

Alice shut the door behind her.

'How bare and untidy the room looks at this season of the year; really you and Olive ought to go into the conservatory and see if you can't get some geraniums.'

'Yes, mamma, I will presently; but it was about Olive that I wanted to speak,' said Alice, in a strained and anxious way.

'What a bore that girl is with her serious face,' thought Mrs. Barton; but she laughed coaxingly, and said:

'And what has my grave-faced daughter to say—the learned keeper of the family's wisdom?'

Even more than Olive's—for they were less sincere—Mrs. Barton's trivialities jarred, and Alice's ideas had already begun to slip from her, and feeling keenly the inadequacy of her words, she said:

'Well, mamma, I wanted to ask you if Olive is going to marry Captain Hibbert?'

It was now for Mrs. Barton to look embarrassed.

'Well, really, I don't know; nothing is arranged—I never thought about the matter. What could have made you think she was going to marry Captain Hibbert? In my opinion they aren't at all suited to each other. Why do you ask me?'

'Because I have heard you speak of Lord Kilcarney as a man you would like Olive to marry, and, if this be so, I thought I had better tell you about Captain Hibbert. I think she is very much in love with him.'

'Oh! nonsense; it is only to kill time. A girl must amuse herself somehow.'

It was on Alice's lips to ask her mother if she thought such conduct quite right, but, checking herself, she said:

'I am afraid people are talking about it, and that surely is not desirable.'

'But why do you come telling me these stories?' she said.

'Why, mamma, because I thought it right to do so.'

The word 'right' was unpleasant; but, recovering her temper, which for years before had never failed her, Mrs. Barton returned to her sweet little flattering manners.

'Of course, of course, my dear girl; but you do not understand me. What I mean to say is, Have you any definite reason for supposing that Olive is in love with Captain Hibbert, and that people are talking about it?'

'I think so, mamma,' said the girl, deceived by this expression of goodwill. 'You remember when the Scullys came here? Well, Violet was up in our

room, and we were showing her our dresses; the conversation somehow turned on Captain Hibbert, and when Violet said that she had seen him that day, as they came along in the carriage, shooting with the Lawlers, Olive burst out crying and rushed out of the room. It was very awkward. Violet said she was very sorry and all that, but—'

'Yes, yes, dear; but why was Olive angry at hearing that Captain Hibbert went out shooting with the Lawlers?'

'Because, it appears, she had previously forbidden him to go there, you know, on account of Mrs. Lawler.'

'And what happened then?'

'Well, that's the worst of it. I don't mean to say it was all Olive's fault; I think she must have lost her head a little, for she sent Barnes over that evening to the Lawlers' with a note, telling Captain Hibbert that he must come at once and explain. It was eleven o'clock at night, and they had a long talk through the window.'

Mrs. Barton did not speak for some moments. The peat-fire was falling into masses of white ash, and she thought vaguely of putting on some more turf; then her attention was caught by the withering ferns in the flower-glasses, then by the soaking pasture-lands, then by the spiky branches of the chestnut-trees swinging against the grey, dead sky.

'But tell me, Alice,' she said at last, 'for of course it is important that I should know—do you think that Olive is really in love with Captain Hibbert?'

'She told me, as we were going to bed the other night, mamma, that she never could care for anyone else; and—and'

'And what, dear?'

'I don't like to betray my sister's confidence,' Alice answered, 'but I'm sure I had better tell you all: she told me that he had kissed her many times, and no later than yesterday, in the conservatory.'

'Indeed! you did very well to let me know of this,' said Mrs. Barton, becoming as earnestly inclined as her daughter Alice. 'I am sorry that Olive

was so foolish; I must speak to her about it. This must not occur again. I think that if you were to tell her to come down here—'

'Oh no, mamma; Olive would know at once that I had been speaking about her affairs; you must promise me to make only an indirect use of what I have told you.'

'Of course—of course, my dear Alice; no one shall ever know what has passed between us. You can depend upon me. I will not speak to Olive till I get a favourable opportunity. And now I have to go and see after the servants. Are you going upstairs?'

On Alice, tense with the importance of the explanation, this dismissal fell not a little chillingly; but she was glad that she had been able to induce her mother to consider the matter seriously.

A few minutes passed dreamily, almost unconsciously; Mrs. Barton threw two sods of turf on the fire, and resumed her thinking. Her first feeling of resentment against her eldest daughter had vanished; and she now thought solely of the difficulty she was in, and how she could best extricate herself from it. 'So Olive was foolish enough to allow Captain Hibbert to kiss her in the conservatory!' Mrs. Barton murmured to herself. The morality of the question interested her profoundly. She had never allowed anyone to kiss her before she was married; and she was full of pity and presentiment for the future of a young girl who could thus compromise herself. But in Olive's love for Captain Hibbert Mrs. Barton was concerned only so far as it affected the labour and time that would have to be expended in persuading her to cease to care for him. That this was the right thing to do Mrs. Barton did not for a moment doubt. Her daughter was a beautiful girl, would probably be the belle of the season; therefore to allow her, at nineteen, to marry a thousand-a-year captain would be, Mrs. Barton thought, to prove herself incapable, if not criminal, in the performance of the most important duty of her life. Mrs. Barton trembled when she thought of the sending of the letter: if the story were to get wind in Dublin, it might wreck her hopes of the marquis. Therefore, to tell Barnes to leave the house would be fatal. Things must be managed gently, very gently. Olive must be talked to, how far her heart was engaged in the matter must be found out, and she must be

made to see the folly, the madness of risking her chance of winning a coronet for the sake of a beggarly thousand-a-year captain. And, good heavens! the chaperons: what would they say of her, Mrs. Barton, were such a thing to occur? Mrs. Barton turned from the thought in horror; and then, out of the soul of the old coquette arose, full-fledged, the chaperon, the satellite whose light and glory is dependent on that of the fixed star around which she revolves.

At this moment Olive, her hands filled with ferns, bounced into the room.

'Oh! here you are, mamma! Alice told me you wanted a few ferns and flowers to brighten up the room.'

'I hope you haven't got your feet wet, my dear; if you have, you had better go up at once and change.'

Olive was now more than ever like her father. Her shoulders had grown wider, and the blonde head and scarlet lips had gained a summer brilliance and beauty.

'No, I am not wet,' she said, looking down at her boots; 'it isn't raining; but if it were Alice would send me out all the same.'

'Where is she now?'

'Up in her room reading, I suppose; she never stirs out of it. I thought when we came home from school the last time that we would be better friends; but, do you know what I think: Alice is a bit sulky. What do you think, mamma?'

To talk of Alice, to suggest that she was a little jealous, to explain the difficulty of the position she occupied, to commiserate and lavish much pity upon her was, no doubt, a fascinating subject of conversation, it had burned in the brains of mother and daughter for many months; but, too wise to compromise herself with her children, Mrs. Barton resisted the temptation to gratify a vindictiveness that rankled in her heart. She said:

'Alice has not yet found her *beau cavalier*; we shall see when we are at the Castle if she will remain faithful to her books. I am afraid that Miss Alice will then prefer some gay, dashing young officer to her *Marmion* and her *Lara*.'

'I should think so, indeed. She says that the only man she cares to speak to in the county is Dr. Reed, that little frumpy fellow with his medicines. I can't understand her. I couldn't care for anyone but an officer.'

This was the chance Mrs. Barton required, and she instantly availed herself of it. 'The red-coat fever!' she exclaimed, waving her hands. 'There is no one like officers *pour faire passer le temps*'

'Yes, ma!' cried Olive, proud of having understood so much French; 'doesn't time pass quickly with them?'

'It flies, my dear, and they fly away, and then we take up with another. They are all nice; their profession makes them that.'

'But some are nicer than others; for instance, I am sure they are not all as handsome as Captain Hibbert.'

'Oh! indeed they are,' said Mrs. Barton, laughing; 'wait until we get to Dublin; you have no idea what charming men we shall meet there. We shall find a lord or an earl, or perhaps a marquis, who will give a coroneted carriage to my beautiful girl to drive in.'

Olive tossed her head, and her mother looked at her admiringly, and there was love in the sweet brown deceit of the melting eyes; a hard, worldly affection, but a much warmer one than any Mrs. Barton could feel for Alice, in whom she saw nothing but failure, and in the end spiritual spinsterhood. After a pause she said:

'What a splendid match Lord Kilcarney would be, and where would he find a girl like my Olive to do the honours of his house?'

'Oh! mamma, I never could marry him!'

'And why not, my dear girl?'

'I don't know, he's a silly little fool; besides, I like Captain Hibbert.'

'Yes, you like Captain Hibbert, so do I; but a girl like you could not throw herself away on a thousand-a-year captain in the army.'

'And why not, mamma?' said Olive, who had already begun to whimper; 'Captain Hibbert loves me, I know, very dearly, and I like him; he is of very good family, and he has enough to support me.'

The moment was a supreme one, and Mrs. Barton hesitated to strike and bring the matter to a head. Would it be better, she asked herself, to let things go by and use her influence for the future in one direction? After a brief pause she decided on the former course. She said:

'My dear child, neither your father nor myself could ever consent to see you throw yourself away on Captain Hibbert. I am afraid you have seen too much of him, and have been led away into caring for him. But take my word for it, a girl's love is only *à fleur de peau*. When you have been to a few of the Castle balls you'll soon forget all about him. Remember, you are not twenty yet; it would be madness.'

'Oh! mamma, I didn't think you were so cruel!' exclaimed Olive, and she rushed out of the room.

Mrs. Barton made no reply, but her resolve was rapidly gaining strength in her mind: Olive's flirtation was to be brought at once to a close. Captain Hibbert she would admit no more, and the girl was in turn to be wheedled and coerced.

Nor did Mrs. Barton for a moment doubt that she would succeed; she had never tasted failure; and she stayed only a moment to regret, for she was too much a woman of the world to waste time in considering her mistakes. The needs of the moment were ever present to her, and she now devoted herself entirely to the task of consoling her daughter. Barnes, too, was well instructed, and henceforth she spoke only of the earls, dukes, lords, and princes who were waiting for Olive at the Castle.

In the afternoon Mrs. Barton called Olive into the drawing-room, where woman was represented as a triumphant creature walking over the heads and hearts of men. '*Le génie de la femme est la beauté*,' declared Milord, and again: '*Le coeur de l'homme ne peut servir que de piédestal pour l'idole.*'

'Oh! Milord, Milord!' said Mrs. Barton. 'So in worshipping us you are idolaters. I'm ashamed of you.'

'Pardon, pardon, madame: *Devant un amour faux on est idolâtre, mais à l'autel d'un vrai, on est chrétien*.'

And in such lugubrious gaiety the girl grieved. Captain Hibbert had been refused admission; he had written, but his letters had been intercepted; and holding them in her hand Mrs. Barton explained she could not consent to such a marriage, and continued to dazzle the girl with visions of the honours that awaited the future Marchioness of Kilcarney. 'An engaged girl is not noticed at the Castle. You don't know what nice men you'll meet there; have your fun out first,' were the arguments most frequently put forward; and, in the excitement of breaking off Olive's engagement, even the Land League was forgotten. Olive hesitated, but at length allowed herself to be persuaded to at least try to captivate the marquis before she honoured the captain with her hand. No sooner said than done. Mrs. Barton lost not a moment in writing to Captain Hibbert, asking him to come and see them the following day, if possible, between eleven and twelve. She wanted to speak to him on a matter which had lately come to her knowledge, and which had occasioned her a good deal of surprise.

CHAPTER 13

Mr. Barton could think of nothing but the muscles of the strained back of a dying Briton and a Roman soldier who cut the cords that bound the white captive to the sacrificial oak; but it would be no use returning to the studio until these infernal tenants were settled with, and he loitered about the drawing-room windows looking pale, picturesque, and lymphatic. His lack of interest in his property irritated Mrs. Barton. 'Darling, you must try to get them to take twenty per cent.' At times she strove to prompt the arguments that should be used to induce the tenants to accept the proffered abatement, but she could not detach her thoughts from the terrible interview she was about to go through with Captain Hibbert. She expected him to be violent; he would insist on seeing Olive, and she watched wearily the rain dripping from the wooden edges of the verandah. The last patches of snow melted, and at last a car was seen approaching, closely followed by another bearing four policemen.

'Here's your agent,' exclaimed Mrs. Barton hurriedly. 'Don't bring him in here; go out and meet him, and when you see Captain Hibbert welcome him as cordially as you can. But don't speak to him of Olive, and don't give him time to speak to you; say you are engaged. I don't want Mr. Scully to know anything about this break-off. It is most unfortunate you didn't tell me you were going to meet your tenants to-day. However, it is too late now.'

'Very well, my dear, very well,' said Mr. Barton, trying to find his hat. 'I would, I assure you, give twenty pounds to be out of the whole thing. I can't argue with those fellows about their rents. I think the Government ought to let us fight it out. I should be very glad to take the command of a flying column of landlords, and make a dash into Connemara. I have always thought my military genius more allied to that of Napoleon than to that of Wellington.'

It was always difficult to say how far Mr. Barton believed in the extravagant remarks he was in the habit of giving utterance to. He seemed to be aware of their absurdity, without, however, relinquishing all belief in their truth.

And now, as he picked his way across the wet stones, his pale hair blown about in the wind, he presented a strange contrast with the short-set man who had just jumped down from the car, his thick legs encased in gaiters, and a long ulster about them.

'Howd' yer do, Barton?' he exclaimed. 'D'yer know that I think things are gitting worse instid of bither. There's been another bailiff shot in Mayo, and we've had a process-server nearly beaten to death down our side of the counthry. Gad! I was out with the Sub-Sheriff and fifty police thrying to serve notices on Lord Rosshill's estate, and we had to come back as we wint. Such blawing of horns you niver heard in yer life. The howle counthry was up, and they with a trench cut across the road as wide as a canal.'

'Well, what do you think we had better do with these fellows? Do you think they will take the twenty per cent.?'

''Tis impossible to say. Gad! the Lague is gittin' stronger ivery day, Barton. But they ought to take it; twenty per cent. will bring it very nearly to Griffith's.'

'But if they don't take it?'

'Well, I don't know what we will do, for notices it is impossible to serve. Gad! I'll never forgit how we were pelted the other day—such firing of stones, such blawing of horns! I think you'll have to give them the thirty; but we'll thry them at twinty-foive.'

'And if they won't take it—?'

'What! the thirty? They'll take that and jumping, you needn't fear. Here they come.'

Turning, the two men watched the twenty or thirty peasants who, with heads set against the gusts, advanced steadily up the avenue, making way for a horseman; and from the drawing-room window Mrs. Barton recognized the square-set shoulders of Captain Hibbert. After shaking hands and speaking a few words with Mr. Barton, he trotted round to the stables; and when he walked back and entered the house, in all the clean-cut

elegance of military boots and trousers, the peasants lifted their hats, and the interview began.

'Now, boys,' said Mr. Barton, who thought that a little familiarity would not be inappropriate, 'I've asked you to meet me so that we might come to some agreement about the rents. We've known each other a long time, and my family has been on this estate I don't know for how many generations. Therefore—why, of course, I should be very sorry if we had any falling out. I don't know much about farming, but I hear everyone say that this has been a capital year, and . . . I think I cannot do better than to make you again the same offer as I made you before—that is to say, of twenty per cent, abatement all round; that will bring your rents down to Griffith's valuation.'

Mr. Barton had intended to be very impressive, but, feeling that words were betraying him, he stopped short, and waited anxiously to hear what answer the peasant who had stepped forward would make. The old man began by removing a battered tall-hat, out of which fell a red handkerchief. The handkerchief was quickly thrown back into the crown, and, at an intimation from Mr. Barton, hat and handkerchief were replaced upon the white head. He then commenced:

'Now, yer honour, the rints is too high; we cannot pay the present rint, at least without a reduction. I have been a tinent on the property, and my fathers before me, for the past fifty years. And it was in forty-three that the rints was ruz—in the time of your father, the Lord have mercy on his soul!—but he had an agent who was a hard man, and he ruz the rints, and since then we have been in poverty, livin' on yaller mail and praties, and praties that is watery; there is no diet in them, yer honour. And if yer honour will come down and walk the lands yerself, yer wi' see I am spaking the truth. We ask nothing better than yer should walk the lands yerself. There is two acres of my land, yer honour, flooded for three months of the year, and for that land I am paying twenty-five shillings an acre. I have my receipts, paid down to the last gale-day.'

And, still speaking, the old man fumbled in his pockets and produced a large pile of papers, which he strove to push into Mr. Barton's hand, alluding all the while to the losses he had sustained. Two pigs had died on him, and he

had lost a fine mare and foal. His loquacity was, however, cut short by a sturdy, middle-aged peasant standing next him.

'And I, too, yer honour, am payin' five-and-twenty shillin's for the same flooded land. Yer honour can come down any day and see it. It is not worth, to me, more than fifteen shillings an acre at the bare outside. But it could be drained, for there is a fall into the marin stream betwixt your honour's property and the Miss Brennans'. It wouldn't cost more than forty pound, and the Miss Brennans will pay half if yer honour will pay the other.'

Mr. Barton listened patiently to those peasant-like digressions, while Mrs. Barton listened patiently to the Captain's fervid declarations of love. He had begun by telling her of the anguish it had caused him to have been denied, and three times running, admittance to Brookfield. One whole night he had lain awake wondering what he had done to offend them. Mrs. Barton could imagine how he had suffered, for she, he ventured to say, must have long since guessed what were his feelings for her daughter.

'We were very sorry to have been out, and it is so unusual that we should be,' said Mrs. Barton, leaning forward her face insinuatingly. 'But you were speaking of Olive. We say here that there is no one like *le beau capitaine*, no one so handsome, no one so nice, no one so gallant, and—and—' here Mrs. Barton laughed merrily, for she thought the bitterness of life might be so cunningly wrapped up in sweet compliments that both could be taken together, like sugared-medicine—in one child-like gulp. 'There is, of course, no one I should prefer to *le beau capitaine*—there is no one to whom I would confide my Olive more willingly; but, then, one must look to other things; one cannot live entirely on love, even if it be the love of a *beau capitaine*.'

Nevertheless, the man's face darkened. The eyebrows contracted, the straight white nose seemed to grow straighter, and he twirled his moustache angrily.

'I am aware, my dear Mrs. Barton, that I cannot give your daughter the position I should like to, but I am not as poor as you seem to imagine. Independent of my pay I have a thousand a year; Miss Barton has, if I be not mistaken, some money of her own; and, as I shall get my majority within the

next five years, I may say that we shall begin life upon something more than fifteen hundred a year.'

'It is true that I have led you to believe that Olive has money, but Irish money can be no longer counted upon. Were Mr. Barton to create a charge on his property, how would it be possible for him to guarantee the payment of the interest in such times as the present? We are living on the brink of a precipice. We do not know what is, and what is not, our own. The Land League is ruining us, and the Government will not put it down; this year the tenants may pay at twenty per cent. reduction, but next year they may refuse to pay at all. Look out there: you see they are making their own terms with Mr. Barton.'

'I should be delighted to give you thirty per cent. if I could afford it,' said Mr. Barton, as soon as the question of reduction, that had been lost sight of in schemes for draining, and discussion concerning bad seasons, had been re-established; 'but you must remember that I have to pay charges, and my creditors won't wait any more than yours will. If you refuse to pay your rents and I get sold out, you will have another landlord here; you'll ruin me, but you won't do yourselves any good. You will have some Englishman here who will make you pay your rents.'

'An Englishman here!' exclaimed a peasant. 'Arrah! he'll go back quicker than he came.'

'Maybe he wouldn't go back at all,' cried another, chuckling. 'We'd make an Oirishman of him for ever.'

'Begad, we'd make him wear the grane in raal earnest, and, a foine scraw it would be,' said a third.

The witticism was greeted with a roar of laughter, and upon this expression of a somewhat verdant patriotism the dispute concerning the reduction was resumed.

'Give us the land all round at the Government valuation,' said a man in the middle of the group.

'Why, you are only fifteen per cent. above the valuation,' cried Mr. Scully.

For a moment this seemed to create a difference of opinion among the peasants; but the League had drawn them too firmly together to be thus easily divided. They talked amongst themselves in Irish. Then the old man said:

'We can't take less than thirty, yer honour. The Lague wouldn't let us.'

'I can't give you more than twenty.'

'Thin let us come on home, thin; no use us wasting our toime here,' cried a sturdy peasant, who, although he had spoken but seldom, seemed to exercise an authority over the others. With one accord they followed him; but, rushing forward, Mr. Scully seized him by the arm, saying:

'Now then, boys, come back, come back; he'll settle with you right enough if you'll listen to reason.'

From the drawing-room window Mrs. Barton watched the conflict. On one side she saw her daughter's beautiful white face becoming the prize of a penniless officer; on the other she saw the pretty furniture, the luxurious idleness, the very silk dress on her back, being torn from them, and distributed among a crowd of Irish-speaking, pig-keeping peasants. She could see that some new and important point was being argued; and it was with a wrench she detached her thoughts from the pantomime that was being enacted within her view, and, turning to Captain Hibbert, said:

'You see—you see what is happening. We are—that is to say, we may be—ruined at any moment by this wicked agitation. As I have said before, there is no one I should like so much as yourself; but, in the face of such a future, how could I consent to give you my daughter?—that is to say, I could not unless you could settle at least a thousand a year upon her. She has been brought up in every luxury.'

'That may be, Mrs. Barton. I hope to give her quite as comfortable a home as any she has been accustomed to. But a thousand a year is impossible. I haven't got it. But I can settle five hundred on her, and there's many a

peeress of the realm who hasn't that. Of course five hundred a year is very little. No one feels it more than I. For had I the riches of the world, I should not consider them sufficient to create a place worthy of Olive's beauty. But love must be allowed to count for something, and I think—yes, I can safely say—she will never find—'

'Yes, I know—I am sure; but it cannot be.'

'Then you mean to say that you will sacrifice your daughter's happiness for the sake of a little wretched pride?'

'Why press the matter further? Why cannot we remain friends?'

'Friends! Yes, I hope we shall remain friends; but I will never consent to give up Olive. She loves me. I know she does. My life is bound up in hers. No, I'll never consent to give her up, and I know she won't give me up.'

'Olive has laughed and flirted with you, but it was only *pour passer le temps*; and I may as well tell you that you are mistaken when you think that she loves you.'

'Olive does love me. I know she does; and I'll not believe she does not—at least, until she tells me so. I consider I am engaged to her; and I must beg of you, Mrs. Barton, to allow me to see her and hear from her own lips what she has to say on this matter.'

With the eyes of one about to tempt fortune adventurously, like one about to play a bold card for a high stake, Mrs. Barton looked on the tall, handsome man before her; and, impersonal as were her feelings, she could not but admire, for the space of one swift thought, the pale aristocratic face now alive with passion. Could she depend upon Olive to say no to him? The impression of the moment was that no girl would. Nevertheless, she must risk the interview, and gliding towards the door, she called; and then, as a cloud that grows bright in the sudden sunshine, the man's face glowed with delight at the name, and a moment after, white and drooping like a cut flower, the girl entered. Captain Hibbert made a movement as if he were going to rush forward to meet her. She looked as if she would have opened her arms to receive him, but Mrs. Barton's words fell between them like a sword.

'Olive,' she said, 'I hear you are engaged to Captain Hibbert! Is it true?'

Startled in the drift of her emotions, and believing her confidence had been betrayed, the girl's first impulse was to deny the impeachment. No absolute promise of marriage had she given him, and she said:

'No, mamma, I am not engaged. Did Edward—I mean Captain Hibbert—say I was engaged to him? I am sure—'

'Didn't you tell me, Olive, that you loved me better than anyone else? Didn't you even say you could never love anyone else? If I had thought that—'

'I knew my daughter would not have engaged herself to you, Captain Hibbert, without telling me of it. As I have told you before, we all like you very much, but this marriage is impossible; and I will never consent, at least for the present, to an engagement between you.'

'Olive, have you nothing to say? I will not give you up unless you tell me yourself that I must do so.'

'Oh, mamma, what shall I do?' said Olive, bursting into a passionate flood of tears.

'Say what I told you to say,' whispered Mrs. Barton.

'You see, Edward, that mamma won't consent, at least not for the present, to our engagement.'

This was enough for Mrs. Barton's purpose, and, soothing her daughter with many words, she led her to the door. Then, confronting Captain Hibbert, she said:

'There is never any use in forcing on these violent scenes. As I have told you, there is no one I should prefer to yourself. We always say here that there is no one like *le beau capitaine*; but, in the face of these bad times, how can I give you my daughter? And you soldiers forget so quickly. In a year's time you'll have forgotten all about Olive.'

'That isn't true; I shall never forget her. I cannot forget her; but I will consent to wait if you will consent to our being engaged.'

'No, Captain Hibbert, I think it is better not. I do not approve of those long engagements.'

'Then you'll forget what has passed between us, and let us be the same friends as we were before?'

'I hope we shall always remain friends; but I do not think, for my daughter's peace of mind, it would be advisable for us to see as much of each other as we have hitherto done. And I hope you will promise me not to communicate with my Olive in any way.'

'Why should I enter into promises with you, Mrs. Barton, when you decline to enter into any with me?'

Mrs. Barton did not look as if she intended to answer this question. The conversation had fallen, and her thoughts had gone back to the tenants and the reduction that Mr. Scully was now persuading them to accept. He talked apart, first with one, then with another. His square bluff figure in a long coarse ulster stood out in strong relief against the green grass and the evergreens.

'Thin it is decided yer pay at twinty-foive per cint.,' said Mr. Scully.

'Then, Captain Hibbert,' said Mrs. Barton a little sternly, 'I am very sorry indeed, that we can't agree; but, after what has passed between us to-day, I do not think you will be justified in again trying to see my daughter.'

'Begad, sor, they were all aginst me for agraying to take the twinty-foive,' whispered the well-to-do tenant who was talking to the agent.

'I fail to understand,' said Captain Hibbert haughtily, 'that Miss Barton said anything that would lead me to suppose that she wished me to give her up. However, I do not see that anything would be gained by discussing this matter further. Good-morning, Mrs. Barton.'

'Good-morning, Captain Hibbert;' and Mrs. Barton smiled winningly as she rang the bell for the servant to show him out. When she returned to the window the tenants were following Mr. Scully into the rent-office, and, with a feeling of real satisfaction she murmured to herself:

'Well, after all, nothing ever turns out as badly as we expect it.'

CHAPTER 14

But, although Mrs. Barton had bidden the captain away, Olive's sorrowful looks haunted the house.

A white weary profile was seen on the staircase, a sigh was heard when she left the room; and when, after hours of absence, she was sought for, she was found lying at full length, crying upon her bed.

'My dear, it distresses me to see you in this state. You really must get up; I cannot allow it. There's nothing that spoils one's good looks like unhappiness. Instead of being the belle of the season, you'll be a complete wreck. I must insist on your getting up, and trying to interest yourself in something.'

'Oh! mamma, don't, don't! I wish I were dead; I am sick of everything!'

'Sick of everything?' said Mrs. Barton, laughing. 'Why, my dear child, you have tasted nothing yet. Wait until we get to the Castle; you'll see what a lot of Captain Hibberts there will be after this pretty face; that's to say if you don't spoil it in the meantime with fretting.'

'But, mamma,' she said, 'how can I help thinking of him?—there's nothing to do here, one never hears of anything but that horrid Land League—whether the Government will or will not help the landlords, whether Paddy So-and-so will or will not pay his rent. I am sick of it. Milord comes to see you, and Alice likes reading-books, and papa has his painting; but I have nothing since you sent Captain Hibbert away.'

'Yes, yes, my beautiful Olive flower, it is a little dull for you at present, and to think that this wicked agitation should have begun the very season you were coming out! Who could have foreseen such a thing? But come, my pet, I cannot allow you to ruin your beautiful complexion with foolish tears; you must get up; unfortunately I can't have you in the drawing-room, I have to talk business with Milord, but you can go out for a walk with Alice—it isn't raining to-day.'

'Oh! no; I couldn't go out to walk with Alice, it would bore me to death. She never talks about anything that interests me.'

Vanished the sweet pastel-like expression of Mrs. Barton's features, lost in a foreseeing of the trouble this plain girl would be. Partners would have to be found, and to have her dragging after her all through the Castle season would be intolerable. And all these airs of virtue, and injured innocence, how insupportable they were! Alice, as far as Mrs. Barton could see, was fit for nothing. Even now, instead of helping to console her sister, and win her thoughts away from Captain Hibbert, she shut herself up to read books. Such a taste for reading and moping she had never seen in a girl before—*voilà un type de vieille fille*. Whom did she take after? Certainly not after her mother, nor yet her father. But what was the good of thinking of the tiresome girl? There were plenty of other things far more important to consider, and the first thing of all was—how to make Olive forget Captain Hibbert? On this point Mrs. Barton was not quite satisfied with the manner in which she had played her part. Olive's engagement had been broken off by too violent means, and nothing was more against her nature than (to use her own expression) *brusquer les choses*. Early in life Mrs. Barton discovered that she could amuse men, and since then she had devoted herself assiduously to the cultivation of this talent, and the divorce between herself and her own sex was from the first complete. She not only did not seek to please, but she made no attempt to conceal her aversion from the society of women, and her preference for those forms of entertainment where they were found in fewest numbers. Balls were, therefore, never much to her taste; at the dinner-table she was freer, but it was on the racecourse that she reigned supreme. From the box-seat of a drag the white hands were waved, the cajoling laugh was set going; and fashionably-dressed men, with race-glasses about their shoulders, came crowding and climbing about her like bees about their queen. Mrs. Barton had passed from flirtation to flirtation without a violent word. With a wave of her hands she had called the man she wanted; with a wave of her hands, and a tinkle of the bell-like laugh, she had dismissed him. As nothing had cost her a sigh, nothing had been denied her. But now all was going wrong. Olive was crying and losing her good looks. Mr. Barton had received a threatening letter, and, in consequence, had for a week past been unable to tune his guitar; poor Lord

Dungory was being bored to death by policemen and proselytizing daughters. Everything was going wrong. This phrase recurred in Mrs. Barton's thoughts as she reviewed the situation, her head leaned in the pose of the most plaintive of the pastels that Lord Dungory had commissioned his favourite artist to execute in imitation of the Lady Hamilton portraits. And now, his finger on his lip, like harlequin glancing after columbine, the old gentleman, who had entered on tiptoe, exclaimed:

'"*Avez vous vu, dans Barcelone*
Une Andalouse au sein bruni?
Pâle comme un beau soir d' Automne;
C'est ma maîtresse, ma lionne!
La Marquesa d' Amalëqui."'

Instantly the silver laugh was set a-tinkling, and, with delightful gestures, Milord was led captive to the sofa.

'*C'est l'aurore qui vient pour dissiper les brumes du matin*,' Mrs. Barton declared as she settled her skirts over her ankles.

'"_Qu'elle est superbe en son désordre
Quand elle tombe. . . ."'

'Hush, hush!' exclaimed Mrs. Barton, bursting with laughter; and, placing her hand (which was instantly fervently kissed) upon Milord's mouth, she said: 'I will hear no more of that wicked poetry.'

'What! hear no more of the divine Alfred de Musset?' Milord answered, as if a little discouraged.

'Hush, hush!'

Alice entered, having come from her room to fetch a book, but seeing the couple on the sofa she tried to retreat, adding to her embarrassment and to theirs by some ill-expressed excuses.

'Don't run away like that,' said Mrs. Barton; 'don't behave like a charity-school girl. Come in. I think you know Lord Dungory.'

'Oh! this is the studious one,' said Milord, as he took Alice affectionately with both hands, and drew her towards him. 'Now look at this fair brow; I am sure there is poetry here. I was just speaking to your mother about Alfred de Musset. He is not quite proper, it is true, for you girls; but oh, what passion! He is the poet of passion. I suppose you love Byron?'

'Yes; but not so much as Shelley and Keats,' said Alice enthusiastically, forgetting for the moment her aversion to the speaker in the allusion to her favourite pursuit.

'The study of Shelley is the fashion of the day. You know, I suppose, the little piece entitled *Love's Philosophy*—"*The fountains mingle with the river; the river with the ocean*." You know "*Nothing in the world is single: all things, by a law divine, in one another's being mingle. Why not I with thine?*"'

'Oh yes, and the *Sensitive Plant*. Is it not lovely?'

'There is your book, my dear; you must run away now. I have to talk with Milord about important business.'

Milord looked disappointed at being thus interrupted in his quotations; but he allowed himself to be led back to the sofa. 'I beg your pardon for a moment,' said Mrs. Barton, whom a sudden thought had struck, and she followed her daughter out of the room.

'Instead of wasting your time reading all this love-poetry, Alice, it would be much better if you would devote a little of your time to your sister; she is left all alone, and you know I don't care that she should be always in Barnes' society.'

'But what am I to do, mamma? I have often asked Olive to come out with me, but she says I don't amuse her.'

'I want you to win her thoughts away from Captain Hibbert,' said Mrs. Barton; 'she is grieving her heart out and will be a wreck before we go to Dublin. Tell her you heard at Dungory Castle that he was flirting with other girls, that he is not worth thinking about, and that the Marquis is in love with her.'

'But that would be scarcely the truth, mamma,' Alice replied hesitatingly.

Mrs. Barton gave her daughter one quick look, bit her lips, and, without another word, returned to Milord. Everything was decidedly going wrong; and to be annoyed by that gawk of a girl in a time like the present was unbearable. But Mrs. Barton never allowed her temper to master her, and in two minutes all memory of Alice had passed out of her mind, and she was talking business with Lord Dungory. Many important questions had to be decided. It was known that mortgages, jointures, legacies, and debts of all kinds had reduced the Marquis's income to a minimum, and that he stood in urgent need of a little ready money. It was known that his relations looked to an heiress to rehabilitate the family fortune. Mrs. Barton hoped to dazzle him with Olive's beauty, but it was characteristic of her to wish to bait the hook on every side, and she hoped that a little gilding of it would silence the chorus of scorn and dissent that she knew would be raised against her when once her plans became known. Four thousand pounds might be raised on the Brookfield property, but, if this sum could be multiplied by five, Mrs. Barton felt she would be going into the matrimonial market armed to the teeth, and prepared to meet all comers. And, seeking the solution of this problem, Milord and Mrs. Barton sat on the sofa, drawn up close together, their knees touching; he, although gracious and urbane as was his wont, seemed more than usually thoughtful. She, although as charmful and cajoling as ever, in the pauses of the conversation allowed an expression of anxiety to cloud her bright face. Fifteen thousand pounds requires a good deal of accounting for, but, after many arguments had been advanced on either side, it was decided that she had made, within the last seven years, many successful investments. She had commenced by winning five hundred pounds at racing, and this money had been put into Mexican railways. The speculation had proved an excellent one, and then, with a few airy and casual references to Hudson Bay, Grand Trunks, and shares in steamboats, it was thought the creation of Olive's fortune could be satisfactorily explained to a not too exacting society.

Three or four days after, Mrs. Barton surprised the young ladies by visiting them in the sitting-room. Barnes was working at the machine, Olive stood drumming her fingers idly against the window-pane.

'Just fancy seeing you, mamma! I was looking out for Milord; he is a little late to-day, is he not?' said Olive.

'I do not expect him to-day—he is suffering from a bad cold; this weather is dreadfully trying. But how snug you are in your little room; and Alice is absolutely doing needlework.'

'I wonder what I am doing wrong now,' thought the girl.

Barnes left the room. Mrs. Barton threw some turf upon the fire, and she looked round. Her eyes rested on the cardboard boxes—on the bodice left upon the work-table—on the book that Alice had laid aside, and she spoke of these things, evidently striving to interest herself in the girl's occupation. At length she said:

'If the weather clears up I think we might all go for a drive; there is really no danger. The Land League never has women fired at. We might go and see the Brennans. What do you think, Olive?'

'I don't care to go off there to see a pack of women,' the girl replied, still drumming her fingers on the window-pane.

'Now, Olive, don't answer so crossly, but come and sit down here by me;' and, to make room for her, Mrs. Barton moved nearer to Alice. 'So my beautiful Olive doesn't care for a pack of women,' said Mrs. Barton—'Olive does not like a pack of women; she would prefer a handsome young lord, or a duke, or an earl.'

Olive turned up her lips contemptuously, for she guessed her mother's meaning.

'What curious lives those girls do lead, cooped up there by themselves, with their little periodical trip up to the Shelbourne Hotel. Of course the two young ones never could have done much; they never open their lips, but Gladys is a nice girl in her way, and she has some money of her own, I wonder she wasn't picked up.'

'I should like to know who would care for her?'

'She had a very good chance once; but she wouldn't say yes, and she wouldn't say no, and she kept him hanging after her until at last off he went and married someone else. A Mr. Blake, I think.'

'Yes, that was his name; and why wouldn't she marry him?'

'Well, I don't know—folly, I suppose. He was, of course, not so young as Harry Renley, but he had two thousand a year, and he would have made her an excellent husband; kept a carriage for her, and a house in London: whereas you see she has remained Miss Brennan, goes up every year to the Shelbourne Hotel to buy dresses, and gets older and more withered every day.'

'I know they lead a stupid life down here, but mightn't they go abroad and travel?' asked Alice; 'they are no longer so very young.'

'A woman can do nothing until she is married,' Mrs. Barton answered decisively.

'But some husbands treat their wives infamously; isn't no husband better than a bad husband?'

'I don't think so,' returned Mrs. Barton, and she glanced sharply at her daughter. 'I would sooner have the worst husband in the world than no husband.' Then settling herself like a pleader who has come to the incisive point of his argument, she continued: 'A woman is absolutely nothing without a husband; if she doesn't wish to pass for a failure she must get a husband, and upon this all her ideas should be set. I have always found that in this life we can only hope to succeed in what we undertake by keeping our minds fixed on it and never letting it out of sight until it is attained. Keep on trying, that is my advice to all young ladies: try to make yourselves agreeable, try to learn how to amuse men. Flatter them; that is the great secret; nineteen out of twenty will believe you, and the one that doesn't can't but think it delightful. Don't waste your time thinking of your books, your painting, your accomplishments; if you were Jane Austens, George Eliots, and Rosa Bonheurs, it would be of no use if you weren't married. A husband is better than talent, better even than fortune—without a husband a woman is nothing; with a husband she may rise to any height. Marriage

gives a girl liberty, gives her admiration, gives her success; a woman's whole position depends upon it. And while we are on the subject it is as well to have one's say, and I speak for you both. You, Alice, are too much inclined to shrink into the background and waste your time with books; and you too, Olive, are behaving very foolishly, wasting your time and your complexion over a silly girlish flirtation.'

'There's no use talking about that. You have forbidden him the house; you can't do any more.'

'No, Olive, all I did was to insist that he should not come running after you until you had had time to consider the sacrifices you were making for him. I have no one's interest in the world, my dear girl, but your interests. Officers are all very well to laugh, talk, and flirt with—*pour passer le temps*—but I couldn't allow you to throw yourself away on the first man you meet. You will meet hundreds of others quite as handsome and as nice at the Castle.'

'I never could care for anyone else.'

'Wait until you have seen the others. Besides, what do you want? to be engaged to him? And I should like to know what is the use of my taking an engaged girl up to the Castle? No one would look at you.'

Olive raised her eyes in astonishment; she had not considered the question from this point of view, and the suggestion that, if engaged, she might as well stop at home, for no one would look at her, filled her with alarm.

'Whereas,' said Mrs. Barton, who saw that her words had the intended effect, 'if you were free you would be the season's beauty; nothing would be thought of but you; you would have lords, and earls, and marquesses dancing attendance on you, begging you to dance with them; you would be spoken of in the papers, described as the new beauty, and what not, and then if you were free—' Here Mrs. Barton heaved a deep sigh, and, letting her white hand fall over the arm of her chair, she seemed to abandon herself to the unsearchable decrees of destiny.

'Well, what then, mamma?' asked Olive excitedly. 'I am free, am I not?'

'Then you could outstrip the other girls, and go away with the great prize. They are all watching him; he will go to one of you for certain. I hear that Mrs. Scully—that great, fat, common creature, who sold bacon in a shop in Galway—is thinking of him for her daughter. Of course, if you like to see Violet become a marchioness, right under your nose, you can do so.'

'But what do you want me to do?' exclaimed the coronet-dazzled girl.

'Merely to think no more of Captain Hibbert. But I didn't tell you;—he was very impertinent to me when I last saw him. He said he would flirt with you, as long as you would flirt with him, and that he didn't see why you shouldn't amuse yourself. That's what I want to warn you against—losing your chance of being a marchioness to help an idle young officer to while away his time. If I were you, I would tell him, when I next saw him, that he must not think about it any more. You can put it all down to me; say that I would never hear of it; say that you couldn't think of disobeying me, but that you hope you will always remain friends. You see, that's the advantage of having a mother;—poor mamma has to bear everything.'

Olive made no direct answer, but she laughed nervously, and in a manner that betokened assent; and, having so far won her way, Mrs. Barton determined to conclude. But she could not invite Captain Hibbert to the house! The better plan would be to meet on neutral ground. A luncheon-party at Dungory Castle instantly suggested itself; and three days after, as they drove through the park, Mrs. Barton explained to Olive, for the last time, how she should act if she wished to become the Marchioness of Kilcarney.

'Shake hands with him just as if nothing had happened, but don't enter into conversation; and after lunch I shall arrange that we all go out for a walk on the terrace. You will then pair off with him, Alice; Olive will join you. Something will be sure to occur that will give her an opportunity of saying that he must think no more about her—that I would never consent.'

'Oh! mamma, it is very hard, for I can never forget him.'

'Now, my dear girl, for goodness' sake don't work yourself up into a state of mind, or we may as well go back to Brookfield. What I tell you to do is right;

and if you see nobody at the Castle that you like better—well, then it will be time enough. I want you to be, at least, the beauty of one season.'

This argument again turned the scales. Olive laughed, but her laugh was full of the nervous excitement from which she suffered.

'I shan't know what to say,' she exclaimed, tossing her head, 'so I hope you will help me out of my difficulty, Alice.'

'I wish I could be left out of it altogether,' said the girl, who was sitting with her back to the horses. 'It seems to me that I am being put into a very false position!'

'Put into a false position!' said Mrs. Barton. 'I'll hear no more of this! If you won't do as you are told, you had better go back to St. Leonards—such wicked jealousy!'

'Oh, mamma!' said Alice, wounded to the quick, 'how can you be so unjust?

And her eyes filled with tears, for since she had left school she had experienced only a sense of retreating within herself, but so long as she was allowed to live within herself she was satisfied. But this refuge was no longer available. She must take part in the scuffle; and she couldn't. But whither to go? There seemed to be no escape from the world into which she had been thrust, and for no purpose but to suffer. But the others didn't suffer. Why wasn't she like them?

'I am sorry, Alice dear, for having spoken so crossly; but I am sorely tried. I really am more to be pitied than blamed; and if you knew all, you would, I know, be the first to try to help me out of my difficulties, instead of striving to increase them.' 'I would do anything to help you,' exclaimed Alice, deceived by the accent of sorrow with which Mrs. Barton knew how to invest her words.

'I am sure you would, if you knew how much depends—But dry your eyes, my dear, for goodness' sake dry them. Here we are at the door. I only want you to be with Olive when she tells Captain Hibbert that she cannot—and, now mind, Olive, you tell him plainly that he must not consider himself engaged to you.'

In the ceremonious drawing-room, patched with fragments of Indian drapery, Lady Jane and Lady Sarah sat angularly and as far from their guests as possible, for they suspected that their house was being made use of as a battle-ground by Mrs. Barton, and were determined to resent the impertinence as far as lay in their power. But Milord continued to speak of indifferent things with urbanity and courtly gestures; and as they descended the staircase, he explained the beauty of his marble statues and his stuffed birds.

'But, Lady Jane, where is Cecilia? I hope she is not unwell?'

'Oh no; Cecilia is quite well, thank you. But she never comes down when there is company—she is so very sensitive. But that reminds me. She told me to tell you that she is dying to see you. You will find her waiting for you in her room when we have finished lunch.'

'Cecilia is not the only person to be thought of,' said Milord. 'I will not allow Alice to hide herself away upstairs for the rest of the afternoon. I hear, Alice, you are a great admirer of Tennyson's *Idylls*. I have just received a new edition of his poems, with illustrations by Doré: charming artist, full of poetry, fancy, sweetness, imagination. Do you admire Doré, Captain Hibbert?'

The Captain declared that he admired Doré far more than the old masters, a point of taste that Milord ventured to question; and until they rose from table he spoke of his collection of Arundel prints with grace and erudition. Then they all went out to walk on the terrace. But as their feet echoed in the silence of the hall, Cecilia, in a voice tremulous with expectancy, was heard speaking:

'Alice, come upstairs; I am waiting for you.'

Alice made a movement as if to comply, but, stepping under the banisters, Lord Dungory said:

'Alice cannot come now, she is going out to walk with us, dear. She will see you afterwards.'

'Oh! let me go to her,' Alice cried.

'There will be plenty of time to see her later on,' whispered Mrs. Barton. 'Remember what you promised me; 'and she pointed to Captain Hibbert, who was standing on the steps of the house, his wide decorative shoulders defined against a piece of grey sky.

In despair at her own helplessness, and with a feeling of loathing so strong that it seemed like physical sickness, Alice went forward and entered into conversation with Captain Hibbert. Lord Dungory, Mrs. Barton, and Olive walked together; Lady Jane and Lady Sarah followed at a little distance. In this order the party proceeded down the avenue as far as the first gate; then they returned by a side-walk leading through the laurels, and stood in a line facing the wind-worn tennis-ground, with its black, flowerless beds, and bleak vases of alabaster and stone. From time to time remarks anent the Land League were made; but all knew that a drama even as important as that of rent was being enacted. Olive had joined her sister, and the girls moved forward on either side of the handsome Captain; and, as a couple of shepherds directing the movements of their flock, Lord Dungory and Mrs. Barton stood watching. Suddenly her eyes met Lady Jane's. The glance exchanged was tempered in the hate of years; it was vindictive, cruel, terrible; it shone as menacingly as if the women had drawn daggers from their skirts, and Jane, obeying a sudden impulse, broke away from her sister, and called to Captain Hibbert. Fortunately he did not hear her, and, before she could speak again, Lord Dungory said:

'Jane, now, Jane, I beg of you—'

Mrs. Barton smiled a sweet smile of reply, and whispered to herself:

'Do that again, my lady, and you won't have a penny to spend this year.'

'And now, dear, tell me, I want to hear all about it,' said Mrs. Barton, as the carriage left the steps of Dungory Castle. 'What did he say?'

'Oh! mamma, mamma, I am afraid I have broken his heart,' replied Olive dolorously.

'It doesn't do a girl any harm even if it does leak out that she jilted a man; it makes the others more eager after her. But tell me, dear, I hope there was

no misunderstanding; did you really tell him that it was no use, that he must think of you no more?'

'Mamma dear, don't make me go over it again, I can't, I can't; Alice heard all I said—she'll tell you,'

'No, no, don't appeal to me; it's no affair of mine,' exclaimed the girl more impetuously than she had intended.

'I am surprised at you, Alice; you shouldn't give way to temper like that. Come, tell me at once what happened.'

The thin, grey, moral eyes of the daughter and the brown, soft, merry eyes of the mother exchanged a long deep gaze of inquiry, and then Alice burst into an uncontrollable fit of tears. She trembled from too much grief, and could not answer; and when she heard her mother say to Olive, 'Now that the coast is clear, we can go in heart and soul for the marquess,' she shuddered inwardly and wished she might stay at home in Galway and be spared the disgrace of the marriage-market.

CHAPTER 15

It rained incessantly. Sheets of water, blown by winds that had travelled the Atlantic, deluged the county; grey mists trailed mournful and shapeless along the edges of the domain woods, over the ridges of the tenants' holdings. 'Never more shall we be driven forth to die in the bogs and ditches,' was the cry that rang through the mist; and, guarded by policemen, in their stately houses, the landlords listened, waiting for the sword of a new coercion to fall and release them from their bondage. The meeting of Parliament in the spring would bring them this; in the meantime, all who could, fled, resolving not to return till the law restored the power that the Land League had so rudely shaken. Some went to England, others to France. Mr. Barton accepted two hundred pounds from his wife and proceeded to study gargoyles and pictures in Bruges; and, striving to forget the murders and rumours of murders that filled the papers, the girls and their mammas talked of beaux, partners, and trains, in spite of the irritating presence of the Land League agitators who stood on the platforms of the different stations. The train was full of girls. Besides the Bartons, there were the Brennans: Gladys and Zoe—Emily remained at home to look after the place. Three of the Miss Duffys were coming to the Drawing-Room, and four of the Honourable Miss Gores; the Goulds and Scullys made one party, and to avoid Mrs. Barton, the Ladies Cullen had pleaded important duties. They were to follow in a day or so.

Lord Dungory's advice to Mrs. Barton was to take a house, and he warned her against spending the whole season in an hotel, but apparently without avail, for when the train stopped a laughing voice was heard: 'Milord, *vous n'êtes qu'un vilain misanthrope*; we shall be very comfortable at the Shelbourne; we shall meet all the people in Dublin there, and we can have private rooms to give dinner-parties.'

Hearing this, Alice congratulated herself, for in an hotel she would be freer than she would be in a house let for the season. She would hear something, and see a little over the horizon of her family in an hotel. She had spent a

week in the Shelbourne on her way home from school, and remembered the little winter-garden on the first landing, and the fountain splashing amid ferns and stone frogs. The ladies' drawing-room she knew was on the right, and when she had taken off her hat and jacket, leaving her mother and sister talking of Mrs. Symond and Lord Kilcarney, she went there hoping to find some of the people whom she had met there before.

The usually skirt-filled ottoman stood vacantly gaping, the little chairs seemed lonely about the hearthrug, even the sofa where the invalid ladies sat was unoccupied, and the perforated blinds gave the crowds that passed up and down the street a shadow-like appearance. The prospect was not inspiriting, but not knowing what else to do, Alice sat down by the fire, and fell to thinking who the man might be that sat reading on the other side of the fireplace. He didn't seem as if he knew much about horses, and as he read intently, she could watch him unobserved. At last their eyes met, and when Alice turned away her face she felt that he was looking at her, and, perhaps getting nervous under his examination, she made a movement to stir the fire.

'Will you allow me?' he said, rising from his chair. 'I beg your pardon, but, if you will allow me, I will arrange the fire.'

Alice let him have the poker, and when he had knocked in the coal-crust and put on some fresh fuel, he said:

'If it weren't for me I don't know what would become of this fire. I believe the old porter goes to sleep and forgets all about it. Now and again he wakes up and makes a deal of fuss with a shovel and a broom.'

'I really can't say, we only came up from Galway to-day.'

'Then you don't know the famous Shelbourne Hotel! All the events of life are accomplished here. People live here, and die here, and flirt here, and, I was going to say, marry here—but hitherto the Shelbourne marriages have resulted in break-offs—and we quarrel here; the friends of to-day are enemies to-morrow, and then they sit at different ends of the room. Life in the Shelbourne is a thing in itself, and a thing to be studied.'

Alice laughed again, and again she continued her conversation.

'I really know nothing of the Shelbourne. I was only here once before, and then only for a few days last summer, when I came home from school.'

'And now you are here for the Drawing-Room?'

'Yes; but how did you guess that?'

'The natural course of events: a young lady leaves school, she spends four or five months at home, and then she is taken to the Lord-Lieutenant's Drawing-Room.'

She liked him none the better for what he had said, and began to wonder how she might bring the conversation to a close. But when he spoke again she forgot her intentions, and allowed his voice to charm her.

'I think you told me,' he said, 'that you came up from Galway to-day; may I ask you from what side of the county?'

Another piece of impertinence. Why should he question her? And yet she answered him.

'We live near Gort—do you know Gort?'

'Oh yes, I have been travelling for the last two months in Ireland. I spent nearly a fortnight in Galway. Lord Dungory lives near Gort. Do you know him?'

'Very well indeed. He is our nearest neighbour; we see him nearly every day. Do you know him?'

'Yes, a little. I have met him in London. If I had not been so pressed for time I should have called upon him when I was in Galway. I passed his place going to a land meeting—oh, you need not be alarmed, I am not a Land League organizer, or else I should not have thought of calling at Dungory Castle. What a pretty drive it is to Gort.'

'Then, do you know a place on the left-hand side of the road, about a mile and a half from Dungory Castle?'

'You mean Brookfield?'

'Yes; that is our place.'

'Then you are Miss Barton?'

'Yes, I am Miss Barton; do you know father or mother?'

'No, no; but I have heard the name in Galway. I was spending a few days with one of your neighbours.'

'Oh, really!' said Alice, a little embarrassed; for she knew it must have been with the Lawlers that he had been staying. At the end of a long silence she said:

'I am afraid you have chosen a rather unfortunate time for visiting Ireland. All these terrible outrages, murders, refusals to pay rent; I wonder you have not been frightened away.'

'As I do not possess a foot of land—I believe I should say "not land enough to sod a lark"—my claim to collect rent would rest on even a slighter basis than that of the landlords; and as, with the charming inconsistency of your race, you have taken to killing each other instead of slaughtering the hated Saxon, I really feel safer in Ireland than elsewhere. I suppose,' he said, 'you do a great deal of novel-reading in the country?'

'Oh yes,' she answered, with almost an accent of voluptuousness in her voice; 'I spent the winter reading.'

'Because there was no hunting?' replied Harding, with a smile full of cynical weariness.

'No, I assure you, no; I do not think I should have gone out hunting even if it hadn't been stopped,' said Alice hastily; for it vexed her not a little to see that she was considered incapable of loving a book for its own sake.

'And what do you read?'

The tone of indifference with which the question was put was not lost upon Alice, but she was too much interested in the conversation to pay heed to it. She said:

'I read nearly all Byron, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, and Browning—I think I like him better than all the poets! Do you know the scene at St. Praxed's?'

'Yes, of course; it is very fine. But I don't know that I ever cared much for Browning. Not only the verse, but the whole mind of the man is uncouth—yes, uncouth *is* the word I want. He is the Carlyle of Poetry. Have you ever read Carlyle?'

'Oh yes, I have read his *French Revolution* and his *Life of Schiller*, but that's all. I only came home from school last summer, and at school we never read anything. I couldn't get many new books down in Galway. There were, of course, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot in the library, but that was all. I once got a beautiful book from Dungory Castle. I wonder if you ever read it? It is called *Madame Gervaisais*. From the descriptions of Rome it almost seems to me that I have been there.'

'I know the book, but I didn't know a Catholic girl could admire it—and you are a Catholic, I presume?'

'I was brought up a Catholic.'

'It is one thing to be brought up a Catholic, and another to avoid doubting.'

'There can surely be no harm in doubting?'

'Not the least; but toward which side are you? Have you fallen into the soft feather-bed of agnosticism, or the thorny ditch of belief?'

'Why do you say "the soft feather-bed of agnosticism"?'

'It must be a relief to be redeemed from belief in hell; and perhaps there is no other redemption.'

'And do you never doubt?' she said.

'No, I can't say I am given much to doubting, nor do I think the subject is any longer worthy of thought. The world's mind, after much anxiety, arrives at a conclusion, and what sages cannot determine in one age, a child is certain about in the next. Thomas Aquinas was harassed with doubts regarding the possibility of old women flying through the air on broomsticks; nowadays were a man thus afflicted he would be surely a fit subject for Hanwell. The world has lived through Christianity, as it has through a score of other things. But I am afraid I shock you?'

'No, I don't think you do; only I never heard anyone speak in that way before—that is all.'

Here the conversation came to a pause, and soon after the presence of some ladies rendered its revival impossible. Their evening gowns suggested the dinner-hour, and reminded Alice that she had to prepare herself for the meal.

All the Galway people, excepting the Honourable Misses Gore and the Scullys—who had taken houses in town for the season—dined at *table d'hote.* The Miss Duffys were, with the famous Bertha, the terror of the *débutantes.* The Brennans and the Goulds sat at the same table. May, thinking of Fred, who had promised to come during the evening, leaned back in her chair, looking unutterably bored. Under a window Sir Richard and Sir Charles were immersed in wine and discussion. In earnest tones the latter deprecated the folly of indulging in country love; the former, his hand on the champagne bottle, hiccoughed, 'Mu—ch better come up—up Dub—lin, yer know, my boy. But look, look here; I know such a nice'—a glance round, to make sure that no lady was within earshot; and the conversation lapsed into a still more confidential whisper.

Mr. Ryan and Mr. Lynch ate their dinner in sullen silence, and at the other end of the long table Mr. Adair—whom it was now confidently stated Mr. Gladstone could not possibly get on without—talked to Mr. Harding; and when the few dried oranges and tough grapes that constituted dessert had been tasted, the ladies got up, and in twos and threes retired to the ladies' sitting-room. They were followed by Lord Dungory, Mr. Adair, and Mr. Harding: the other gentlemen—the baronets and Messrs. Ryan and Lynch—preferring smoke and drink to chatter and oblique glances in the direction of ankle-concealing skirts, went up to the billiardroom. And the skirts, what an importance they took in the great sitting-room full of easy-chairs and Swiss scenery: châlets, lakes, cascades, and chamois, painted on the light-coloured walls. The big ottoman was swollen with bustled skirts; the little low seats around the fire disappeared under skirts; skirts were tucked away to hide the slippered feet, skirts were laid out along the sofas to show the elegance of the cut. Then woolwork and circulating novels were produced, and the conversation turned on marriage. Bertha being the only Dublin girl present,

all were anxious to hear her speak; after a few introductory remarks, she began:

'Oh! so you have all come up to the Castle and are going to be presented. Well, you'll find the rooms very grand, and the suppers very good, and if you know a lot of people—particularly the officers quartered here—you will find the Castle balls very amusing. The best way is to come to town a month before the Drawing-Room, and give a ball; and in that way you get to know all the men. If you haven't done that, I am afraid you won't get many partners. Even if you do get introduced, they'll only ask you to dance, and you'll never see them again. Dublin is like a racecourse, men come and speak to you and pass on. 'Tis pleasant enough if you know people, but as for marriages, there aren't any. I assure you I know lots of girls—and very pretty girls, too—who have been going out these six or seven seasons, and who have not been able to pull it off.'

'And the worst of it is,' said a girl, 'every year we are growing more and more numerous, and the men seem to be getting fewer. Nowadays a man won't look at you unless you have at least two thousand a year.'

Mrs. Barton, who did not wish her daughters to be discouraged from the first, settled her skirts with a movement of disdain. Mrs. Gould pathetically declared she did not believe love to be dead in the world yet, and maintained her opinion that a nice girl could always marry. But Bertha was not easily silenced, and, being perfectly conversant with her subject, she disposed of Dublin's claims as a marriage-mart, and she continued to comment on the disappointments of girls until the appearance of Lord Dungory and Mr. Harding brought the conversation to a sudden close.

'*Une causerie de femme! que dites-vous?—je le suis—l'amour n'existe plus, et l'âme de l'homme est plus près des sens que l'âme de la femme*,' said Milord. Everyone laughed; and, with a charming movement of her skirts, Mrs. Barton made room for him to sit beside her.

Harding withdrew to the other end of the room to resume his reading, and Alice did not dare to hope that he would lay aside his book and come to talk to her. If he did, her mother would ask her to introduce him to her, and she

would have to enter into explanations that he and she had merely exchanged a few words before dinner.

She withstood the conversation of the charmed circle as long as she could, and then boldly crossed the room for a newspaper. Harding rose to help her to find one, and they talked together till Milord took him away to the billiard-room.

May, who had been vainly expecting Fred the whole evening, said:

'Well, Alice, I hope you have had a nice flirtation?'

'And did you notice, May, how she left us to look for a newspaper. Our Alice is fond of reading, but it was not of reading she was thinking this evening. She kept him all to herself at the other end of the room.' Mrs. Barton laughed merrily, and Alice began to understand that her mother was approving her flirtation. That is the name that her mother would give her talk with Mr. Harding.

CHAPTER 16

During the Dublin Season it is found convenient to give teas: the young ladies have to be introduced to the men they will meet after at the Castle. These gatherings take place at five o'clock in the afternoon; and as Mrs. Barton started from the Shelbourne Hotel for Lady Georgina Stapleton's, she fell to thinking that a woman is never really vulnerable until she is bringing out her daughters. Till then the usual shafts directed against her virtue fall harmlessly on either side, but now they glance from the marriage buckler and strike the daughter in full heart. In the ball-room, as in the forest, the female is most easily assailed when guarding her young, and nowhere in the whole animal kingdom is this fact so well exemplified as in Dublin Castle.

Lady Georgina lived in Harcourt Street, and it was on her way thither that something like a regret rose up in Mrs. Barton that she had (she was forced to confess it) aroused the enmity of women, and persistently.

Lady Georgina Stapleton was Lord Dungory's eldest sister. She, too, hated Mrs. Barton; but, being poor (Milord used to call himself the milch-cow), she found herself, like the Ladies Cullen, occasionally obliged to smile upon and extend a welcoming hand to the family enemy; and when Mrs. Barton came to Dublin for the Castle Season, a little pressure was put upon Lady Georgina to obtain invitations from the Chamberlain; the ladies exchanged visits, and there the matter ended, as Mrs. Barton and her daughter passed through Stephen's Green, and she remembered that she had never taken the trouble to conceal her dislike of the house in Harcourt Street, and some of the hard things she had said when standing on the box-seat of a drag at Punchestown Races had travelled back and had found a lasting resting-place in Lady Georgina's wrathful memory.

'This is considered to be the most artistic house in Dublin,' said Mrs. Barton, as the servant showed them upstairs.

'How lovely the camellias look,' said Olive.

'And now, Alice, mind, none of your Liberalism in this house, or you will ruin your sister's chances.'

Lady Georgina wore a wig, or her hair was arranged so as to look like one. Fifty years had rubbed away much of her youthful ugliness; and, in the delicate twilight of her rooms, her aristocratic bearing might be mistaken for good looks.

Lady Georgina was a celebrated needlewoman, and she was now begging Lord Kilcarney to assist her at a charity bazaar. Few people had yet arrived; and when Harding was announced, Mrs. Barton whispered:

'Here's your friend, Alice; don't miss your chance.'

Then every moment bevies of girls came in and were accommodated with seats, and if possible with young men. Teacups were sent down to be washed, and the young men were passed from group to group. The young ladies smiled and looked delightful, and spoke of dancing and tennis until, replying to an imperative glance from their chaperons, from time to time they rose to leave; but, obeying a look of supplication from their hostess, the young men remained.

Lord Kilcarney had been hunted desperately around screens and over every ottoman in the room; and Lady Georgina had proved her goodwill in proportion to the amount of assistance she had lent to her friends in the chase. Long ago he had been forced away from Olive. Mrs. Barton endured with stoical indifference the scowls of her hostess; but at length, compelled to recognize that none of the accidents attendant on the handing of teacups or the moving of chairs would bring him back, she rose to take her leave. The little Marquis was on his feet in a moment, and, shaking hands with her effusively, he promised to call to see them at the Shelbourne. A glance went round; and of Mrs. Barton's triumph there could be no doubt.

'But to-day's success is often a prelude to to-morrow's defeat,' was Lady Georgina's comment, and Mrs. Barton and her daughters were discussed as they walked across the green to their hotel. Nor was Lady Georgina altogether a false prophet, for next day Mrs. Barton found the Marquis's cards on her table. 'I'm sorry we missed him,' she said, 'but we haven't a

minute;' and, calling on her daughters to follow, she dashed again into the whirl of a day that would not end for many hours, though it had begun twelve hours ago—a day of haste and anticipation it had been, filled with cries of 'Mamma,' telegrams, letters, and injunctions not to forget this and that—a day whose skirts trailed in sneers and criticisms, a hypocritical and deceitful day, a day of intrigue, a day in which the post-box was the chief factor—a great day withal.

But above this day, and above all other days, was the day that took them spellbound to the foot of a narrow staircase, a humble flight seemingly, but leading to a temple of tightly-stretched floorcloth, tall wardrobes, and groups and lines of lay figures in eternally ladylike attitudes.

'Oh! how do you do, Mrs. Barton? We have been expecting you for the last two or three days. I will run upstairs and tell Mrs. Symond that you are here; she will be so glad to see you.'

'That is Miss Cooper!' explained Mrs. Barton. 'Everyone knows her; she has been with Mrs. Symond many years. And, as for dear Mrs. Symond, there is no one like her. She knows the truth about everybody. Here she comes,' and Mrs. Barton rushed forward and embraced a thin woman with long features.

'And how do you do, dear Mrs. Barton, and how well you are looking, and the young ladies? I see Miss Olive has improved since she was in Dublin.' (In an audible whisper.) 'Everyone is talking about her. There is no doubt but that she'll be the belle of the season.' (In a still audible, but lower tone of voice.) 'But tell me, is it true that—'

'Now, now, now!' said Mrs. Barton, drowning her words in cascades of silvery laughter, 'I know nothing of what you're saying; ha! ha! ha! no, no—I assure you. I will not—'

Then, as soon as the ladies had recovered their composure, a few questions were asked about her Excellency, the prospects of the Castle season, and the fashions of the year.

'And now tell me,' said Mrs. Barton, 'what pretty things have you that would make up nicely for trains?'

'Trains, Mrs. Barton? We have some sweet things that would make up beautifully for trains. Miss Cooper, will you kindly fetch over that case of silks that we had over yesterday from Paris?'

'The young ladies must be, of course, in white; for Miss Olive I should like, I think, snowdrops; for you, Mrs. Barton, I am uncertain which of two designs I shall recommend. Now, this is a perfectly regal material.'

With words of compliment and solicitation, the black-dressed assistant displayed the armouries of Venus—armouries filled with the deep blue of midnight, with the faint tints of dawn, with strange flowers and birds, with moths, and moons, and stars. Lengths of white silk clear as the notes of violins playing in a minor key; white poplin falling into folds statuesque as the bass of a fugue by Bach; yards of ruby velvet, rich as an air from Verdi played on the piano; tender green velvet, pastoral as hautboys heard beneath trees in a fair Arcadian vale; blue turquoise faille fanciful as the tinkling of a guitar twanged by a Watteau shepherd; gold brocade, sumptuous as organ tones swelling through the jewelled twilight of a nave; scarves and trains of midnight-blue profound as the harmonic snoring of a bassoon; golden daffodils violent as the sound of a cornet; bouquets of pink roses and daisies, charmful and pure as the notes of a flute; white faille, soft draperies of tulle, garlands of white lilac, sprays of white heather, delicate and resonant as the treble voices of children singing carols in dewy English woods; berthas, flounces, plumes, stomachers, lappets, veils, frivolous as the strains of a German waltz played on Liddell's band.

An hour passed, but the difficulty of deciding if Olive's dress should be composed of silk or Irish poplin was very great, for, determined that all should be humiliated, Mrs. Barton laid her plans amid designs for night and morning; birds fluttering through leafy trees, birds drowsing on bending boughs, and butterflies folding their wings. At a critical moment, however, an assistant announced that Mrs. Scully was waiting. The ladies started; desperate effort was made; rosy clouds and veils of silver tissue were spoken of; but nothing could be settled, and on the staircase the ladies had to squeeze into a corner to allow Violet and Mrs. Scully to pass.

'How do you do, Olive? How do you do, Alice? and you, Mrs. Barton, how do you do? And what are you going to wear? Have you decided on your dress?'

'Oh! That is a secret that could be told to no one; oh, not for worlds!' said Mrs. Barton.

'I'm sure it will be very beautiful,' replied Mrs. Scully, with just a reminiscence of the politeness of the Galway grocery business in her voice.

'I hear you have taken a house in Fitzwilliam Square for the season?' said Mrs. Barton.

'Yes, we are very comfortable; you must come and see us. You are at the Shelbourne, I believe?'

'Come to tea with us,' cried Violet. 'We are always at home about five.'

'We shall be delighted,' returned Mrs. Barton.

Mrs. Scully's acquaintance with Mrs. Symond was of the slightest; but, knowing that claims to fashion in Dublin are judged by the intimacy you affect with the dressmaker, she shook her warmly by the hand, and addressed her as dear Mrs. Symond. To the Christian name of Helen none less than a Countess dare to aspire.

'And how well you are looking, dear Mrs. Symond; and when are you going to take your daughters to the Castle?'

'Oh, not for some time yet; my eldest is only sixteen.'

Mrs. Symonds had three daughters to bring out, and she hoped when her feet were set on the redoubtable ways of Cork Hill, her fashionable customers would extend to her a cordial helping hand. Mrs. Symonds' was one of the myriad little schemes with which Dublin is honeycombed, and although she received Mrs. Scully's familiarities somewhat coldly, she kept her eyes fixed upon Violet. The insidious thinness of the girl's figure, and her gay, winsome look interested her, and, as if speaking to herself, she said:

'You will want something very sweet; something quite pure and lovely for Miss Scully?'

Mother and daughter were instantly all attention, and Mrs. Symond continued:

'Let me see, I have some Surat silk that would make up sweetly. Miss Cooper, will you have the kindness to fetch those rolls of Surat silk we received yesterday from Paris?'

Then, beautiful as a flower harvesting, the hues and harmonies of earth, ocean, and sky fell before the ravished eyes. The white Surat silk, chaste, beautiful, delicious as that presentiment of shared happiness which fills a young girl's mind when her fancy awakens in the soft spring sunlight; the white faille with tulle and garlands of white lilac, delicate and only as sensuous as the first meetings of sweethearts, when the may is white in the air and the lilac is in bloom on the lawn; trains of blue sapphire broché looped with blue ostrich feathers, seductive and artificial as a boudoir plunged in a dream of Ess. bouquet; dove-coloured velvet trains adorned with tulips and tied with bows of brown and pink—temperate as the love that endures when the fiery day of passion has gone down; bodices and trains of daffodil silk, embroidered with shaded maple-leaves, impure as lamp-lit and patchouli-scented couches; trains of white velouture festooned with tulle; trails of snowdrops, icy as lips that have been bought, and cold as a life that lives in a name.

The beautiful silks hissed as they came through the hands of the assistants, cat-like the velvet footfalls of the velvet fell; it was a witches' Sabbath, and out of this terrible caldron each was to draw her share of the world's gifts. Smiling and genial, Mrs. Symond stirred the ingredients with a yard measure; the girls came trembling, doubting, hesitating; and the anxious mothers saw what remained of their jeopardized fortunes sliding in a thin golden stream into the flaming furnace that the demon of Cork Hill blew with unintermittent breath.

Secrets, what secrets were held on the subject of the presentation dresses! The obscure Hill was bound with a white frill of anticipation. Olive's fame had gone forth. She was admitted to be the new Venus, and Lord Kilcarney was spoken of as likely to yield to her the coveted coronet. Would he marry her without so much as looking at another girl? was the question on every

lip, and in the jealousy thus created the appraisers of Violet's beauty grew bolder. Her thinness was condoned, and her refinement insisted upon. Nor were May Gould and her chances overlooked by the gossips of Merrion Square. Her flirtation with Fred Scully was already a topic of conversation.

Alice knew she was spoken of pityingly, but she hungered little after the praise of the Dubliners, and preferred to stay at home and talk to Harding in the ladies' drawing-room rather than follow her mother and sister in their wild hunt after Lord Kilcarney. Through the afternoon teas of Merrion Square and Stephen's Green the chase went merrily.

CHAPTER 17

On the night of the Drawing-Room, February 20, 1882, the rain rushed along the streets; wind, too, had risen, and, threatening to tear every window from its sash, it careered in great gusts. Sky there was none, nor sight of anything save when the lightning revealed the outline of the housetops. The rattling and the crashing of the thunder was fearsome, and often, behind their closely drawn curtains, the girls trembled, and, covering their faces with their hands, forgot the article of clothing they were in search of. In their rooms all was warm and snug, and gay with firelight and silk; the chaperons had whispered that warm baths were advisable, and along the passages the ladies'-maids passed hurriedly, carrying cans of hot water, sponges, and drying-sheets.

Alice and Olive slept in two rooms on the third floor, on either side of their mother; May and Mrs. Gould were on the fourth, and next to May was Fred Scully, who, under the pretext of the impossibility of his agreeing with his mother concerning the use of a latch-key, had lately moved into the hotel. May was deeply concerned in Fred's grievance, and, discussing it, or the new Shelbourne scandal—the loves of the large lady and the little man at the other end of the corridor—they lingered about each other's bedroom-doors. Alice could now hear them talking as they descended the staircase together; then a burst of smothered laughter, and May came in to see her.

'Oh, how nice you look!'

'If you don't "mash" Mr. Harding to-night, he'll be a tough one indeed. Did I tell you I was talking to him yesterday in the ladies' drawing-room? He is very enticing, but I can't quite make him out: I think he despises us all; all but you; about you he said all kinds of nice things—that you were so clever, and nice, and amusing. And tell me, dear,' said May, in her warm, affectionate way, 'do you really like him—you know what I mean?'

May's eyes and voice were so full of significance that to pretend to misunderstand was impossible.

'I like Mr. Harding well enough. It is very pleasant to have him to talk to. I am sure I don't want to run down my own sex—there are plenty only too anxious to do that—but I am afraid that there is not a girl in Dublin who thinks of anything except how she is to get married.'

'I don't know about that,' said May, a little offended. 'I suppose if you think of a man at all, you think of how he likes you.'

The defiant tone in which these words were spoken was surprising; and, for a moment, Alice stood staring blankly at this superb cream-fleshed girl, superb in her dress of cream faille, her sensual beauty poetized by the long veils which hung like gossamer-webs from the coils of her copper-gleaming hair.

'I am afraid, May,' she said, 'that you think a great deal too much of such things. I don't say anything against Mr. Scully, but I think it right to tell you that he is considered a very dangerous young man; and I am sure it does a girl no good to be seen with him. It was he who . . .'

'Now I'll not hear you abuse Fred,' cried May. 'We are great friends; I like you better than any other girl, and if you value our friendship, you'll not speak to me again like this. I wouldn't put up with it, no, not from my own mother.'

The girl moved towards the door hastily, but Alice laid her hand on her arm, saying:

'You mustn't be angry, May; perhaps you're right; I shouldn't meddle in things that don't concern me; but then we have been so long friends that I couldn't help—'

'I know, I know,' the girl answered, overcome as it were by an atmosphere. 'You were speaking only for my good; but if you're friends with a person, you can't stand by and hear them abused. I know people speak badly of Fred; but then people are so jealous—and they are all jealous of Fred.'

The girls examined each other's dresses, and at the end of a long silence May said:

'What an extraordinary thing this Drawing-Room is when one comes to think of it. Just fancy going to all this expense to be kissed by the Lord-

Lieutenant—a man one never saw before. Will you feel ashamed when he kisses you?'

'Well, I don't know that I have thought much about it,' said Alice, laughing. 'I suppose it doesn't matter, it is only a ceremony, not a real kiss.'

At this moment Mrs. Barton's voice was heard calling: 'Now, Alice, Alice, where are you? We are waiting for you! Make haste, for goodness' sake; we are very late as it is.'

The trail of a sachet-scented petticoat could be detected on this length of Brussels carpet, the acrid vulgarity of eau de Cologne hung like a curtain before an open door, a vision of white silk gleamed for a moment as it fled from room to room: men in a strange garb—black velvet and steel buttons—hurried away, tripping over their swords, furtively ashamed of their stockinged calves. On the first landing, about the winter-garden, a crowd of German waiters, housemaids, billiard-players with cigars in their teeth and cues in their hands, had collected; underneath, in the hall, the barmaids, and old ladies, wrapped up in rugs and shawls to save them from the draughts, were criticizing the dresses. Olive's name was on every lip, and to see her all were breathless with expectation; her matrimonial prospects were discussed, and Lord Kilcarney was openly spoken of. 'Ah! here she is! there she is!' was whispered. The head-porter, wild with excitement, shouted for Mrs. Barton's carriage; three under-porters distended huge umbrellas; the door was opened, an immense wind tore through the hall, sending the old ladies flying back to their sitting-room, and the Bartons, holding their hair and their trains, rushed across the wet pavement and took refuge in the brougham.

'Did one ever see such weather?' said Mrs. Barton. 'I hope your hair isn't ruffled, Olive?'

'No, mamma, I think it is all right.'

Reassured, Mrs. Barton continued: 'I don't think there ever was a country so hateful as Ireland. What with rain and Land League. I wonder why we live here! Did you notice the time, Alice, as we left the hotel?'

'Yes, mamma; it was twenty-five minutes to ten.'

'Oh! we are very late; we shan't be there before ten. The thing to do is to get there about half-past nine; the Drawing-Room doesn't begin before eleven; but if you can get into the first lot you can stand at the entrance of Patrick's Hall. I see, Alice, your friend Harding is going to the Drawing-Room. Now, if you do what I tell you, you won't miss him; for it does look so bad to see a girl alone, just as if she was unable to get a man.'

While Mrs. Barton continued to advise her girls, the carriage rolled rapidly along Stephen's Green. It had now turned into Grafton Street; and on the steep, rain-flooded asphalte, they narrowly escaped an accident. The coachman, however, steadied his horses, and soon the long colonnades of the Bank of Ireland were seen on the left. From this point they were no longer alone, and except when a crash of thunder drowned every other sound, the rattling of wheels was heard behind and in front of them. Carriages came from every side: the night was alive with flashing lamps; a glimpse of white fur or silk, the red breast of a uniform, the gold of an epaulette, were seen, and thinking of the block that would take place on the quays, the coachmen whipped up their horses; but soon the ordering voices of the mantled and mounted policemen were heard, and the carriages came to a full stop.

'We are very late; hundreds will pass before us,' said Mrs. Barton despairingly, as she watched the lines of silk-laden carriages that seemed to be passing them by. But it was difficult to make sure of anything; and fearful of soiling their gloves, they refrained from touching the breath-misted windows.

Despite the weather the streets were lined with vagrants, patriots, waifs, idlers of all sorts and kinds. Plenty of girls of sixteen and eighteen came out to see the 'finery.' Poor little things in battered bonnets and draggled skirts, who would dream upon ten shillings a week; a drunken mother striving to hush a child that cries beneath a dripping shawl; a harlot embittered by feelings of commercial resentment; troops of labourers; hang-dog faces, thin coats, torn shirts; Irish-Americans, sinister faced, and broad-brimmed. Never were poverty and wealth brought into plainer proximity. In the broad glare of the carriage lights the shape of every feature, even the colour of the eyes, every glance, every detail of dress, every stain of misery were revealed

to the silken exquisites who, a little frightened, strove to hide themselves within the scented shadows of their broughams; and in like manner the bloom on every aristocratic cheek, the glitter of every diamond, the richness of every plume, were visible to the wondering eyes of those who stood without in the wet and the cold.

'I wish they wouldn't stare so,' said Mrs. Barton; 'one would think they were a lot of hungry children looking into a sweetmeat shop. The police ought really to prevent it.'

'And how wicked those men in the big hats look,' said Olive; 'I'm sure they would rob us if they only dared.'

At last the order came that the carriages were to move on, and they rolled on, now blocked under the black rain-dripping archway of the Castle yard, now delayed as they laboriously made the tour of the quadrangle. Olive doubted if her turn would ever come; but, by slow degrees, each carriage discharged its cargo of silk, and at last Mrs. Barton and her daughters found themselves in the vestibule, taking numbers for their wraps at the cloak-rooms placed on either side of the stairway.

The slender figures ascending to tiny naked shoulders, presented a piquant contrast with the huge, black Assyrian, bull-like policemen, who guarded the passage, and reduced, by contrast, to almost doll-like proportions the white creatures who went up the great stairway. Overhead an artificial plant, some twenty feet wide, spread a decorative greenness; the walls were lined with rifles, and at regular intervals, in lieu of pictures, were set stars made out of swords. There were also three suits of plate armour, and the grinning of the helmets of old-time contrasted with the bearskin-shrouded faces of the red guardsmen. And through all this military display the white ware tripped past powdered and purple-coated footmen, splendid in the splendour of pink calves and salmon-coloured breeches.

As the white mass of silk pushed along the white-painted corridor, the sense of ceremony that had till then oppressed it, evaporated in the fumes of the blazing gas, and something like a battle began in the blue drawing-room. Heat and fatigue soon put an end to all coquetting between the sexes. The beautiful silks were hidden by the crowd; only the shoulders remained, and,

to appease their terrible ennui, the men gazed down the backs of the women's dresses. Shoulders were there, of all tints and shapes. Indeed, it was like a vast rosary, alive with white, pink, and cream-coloured flowers; of Maréchal Niels, Souvenir de Malmaisons, Mademoiselle Eugène Verdiers, Aimée Vibert Scandens. Sweetly turned, adolescent shoulders, blush-white, smooth and even as the petals of a Marquise Mortemarle; the strong, commonly turned shoulders, abundant and free as the fresh rosy pink of the Anna Alinuff; the drooping white shoulders, full of falling contours as a pale Madame Lacharme; the chlorotic shoulders, deadly white, of the almost greenish shade that is found in a Princess Clementine; the pert, the dainty little shoulders, filled with warm pink shadows, pretty and compact as Countess Cécile de Chabrillant; the large heavy shoulders full of vulgar madder tints, coarse, strawberry-colour, enormous as a Paul Neron; clustering white shoulders, grouped like the blossoms of an Aimée Vibert Scandens, and, just in front of me, under my eyes, the flowery, the voluptuous, the statuesque shoulders of a tall blonde woman of thirty, whose flesh is full of the exquisite peach-like tones of a Mademoiselle Eugène Verdier, blooming in all its pride of summer loveliness.

To make way for this enormous crowd, the Louis XV. sofas and arm-chairs had been pushed against the walls, and an hour passed wearily, in all its natural impudence, in this beautiful drawing-room, the brain aching with dusty odour of poudre de riz, and the many acidities of evaporating perfume; the sugary sweetness of the blondes, the salt flavours of the brunettes, and this allegro movement of odours was interrupted suddenly by the garlicky andante, deep as the pedal notes of an organ, that the perspiring armpits of a fat chaperon exhaled slowly.

At last there was a move forwards, and a sigh of relief, a grunt of satisfaction, broke from the oppressed creatures; but a line of guardsmen was pressing from behind, and the women were thrown hither and thither into the arms and on to the backs of soldiers, police officers, county inspectors, and Castle underlings. Now a lady turns pale, and whispers to her husband that she is going to faint; now a young girl's petticoats have become entangled in the moving mass of legs! She cries aloud for help; her brother expostulates with those around. He is scarcely heeded. And the

struggle grows still more violent when it becomes evident that the guardsmen are about to bring down the bar; and, begging a florid-faced attorney to unloose his sword, which had become entangled in her dress, Mrs. Barton called on her daughter, and, slipping under the raised arms, they found themselves suddenly in a square, sombre room, full of a rich, brown twilight. In one corner there was a bureau, where an attendant served out blank cards; in another the white plumes nodded against the red glare that came from the throne-room, whence Liddell's band was heard playing waltz tunes, and the stentorian tones of the Chamberlain's voice called the ladies' names.

'Have you got your cards?' said Mrs. Barton.

'I have got mine,' said Olive.

'And I have got mine,' said Alice.

'Well, you know what to do? You give your card to the aide-de-camp, he passes it on and spreads out your train, and you walk right up to His Excellency; he kisses you on both cheeks, you curtsy, and, at the far door, two aides-de-camp pick up your train and place it on your arm.'

The girls continued to advance, experiencing the while the nerve atrophy, the systolic emotion of communicants, who, when the bell rings, approach the altar-rails to receive God within their mouths.

The massive, the low-hanging, the opulently twisted gold candelabra, the smooth lustre of the marble columns are evocative of the persuasive grandeur of a cathedral; and, deep in the darkness of the pen, a vast congregation of peeresses and judges watch the ceremony in devout collectiveness. How symmetrical is the place! A red, a well-trimmed bouquet of guardsmen has been set in the middle of the Turkey carpet; around the throne a semicircle of red coats has been drawn, and above it flow the veils, the tulle, the skirts of the ladies-of-honour—they seem like white clouds dreaming on a bank of scarlet poppies—and the long sad legs, clad in maroon-coloured breeches, is the Lord-Lieutenant, the teeth and the diamonds on his right is Her Excellency. And now a lingering survival of the terrible Droit de Seigneur—diminished and attenuated, but still circulating

through our modern years—this ceremony, a pale ghost of its former self, is performed; and, having received a kiss on either cheek, the *débutantes* are free to seek their bridal beds in Patrick's Hall.

'Miss Olive Barton, presented by Mrs. Barton!' shouted the Chamberlain.

Olive abandoned her train to the aides-de-camp; she saw their bent backs, felt their nimble fingers exhibiting this dress whereon Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Symond had for days been expending all the poetry of their natures. What white wonder, what manifold marvel of art! Dress of snow satin, skirt quite plain in front. Bodice and train of white poplin; the latter wrought with patterns representing night and morning: a morning made of silver leaves with silver birds fluttering through leafy trees, butterflies sporting among them, and over all a sunrise worked in gold and silver thread; then on the left side the same sun sank amid rosy clouds, and there butterflies slept with folded wing, and there birds roosted on bending boughs; veils of silver tissue softened the edges of the train, silver stars gleamed in the corn-coloured hair, the long hands, gloved with white undressed kid, carried a silver fan; she was adorably beautiful and adorably pale, and she floated through the red glare, along the scarlet line, to the weary-looking man in maroon breeches, like some wonderful white bird of downy plumage. He kissed her on both cheeks; and she passed away to the farther door, where her train was caught up and handed to her by two aides-de-camp. He had seemed to salute her with deference and warmth; his kiss was more than ceremonial, and eager looks passed between the ladies-of-honour standing on the estrade; the great bouquet of red-coats placed in the middle of the floor, animated by one desire, turned its sixteen heads to gaze after the wonderful vision of blonde beauty that had come—that had gone. Mrs. Barton experienced an instant thrill of triumph, and advanced into the throne.

In the composition of her dress she had given range to her somewhat florid taste. The front was brocade, laid upon a ground of grey-pink, shot with orange, and the effect was such as is seen when the sun hangs behind a lowering grey cloud, tinged with pink. On this were wonderful soft-coloured flowers, yellow melting into pink, green fading to madder-like tints. The bodice and the train were of gold-brown velvet that matched the gold-

brown of the hair. Mrs. Barton was transformed from the usual Romney portrait to one by Sir Peter Lely; and when she made her curtsy, Her Excellency's face contracted, and the ladies-of-honour whispered: 'The harm she does her daughters . . . I wonder . . .'

'Miss Violet Scully, presented by Mrs. Scully,' shouted the Chamberlain.

Now there was an admixture of curiosity in the admiration accorded to Violet. Hers was not the plain appealing of Olive's Greek statue-like beauty; it was rather the hectic erethism of painters and sculptors in a period preceding the apogee of an art. She was a statuette in biscuit after a design by Andrea Mantegna. But the traces of this exquisite atavism were now almost concealed in the supreme modernity of her attire. From the tiny waist trailed yards of white faille, trimmed with tulle ruchings, frecked as a meadow with faintly-tinted daisies; the hips were engarlanded with daisies, and the flowers melted and bloomed amid snows of faille and tulle.

The Lord-Lieutenant leaned forward to kiss her, but at that moment of his kiss the thunder crashed so loudly that he withdrew from her, and so abruptly that Her Excellency looked surprised. The incident passed, however, almost unperceived. So loud was the thunder, everybody was thinking of dynamite, and it was some time before even the voluptuous strains of Liddell's band could calm their inquietude. Nevertheless the Chamberlain continued to shout:

'Lady Sarah Cullen, Lady Jane Cullen, Mrs. Scully, presented by Lady Sarah Cullen.'

Then came a batch of people whom no one knew, and in the front of these the aides-de-camp allowed Alice to pass on to His Excellency. She was prettily dressed, dragging after her a train of white faille trimmed with sprays of white heather and tulle, the petticoat being beautifully arranged with folded draperies of crêpe de Chine.

A number of ladies had collected in the farther ante-room, and, in lines, they stood watching the effluent tide of satin and silk discharging its volume into the spaces of Patrick's Hall.

CHAPTER 18

'I wish Alice would make haste, and not keep us waiting. I suppose she has got behind a crowd. Here are the Scullys; let's hide, they don't know a creature, and will hang on us.'

Olive and Mrs. Barton tried to slip out of sight, but they were too late; and a moment after, looking immense in a train and bodice of Lyons velvet, Mrs. Scully came up and accosted them.

'And how do you do, Mrs. Barton?' she said, with a desperate effort to make herself agreeable;

'I must congratulate you. Everyone is admiring your dress; I assure you your train looked perfectly regal.'

'I am glad you like it,' replied Mrs. Barton; 'but what do you think of Olive? Do you like her dress?'

'Oh, Olive has no need of my praises. If I were not afraid of making her too vain I would tell her that all Dublin is talking of her. Indeed, I heard a gentleman say—a gentleman who, I believe, writes for the papers—that she will be in the *World* or *Truth* next week as the belle of the season. None of the other young ladies will have a chance with her.'

'Oh, I don't know about that,' exclaimed Mrs. Barton, laughing merrily; 'haven't you got your Violet?—whom, by the way, you have transformed into a beautiful daisy. It will be, perhaps, not the Rose nor the Olive that will carry off the prize, but the daisy.'

Violet glanced sharply at Mrs. Barton, and there was hate in the glance; for, although her mother did not, she understood well what was meant by the allusion to the daisy, the humblest of the earth's flowers.

The appearance, however, of Lord Kilcarney brought the conversation to a close; and, not knowing how to address him, Olive laughed beautifully from behind her silver fan. They entered Patrick's Hall, where Lord Dungory, Lord

Rosshill, and others were waiting to receive Mrs. Barton, who sought for a prominent seat, and dealing out pearly laughs and winsome compliments to her court, she watched Olive, who, according to orders, had taken Lord Kilcarney to sit on the highest of the series of benches that lined one side of the room, which she did, and for a moment Mrs. Barton felt as if she held Dublin under her satin shoe. Alice was her only trouble. What would she do with this gawk of a girl? But soon even this difficulty was solved, for Harding came up and asked her if he might take her to get an ice.

'How absurd we looked dressed up in this way,' said Harding; 'look at that attorney and the court sword. It would be just as logical to stick a quill pen behind the ear of a fat pig.'

'Well, the sword—I confess I don't see much meaning in that; but the rest of the dress is well enough. I don't see why one style of dress should be more absurd than another, unless it is because it isn't the fashion.'

'Yes, but that is just the reason; just fancy dressing oneself up in the costume of a bygone time.'

'And is everything that isn't the fashion ridiculous?'

'Ah, there, I fancy, you have the best of the argument. Waiter, a strawberry ice. But did you say you would have strawberry?'

'I don't think I did, for I prefer lemon.'

The centre of the ceiling was filled with an oval picture representing St. Patrick receiving Pagans into the true faith. The walls were white painted, the panels were gold-listed. There were pillars at both ends of the room, and in a top gallery, behind a curtain of evergreen plants, Liddell's orchestra continued to pour an uninterrupted flood of waltz melody upon the sea of satin, silk, poplin, and velvet that surged around the buffet, angrily demanding cream ices, champagne, and claret-cup. Every moment the crowd grew denser, and the red coats of the Guards and the black corded jackets of the Rifles stained like spots of ink and blood the pallor of the background. A few young men looked elegant and shapely in the velvet and stockings of Court dress. One of these was Fred Scully. He was with May,

who, the moment she caught sight of Alice, made frantic efforts to reach her.

'My dear, did anyone ever look so nice! You are as sweet—well, a little sweeter—than you generally are! How do you do, Mr. Harding? And tell me, Alice, what do you think of my dress?'

May was in cream faille with ruchings of tulle. A beautiful piece of white lilac nestled upon her right breast.

'You are very nice, May, and I think the white sets off your hair to advantage.'

'Well, good-bye dear, Fred and I are going into the next room; one is so pushed about here, but there are nice large velvet sofas there where one can sit and talk. I advise you to come.'

In the reposing shadows of rich velvet and sombre hangings women leaned over the sofas, talking to men in uniform, while two strange-looking creatures, in long garments, walked up and down the room—Dons from Trinity, who argued with Mr. Adair earnestly.

'He is one of the lights of your county, is he not?' said Harding, indicating Mr. Adair.

'Oh, yes,' replied Alice, 'he took honours and a gold medal at Trinity College.'

'I know he did, and a capacity for passing competitive examinations is the best proof of a man's incapacity for everything else.'

'Do you know him?'

'Yes, a little. He wears his University laurels at forty, builds parish schools, and frightens his neighbours with the liberality of his opinions and the rectitude of his life.'

'But have you seen his pamphlets on the amalgamation of the poor houses?' said Alice, astonished at the slight consideration afforded to the rural genius.

'I have heard of them. It appears he is going in for politics; but his politics will be on a par with his saw-mill, and his farmyard in concrete. Mr. Adair is a well-known person. Every county in England, Ireland, and Scotland, possesses and is proud of its Mr. Adair.'

Alice wondered for some moments in silence; and when suddenly her thoughts detached themselves, she said: 'We didn't see you in the ladies' drawing-room.'

'I was very busy all the morning. I had two articles to write for one of my papers and some books to review.'

'How nice it must be to have a duty to perform every day; to have always an occupation to which you can turn with pleasure.'

'I don't know that I look upon my ink-bottle as an eternal haven of bliss. Still, I would sooner contribute articles to daily and weekly papers than sit in the Kildare Street Club, drinking glasses of sherry. Having nothing to do must be a terrible occupation, and one difficult to fulfil with dignity and honour. But,' he added, as if a sudden thought had struck him, 'you must have a great deal of time on your hands; why don't you write a novel?'

'Everybody can't write novels.'

'Oh yes, they can.'

'Is that the reason why you advise me to write one?

'Not exactly. Did you ever try to write a story?'

'No, not since I was at school. I used to write stories there, and read them to the girls, and . . .'

'And what?'

'Oh, nothing; it seems so absurd of me to talk to you about such things; you will only laugh at me just as you did at Mr. Adair.'

'No, I assure you, I am very loyal to my friends.'

'Friends!'

'I should have thought that friendship was a question of sympathy, and not one of time: but I will withdraw the word.'

'Oh, no, I didn't mean that—I am sure I am very glad . . .'

'Very well, then, we will be friends; and now tell me what you were going to say.'

'I have forgotten—what was I saying?'

'You were telling me about something you had written at school.'

'Oh, yes, I remember. I did a little play for the girls to act just before we left.'

'What was it about—what was it called?'

'It was not original—it was an adaptation of Tennyson's ballad of King Cophetua. You know Miss Gould—she played the King; and Miss Scully, she played the beggar-maid. But, of course, the whole thing was very childish.'

At this moment a figure in knee-breeches and flesh-coloured stockings was seen waving a wand at the far end of the room. He was the usher clearing the way for the viceregal procession.

The first to appear were the A.D.C.'s. They were followed by the Medical Department, by the Private Secretary, the Military Private Secretary, the Assistant Under Secretaries, by the Gentlemen in Waiting, the Master of the Horse, the Dean of the Chapel Royal, the Chamberlain, the Gentleman Usher, the Comptroller, the State Steward, walking with a wand, like a doge in an opera bouffe; then came another secretary, and another band of the underlings who flock about this mock court. And then came a heavy-built, red-bearded man, who carried, as one might a baby, a huge gilt sword in his fat hands. He was followed by their Excellencies. The long, maroon-coloured breeches preserved their usual disconsolateness, the teeth and diamonds retained their splendour, and the train—many yards of azure blue richest Duchesse satin, embroidered with large bouquets of silver lily of the valley, and trimmed with plumes of azure blue ostrich feathers, and bunches of silver coral—was upheld by two tiny children who tottered beneath its enormous weight. Then another batch of A.D.C.'s-in-Waiting, the ladies of the viceregal family: their Excellencies' guests and the ladies in

attendance—placed according to their personal precedence—brought up the rear of the procession.

'Doesn't real, actual life sometimes appear to you, Miss Barton, more distorted and unreal than a dream? I know it does to me. The spectacle we have just witnessed was a part of the ages that believed in the godhead of Christ and the divine right of Kings; but it seems to me strange that such barbarities should be permitted to loiter.'

'But what has Christianity to do with the procession that has just passed?'

'Were it not for faith, do you think a mock court would be allowed to promenade in that ludicrous fashion?'

'I'm not sure it is faith that enables them to reverence the sword of State. Is it not rather that love of ceremonial inherent in us all—more or less?'

'Perhaps you are right.'

The conversation drifted back to literature; they talked for ten minutes, and then Alice suggested that it was time she should return to Mrs. Barton. Patrick's Hall was still crowded, and champagne corks exploded through the babbling of the voices. The squadron of distressed damsels had not deserted their favourite corner, and they waited about the pillars like cabs on a stand. At this hour a middle-aged married doctor would be welcomed; all were desirous of being seen, if only for a moment, on the arm of a man. Mrs. Barton's triumph was Cæsarean. More than half-a-dozen old lords and one young man listened to her bewitching laugh, and were fed on the brown flashing gold of her eyes. Milord and Rosshill had been pushed aside; and, apart, each sought to convince the other that he was going to leave town by the evening mail. Well in view of everyone, Olive had spent an hour with Lord Kilcarney. He had just brought her back to Mrs. Barton. At a little distance the poor Scullys stood waiting. They knew no one, even the Bartons had given them a very cold shoulder. Mrs. Gould, in an old black velvet dress, wondered why all the nice girls did not get married, and from time to time she plaintively questioned the passers-by if they had seen May. Violet's sharp face had grown sharper. She knew she could do something if she only got a chance. But would she get a chance? The Ladies Cullen, their

plank-like shoulders bound in grey frisé velvet and steel, were talking to her. Suddenly Lady Sarah bowed to Lord Kilcarney, and the bow said, 'Come hither!' Leaving Olive he approached. A moment after he was introduced to Violet. Her thin face lit up as if from a light within; a grey cloud dimmed the light of Mrs. Barton's golden eyes, and when she saw *Him* in the vestibule helping the Scullys on with their wraps, she shuddered as if struck with a blast of icy wind.

CHAPTER 19

'DUNGORY CASTLE, GORT,
'Co. GALWAY.

'MY DEAREST ALICE, 'I was so delighted to hear from you; it was very good of you to write to me. I was deeply interested in your description of the Dublin festivities, and must try and tell you all the news.

'Everybody here is talking of Olive and Lord Kilcarney. It is said that he proposed to her at the Drawing-Room. Is this true? I hope so, for she seems to have set her heart on the match. But she is a great deal too nice for him. They say that when he is in London he does nothing but go about from bar-room to bar-room drinking brandies and sodas. It is also said that he used to spend much of his time with actresses. I hope these stories are false, but I cannot help thinking. . . . Well, we have often talked over these things, and you know what my opinions of men are. I hope I am not doing wrong in speaking like this; but a piece of news has reached me that forces my thoughts back into the old ways—ways that I know you have often reproved me for letting my mind wander in. In a word, darling Alice, I hear that you are very much taken up with a Mr. Harding, a writer, or painter, or something of that sort. Now, will you promise to write and tell me if this be true? I would sooner know the worst at once—hear that you love him madly, passionately, as I believe some women love men. But you, who are so nice, so good, so beautiful, you could not love a man thus. I cannot think you could—I will not think you do. I have been crying all the morning, crying bitterly; horrible thoughts have forced themselves on my mind. I have seen (but it was not true though it seemed so clear; visions are not always true) this man kissing you! Oh! Alice, let me warn you, let me beg of you to think well before you abandon yourself to a man's power, to a man's love.

'But you, Alice; you who are so noble, so pure, so lofty-minded, you would not soil yourself by giving way to such a sentiment. Write! you will write, and tell me that what I saw in vision was a lie, an abominable lie! Nay, you do not love Mr. Harding. You will not marry him; surely you will not. Oh! to be left

here alone, never to see you again—I could not bear it, I should die. You will not leave me to die, Alice dear, you will not; write and tell me you will not. And what grieves me doubly is that it must seem to you, dear, that I am only thinking of myself. I am not; I think of you, I wish to save you from what must be a life of misery and, worse still, of degradation; for every man is a degradation when he approaches a woman. I know you couldn't bear up against this; you are too refined, too pure—I can sympathize with you. I know, poor little cripple though I be, the horrors of married life. I know what men are—you smile your own kind, sweet smile; I see it as I write; but you are wrong: I know nothing of men in particular, but I know what the sex is—I know nothing of individuals, but I know what life is. The very fact of being forced to live apart has helped me to realize how horrible life is, and how the passions of men make it vile and abominable. All their tender little words and attentions are but lust in disguise. I hate them! I could whip, I could beat, I would torture them; and when I had done my worst I should not have done enough to punish them for the wrongs they have done to my sex.

'I know, Alice dear, I am writing violently, that I am letting my temper get the better of me, and this is very wrong; you have often told me it is very wrong; but I cannot help it, my darling, when I think of the danger you are in. I cannot tell you how, but I do know you are in danger; something, some instinct has put me in communication with you: there are moments when I see you, yes, see you sitting by that man—I see you now:—the scene is a long blue drawing-room all aglow with gold mirrors and wax candles—he is sitting by you, I see you smiling upon him—my blood boils, Alice—I fear I am going mad; my head drops on the table, and I strive to shut out the odious sight, but I cannot, I cannot, I cannot. . . .

'I am calmer now: you will forgive me, Alice dear? I know I am wrong to write to you in this way, but there are moments when I realize things with such horrible vividness that I am, as it were, maddened with pain. Sometimes I awake in the night, and then I see life in all its hideous nakedness, revealed, as it were, by a sudden flash of lightning. Oh, it is terrible to think we are thus. Good-bye, dear, I know you will forgive me, and I hope you will write at once, and will not leave me in suspense: that is the

worst torture. With love to our friends Olive, May, and Violet, believe me, darling Alice, 'Yours affectionately, 'CECILIA CULLEN.'

She read steadily, word by word, and then let the letter fall.

Her vision was not precise, but there were flashes of sun in it, and her thoughts loomed and floated away. She thought of herself, of Harding, of their first meeting. The first time she had seen him he was sitting in the same place and in the same chair as she was sitting in now. She remembered the first words that had been spoken: the scene was as clear to her as if it were etched upon her brain; and as she mused she thought of the importance of that event. Harding was to her what a mountain is to the level plain. From him she now looked forward and back. 'So people say that I am in love with him! well, supposing I were, I do not know that I should feel ashamed of myself.'

The reflection was an agreeable one, and in it her thoughts floated away like red-sailed barges into the white mists that veil with dreamy enchantment the wharves and the walls of an ancient town. What did she know of him? Nothing! He was to her as much, but no more, than the author of a book in which she was deeply interested: with this difference:—she could hear him reply to her questions; but his answers were only like other books, and revealed nothing of his personality. She would have liked to have known the individual man surrounded with his individual hopes and sufferings, but of these she knew nothing. They had talked of all things, but it seemed to her that of the real man she had never had a glimpse. Never did he unbend, never did he lift the mask he wore. He was interesting, but very unhuman, and he paraded his ideas and his sneers as the lay figures did the mail-armour on the castle stairway. She did not know if he were a good or a bad man; she fancied he was not very good, and then she grew angry with herself for suspecting him. But honest or dishonest, she was sure he could love no one; and she strove to recall his face. She could remember nothing but the cold merciless eyes—eyes that were like the palest blue porcelain: 'But how ungrateful I am,' thought the girl, and she checked the bitter flow of reproaches that rose in her mind.

Two old ladies sat on the sofa under the window, their white hair and white caps coming out very white upon the grey Irish day; and around the ottoman the young ladies, Gladys and Zoe Brennan, one of the Miss Duffys, and the girl in red, yawned over circulating novels, longing that a man might come in—not with hope that he would interest them, but because they were accustomed to think of all time as wasted that was not spent in talking to a man.

Nor were they awakened from their languid hopes until Olive came rushing into the room with a large envelope in her hand.

'Oh, I see,' she said, 'you have got a letter from Cecilia. What does she say? I got one this morning from Barnes;' and, bending her head, Olive whispered in Alice's ear: 'She says that everyone is talking in Galway of when I shall be a marchioness!'

'Is that the letter?' asked Alice innocently.

'No, you silly, this is a Castle invitation.'

The Brennans and the girl in red looked up.

'Ah, is it for to-night or to-morrow?' said the latter.

'For to-morrow.'

'Now, I wonder if there will be one for me. Is it to dinner or to the dance?'

'To dinner.'

'Ah, really . . . yes, very lucky.' Her eyes fell, and her look was expressive of her deep disappointment. A dance—yes, but a dinner and a dance! Then she continued: 'Ah, the Castle treats us all very badly. I am glad sometimes when I hear the Land League abusing it. We come up here, and spend all our money on dresses, and we get nothing for it except two State balls, and it is no compliment to ask us to them—they are obliged to. But what do you think of my little coat? It is this that keeps me warm,' and Miss O'Reilly held out her sealskin for the company to feel the texture. For the last three weeks she had not failed, on all occasions, to call attention to this garment—'Signor Parisina had said it was lovely.' Here she sighed—Signor

Parisina had left the hotel. 'And I have a new dress coming home—it is all red—a cardinal silk—you know nothing but red suits me!'

'Is the hall-porter distributing the invitations?' asked Gladys Brennan. 'Did he give you yours?'

'No, ours was, of course, directed to mamma; I found it in her room.'

'Then perhaps—' Zoe did not finish the sentence, and both sisters rolled up their worsted-work preparatory to going upstairs.

In Dublin, during six weeks of the year, the arrival of these large official envelopes is watched with eagerness. These envelopes are the balm of Gilead; and the Land League and the hopelessness of matchmaking are merged and lost for a moment in an exquisite thrill of triumph or despair. An invitation to the Castle means much. The greyheaded official who takes you down to dinner may bore you, and, at the dance, you may find yourself without a partner; but the delight of asking your friends if you may expect to meet them on such a night, of telling them afterwards of your successes, are the joys of Dublin. And, armed with their invitation, the Bartons scored heavily over the Scullys and the Goulds, who were only asked to the dance.

'And what will the dinner be like, mamma?' asked Olive.

'It will be very grand. Lord Cowper does things in very good style indeed; and our names will be given in the papers. But I don't think it will amuse you, dear. All the officials have to be asked—judges, police-officers, etc. You will probably go down with some old fellow of sixty: but that can't be helped. At the dance, after, we'll see the Marquis.'

'I told you, mamma, didn't I, that Barnes wrote that everybody in Galway said he was in love with me, and had proposed?'

'You did, dear; and it does no harm for the report to have got about, for if a thing gets very much spoken of, it forces a man to come to the point. You will wear your red tulle. I don't know that you look better in anything else.'

Whatever Mrs. Barton's faults may have been, she did her duty, as she conceived it, by her daughter; and during the long dinner, through the leaves of the flowering-plants, she watched her Olive anxiously. A hundred

and twenty people were present. Mothers and eligible daughters, judges, lords, police-officers, earls, poor-law inspectors, countesses, and Castle officials. Around the great white-painted, gold-listed walls the table, in the form of a horseshoe, was spread. In the soothing light of the shaded lamps the white glitter of the piled-up silver danced over the talking faces, and descended in silvery waves into the bosoms of the women. Salmon and purple-coloured liveries passed quickly; and in the fragrance of soup and the flavours of sherry, in the lascivious pleasing of the waltz tunes that Liddell's band poured from a top gallery, the goodly company of time-servers, panders, and others forgot their fears of the Land League and the doom that was now waxing to fulness.

To the girls the dinner seemed interminable, but at the 'private dance' afterwards those who were known in official circles, or were fortunate enough to meet their friends, amused themselves. It took place in the Throne-Room. As the guests arrived they scanned each other narrowly. People who had known each other from childhood upwards, as they met on the landing, affected a look of surprise: 'Oh, so you are here? I wonder how you got your invitation? Well, I suppose you are better than I took you to be!' Acquaintances saluted each other more cordially than was their wont: he or she who had dined at the Castle took his or her place at once among the *élite;* he or she who had come to dance was henceforth considered worthy of a bow in Grafton Street. For Dublin is a city without a conviction, without an opinion. Things are right and wrong according to the dictum of the nearest official. If it be not absolutely ill-bred to say you think this, or are inclined to take such or such a view, it is certainly more advisable to say that the Attorney-General thinks so, or that on one occasion you heard the State Steward, the Chamberlain, or any other equally distinguished underling, express this or that opinion. Castle tape is worn in time of mourning and in the time of feasting. Every gig-man in the Kildare Street wears it in his buttonhole, and the ladies of Merrion Square are found to be gartered with it.

Mrs. Barton's first thought was to get Olive partners. Milord and Lord Rosshill were sent hither and thither, and with such good result that the whole evening the beauty was beset with A.D.C.'s. But the Marquis had

danced three times with Violet Scully, and Mrs. Barton vented her anger on poor Alice. The girl knew no one, nor was there time to introduce her to men. She was consequently sent off with Milord to see where the Marquis was hiding; and she was commissioned to tell her sister to answer thus when Lord Kilcarney asked for another dance: 'I am engaged, *cher marquis*, but for you, of course, I shall have to throw some poor fellow over.' Mrs. Barton did not know how to play a waiting game. Her tactics were always to grapple with the enemy. She was a Hannibal: she risked all to gain all. Mrs. Scully, on the contrary, watched the combat from afar—as Moltke did the German lines when they advanced upon Paris.

The Bartons were not invited to the next private dance, which was annoying, and after long conjecturing as to the enemy that had served them this trick, they resigned themselves to the inevitable, and began to look forward to the State ball given on the following Monday.

As they mounted the stairway Mrs. Barton said:

'You know we turn to the left this time and enter Patrick's Hall by this end; the other entrance is blocked up by the daïs—only the three and four season girls stand about the pillars. There they are drawn up in battle array.'

'I declare Olive Barton is here!' whispered the redoubtable Bertha; 'this doesn't look as if the beaux were coming forward in their hundreds. It is said that Lord Kilcarney has given her up for Violet Scully.'

'I'm not a bit surprised,' said the girl in red; 'and, now I think of it, all the beauties come to the same end. I'll just give her a couple more Castle seasons. It is that that will pull the fine feathers out of her.'

St. Patrick's Hall was now a huge democratic crush. All the little sharp glances of the 'private dances,' 'What, you here!' were dispensed with as useless, for all were within their rights in being at the ball. They pushed, laughed, danced. They met as they would have met in Rotten Row, and they took their amusement with the impartiality of pleasure-seekers jigging and drinking in a marketplace on fair-day. On either side of the Hall there were ascending benches; these were filled with chaperons and *débutantes*, and over their heads the white-painted, gold-listed walls were hung with

garlands of evergreen oak interwoven with the celebrated silver shields, the property of the Cowper family, and in front of the curtains hanging about the daïs, the maroon legs of His Excellency, and the teeth and diamonds of Her Excellency, were seen passing to and fro, and up and down to the music of oblivion that Liddell dispensed with a flowing arm.

'Now aren't the Castle balls very nice?' said Bertha; 'and how are you amusing yourself?'

'Oh, very much indeed,' replied the poor *débutante* who had not even a brother to take her for a walk down the room or to the buffet for an ice.

'And is it true, Bertha,' asks the fierce aunt—'you know all the news—that Mr. Jones has been transferred to another ship and has gone off to the Cape?'

'Yes, yes,' replied the girl; 'a nice end to her beau; and after dinnering him up the whole summer, too.'

Alice shuddered. What were they but snowflakes born to shine for a moment and then to fade, to die, to disappear, to become part of the black, the foul-smelling slough of mud below? The drama in muslin was again unfolded, and she could read each act; and there was a 'curtain' at the end of each. The first was made of young, hopeful faces, the second of arid solicitation, the third of the bitter, malignant tongues of Bertha Duffy and her friend. She had begun to experience the worst horrors of a Castle ball. She was sick of pity for those around her, and her lofty spirit resented the insult that was being offered to her sex.

'Have you been long here, Miss Barton?' She looked up. Harding was by her! 'I have been looking out for you, but the crowd is so great that it is hard to find anyone.'

'I think we arrived about a quarter to eleven,' Alice answered.

Then, after a pause, Harding said: 'Will you give me this waltz?' She assented, and, as they made their way through the dancers, he added: 'But I believe you do not care about dancing. If you'd prefer it, we might go for a

walk down the room. Perhaps you'd like an ice? This is the way to the buffet.'

But Alice and Harding did not stop long there; they were glad to leave the heat of gas, the odour of sauces, the effervescence of the wine, the detonations of champagne, the tumult of laughter, the racing of plates, the heaving of bosoms, the glittering of bodices, for the peace and the pale blue refinement of the long blue drawing-room. How much of our sentiments and thoughts do we gather from our surroundings; and the shining blue of the turquoise-coloured curtains, the pale dead-blue of the Louis XV. furniture, and the exquisite fragility of the glass chandeliers, the gold mirrors rutilant with the light of some hundreds of tall wax candles, were illustrative of the light dreams and delicate lassitude that filled the souls of the women as they lay back whispering to their partners, the crinolettes lifting the skirts over the edges of the sofas. Here the conversation seems serious, there it is smiling, and broken by the passing and repassing of a fan.

'Only four days more of Dublin,' said Harding; 'I have settled, or rather the fates have settled, that I am to leave next Saturday.'

'And where are you going? to London?'

'Yes, to London. I am sorry I am leaving so soon; but it can't be helped. I have met many nice people here—some of whom I shall not be able to forget.'

'You speak as if it were necessary to forget them—it is surely always better to remember.'

'I shall remember you.'

'Do you think you will?'

At this moment only one thing in the world seemed to be of much real importance—that the man now sitting by her side should not be taken away from her. To know that he existed, though far from her, would be almost enough—a sort of beacon-light—a light she might never reach to, but which would guide her . . . whither?

In no century have men been loved so implicitly by women as in the nineteenth; nor could this be otherwise, for putting aside the fact that the natural wants of love have become a nervous erethism in the struggle that a surplus population of more than two million women has created, there are psychological reasons that to-day more than ever impel women to shrink from the intellectual monotony of their sex, and to view with increasing admiration the male mind; for as the gates of the harem are being broken down, and the gloom of the female mind clears, it becomes certain that woman brings a loftier reverence to the shrine of man than she has done in any past age, seeing, as she now does, in him the incarnation of the freedom of which she is vaguely conscious and which she is perceptibly acquiring. So sets the main current that is bearing civilization along; but beneath the great feminine tide there is an undercurrent of hatred and revolt. This is particularly observable in the leaders of the movement; women who in the tumult of their aspirations, and their passionate yearnings towards the new ideal, and the memory of the abasement their sex have been in the past, and are still being in the present, subjected to, forget the laws of life, and with virulent virtue and protest condemn love—that is to say, love in the sense of sexual intercourse—and proclaim a higher mission for woman than to be the mother of men: and an adjuvant, unless corrected by sanative qualities of a high order, is, of course, found in any physical defect. But as the corporeal and incorporeal hereditaments of Alice Barton and Lady Cecilia Cullen were examined fully in the beginning of this chapter, it is only necessary to here indicate the order of ideas—the moral atmosphere of the time—to understand the efflorescence of the two minds, and to realize how curiously representative they are of this last quarter of the nineteenth century.

And it was necessary to make that survey of psychical cause and effect to appreciate the sentiments that actuated Alice in her relationship with Harding. She loved him, but more through the imagination than the heart. She knew he was deceiving her, but to her he meant so much that she had not the force of will to cast him off, and abandoned herself to the intellectual sensualism of his society. It was this, and nothing more. What her love might have been it is not necessary to analyze; in the present circumstances, it was completely merged in the knowledge that he was to

her, light, freedom, and instruction, and that when he left, darkness and ignorance would again close in upon her. They had not spoken for some moments. With a cruelty that was peculiar to him, he waited for her to break the silence.

'I am sorry you are going away; I am afraid we shall never meet again.'

'Oh yes, we shall,' he replied: 'you'll get married one of these days and come to live in London.'

'Why should I go to live in London?'

'There are Frenchmen born in England, Englishmen born in France. Heine was a Frenchman born in Germany—and you are a Kensingtonian. I see nothing Irish in you. Oh, you are very Kensington, and therefore you will—I do not know when or how, but assuredly as a stream goes to the river and the river to the sea, you will drift to your native place—Kensington. But do you know that I have left the hotel? There were too many people about to do much work, so I took rooms in Molesworth Street—there I can write and read undisturbed. You might come and see me.'

'I should like to very much, but I don't think I could ask mother to come with me; she is so very busy just now.'

'Well, don't ask your mother to come; you won't be afraid to come alone?'

'I am afraid I could not do that.'

'Why not? No one will ever know anything about it.'

'Very possibly, but I don't think it would be a proper thing to do—I don't think it would be a *right* thing to do.'

'Right! I thought we had ceased to believe in heaven and hell.'

'Yes; but does that change anything? There are surely duties that we owe to our people, to our families. The present ordering of things may be unjust, but, as long as it exists, had we not better live in accordance with it?'

'A very sensible answer, and I suppose you are right.'

Alice looked at him in astonishment, but she was shaken too intensely in all her feelings to see that he was perfectly sincere, that his answer was that of a man who saw and felt through his intelligence, and not his conscience.

The conversation had come to a pause, and the silence was broken suddenly by whispered words, and the abundant laughter that was seemingly used to hide the emotions that oppressed the speakers. Finally they sat down quite close to, but hidden from, Alice and Harding by a screen, and through the paper even their breathing was audible. All the dancers were gone; there was scarcely a white skirt or black coat in the pale blueness of the room. Evidently the lovers thought they were well out of reach of eavesdroppers. Alice felt this, but before she could rise to go Fred Scully had said—

'Now, May, I hope you won't refuse to let me come and see you in your room to-night. It would be too cruel if you did. I'll steal along the passage; no one will hear, no one will ever know, and I'll be so very good. I promise you I will.'

'Oh, Fred, I'm afraid I can't trust you; it would be so very wicked.'

'Nothing is wicked when we really love; besides, I only want to talk to you.'

'You can talk to me here.'

'Yes, but it isn't the same thing; anyone can talk to you here. I want to show you a little poem I cut out of a newspaper to-day for you. I'll steal along the passage—no one will ever know.'

'You'll promise to be very good, and you won't stop more than five minutes.'

The words were spoken in low, soft tones, exquisitely expressive of the overthrow of reason and the merging of all the senses in the sweet abandonment of passion.

Alice sat unable to move, till at last, awakening with a pained look in her grey eyes, she touched Harding's hand with hers, and, laying her finger on her lips, she arose. Their footfalls made no sound on the deep, soft carpet.

'This is very terrible,' she murmured, half to herself.

Harding had too much tact to answer; and, taking advantage of the appearance of Violet Scully, who came walking gaily down the room on the Marquis's arm, he said:

'Your friend Miss Scully seems to be in high spirits.'

Violet exchanged smiles with Alice as she passed. The smile was one of triumph. She had waltzed three times with the Marquis, and was now going to sit out a set of quadrilles.

'What a beautiful waltz the *Blue Danube* is!' she said, leading her admirer to where the blue fans were numerous. Upon the glistening piano stood a pot filled with white azaleas; and, in the pauses of the conversation, one heard the glass of the chandeliers tinkling gently to the vibration of the music.

'It is a beautiful waltz when I am dancing it with you.'

'I am sure you say that to every girl you dance with.'

'No, I shouldn't know how to say so to anyone but you,' said the little man humbly; and so instinct were the words with truth that the girl, in the violence of her emotion, fancied her heart had ceased to beat.

'But you haven't known me a fortnight,' she answered involuntarily.

'But that doesn't matter; the moment I saw you, I—I—liked you. It is so easy to know the people we—like; we know it at once—at least I do.'

She was more self-possessed than he, but the words 'Am I—am I going to be a marchioness?' throbbed like a burning bullet sunk into the very centre of her forehead. And to maintain her mental equipoise she was forced, though by doing so she felt she was jeopardizing her chances, to coquette with him. After a long silence she said:

'Oh, do you think we know at first sight the people we like? Do you believe in first impressions?'

'My first and last impressions of you are always the same. All I know is that when you are present all things are bright, beautiful, and cheering, and when you are away I don't much care what happens. Now, these Castle balls used to bore me to death last year; I used to go into a back room and fall

asleep. But this year I am as lively as a kitten—I think I could go on for ever, and the Castle seems to me the most glorious place on earth. I used to hate it; I was as bad as Parnell, but not for the same reasons, of course. Now I am only afraid he will have his way, and they'll shut the whole place up. Anyhow, even if they do, I shall always look back upon this season as a very happy time.'

'But you do not really think that Parnell will be allowed to have his way?' said Violet inadvertently.

'I don't know; I don't take much interest in politics, but I believe things are going to the bad. Dublin, they say, is undermined with secret societies, and the murder that was committed the other day in Sackville Street was the punishment they inflict on those whom they suspect of being informers, even remotely.'

'But don't you think the Government will soon be obliged to step in and put an end to all this kind of thing?'

'I don't know; I'm afraid they'll do nothing until we landlords are all ruined.'

Violet's thin face contracted. She had introduced a subject that might prevent him from ever proposing to her. She knew how heavily the Kilcarney estates were mortgaged; and, even now, as she rightly conjectured, the poor little man was inwardly trembling at the folly it had been on his lips to speak. Three of his immediate ancestors had married penniless girls, and it was well known that another love-match would precipitate the property over that precipice known to every Irish landowner—the Encumbered Estates Court. But those dainty temples, so finely shaded with light brown tresses, that delicately moulded head—delicate as an Indian carven ivory, dispelled all thoughts of his property, and he forgot his duty to marry an heiress. Violet meanwhile, prompted by her instinct, said the right words:

'But things never turn out as well or as badly as we expect them to.'

This facile philosophy went like wine to the little Marquis's head, and he longed to throw himself at the feet of his goddess and thank her for the balm she had poured upon him. The gloom of approaching ruin disappeared,

and he saw nothing in the world but a white tulle skirt, a thin foot, a thin bosom, and a pair of bright grey eyes. Vaguely he sought for equivalent words, but loud-talking dancers passed into the room, and, abashed by their stares, the Marquis broke off a flowering branch and said, stammering the while incoherently:

'Will you keep this in memory of this evening?'

Violet thrust the flowers into her bosom, and was about to thank him, when an A.D.C. came up and claimed her for the dance. She told him he was mistaken, that she was engaged; and, taking Lord Kilcarney's arm, they made their way in silence back to the ball-room. Violet was satisfied; she felt now very sure of her Marquis, and, as they approached Mrs. Scully, a quick glance said that things were going as satisfactorily as could be desired. Not daring to trust herself to the gossip of the chaperons, this excellent lady sat apart, maintaining the solitary dignity to which the Galway counter had accustomed her. She received the Marquis with the same smile as she used to bestow on her best customers, and they talked for a few minutes of the different aspects of the ball-room, of their friends, of things that did not interest them. Then Violet said winsomely, affecting an accent of command that enchanted him:

'Now I want you to go and dance with someone else; let me see—what do you say to Olive Barton? If you don't, I shall be in her mother's black books for the rest of my life. Now go. We shall be at home to-morrow; you might come in for tea;' and, suffocated with secret joy, Lord Kilcarney made his way across the room to Mrs. Barton, who foolishly cancelled a couple of Olive's engagements, and sent her off to dance with him, whereas wise Violet sat by her mother, refusing all her partners; but, when *God Save the Queen* was played, she accepted Lord Kilcarney's arm, and they pressed forward to see the Lord-Lieutenant and Her Excellency pass down the room.

Violet's eyes feasted on the bowing black coats and light toilettes, and, leaning on her escutcheon, she dreamed vividly of the following year when she would take her place amid all these noble people, and, as high as they, stand a peeress on the daïs.

CHAPTER 20

'So you couldn't manage to keep him after all, my lady? When did he leave the hotel?'

'Mr. Harding left Dublin last Monday week.'

Alice wondered if her mother hated her; if she didn't, it was difficult to account for her cruel words. And this was the girl's grief, and she feared that hatred would beget hatred, and that she would learn to hate her mother. But Mrs. Barton was a loving and affectionate mother, who would sacrifice herself for one child almost as readily for the other. In each of us there are traits that the chances of life have never revealed; and though she would have sat by the bedside, even if Alice were stricken with typhoid fever, Mrs. Barton recoiled spitefully like a cat before the stern rectitudes of a nature so dissimilar from her own. She had fashioned Olive, who was now but a pale copy of her mother according to her guise: all the affectations had been faithfully reproduced, but the charm of the original had evaporated like a perfume. It would be rash to say that Mrs. Barton did not see that the weapons which had proved so deadly in her hands were ineffectual in her daughter's; but twenty years of elegant harlotry had blunted her finer perceptions, and now the grossest means of pushing Olive and the Marquis morally and physically into each other's arms seemed to her the best. Alice was to her but a plain girl, whose misfortune was that she had ever been born. This idea had grown up with Mrs. Barton, and fifteen years ago she had seen in the child's face the spinster of fifty. But since the appearance of Harding, and the manifest interest he had shown in her daughter, Mrs. Barton's convictions that Alice would never be able to find a husband had been somewhat shaken, and she had almost concluded that it would be as well—for there was no knowing what men's tastes were—to give her a chance. Nor was the dawning fancy dispelled by the fact that Harding had not proposed, and the cutting words she had addressed to the girl were the result of the nervous irritation caused by the marked attention the Marquis was paying Violet Scully.

For, like Alice, Mrs. Barton never lived long in a fool's paradise, and she now saw that the battle was going against her, and would most assuredly be lost unless a determined effort was made. So she delayed not a moment in owning to herself that she had committed a mistake in going to the Shelbourne Hotel. Had she taken a house in Mount Street or Fitzwilliam Place, she could have had all the best men from the barracks continually at her house. But at the hotel she was helpless; there were too many people about, too many beasts of women criticizing her conduct. Mrs. Barton had given two dinner-parties in a private room hired for the occasion; but these dinners could scarcely be called successful. On one occasion they had seven men to dinner, and as some half-dozen more turned in in the evening, it became necessary to send down to the ladies' drawing-room for partners. Bertha Duffy and the girl in red of course responded to the call, but they had rendered everything odious by continuous vulgarity and brogue. Then other mistakes had been made. A charity costume ball had been advertised. It was to be held in the Rotunda. An imposing list of names headed the prospectus, and it was confidently stated that all the lady patronesses would attend. Mrs. Barton fell into the trap, and, to her dismay, found herself and her girls in the company of the rag, tag, and bobtail of Catholic Dublin: Bohemian girls fabricated out of bed-curtains, negro minstrels that an application of grease and burnt cork had brought into a filthy existence. And from the single gallery that encircled this tomb-like building the small tradespeople looked down upon the multicoloured crowd that strove to dance through the mud that a late Land League meeting had left upon the floor; and all the while grey dust fell steadily into the dancers' eyes and into the sloppy tea distributed at counters placed here and there like coffee-stands in the public street.

'I never felt so low in my life,' said the lady who always brought back an A.D.C. from the Castle, and the phrase was cited afterwards as being admirably descriptive of the festival.

When it became known that the Bartons had been present at this ball, that the beauty had been seen dancing with the young Catholic nobodies, their names were struck off the lists, and they were asked to no more private dances at the Castle. Lord Dungory was sent to interview the Chamberlain,

but that official could promise nothing. Mrs. Barton's hand was therefore forced. It was obligatory upon her to have some place where she could entertain officers; the Shelbourne did not lend itself to that purpose. She hired a house in Mount Street, and one that possessed a polished floor admirably suited to dancing.

Then she threw off the mask, and pirate-like, regardless of the laws of chaperons, resolved to carry on the war as she thought proper. She'd have done once and for ever with those beasts of women who abused and criticized her. Henceforth she would shut her door against them all, and it would only be open to men—young men for her daughters, elderly men for herself. At four o'clock in the afternoon the entertainment began. Light refreshments, consisting of tea, claret, biscuits, and cigarettes, were laid out in the dining-room. Having partaken, the company, consisting of three colonels and some half-dozen subalterns, went upstairs to the drawing-room. And in recognition of her flirtation with Harding, a young man replaced Alice at the piano, and for half-a-crown an hour supplied the necessary music.

Round and round the girls went, passing in turn out of the arms of an old into those of a young man, and back again. If they stayed their feet for a moment, Mrs. Barton glided across the floor, and, with insinuating gestures and intonations of voice, would beg of them to continue. She declared that it was *la grâce et la beauté*, etc. The merriment did not cease until half-past six. Some of the company then left, and some few were detained for dinner. A new pianist and fresh officers arrived about nine o'clock, and dancing was continued until one or two in the morning. To yawning subalterns the house in Mount Street seemed at first like a little paradise. The incessant dancing was considered fatiguing, but there were interludes in which claret was drunk, cigarettes smoked, and loose conversation permitted in the dining-room.

Then the dinners! Mrs. Barton's dinners are worthy of special study. Her circle of acquaintances being limited, the same guests were generally found at her table. Lord Dungory always sat next to her. He displayed his old-fashioned shirt-front, his cravat, his studs, his urbanity, his French epigram. Lord Rosshill sat opposite him; he was thin, melancholy, aristocratic, silent,

and boring. There was a captain who, since he had left the army, had grown to the image of a butler, and an ashen-tinted young man who wore his arm in a sling; and an old man, who looked like a dirty and worn-out broom, and who put his arm round the backs of the chairs. These and three A.D.C.'s made up the party. There was very little talking, and what there was was generally confined to asking the young ladies if they had been to the Castle, and if they liked dancing.

The Marquis was a constant, although an unwilling guest at all these entertainments. He would fain have refused Mrs. Barton's hospitalities, but so pressing was she that this seemed impossible. There were times when he started at the postman's knock as at the sound of a Land Leaguer's rifle. Too frequently his worst fears were realized. '*Mon cher Marquis*, it will give us much pleasure if you will dine with us to-morrow night at half-past seven.' 'Dear Mrs. Barton, I regret extremely that I am engaged for to-morrow night.' An hour later, '*Mon cher Marquis*, I am very sorry you cannot come to-morrow night, but Thursday will suit us equally well.' What was to be done? A second excuse would result only in a proposal to fix a day next week; better accept and get it over. He must do this or send a rude message to the effect that he was engaged for every day he intended to dine out that season, and he lacked the moral courage to write such a letter. Mrs. Barton's formula for receiving the Marquis never varied. If he arrived early he found Olive waiting to receive him in the drawing-room. She was always prepared with a buttonhole, which she insisted on arranging and pinning into his coat. Then allusion was made to the forget-me-nots that the bouquet was sure to contain; and laughing vacantly—for laughter with Olive took the place of conversation—she fled through the rooms, encouraging him to pursue her. During dinner attempts were made to exchange a few words, but without much success. Nor was it until Olive pelted him with flowers, and he replied by destroying another bouquet and applying it to the same purpose, that much progress was made towards intimacy. But this little scene was exceptional, and on all other occasions Lord Kilcarney maintained an attitude of reserve.

Mrs. Barton was at her wits' end. Three days ago she had met him walking in Grafton Street with Violet; yesterday she had caught sight of him driving

towards Fitzwilliam Place in a four-wheeler. She had fortunately a visit to pay in that neighbourhood, and was rewarded by seeing the Marquis's cab draw up before the Scullys' door. The mere fact that he should use a cab instead of an outside car was a point to consider, but when she noticed that one of the blinds was partially drawn down, her heart sank. Nor did the secret of this suspicious visit long remain her exclusive property. As if revealed by those mysteriously subtle oral and visual faculties observed in savage tribes, by which they divine the approach of their enemies or their prey, two days had not elapsed before the tongue of every chaperon was tipped with the story of the four-wheeler and the half-drawn blind, but it was a distinctly latter-day instinct that had led these ladies to speak of there having been luggage piled upon the roof of this celebrated cab. Henceforth eye, ear, and nostril were open, and in the quivering ardour of the chase they scattered through the covers of Cork Hill and Merrion Square, passing from one to the other, by means of sharp yelps and barkings, every indication of the trail that came across their way. Sometimes hearkening to a voice they had confidence in, they rallied at a single point, and then an old bitch, her nose in the air, her capstrings hanging lugubriously on either side of her weatherbeaten cheeks, would utter a deep and prolonged baying; a little farther on the scent was recovered, and, with sterns wagging and bristles erect, they hunted the quarry vigorously. Every moment he was expected to break—fear was even expressed that he might end by being chopped.

The Shelbourne Hotel was a favourite meet, and in the ladies' drawing-room each fresh piece of news was torn with avidity. The consumption of notepaper was extraordinary. Two, three, four, and even five sheets of paper were often filled with what these scavengeresses could rake out of the gutters of gossip. 'Ah! me arm aches, and the sleeve of me little coat is wore; I am so eager to write it all off to me ant, that I am too impatient to wait to take it off,' was the verbal form in which the girl in red explained her feelings on the subject. Bertha Duffy declared she would write no more; that she was ruining herself in stamps. Nor were the pens of the Brennans silent; and looking over their shoulders, on which the mantles of spinsterhood were fast descending, one read: 'I hear they danced at the Castle three times together last night . . . a friend of mine saw them sitting in Merrion

Square the whole of one afternoon. . . . They say that if he marries her, that he'll be ruined. . . . The estates are terribly encumbered . . . his family are in despair about it. . . . Violet is a very nice girl, but we all know her mother sold bacon behind a counter in Galway. . . . He never looks at Olive Barton now; this is a sad end to her beau, and after feeding him up the whole season. . . . He dined there three times a week: Mrs. Barton took the house on purpose to entertain him. . . . It is said that she offered him twenty thousand pounds if he'd marry her daughter. . . . The money that woman spends is immense, and no one knows whence it comes.'

In these matrimonial excitements the amatories of the lady who brought the A.D.C. home from the Castle passed unheeded. The critical gaze of her friends was sorely distracted, and even the night porter forgot to report the visits of her young gentlemen. May, too, profited largely by the present ferment of curiosity; and, unobserved, she kept her trysts with Fred Scully at the corners of this and that street, and in the hotel they passed furtively down this passage and up that pair of stairs; when disturbed they hid behind the doors.

Mrs. Gould lived in ignorance of all this chambering folly, spending her time either writing letters or gossiping about Lord Kilcarney in the drawing-room. And when she picked up a fragment of fresh news she lost not a moment, but put on her bonnet and carried it over to Mount Street. So assiduous was she in this self-imposed duty, that Mrs. Barton was obliged at last to close her door against this obtrusive visitor.

But one day, after a moment of intense reflection, Mrs. Barton concluded that she was losing the battle—that now, in the eleventh hour, it could only be snatched out of defeat by a bold and determined effort. She sat down and penned one of her admirable invitations to dinner. An hour later a note feebly pleaded a 'previous engagement.' Undaunted, she sat down again and wrote: 'Tomorrow will suit us equally well.' The Marquis yielded; and Lord Dungory was ordered, when he found himself alone with him in the dining-room, to lose no opportunity of insisting upon the imminent ruin of all Irish landlords. He was especially enjoined to say that, whatever chance of escape there was for the owners of unencumbered properties, the doom of those who had mortgages to pay had been sounded. Milord executed his

task with consummate ability; and when the *grand parti*entered the drawing-room, his thoughts were racked with horrible forebodings. The domain woods, the pride of centuries, he saw plundered and cut down; lawns, pleasure-grounds, and gardens distributed among peasants, and he, a miserable outcast, starving in a Belgian boarding-house. Mrs. Barton's eyes brightened at the distressed expression of his face. Olive brought in the buttonhole and went to the piano; Milord engaged Alice's attention; and the Marquis was led into the adjoining room.

'The season is now drawing to its close,' Mrs. Barton said; 'we shall be soon returning to Galway. We shall be separating. I know Olive likes you, but if there is no—if it is not to be, I should like to tell her not to think about it any more.'

The Marquis felt the earth gliding. What could have tempted the woman to speak like this to him? What answer was he to make her? He struggled with words and thoughts that gave way, as he strove to formulate a sentence, like water beneath the arms of one drowning.

'Oh, really, Mrs. Barton,' he said, stammering, speaking like one in a dream, 'you take me by surprise. I did not expect this; you certainly are too kind. In proposing this marriage to me, you do me an honour I did not anticipate, but you know it is difficult offhand, for I am bound to say . . . at least I am not prepared to say that I am in love with your daughter. . . . She is, of course, very beautiful, and no one admires her more than I, but—'

'Olive will have twenty thousand pounds paid down on her wedding-day; not promised, you know, but paid down; and in the present times I think this is more than most girls can say. Most Irish properties are embarrassed, mortgaged,' she continued, risking everything to gain everything, 'and twenty thousand pounds would be a material help to most men. At my death she will have more; I—'

'Oh, Mrs. Barton, do not let us speak of that!' cried the little man.

'And why not? Does it prove that because we are practical, we do not care for a person? I quite understand that it would be impossible for you to marry without money, and that Olive will have twenty thousand paid down on her

wedding-day will not prevent you from being very fond of her. On the contrary, I should think—'

'Twenty thousand pounds is, of course, a great deal of money,' said the little man, shrinking, terror-stricken, from a suddenly protruding glimpse of the future with which Milord had previously poisoned his mind.

'Yes, indeed it is, and in these times,' urged Mrs. Barton.

The weak grey eyes were cast down, abashed by the daring determination of the brown.

'Of course Olive is a beautiful girl,' he said.

'And she is so fond of you, and so full of affection. . . .'

The situation was now tense with fear, anxiety, apprehension; and with resolute fingers Mrs. Barton tightened the chord until the required note vibrated within the moral consciousness. The poor Marquis felt his strength ebbing away; he was powerless as one lying in the hot chamber of a Turkish bath. Would no one come to help him? The implacable melody of *Dream Faces*, which Olive hammered out on the piano, agonized him. If she would stop for one moment he would find the words to tell her mother that he loved Violet Scully and would marry none other. But bang, bang, bang the left hand pounded the bass into his stunned ears, and the eyes that he feared were fixed upon him. He gasped for words, he felt like a drunkard who clutches the air as he reels over a precipice, and the shades of his ancestors seemed to crowd menacingly around him. He strove against his fears until a thin face with luminous eyes shone through the drifting wrack like a stars.

'But we have seen so little of each other,' he said at last; 'Miss Barton is a great beauty, I know, and nobody appreciates her beauty more than I, but I am not what you call in love with her.'

He deplored the feebleness of his words, and Mrs. Barton swooped upon him again.

'You do not love her because, as you say, you have seen very little of each other. We are going down to Brookfield to-morrow. We shall be very glad if

you will come with us, and in the country you will have an opportunity of judging, of knowing her: and she is such an affectionate little thing.'

Affrighted, the Marquis sought again for words, and he glanced at his torturer timidly, like the hare on the ever-nearing hounds. Why did she pursue him, he asked, in this terrible way? Had she gone mad? What was he to say? He had not the courage to answer no to her face. Besides, if Violet would not have him, he might as well save the family estates. If Violet refused him! Then he didn't care what became of him! He sought, and he struggled for words, for words that would save him; and, in this hour of deep tribulation, words came and they saved him.

'I have a great deal of business to attend to to-morrow. I am—that is to say, my solicitor is, raising for me a large sum of money at four per cent. On one large mortgage I am paying six per cent., therefore if I can get the money at four I shall be by some hundreds of pounds a richer man than I am at present. At the end of the week this matter will be settled. I will write to you and say when I shall be able to accept your invitation.'

Mrs. Barton would have preferred to have brought the matter at once to a conclusion, but in the hesitation that ensued, the Marquis, unable to withstand the strain set upon his feelings any longer, moved away from her. And in the next room, to save himself from further persecution, he engaged at once in conversation with Alice. Ten minutes after he said good-night. To get out of the light into the dark, to feel the cool wind upon his cheek, oh! what a relief! 'What could have persuaded that woman to speak to me as she did? She must be mad.' He walked on as if in a dream, the guineas she had promised him chinking dubiously through his brain. Then stopping suddenly, overcome by nerve-excitement, he threw his arms in the air: his features twitched convulsively. The spasm passed; and, unconscious of all save the thoughts that held and tore him—their palpitating prey—he walked onwards. . . . Black ruin on one side, and oh! what sweet white vision of happiness on the other! Why was he thus tortured—why was he thus torn on the rack of such a terrible discussion? He stopped again, and his weak neck swayed plaintively. Then, in the sullen calm that followed, the thought crossed his mind: If he only knew. . . . She might refuse him; if so, he did not care what became of him, and he would accept the other willingly.

But would she refuse him? That he must know at once. If she did refuse, he would, at all events, escape the black looks of his relations, and in the cowardice of the thought the weary spirit was healed, assuaged, as tired limbs might be in a bath of cool, clear water. Why lose a moment? It was only half-past ten—an 'outside' would take him in less than two minutes to Fitzwilliam Place. Yes, he would go.

And as the car clattered he feasted on the white thin face and the grey allurements of her eyes. But if she weren't at home.

He was shown upstairs. Mother and daughter were alone, talking over the fire in the drawing-room. Nothing could be more propitious, but his fears returned to him, and when he strove to explain the lateness of his visit his face had again grown suddenly haggard and worn. Violet exchanged glances, and said in looks, if not in words: 'It is clear they have been hunting him pretty closely to-day.'

'I must apologize,' he said, 'for calling on you at such an hour; I really did not think it was so late, but the fact is I was rather anxious to see. . . .'

'But won't you sit down, Lord Kilcarney?' said Violet. 'I assure you we never go to bed before twelve, and sometimes we sit up here until one—don't we, mamma?'

Mrs. Scully smiled jocosely, and the Marquis sat down. In an instant his fate was decided. Overcome by the girl's frail sweetness, by the pellucid gaiety of her grey eyes, he surrendered; and his name and fortune fluttered into her lap, helplessly as a blown leaf. He said:

'I came to see you to-night . . . I took the liberty of calling on you at this late hour, because things had occurred that . . . well, I mean . . . you must have observed that I was attached to you. I don't know if you guessed it, but the fact is that I never cared for anyone as I do for you, and I felt I could bear with uncertainty no longer, and that I must come to-night, and ask you if you will have me.'

Violet raised her eyes.

'Say yes,' murmured the Marquis, and it seemed to him that in the words life had fallen from his lips.

'Yes,' was the answer, and he clasped the thin hand she extended to him.

'Ah, how happy you have made me, I never thought such honours were in store for me,' exclaimed Mrs. Scully. The discipline of years was lost in a moment; and, reverting to her long-buried self, she clasped the Marquis to her agitated bosom. Violet looked annoyed, ashamed; and Mrs. Scully, whom excitement had stripped of all her grand manners, said:

'And now, me dear children, I'll leave you to yerselves.'

The lovers sat side by side. Violet thought of the great love she had inspired, and the Marquis of the long years of happiness that would—that must now be his, of the frail grace that as a bland odour seemed to float about his beloved. And now that she was his, he would have her know that his love of her rose out of his deepest sense of soul; but words were weak: he seemed to be tongue-tied.

'Where did you dine to-night?' she said suddenly.

'With the Bartons.'

He told her everything—of the proposal and the invitation to Brookfield.

'And are you going down to Galway to stay with them?'

'Of course not. How can you ask such a question?'

'And why not—why shouldn't you go? I wish you would,' she added; and the light in her grey eyes was malign.

'You're joking? You surely don't mean what you say. I thought you said you loved me.'

'Yes, my dear Harry, that is the very reason. We love each other, therefore I know I can trust you.'

He pressed the hand—the silken skin, the palm delicately moist—in recognition of her kind words.

'I wouldn't go for anything in the world. I hate those people. 'Pon my word, I don't think anything would tempt me to spend a week with them in the country.'

'Yes; I could.'

The Marquis laughed. 'Yes, you could—you could tempt me to do anything. But why should you want me to go and spend a week with them in Galway?'

'Because, dear, they were rude to me; because,' she added, casting down her eyes—'because they tried to buy you from me. That is why I should like to humiliate them.'

The enchantment of the Marquis was completed, and he said:

'What, a whole week away from you! a whole week with Mrs. Barton! I could not endure it.'

'What, not for my sake?'

'Anything for your sake, darling.' He clasped her in his arms, and then they lapsed into silence that to him was even sweeter than the kiss she had given him. Love's deepest delight is the ineffable consciousness of our own weakness. We drink the sweetened cup in its entirety when, having ceased to will, we abandon ourselves with the lethal languors of the swimmer to the vague depths of dreams. And it was past midnight when the Marquis left Fitzwilliam Place. The ladies accompanied him downstairs; their hands helped him to his hat and coat, and then the lock slipped back sharply, and in the gloom, broken in one spot by the low-burning gas, the women wondered.

'Oh, mamma, mamma, mamma! I am so happy!' the girl exclaimed, and, weeping passionately, she threw herself for rest upon Mrs. Scully's arms.

'Yes, my child; you have been very good, you have made me very happy. You'll be a marchioness. Who would have thought I'd have lived to see all this honour when I served in the little shop at Galway!'

At the mention of the shop Violet recovered her composure, and mother and daughter listened to the receding footfalls.

'I wonder if he is happy,' Violet murmured; 'as happy as I am. For I do like him. He is a good sort.'

'Your happiness is a different happiness,' Mrs. Scully answered.

Like a flowering tree, a luxuriant joy bloomed in the Marquis's heart; in its shade and fragrance his thoughts lay supinely; and, a prey to many floating and fanciful imaginings, he walked onwards through the darkness. In the lowering skies he saw the fair face that had led him to the verge on which he now stood.

'Was anybody as happy as he? And what did his happiness mean?' he asked himself.

Shades flitted across yellow window-panes, and he remembered he had received an invitation for this very ball.

Cats slunk through the area railings; policemen moved from their hiding corners; a lover passed on with his dreams.

CHAPTER 21

Mrs. Barton rarely took anyone into her confidence, and her plan for the capture of the Marquis was locked within her breast. Not to her husband, nor yet to Milord, did she think of going for advice. Her special experience of life had taught her to trust none, to be self-reliant, and never to give up hope. For as she often said, it is the last effort that wins the battle. Mrs. Barton's knowledge of the world, when it came to be analyzed, was only that of the courtesan—skin deep.

Two days after she received a note from the Marquis, saying he would be glad to spend a week with them at Brookfield. She read it quietly, slipped it into the pocket of the black silk that covered the unseen feet, and glided out of the room. Every detail was clear to her. They must leave Dublin to-morrow morning; they need not trouble about calling on a pack of women, but they would have all their men friends to dinner.

Mr. Barton, when he was informed of these sudden determinations, was in the act of rehearsing a song he was to sing the following day at a concert.

'But, my dear,' he said, tightening one of the strings; 'the public will be awfully disappointed.'

'Yes, my dear, yes; I am very sorry, but I have my reasons—serious reasons; and in this world we must only do what's right.'

'Then in the next world we shall be able to do everything that's wrong,' said Mr. Barton; and he threw back his blond locks with troubadour-like waves of his lymphatic hand. 'I shall like the next world better than this,' he added, and his wife and daughter laughed; for papa was supposed to be very naughty.

'Olive, dear—'

'Oh, mamma, I wish you wouldn't call me Olive. I shall change my name. Captain Talbot was chaffing me about it yesterday. Everybody chaffs me about it.'

'Never mind, my dear; it makes a subject of conversation. But I was going to tell you that we shall have to start for Brookfield to-morrow.'

'Go to Brookfield! I couldn't possibly leave Dublin yet a while; what would all my young men do—they'd die of broken hearts!'

'It won't matter much if they do; there aren't a dozen worth two thousand a year each.'

'No? You are joking, mamma. And the Marquis?'

'That's a secret, dear.'

'Then you don't think he'll propose to me after all; and I gave up Edward—Captain Hibbert.'

'I thought you had forgotten that horrid man's name. I didn't say, dear, that the Marquis wouldn't propose to you—of course he will. But we must leave Dublin to-morrow—I have serious reasons.'

'Oh, mamma, I didn't think you were so cruel, to go back to that hateful place, where everybody talks of rents, and that odious Land League.'

'Now, I will not allow my darling to cry like that,' exclaimed Mrs. Barton, and she threw her arms round the girl's shoulders. 'I didn't say that there wouldn't be a man within seven miles. On the contrary, there will be one very charming man indeed.'

'What do you mean, mamma?'

'That's a secret—that's a secret.'

Alice was told that she had better come home early that afternoon, so that she might have plenty of time to pack her own things and help her sister with hers; and it seemed to her unbelievable that she was at last leaving that hateful little varnished floor, complimenting old beaux and young A.D.C.'s.

But if to nobody else, she must say good-bye to May. She had hardly seen her since the night of the State ball—the night she had given Fred Scully permission to see her in her room. She found her in the ladies' drawing-room.

'How do you do, May?'

'Oh, how do you do, Alice? I am so glad to see you. What a dreadful day!'

'Yes, isn't it? Don't you find it very depressing?'

'I should think I did. I'm feeling rather out of sorts. Do you ever feel out of sorts? you know, when everything seems as if it were reflected in a darkened glass? There are times when we girls are nervous and weak, and ready to quarrel with anyone. I don't know what I wish for now; I think I should like to go back to the country.'

'We are going back to-morrow morning.'

'You don't say so; and how's that? There are plenty of balls and afternoon dances. What does Olive say to going home?'

'She doesn't mind. You know mamma always said she would return immediately after the Castle balls.'

'And now that it is all over, tell me what you think of the Castle. Did it come up to your expectations?'

'I don't know that I think much about the matter. I am not so fond of dancing as you are.'

'Oh, goodness me, goodness me, how ill I do feel,' said May, as she started and yawned in a way that betokened the nervous lassitude she was suffering from.

'Perhaps you had better see the doctor,' said Alice significantly.

'I'm worried. Fred hasn't been as nice lately as he used to be.'

'What has he done?'

'Last night he promised to meet me in the Square, and he wrote to say he couldn't come, that he was forced to go and see an important customer about some horses.'

'Perhaps he had.'

'I dare say he had, but what of that? It does not make it any less disagreeable for me to be disappointed.'

'How cross you are, May! I came out on purpose to talk to you on this very subject. I hope you won't be angry, but I think it is my duty to tell you that people are beginning to talk about you.'

'And what do they say?'

'Well, they say many unpleasant things; you know how ill-natured people are.'

'Yes, but what do they say?'

'They say you are desperately in love with Fred Scully.'

'Supposing I were; is there any very great harm in that?'

'I only want to put you on your guard, May dear; and since I have come here for the purpose of speaking out, I had better do so, however unpleasant it may be; and I must say that you often forget yourself when he is in the room, and by your whole manner betray your feelings. You look at him—'

'You needn't talk. Now that Harding has left town, these moral reflections come very easy to you!'

Alice blushed a little; she trembled, and pursuing her advantage, May said:

'Oh, yes; I have watched you in the Castle sitting out dances; and when girls like you butter! 'Pon my word, it was painful to look at you.'

'Mr. Harding and I talked merely of books and pictures.'

'If you come here to insinuate that Fred and I are in the habit of indulging in improper conversation. . . . I didn't expect this from you. I shan't stop another moment. I shan't speak to you again.'

Picking up her novel, and deaf to all explanations, May walked haughtily out of the room. Alice would have given much to help; and, her heart filled with gentle disappointment, she returned home. The evening was spent in packing; and next morning at dawn, looking tired, their eyes still heavy with sleep, the Bartons breakfasted for the last time in Mount Street.

At the Broadstone they met Lord Dungory. Then, their feet and knees cosily wrapped up in furs, with copies of the *Freeman's Journal* lying on the top, they deplored the ineffectiveness of Mr. Forster's Coercion Act. Eight hundred people were in prison, and still the red shadow of murder pointed across the land. Milord read from the newspaper:

'A dastardly outrage was committed last night in the neighbourhood of Mullingar. A woman named Mary —— had some differences with her sister Bridget ——. One day, after some angry words, it appears that she left the house, and seeing a man working in a potato-field, she asked him if he could do anything to help her. He scratched his head, and, after a moment's reflection, he said he was going to meet a "party," and he would see what could be done. On the following day he suggested that Bridget might be removed for the sum of one pound. Mary —— could not, however, procure more than fifteen shillings, and a bargain was struck. On the night arranged for the assassination Mary wished to leave the house, not caring to see her sister shot in her presence, but Pat declared that her absence would excite suspicion. In the words of one of the murderers, the deed was accomplished "nately and without unnecessary fuss."'

'I wonder,' said Mrs. Barton, 'what those wretches will have to do before the Government will consent to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act, and place the country in the hands of the military. Do they never think of how wickedly they are behaving, and of how God will punish them when they die? Do they never think of their immortal souls?'

'*L'âme du paysan se vautre dans la boue comme la mienne se plaît dans la soie*.'

'*Dans la soie! dans la soie! oh, ce Milord, ce Milord!*'

'*Oui, madame*,' he added, lowering his voice, '*dans le blanc paradis de votre corsage*.'

Three days after life at Brookfield had resumed its ordinary course. Once breakfast was over, Arthur retired to the consideration of the pectoral muscles of the ancient Briton, Milord drank his glass of sherry at half-past one, and Mrs. Barton devoted herself to the double task of amusing him and encouraging Olive with visions of future fame. Alice was therefore left

definitely to herself, and without hindrance or comment was allowed to set up her writing-table, and spend as much time as she pleased in her bedroom.

Several sheets of foolscap paper covered with large open handwriting lay upon the table. Upon the first page, with a line ruled beneath it, stood the title: 'The Diary of a Plain Girl—Notes and Sensations.' She had just laid aside her pen and was waiting for Cecilia.

'Oh, Alice darling, how are you? I am delighted—I am so delighted to see you. Let me kiss you, let me see you; I have been longing for you for weeks—for months.'

Alice bent her face down, and then, holding each other's hands, the girls stood looking through a deep and expressive silence into each other's eyes.

'I wish, Alice, I could tell you how glad I am to have you back: it seems like heaven to see you again. You look so nice, so true, so sweet, so perfect. There never was anyone so perfect as you, Alice.'

'Cecilia dear, you shouldn't talk to me like that; it is absurd. Indeed, I don't think it is quite right.'

'Not quite right,' replied the cripple sadly; 'what do you mean? Why is it wrong—why should it be wrong for me to love you?'

'I don't mean to say that it is wrong; you misunderstand me; but—but—well, I don't know how to explain myself, but—'

'I know, I know, I know,' said Cecilia, and her nervous sensitivity revealed thoughts in Alice's mind—thoughts of which Alice herself was not distinctly conscious, just as a photograph exposes irregularities in the texture of a leaf that the naked eye would not perceive.

'If Harding were to speak to you so, you wouldn't think it wrong.'

Alice's face flushed a little, and she said, with a certain resoluteness in her voice, 'Cecilia, I wish you wouldn't talk to me in this way. You give me great pain.'

'I am sorry if I do, but I can't help it. I am jealous of the words that are spoken to you, of the air you breathe, of the ground you walk upon. How, then, can I help hating that man?'

'I do not wish to argue this point with you, Cecilia, nor am I sure that I understand it. There is no one I like better than you, dear, but that we should be jealous of each other is absurd.'

'For you perhaps, but not for me.' Cecilia looked at Alice reproachfully, and at the end of a long and morose silence she said:

'You received the long letter I wrote to you about him?'

'Yes, Cecilia, and I answered it. It seems to me very foolish to pronounce condemnatory opinion on the whole world; and particularly for you who have seen so little of it.'

'That doesn't matter. People are blinded by their passions; but when these have worn themselves out, they see the truth in all its horrible nakedness. One of these days you'll tell me that I am right. You have been a good deal in the world lately; tell me if you have found it beautiful. You didn't believe me when I told you that men were vile and abominable; you said there were good men in the world, that you were sure of it. Have you found them? Was Mr. Harding so very perfect?'

Alice coloured again; she hesitated, and in the silence Cecilia again divined her friend's thoughts.

'A very poor ideal indeed, it seems to me that you set yourself—to make the best of this wretched world.'

'I cannot understand what good can come of craving after the unattainable,' said Alice, looking earnestly out of her grey sharp eyes.

'True beauty lies only in the unattainable,' said Cecilia, lifting her eyes with that curious movement of the eyeball by which painters represent faith and mysticism.

At the end of a long silence, Alice said:

'But you'll have some tea, will you not, Cecilia?'

'Yes; but don't let us go downstairs.'

'We'll have it up here; Barnes will bring it up.'

'Oh, that will be so nice.'

The girls drew closer to the fire, and in its uniting warmth they looked into the ardent face of their friendship, talking, at first, conscious of the appropriateness of their conversation; but soon forgetful of the more serious themes they had been discussing, questions were asked and answered, and comments passed, upon the presentations, the dresses, the crowds, upon all their acquaintances.

'It is given out, Alice dear, that Lord Kilcarney is coming down to stay at Brookfield. Is it true?'

'I have heard nothing of it. Whom did you hear it from?'

'Well, the Duffys wrote it to my sisters. The Duffys, you know, have all the Dublin news.'

'What dreadful gossips they are! And the wonderful part of it is that they often tell you that things have happened long before they do happen.'

'Yes; I have noticed that. They anticipate the news.'

The girls laughed lightly, and Cecilia continued:

'But tell me, which do you think he admires most, Olive or Violet? The rumour goes that he pays Violet great attentions. The family is, of course, wild about it. She hasn't a penny piece, and Olive, they say, has a good deal of money.'

'I don't know.'

'You must show me the dress you wore. You described it beautifully in your letter. You must have looked very sweet. Did everybody say so?'

'I am not sure that they did. Men, you know, do not always admire what women do.'

'I should think not. Men only admire beastliness.'

'Cecilia dear, you shouldn't talk like that; it isn't nice.'

Cecilia looked at Alice wistfully, and she said:

'But tell me about the presentations. I suppose there were an immense number of people present?'

'Yes, and particularly *débutantes*; there were a great number presented this year. It was considered a large Drawing-Room.'

'And how are you presented? I've heard my sister speak about it, but I never quite understood.'

At that moment Barnes brought in the tea. She set it on a little table used for the purpose.

'There is a letter for you, miss, on the tray,' she said as she left the room; 'it came by the afternoon post.'

Without answering, Alice continued to pour out the tea, but when she handed Cecilia her cup, she said, surprised at the dull, sullen stare fixed upon her:

'What is the matter? Why do you look at me like that?'

'That letter, I am sure, is from Harding; it is a man's handwriting.'

She had been expecting that letter for days.

'Oh! give it me,' she said impulsively.

'There it is; I wouldn't touch it. I knew you liked that man; but I didn't expect to find you corresponding with him. It is shameful; it isn't worthy of you. You might have left such things to May Gould.'

'Cecilia, you have no right to speak to me in that way; you are presuming too much on our friendship.'

'Oh, yes, yes; but before you met him I could not presume too much upon our friendship.'

'If you want to know why I wrote to Mr. Harding, I'll tell you.'

'It was you who wrote to him, then?'

'Yes, I wrote to him.'

'Oh, yes, yes, yes; I see it all now,' cried Cecilia, and she walked wildly to and fro, her eye tinged with a strange glare. 'Yes, I see it all. This room, that was once a girl's room, is now Harding's room. He is the atmosphere of the place. I was conscious of it when I entered, but now it is visible to me—that manuscript, that writing-table, that letter. Oh yes, it is Harding, all is Harding!'

'Cecilia, Cecilia, think, I beg of you, of what you are saying.'

But when Alice approached and strove to raise her from the pillow upon which she had thrown herself, she started up and savagely confronted her.

'Don't touch me, don't touch me!' she cried. 'I cannot bear it. What are you to me, what am I to you? It is not with me you would care to be, but with *him*. It is not my kiss of friendship that would console you, but his kiss of passion that would charm you. . . . Go to him, and leave me to die.'

'Was this insanity?' And then, forgetful of the abuse that was being showered upon her, Alice said:

'Cecilia dear, listen; I'll forgive the language you have used toward me, for I know you do not know what you are saying. You must be ill . . . you cannot be in your right senses to-day, or you would not speak like that.'

'You would soothe me, but you little dream of the poison you are dropping on my wounds. You never understood, you are too far removed from me in thought and feeling ever to understand—no, your spirituality is only a delusion; you are no better at heart than May Gould. It is the same thing: one seeks a husband, another gratifies herself with a lover. It is the same thing—where's the difference? It is animal passion all the same. And that letter is full of it—it must be—I am sure it is.'

'You are very insulting, Cecilia. Where have you thrown my letter?'

The letter had fallen beneath the table. Alice made a movement towards it, but, overcome by mad rage, Cecilia caught it up and threw it into the fire. Alice rescued her letter, and then, her face full of stern indignation, she said:

'I think, Cecilia, you had better leave my room, and before you come to see me again, I shall expect to receive a written apology for the outrageous way you have behaved.'

In a few days came a humble and penitent letter; Cecilia returned, her eyes full of tears, and begged to be forgiven; the girls resumed their friendship, but both were conscious that it was neither so bright nor so communicative as in the olden days.

CHAPTER 22

'Something has happened to my learned daughter,' said Mr. Barton, and he continued his thumb-nail sketch on the tablecloth. 'What is it?' he added indolently.

Alice passed the cheque and the memorandum across the table. 'Three pounds for three articles contributed to the —— during the month of April.'

'You don't mean to say, Alice, you got three pounds for your writing?' said Mrs. Barton.

'Yes, mother, I have, and I hope to make ten pounds next month. Mr. Harding says he can get me lots of work.'

'So my lady then, with all her shy ways, knows how to make use of a man as well as any of us.'

Mrs. Barton did not willingly wound. She saw life from the point of view of making use of men, that was all; and when Alice walked out of the room, Mrs. Barton felt sorry for what she had said, and she would have gone to comfort her daughter if Olive had not, at that moment, stood in imminent need of comfort.

'I suppose,' she said pettishly, 'the letter you received this morning is from the Marquis, to say he won't be here next Tuesday?'

It was. For as the day fixed for his arrival at Brookfield approached, he would write to apologize, and to beg that he might be allowed to postpone his visit to Monday week or Wednesday fortnight. Mrs. Barton replied that they would be very glad to see him when he found it convenient to come and see them. She did not inquire into the reason of his rudeness, she was determined to fight the battle out to the end, and she did not dare to think that he was being prompted by that beast of a girl, Violet Scully.

'He writes a very nice letter indeed. He says he has a very bad cold, and doesn't like to show himself at Brookfield with a red nose, but that, unless

he dies in the meantime, he will be with us on the twentieth of the month, and will—if we'll have him—stop three weeks with us.'

'I knew the letter was a put-off. I don't believe he admires me at all, the little beast; and I know I shall never be a marchioness. You made me treat poor Edward shamefully, and for no purpose, after all.'

'Now, Olive, you mustn't speak like that. Go upstairs and ask Barnes if she has heard anything lately?'

'Oh, I'm sick of Barnes; what has she heard?'

'She is a great friend of Lady Georgina's maid, who knows the Burkes intimately, particularly Lady Emily's maid, and Barnes got a letter from her friend the other day, saying that Lady Emily was delighted at the idea of her brother marrying you, dear, and that he thinks of nobody else, speaks of nobody else. Run up and speak to her about it.'

As we have seen, Mrs. Barton had drugged Olive's light brain with visions of victories, with dancing, dresses, admiration; but now, in the tiring void of country days, memories of Edward's love and devotion were certain to arise. He made, however, no attempt to renew his courtship. At Gort, within three miles, he remained silent, immovable as one of the Clare mountains. Sometimes his brown-gold moustache and square shoulders were caught sight of as he rode rapidly along the roads. He had once been seen sitting with Mrs. Lawler behind the famous cream-coloured ponies; and to allude to his disgraceful conduct without wounding Olive's vanity was an art that Mrs. Barton practised daily; and to keep the girl in spirits she induced Sir Charles, who it was reported was about to emigrate his family to the wilds of Maratoga, to come and stay with them. If a rumour were to reach the Marquis's ears, it might help to bring him to the point. In any case Sir Charles's attentions to Olive would keep her in humour until the great day arrived.

Well convinced that this was her last throw, Mrs. Barton resolved to smear the hook well with the three famous baits she was accustomed to angle with. They were—dinners, flattery, and dancing. Accordingly, an order was given to the Dublin fishmonger to send them fish daily for the next three

weeks, and to the pastrycook for a French cook. The store of flattery kept on the premises being illimitable, she did not trouble about that, but devoted herself to the solution of the problem of how she should obtain a constant and unfailing supply of music. Once she thought of sending up to Dublin for a professional pianist, but was obliged to abandon the idea on account of the impossibility of devising suitable employment for him during the morning hours. A tune or two might not come in amiss after lunch, but to have him hanging about the shrubberies all the morning would be intolerable. She might ask a couple of the Brennans or the Duffys to stay with them, but they would be in the way, and occupy the Marquis's time, and go tell-taling all over the country; no, that wouldn't do either. Alice's playing was wretched. It was a wonderful thing that a girl like her would not make some effort to amuse men—would not do something. Once Olive was married, she (Mrs. Barton) would try to patch up something for this gawk of a girl—marry her to Sir Charles; excellent match it would be, too—get all the children emigrated first: and if he would not have her, there was Sir Richard. It was said that he was quite reformed—had given up drink. But there was no use thinking of that: for the present she would have to put up with the girl's music, which was wretched.

Olive fell in with her mother's plans, and she angled industriously for Lord Kilcarney. She did not fail to say in or out of season, '*Il n'y a personne comme notre cher Marquis*,' and as the turbot and fruit, that had arrived by the afternoon train from Dublin, were discussed, Milord did not cease to make the most appropriate remarks. Referring to the bouquet that she had pinned into the Marquis's buttonhole, he said:

'*Il y a des amants partout où il y a des oiseaux et des roses*.' And again: '*Les regardes des amoureux sont la lumière comme le baiser est la vie du monde*.'

After dinner no time was lost, although the Marquis pleaded fatigue, in settling Alice at the piano, and dancing began in sober earnest. After each waltz Olive conducted him to the dining-room; she helped him liberally to wine, and when she held a match to his cigarette their fingers touched. But to find occupation for the long morning hours of her young couple was a grave trouble to Mrs. Barton. She was determined to make every moment of the little Marquis's stay in Galway moments of sunshine; but mental no

more than atmospheric sunshine is to be had by the willing, and the poor little fellow seemed to pine in his Galway cage like a moulting canary. He submitted to all the efforts made in his behalf, but his submission was that of a victim. After breakfast he always attempted to escape, and if he succeeded in eluding Mrs. Barton, he would remain for hours hidden in the laurels, enwrapped in summer meditations, the nature of which it was impossible even to conjecture. In the afternoon he spoke of the burden of his correspondence, and when the inevitable dancing was spoken of, he often excused himself on the ground of having a long letter to finish. If it were impossible for her to learn the contents of these letters, Mrs. Barton ardently desired to know to whom they were addressed. Daily she volunteered to send special messengers to the post on his account; the footman, the coachman, and pony-chaise, were in turn rejected by him.

'Thank you, Mrs. Barton, thank you, but I should like to avail myself of the chance of a constitutional.'

'*La santé de notre petit Marquis avant tout*,' she would exclaim, with much silvery laughter and all the habitual movements of the white hands. 'But what do you say: I am sure the young ladies would like a walk, too?'

With a view to picturesque effect Mrs. Barton's thoughts had long been centred on a picnic. They were now within a few days of the first of May, and there was enough sunshine in the air to justify an excursion to Kinvarra Castle. It is about four miles distant, at the end of a long narrow bay.

Mrs. Barton applied herself diligently to the task of organization. Having heard from Dublin of the hoax that was being played on their enemy, the Ladies Cullen consented to join the party, and they brought with them one of the Honourable Miss Gores. The Duffys and Brennans numbered their full strength, including even the famous Bertha, who was staying with her sisters on a visit. The Goulds excused themselves on account of the distance and the disturbed state of the country. Mrs. Barton found, therefore, much difficulty in maintaining the noted characteristic of her parties. Sir Richard and Sir Charles had agreed to come; Mr. Adair, Mr. Ryan, and Mr. Lynch were also present. They drove up on outside cars, and were all attended by a bodyguard of policemen.

And very soon everybody fell to babbling of the history of the Castle, which nobody knew: Ireland has had few chroniclers. Lord Dungory pointed out that in the seventeenth century people lived in Ireland naked—speaking Latin habitually—without furniture or tapestries or paintings or baths. The Castle suggested a military movement to Mr. Barton.

'If things get any worse, we might all retire into this castle. The ladies will stand on the battlements, and I will undertake to hold the place for ever against those village ruffians.'

'I do not think there will be any necessity for that,' replied Mr. Adair sententiously. 'I think that these last terrible outrages have awakened the Government to a sense of their responsibility. I have reason to believe that immediate steps will be taken to crush this infamous conspiracy.'

Lord Dungory interposed with a neat epigram, and Mr. Adair fell to telling how he would crush the Land League out of existence if the Government would place him in supreme power for the space of one month.

'That is all I would ask: one month to restore this island to peace and prosperity. I have always been a Liberal, but I confess that I entirely fail to understand the action the Government are taking in the present crisis.'

As Lord Dungory was about to reply that he did not believe that the peasants could continue to resist the Government indefinitely, the police-sergeant in charge of the picnic-party approached, his face overcast.

'We've just received bad news from Dublin, my lord. The worst. Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr. Burke were murdered this evening in the Phoenix Park. It is unfortunately true, sir; I've the telegram with me.'
And he handed the yellow envelope to Lord Dungory, who, after glancing at it, handed it on to Mr. Adair.

The appearance of the police in conversation with Lord Dungory and Mr. Adair was a sign for the assembling of the rest of the company, and it was under the walls of old Kinvarra Castle that the picnic-party heard the awful news.

Then, in turn, each ejaculated a few words.

Mrs. Barton said: 'It is dreadful to think there are such wicked people in the world.'

Mr. Adair said: 'There can be no doubt but that we have arrived at the crisis; Europe will ring with the echoes of the crime.'

Olive said: 'I think they ought to hang Mr. Parnell; I believe it was he who drove the car.'

Mr. Barton said: 'The landlords and Land-Leaguers will have to do what I say; they will have to fight it out. Now, at their head, I believe by a series of rapid marches—'

'Arthur, Arthur, I beg of you,' exclaimed Mrs. Barton.

'We shall all have to emigrate,' Sir Charles murmured reflectively.

'The law is in abeyance,' said Mr. Lynch.

'Precisely,' replied Milord; 'and as I once said to Lord Granville, "*Les moeurs sont les hommes, mais la loi est la raison du pays*."'

Mr. Adair looked up; he seemed about to contest the truth of this aphorism, but he relapsed into his consideration of Mr. Gladstone's political integrity. The conversation had fallen, but at the end of a long silence Mr. Ryan said:

'Begorra, I am very glad they were murthered.'

All drew back instinctively. This was too horrible, and doubt of Mr. Ryan's sanity was expressed on every face.

At last Mr. Adair said, conscious that he was expressing the feelings of the entire company: 'What do you mean, sir? Have you gone mad? Do you not know that this is no fitting time for buffoonery?'

'Will ye hear me cousin out?' said Mr. Lynch.

'Begorra, I'm glad they were murthered,' continued Mr. Ryan; 'for if they hadn't been we'd have been—there's the long and the short of it. I know the counthry well, and I know that in six months more, without a proper Coercion Act, we'd have been burned in our beds.'

The unanswerableness of Mr. Ryan's words, and the implacable certainty which forced itself into every heart, that he spoke but the truth, did not, however, make the company less inclined to oppose the utilitarian view he took of the tragedy.

Unfinished phrases . . . 'Disgraceful' . . . 'Shocking' . . . 'Inconceivable' . . . 'That anyone should say such a thing' . . . were passed round, and a disposition was shown to boycott Mr. Ryan.

Mr. Adair spoke of not sitting in the room where such opinions were expressed, but Milord was seen whispering to him, 'We're not in a room, Adair, we're out of doors;' and Mrs. Barton, always anxious to calm troubled lives, suggested that 'people did not mean all they said.' Mr. Ryan, however, maintained through it all an attitude of stolid indifference, the indifference of a man who knows that all must come back sooner or later to his views.

And presently, although the sting remained, the memory of the wasp that had stung seemed to be lost. Milord and Mr. Adair engaged in a long and learned discussion concerning the principles of Liberalism, in the course of which many allusions were made to the new Coercion Bill, which, it was now agreed, Mr. Gladstone would, in a few days, lay before Parliament. The provisions of this Bill were debated. Milord spoke of an Act that had been in force consequent on the Fenian rising in '69. Mr. Adair was of opinion that the importance of a new Coercion Act could not be over-estimated; Mr. Barton declared in favour of a military expedition—a rapid dash into the heart of Connemara. But the conversation languished, and in the ever-lengthening silences all found their thoughts reverting to the idea brutally expressed by Mr. Ryan: *Yes, they were glad; for if Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr. Burke had not been assassinated, every landowner in the country would have been murdered.*

There was no dancing that evening; and as the night advanced the danger of the long drive home increased in intensity in the minds of Messrs. Lynch and Ryan. They sat on either side of Mr. Adair, and it was finally arranged that they should join their police-forces, and spend the night at his place. Sir Charles was sleeping at Brookfield; Milord had four policemen with him; and as all would have to pass his gate, he did not anticipate that even the Land

League would venture to attack thirteen armed men. Mr. Barton, who saw the picturesque in everything, declared, when he came back, that they looked like a caravan starting for a pilgrimage across the desert. After a few further remarks, the ladies rose to retire; but when Mrs. Barton gave her hand to Lord Kilcarney, he said, his voice trembling a little:

'I'm afraid I must leave you to-morrow, Mrs. Barton. I shall have to run over to London to vote in the House of Lords. . .'

Mrs. Barton led the poor little man into the farther corner of the room, and making a place for him by her side, she said:

'Of course we are very sorry you are leaving—we should like you to stop a little longer with us. Is it impossible for you. . . ?'

'I am afraid so, Mrs. Barton; it is very kind of you, but—'

'It is a great pity,' she answered; 'but before we part I should like to know if you have come to any conclusion about what I spoke to you of in Dublin. If it is not to be, I should like to know, that I might tell the girl, so that she might not think anything more about—'

'What am I to say, what am I to do?' thought the Marquis. 'Oh! why does this woman worry me? How can I tell her that I wouldn't marry her daughter for tens of thousands of pounds?' 'I think, Mrs. Barton—I mean, I think you will agree with me that until affairs in Ireland grow more settled, it would be impossible for anyone to enter into any engagements whatever. We are all on the brink of ruin.'

'But twenty thousand pounds would settle a great deal.'

The little Marquis was conscious of annihilation, and he sought to escape Mrs. Barton as he might a piece of falling rock. With a desperate effort he said:

'Yes, Mrs. Barton—yes, I agree with you, twenty thousand pounds is a great deal of money; but I think we had better wait until the Lords have passed the new Coercion Bill—say nothing more about this—leave it an open question.'

And on this eminently unsatisfactory answer the matter ended; even Mrs. Barton saw she could not, at least for the present, continue to press it. Still she did not give up hope. 'Try on to the end; we never know that it is not the last little effort that will win the game,' was the aphorism with which she consoled her daughter, and induced her to write to Lord Kilcarney. And almost daily he received from her flowers, supposed to be emblematical of the feeling she entertained for him; and for these Alice was sometimes ordered to compose verses and suitable mottoes.

CHAPTER 23

But Lord Kilcarney's replies to these letters seldom consisted of more than a few well-chosen words, and he often allowed a week, and sometimes a fortnight, to elapse before answering at all. Olive—too vain and silly to understand the indifference with which she was treated—whined and fretted less than might have been expected. She spent a great deal of her time with Barnes, who fed her with scandal and flattery. But a storm was about to break, and in August it was known, without any possibility of a doubt, that the Marquis was engaged to Violet Scully, and that their marriage was settled for the autumn.

And this marriage, and the passing of the Bill for the Prevention of Crime, were the two interests present in the mind of Irish landlordism during the summer of '82. Immediately the former event was publicly announced, every girl in Dublin ran to her writing desk to confirm to her friends and relatives the truth of the news which for the last two months she had so resolutely anticipated. The famous Bertha, the terror of the *débutantes*, rushed to Brookfield, but she did not get there before the Brennans, and the result was a meeting of these families of girls in Mrs. Barton's drawing-room. Gladys was, however, the person chosen by God and herself to speak the wonderful words:

'Of course you have heard the news, Mrs. Barton?'

'No,' replied Mrs. Barton, a little nervously; 'what is it?'

'Oh yes, what is it?' exclaimed Olive. 'Anyone going to be married?'

'Yes. Can you guess?'

'No; tell me quick . . . no, do tell me. Are you going to be married?'

Had Olive been suddenly dowered with the wit of Congreve she could not have contrived an answer that would have shielded her better from the dart that Gladys was preparing to hurl. The girl winced; and divining the truth in a moment of inspiration, Mrs. Barton said:

'Ah! I know; Lord Kilcarney is engaged to Violet Scully.'

The situation was almost saved, and would have been had Olive not been present. She glanced at her mother in astonishment; and Gladys, fearing utter defeat, hurled her dart recklessly.

'Yes,' she exclaimed, 'and their marriage is fixed for this autumn.'

'I don't believe a word of it. . . . You only say so because you think it will annoy me.'

'My dear Olive, how can it annoy you? You know very well you refused him,' said Mrs. Barton, risking the danger of contradiction. 'Gladys is only telling us the news.'

'News, indeed; a pack of lies. I know her well; and all because—because she didn't succeed in hooking the man she was after in the Shelbourne last year. I'm not going to listen to her lies, if you are;' and on these words Olive flaunted passionately out of the room.

'So very sorry, really,' exclaimed Zoe. 'We really didn't know . . . indeed we didn't. We couldn't have known that—that there was any reason why dear Olive wouldn't like to hear that Lord Kilcarney was engaged to Violet.'

'Not at all, not at all. I assure you that whatever question there may once have been, I give you my word, was broken off a long time ago; they did not suit each other at all,' said Mrs. Barton. Now that she was relieved of the presence of her young, the mother fought admirably. But in a few minutes the enemy was reinforced by the arrival of the Hon. Miss Gores.

'Oh, how do you do? I am so glad to see you,' said Mrs. Barton, the moment they entered the room. 'Have you heard the news? all is definitely settled between the little Marquis and Violet. We were all talking of it; I am so glad for her sake. Of course it is very grand to be a marchioness, but I'm afraid she'll find her coronet a poor substitute for her dinner. You know what a state the property is in. She has married a beggar. The great thing after all, nowadays, is money.'

It would have been better perhaps not to have spoken of Lord Kilcarney's mortgages, but the Marquis's money embarrassments were the weak point

in Violet's marriage, but it would not be natural (supposing that Olive had herself refused Lord Kilcarney) for her not to speak of them. So she prattled on gaily for nearly an hour, playing her part admirably, extricating herself from a difficult position and casting some doubt—only a little, it is true, but a little was a gain on the story that Olive had been rejected.

As soon as her visitors left the room, and she went to the window to watch the carriages drive away and to consider how she might console her daughter—persuade her, perhaps, that everything had happened for the best.

'Oh, mamma,' she said, rushing into the room, 'this is terrible; what shall we do—what shall we do?'

'What's terrible, my beautiful darling?'

Olive looked through her languor and tears, and she answered petulantly:

'Oh, you know very well I'm disgraced; he's going to marry Violet, and I shall not be a marchioness after all.'

'If my beautiful darling likes she can be a duchess,' replied Mrs. Barton with a silvery laugh.

'I don't understand, mamma.'

'I mean that we aren't entirely dependent on that wretched little Marquis with his encumbered property; if he were fool enough to let himself be entrapped by that designing little beast, Violet Scully, so much the worse for him; we shall get someone far grander than he. It is never wise for a girl to settle herself off the first season she comes out.'

'It is all very well to say that now, but you made me break off with dear Edward, who was ever so nice, and loved me dearly.'

Mrs. Barton winced, but she answered almost immediately:

'My dear, we shall get someone a great deal grander than that wretched Marquis. There will be a whole crowd of English dukes and earls at the Castle next year; men who haven't a mortgage on their property, and who will all fight for the hand of my beautiful Olive. Mr. Harding, Alice's friend,

will put your portrait into one of the Society papers as the Galway beauty, and then next year you may be her Grace.'

'And how will they do my portrait, mamma?'

'I think you look best, darling, with your hair done up on the top of your head, in the French fashion.'

'Oh! do you think so? You don't like the way I have it done in now?' said the girl; and, laughing, she ran to the glass to admire herself. 'Barnes said I looked sweet this morning;' and five minutes after she was tossing her head nervously, declaring she was miserable, and often she burst out crying for no assignable cause. Mrs. Barton consoled and flattered gaily; but the sweet placid countenance was sometimes a little troubled. As the girls left the breakfast-room one morning she said, as if asking their advice:

'I have just received an invitation from Dungory Castle; they are giving a tennis-party, and they want us to go to lunch.'

'Oh! mamma, I don't want to go,' cried Olive.

'And why, my dear?'

'Oh! because everybody knows about the Marquis, and I couldn't bear their sneers; those Brennans and the Duffys are sure to be there.'

'Bertha's in Dublin,' said Mrs. Barton, in an intonation of voice a little too expressive of relief.

'Gladys is just as bad; and then there's that horrid Zoe. Oh! I couldn't bear it.'

'It will look as if we were avoiding them; they will only talk the more. I always think it is best to put a bold face on everything.'

'I couldn't, I couldn't. I'm broken-hearted, that's what I am. I have nothing to do or to think of.'

There could be little doubt that the Ladies Cullen had got up the tennis-party so that they might have an opportunity of sneering at her, but Milord would keep them in check (it might be as well to tell him to threaten to put down the school if they did not keep a guard on their tongues), and if Olive would

only put a bold face on it and captivate Sir Charles, this very disagreeable business might blow over. Further than this Mrs. Barton's thoughts did not travel, but they were clear and precise thoughts, and with much subtlety and insinuative force she applied herself to the task of overcoming her daughter's weakness and strengthening her in this overthrow of vanity and self-love. But to the tennis-party they must go. Milord, too, was of opinion that they could not absent themselves, and he had doubtless been able to arrive at a very clear understanding with Lady Sarah and Lady Jane concerning the future of Protestantism in the parish, for on the day of the tennis-party no allusion was made to Lord Kilcarney's visit to Brookfield; certain references to his marriage were, of course, inevitable, but it was only necessary to question Mr. Adair on his views concerning the new Coercion Act to secure for Mrs. Barton an almost complete immunity from feminine sarcasm.

'I do not deny,' said Mr. Adair, 'that the Crimes Bill will restore tranquillity, but I confess that I can regard no Government as satisfactory that can only govern by the sword.'

These sentiments being but only very partially appreciated by the rest of the company, the conversation came to an awkward pause, and Lady Jane said as she left the room:

'I do not know a more able man on a county board than Mr. Adair. He took honours at Trinity, and if he hasn't done as much since as we expected, it is because he is too honourable, too conscientious, to ally himself to any particular party.'

'That was always the way with Lord Dungory,' suggested Mrs. Gould.

Lady Jane bit her lip, and continued, without taking notice of the interruption:

'Now, I hope Mr. Adair will not write a pamphlet, or express himself too openly concerning the Crimes Act. The question of the day is the organization of the Land Act, and I hear that Mr. Gladstone says it will be impossible to get on without Mr. Adair's assistance.'

'Every six months,' said Mrs. Gould, 'it is given out that Gladstone cannot go on without him; but somehow Gladstone does manage to get on without him, and then we never hear any more about it.'

Lady Jane looked angry; and all wondered at Mrs. Gould's want of tact, but at that moment the footman announced Messrs. Ryan and Lynch, and Alice asked if she might go up to see Cecilia. More visitors arrived; the Brennans, the Duffys, the five Honourable Miss Gores, and the company adjourned to the tennis ground. Mr. Lynch was anxious to have May for a partner, but she refused him somewhat pettishly, declaring at the same time that she had given up tennis, and would never touch a racquet again. Her continuous silence and dejected appearance created some surprise, and her cheeks flushed with passion when her mother said she didn't know what had come over May lately. Then obeying an impulse, May rose to her feet, and leaving the tennis players she walked across the pleasure grounds. Dungory Castle was surrounded by heavy woods and overtopping clumps of trees. As the house was neared, these were filled in with high laurel hedges and masses of rhododendron, and an opening in the branches of some large beech-trees revealed a blue and beautiful aspect of the Clare mountains.

'I wonder what May is angry about?' Cecilia said to Alice as they watched the tennis playing from their window; 'suppose those horrid men are annoying her.'

'I never saw her refuse to play tennis before,' Alice replied demurely. And ten minutes after, some subtle desire of which she was not very conscious led her through the shrubberies towards the place where she already expected to find May. And dreaming of reconciliation, of a renewal of friendship, Alice walked through the green summer of the leaves, listening to the infinite twittering of the birds, and startled by the wood-pigeons that from time to time rose boisterously out of the high branches. On a garden bench, leaning forward, her hands rested on her knees, May sat swinging her parasol from side to side, playing with the fallen leaves. When she looked up, the sunlight fell full upon her face, and Alice saw that she was crying. But affecting not to see the tears, she said, speaking rapidly:

'Oh, May dear, I have been looking for you. The last time we—'

But interrupted here by a choking sob, she found herself forced to say:

'My dear May, what is the matter? Can I do anything for you?'

'Oh, no, no; only leave me; don't question me. I don't want anyone's help.'

The ungraciousness of the words was lost in the accent of grief with which they were spoken.

'I assure you I don't wish to be inquisitive,' Alice replied sorrowfully, 'nor do I come to annoy you with good advice, but the last time we met we didn't part good friends. . . . I was merely anxious to assure you that I bore no ill-feeling, but, of course, if you—'

'Oh no, no,' cried May; reaching and catching at Alice's arm she pulled her down into the seat beside her; 'I am awfully sorry for my rudeness to you—to you who are so good—so good. Oh, Alice dear, you will forgive me, will you not?' and sobbing very helplessly, she threw herself into her friend's arms.

'Oh, of course I forgive you,' cried Alice, deeply affected. 'I had no right to lecture you in the way I did; but I meant it for the best, indeed I did.'

'I know you did, but I lost my temper. Ah, if you knew how sorely I was tried you would forgive me.'

'I do forgive you, May dear; but tell me, cannot I help you now? You know that you can confide in me, and I will do any thing in my power to help you.'

'No one can help me now,' said the girl sullenly.

Alice did not speak at once, but at the end of a long silence she said:

'Does Fred Scully love you no more?'

'I do not know whether he does or not; nor does it matter much. He's not in Ireland. He's far away by this time.'

'Where is he?'

'He's gone to Australia. He wrote to me about two months ago to say that all had been decided in a few hours, and that he was to sail next morning.

He's gone out with some racehorses, and expects to win a lot of money. He'll be back again in a year.'

'A year isn't long to wait; you'll see him when he comes back.'

'I don't think I should care to see him again. Oh, you were right, Alice, to warn me against him. I was foolish not to listen to you, but it was too late even then.'

Alice trembled; she had already guessed the truth, but hoping when she knew all hope was vain, she said:

'You had better tell me, May; you know I am to be trusted.'

'Can't you guess it?'

The conversation fell, and the girls sat staring into the depths of the wood. Involuntarily their eyes followed a small bird that ran up branch after branch of a beech-tree, pecking as it went. It seemed like a toy mouse, so quick and unvarying were its movements. At last May said, and very dolorously:

'Alice, I thought you were kinder; haven't you a word of pity? Why tell you, why ask me to tell you? Oh! what a fool I was!'

'Oh! no, no, May, you did right to tell me. I am more sorry for you than words can express, and I didn't speak because I was trying to think of some way of helping you.'

'Oh! there's no—no way of helping me, dear. There's nothing for me to do but to die.' And now giving way utterly, the girl buried her face in her hands and sobbed until it seemed that she would choke in thick grief.

'Oh! May, May dear, you mustn't cry like that: if anyone were to come by, what would they think?'

'What does it matter? Everyone will know sooner or later—I wish I were dead—dead and out of sight for ever of this miserable world.'

'No, May,' said Alice, thinking instinctively of the child, 'you mustn't die. Your trial is a terrible one, but people before now have got over worse. I am trying to think what can be done.'

Then May raised her weeping face, and there was a light of hope in her eyes. She clasped Alice's hand. Neither spoke. The little brown bird pursued his way up and down the branches of the beech; beyond it lay the sky, and the girls, tense with little sufferings, yearned into this vision of beautiful peace.

At last Alice said: 'Did you tell Mr. Scully of the trouble? Does he know—'

'He was away, and I didn't like to write it to him; his departure for Australia took me quite by surprise.'

'Have you told your mother?'

'Oh no, I'd rather die than tell her; I couldn't tell her. You know what she is.'

'I think she ought to be told; she would take you abroad.'

'Oh no, Alice dear; it would never do to tell mamma. You know what she is, you know how she talks, she would never leave off abusing the Scullys; and then, I don't know how, but somehow everybody would get to know about it. But find it out they will, sooner or later; it is only a question of time.'

'No, no, May, they shall know nothing of this—at least, not if I can help it.'

'But you can't help it.'

'There is one thing quite certain; you must go away. You cannot stop in Galway.'

'It is all very well talking like that, but where can I go to? A girl cannot move a yard away from home without people wanting to know where she has gone.'

Alice's eyes filled with tears.

'You might go up to Dublin,' she said, 'and live in lodgings.'

'And what excuse should I give to mother?' said May, who in her despair had not courage to deny the possibility of the plan.

'You needn't tell her where you are,' replied Alice; and then she hesitated, feeling keenly conscious of the deception she was practising. But her unswerving common sense coming, after a moment's reflection, to her aid,

she said: 'You might say that you were going to live in the convent. Go to the Mother Superior, tell her of your need, beg of her, persuade her to receive and forward your letters; and in that way, it seems to me that no one need be the wiser of what is going to happen.'

The last words were spoken slowly, as if with a sense of shame at being forced to speak thus. May raised her face, now aflame with hope and joy.

'I wonder if it is possible to—' A moment after the light died out of her face, and she said:

'But how shall I live? Who will support me? I cannot ask mother for money without awakening suspicion.'

'I think, May, I shall be able to give you almost all the money you want,' replied Alice in a hesitating and slightly embarrassed manner.

'You, Alice?'

'But I haven't told you; I have been writing a good deal lately for newspapers, and have made nearly twenty pounds. That will be all you will want for the present, and I shall be able, I hope, to make sufficient to keep you supplied.'

'I don't think that anyone was ever as good as you, Alice. You make me feel ashamed of myself.'

'I am doing only what anyone else would do if they were called upon. But we have been sitting here a long time now, and before we go back to the tennis-ground we had better arrange what is to be done. When do you propose leaving?'

'I had better leave at once. It is seven months ago now—no one suspects as yet.'

'Well, then, when would you like me to send you the money? You can have it at once if you like.'

'Oh, thanks, dear; mother will give me enough to last me a little while, and I will write to you from Dublin. You are sure no one sees your letters at Brookfield?'

'Quite sure; there's not the slightest danger.' She did not question the advice she had given, and she felt sure that the Reverend Mother, if a proper appeal were made to her common sense, would consent to conceal the girl's fault. Two months would not be long passing, but the expenses of this time would be heavy, and she, Alice, would have to meet them all. She trembled lest she might fail to do so, and she tried to reckon them up. It would be impossible to get rooms under a pound a week, and to live, no matter how cheaply, would cost at least two pounds; three pounds a week, four threes are twelve! The twenty pounds would scarcely carry her over a month, she would not be well for at least two; and then there was the doctor, the nurse, the flannels for the baby. Alice tried to calculate, thinking plainly and honestly. If a repulsive detail rose suddenly up in her mind, she did not shrink, nor was she surprised to find herself thinking of such things; she did so as a matter of course, keeping her thoughts fixed on the one object of doing her duty towards her friend. And how to do this was the problem that presented itself unceasingly for solution. She felt that somehow she would have to earn twenty pounds within the next month. Out of the *Lady's Paper*, in which 'Notes and Sensations of a Plain Girl at Dublin Castle,' was still running, she could not hope to make more than thirty shillings a week; a magazine had lately accepted a ten-page story worth, she fancied, about five pounds, but when they would print it and pay her was impossible to say. She could write the editor an imploring letter, asking him to advance her the money. But even then there was another nine pounds to make up. And to do this seemed to her an impossibility. She could not ask her father or mother; she would only do so if the worst came to the worst. She would write paragraphs, articles, short stories, and would send them to every editor in London. One out of three might turn up trumps.

'GARDNER STREET, 'MOUNTJOY SQUARE. 'DARLING ALICE, 'I have been in Dublin now more than a week. I did not write to you before because I wished to write to tell you that I had done all you told me to do. The first thing I did was to go to the convent. Would you believe it, the new Rev. Mother is Sister Mary who we knew so well at St. Leonards! She has been transferred to the branch convent in Dublin; she was delighted to see me, but the sight of her dear face awoke so many memories, so many old associations, that I burst out crying, and it seemed to me impossible that I

should ever be able to find courage to tell her the truth. None will ever know what it cost me to speak the words. They came to me all of a sudden, and I told her everything. I thought she would reproach me and speak bitterly, but she only said, "My poor child, I am sorry you hadn't strength to resist temptation; your trial is a dreadful one." She was very, very kind. Her face lighted up when I spoke of you, and she said: "Sweet girl; she was always an angel; one of these days she will come back to us. She is too good for the world." Then I insisted that it was your idea that I should seek help from the convent, but she said that it was my duty to go to my mother and tell her the whole truth. Oh, my darling Alice, I cannot tell you what a terrible time I went through. We were talking for at least two hours, and it was only with immense difficulty that I at last succeeded in making her understand what kind of person poor mamma is, and how hopeless it would be to expect her to keep any secret, even if her daughter's honour was in question. I told her how she would run about, talking in her mild unmeaning way of "poor May and that shameful Mr. Scully;" and, at last, the Rev. Mother, as you prophesied she would, saw the matter in its proper light, and she has consented to receive all my letters, and if mother writes, to give her to understand that I am safe within the convent walls. It is very good of her, for I know the awful risk she is wilfully incurring so as to help me out of my trouble.

'The house I am staying in is nice enough, and the landlady seems a kind woman. The name I go by is Mrs. Brandon (you will not forget to direct your letters so), and I said that my husband was an officer, and had gone out to join his regiment in India. I have a comfortable bedroom on the third floor. There are two windows, and they look out on the street. The time seems as if it would never pass; the twelve hours of the day seem like twelve centuries. I have not even a book to read, and I never go out for fear of being seen. In the evening I put on a thick veil and go for a walk in the back streets. But I cannot go out before nine; it is not dark till then, and I cannot stop out later than ten on account of the men who speak to you. My coloured hair makes me look fast, and I am so afraid of meeting someone I know, that this short hour is as full of misery as those that preceded it. Every passer-by seems to know me, to recognize me, and I cannot help imagining that he or she will be telling my unfortunate story half an hour after in the

pitiless drawing-rooms of Merrion Square. Oh, Alice darling, you are the only friend I have in the world. If it were not for you, I believe I should drown myself in the Liffey. No girl was ever so miserable as I. I cannot tell you how I feel, and you cannot imagine how forlorn it all is; and I am so ill. I am always hungry, and always sick, and always longing. Oh, these longings; you may think they are nothing, but they are dreadful. You remember how active I used to be, how I used to run about the tennis-court; now I can scarcely crawl. And the strange sickening fancies: I see things in the shops that tempt me, sometimes it is a dry biscuit, sometimes a basket of strawberries; but whatever it is, I stand and look at it, long for it, until weary of longing and standing with a sort of weight weighing me down, and my stays all rucking up to my neck, I crawl home. There I am all alone; and I sit in the dark, on a wretched hard chair by the window; and I cry; and I watch the summer night and all the golden stars, and I cannot say what I think of during all these long and lonely hours; I only know that I cannot find energy to go to bed. And I never sleep a whole night through; the cramp comes on so terribly that I jump up screaming. Oh, Alice, how I hate *him!* When I think of it all I see how selfish men are; they never think of us—they only think of themselves. You would scarcely know me if you saw me now; all my complexion—you know what a pretty complexion it was—is all red and mottled. When you saw me a fortnight ago I was all right: it is extraordinary what a change has come about. I think it was the journey and the excitement; there would be no concealing the truth now. It is lucky I left Galway when I did.

'Mother gave me five pounds on leaving home. My ticket cost nearly thirty shillings, a pound went in cabs and hotel expenses, and my breakfasts brought my bill up yesterday to two pounds—I cannot think how, for I only pay sixteen shillings for my room—and when it was paid I had only a few shillings left. Will you, therefore, send the money you promised, if possible, by return of post? 'Always affectionately yours, 'MAY GOULD.'

The tears started to Alice's eyes as she read the letter. She did not consider if May might have spared her the physical details with which her letter abounded; she did not stay to think of the cause, of the result; for the moment she was numb to ideas and sensations that were not those of humble human pity for humble human suffering: like the waters of a new

baptism, pity made her pure and whole, and the false shame of an ancient world fell from her. Leaning her head on her strong, well-shaped hand, she set to arranging her little plans for her friend's help—plans that were charming for their simplicity, their sweet homeliness. The letter she had just read had come by the afternoon post, and if she were to send May the money she wrote for that evening, it would be necessary to go into Gort to register the letter. Gort was two miles away; and if she asked for the carriage her mother might propose that the letters should be sent in by a special messenger. This of course was impossible, and Alice, for the first time in her life found herself obliged to tell a deliberate lie. For a moment her conscience stood at bay, but she accepted the inevitable and told her mother that she had some MSS. to register, and did not care to entrust them to other hands. It was a consolation to know that eighteen pounds were safely despatched, but she was bitterly unhappy, and the fear that money might be wanting in the last and most terrible hours bound her to her desk as with a chain; and when her tired and exhausted brain ceased to formulate phrases, the picture of the lonely room, the night walks, and the suffering of the jaded girl, stared her in the face with a terrible distinctness. Her only moments of gladness were when the post brought a cheque from London. Sometimes they were for a pound, sometimes for fifteen shillings. Once she received five pounds ten—it was for her story. On the 10th of September she received the following letter:

'DARLING ALICE, 'Thanks a thousand times for your last letter, and the money enclosed. It came in the nick of time, for I was run almost to my last penny. I did not write before, because I didn't feel in the humour to do anything. Thank goodness! I'm not sick any more, though I don't know that it isn't counterbalanced by the dreadful faintness and the constant movement. Isn't it awful to sit here day after day, watching myself, and knowing the only relief I shall get will be after such terrible pain? I woke up last night crying with the terror of it. Cervassi says there are cases on record of painless confinements, and in my best moods I think mine is to be one of them. I know it is wrong to write all these things to a good girl like you, but I think talking about it is part of the complaint, and poor sinner me has no one to talk to. Do you remember my old black cashmere? I've been altering it till there's hardly a bit of the original body left; but now the skirt is adding to

my troubles by getting shorter and shorter in front. It is now quite six inches off the ground, and instead of fastening it I have to pin the placket-hole, and then it falls nearly right. . . . Only three weeks longer, and then. . . But there, I won't look forward, because I know I am going to die, and all the accounting for it, and everything else, will be on your shoulders. Good-bye, dear; I shan't write again, at least not till afterwards. And if there is an afterward, I shall never be able to thank you properly; but still I think it will be a weight off you. Is it so, dear? Do you wish I were dead? I know you don't. It was unkind to write that last line; I will scratch it out. You will not be angry, dear. I am too wretched to know what I am writing, and I want to lie down. 'Always affectionately yours, 'MAY GOULD.'

Outside the air was limpid with sunlight, and the newly mown meadow was golden in the light of evening. The autumn-coloured foliage of the chestnuts lay mysteriously rich and still, harmonizing in measured tones with the ruddy tints of the dim September sunset. The country dozed as if satiated with summer love. Heavy scents were abroad—the pungent odours of the aftermath. A high baritone voice broke the languid silence, and, in embroidered smoking-jacket and cap, Mr. Barton twanged his guitar. Milord had been thrown down amid the hay; and Mrs. Barton and Olive were showering it upon him. The old gentleman's legs were in the air.

Crushing the letter, Alice's hands fell on the table; she burst into tears. But work was more vital than tears; and, taking up her pen, she continued her story—penny journal fiction of true love and unending happiness in the end. A month later she received this note:

'DEAREST, 'Just a line in pencil—I mustn't sit up—to tell you it is all over, and all I said was "Thank God, thank God!" over and over again, as each pain went. It is such a relief; but I mustn't write much. It is such a funny screwed-up-looking baby, and I don't feel any of those maternal sentiments that you read about—at least not yet. And it always cries just when I am longing to go to sleep. Thank you again and again for all you have done for me and been to me. I feel awfully weak. 'Always affectionately yours, 'MAY GOULD.'

CHAPTER 24

Then Alice heard that the baby was dead, and that a little money would be required to bury it. Another effort was made, the money was sent; and the calm of the succeeding weeks was only disturbed by an uneasy desire to see May back in Galway, and hear her say that her terrible secret was over and done with for ever. One day she was startled by a quick trampling of feet in the corridor, and May rushed into the room. She threw herself into Alice's arms and kissed her with effusion, with tears. The girls looked at each other long and nervously. One was pale and over-worn, her spare figure was buttoned into a faded dress, and her hair was rolled into a plain knot. The other was superb with health, and her face was full of rose-bloom. She was handsomely dressed in green velvet, and her copper hair flamed and flashed beneath a small bonnet with mauve strings.

'Oh, Alice, how tired and pale you look! You have been working too hard, and all for me! How can I thank you? I shall never be able to thank you—I cannot find words to tell you how grateful I am—but I am grateful, Alice, indeed I am.'

'I am sure you are, dear. I did my best for you, it is true; and thank heaven I succeeded, and no one knows—I do not think that anyone even suspects.'

'No, not a soul. We managed it very well, didn't we? And the Reverend Mother behaved splendidly—she just took the view that you said she would. She saw that no good would come of telling mamma about me when I made her understand that if a word were said my misfortune would be belled all over the country in double-quick time. But, Alice dear, I had a terrible time of it, two months waiting in that little lodging, afraid to go out for fear someone would recognize me; it was awful. And often I hadn't enough to eat, for when you are in that state you can't eat everything, and I was afraid to spend any money. You did your best to keep me supplied, dear, good guardian angel that you are.' Then the impulsive girl flung herself on Alice's shoulders, and kissed her. 'But there were times when I was hard up—oh, much more hard up than you thought I was, for I didn't tell you everything; if

I had, you would have worried yourself into your grave. Oh, I had a frightful time of it! If one is married one is petted and consoled and encouraged; but alone in a lodging—oh, it was frightful.'

'And what about the poor baby?' said Alice.

'The poor little thing died, as I wrote you, about ten days after it was born. I nursed it, and I was sorry for it. I really was; but of course . . . well, it seems a hard thing to say, but I don't know what I should have done with it if it had lived. Life isn't so happy, is it, even under the best of circumstances?'

The conversation came to a sudden close. At last the nervous silence that intervened was broken by May:

'We were speaking about money. I will repay you all I owe you some day, Alice dear. I will save up all the money I can get out of mother. She is such a dear old thing, but I cannot understand her. Not a penny did she send me for the first six weeks, and then she sent me £25; and it was lucky she did, for the doctor's bill was something tremendous. And I bought this dress and bonnet with what was left . . . I ought to have repaid you first thing, but I forgot it until I had ordered the dress.'

'I assure you it does not matter, May; I shall never take the money from you. If I did, it would take away all the pleasure I have had in serving you.'

'Oh, but I will insist, Alice dear; I could not think of such a thing.
But there's no use in discussing that point until I get the money. . . .
Tell me, what do you think of my bonnet?'

'I think it very nice indeed, and I never saw you looking better.'

And thus ended May Gould's Dublin adventure. It was scarcely spoken of again, and when they met at a ball given by the officers stationed in Galway, Alice was astonished to find that she experienced no antipathy whatever towards this rich-blooded young person. 'My dear guardian angel, come and sit with me in this corner; I'd sooner talk to you than anyone—we won't go down yet a while—we'll make the men wait;' and when she put her arms round Alice's waist and told her the last news of Violet and her Marquis, Alice abandoned herself to the caress and heard that thirty years ago the

late Marquis had entered a grocer's shop in Galway to buy a pound of tea for an importuning beggar: 'And what do you think, my dear?—It was Mrs. Scully who served it out to him; and do you know what they are saying?—that it is all your fault that Olive did not marry Kilcarney.'

'My fault?'

'Your fault, because you gave the part of the beggar-maid to Violet, and if Olive had played the beggar-maid and hadn't married Kilcarney, the fault would have been laid at your door just the same.'

The pale cheeks of Lord Rosshill's seven daughters waxed a hectic red; the Ladies Cullen grew more angular, and smiled and cawed more cruelly; Mrs. Barton, the Brennans, and Duffys cackled more warmly and continuously; and Bertha, the terror of the *débutantes*, beat the big drum more furiously than ever. The postscripts to her letters were particularly terrible: 'And to think that the grocer's daughter should come in for all this honour. It is she who will turn up her nose at us at the Castle next year.' 'Ah, had I known what was going to happen it is I who would have pulled the fine feathers out of her.' Day after day, week after week, the agony was protracted, until every heart grew weary of the strain put upon it and sighed for relief. But it was impossible to leave off thinking and talking; and the various accounts of orange-blossoms and the bridesmaids that in an incessant postal stream were poured during the month of January into Galway seemed to provoke rather than abate the marriage fever. The subject was inexhaustible, and little else was spoken of until it was time to pack up trunks and prepare for the Castle season. The bride, it was stated, would be present at the second Drawing-Room in March.

Nevertheless Alice noticed that the gladness of last year was gone out of their hearts; none expected much, and all remembered a little of the disappointments they had suffered. A little of the book had been read; the lines of white girls standing about the pillars in Patrick's Hall, the empty waltz tunes and the long hours passed with their chaperons were terrible souvenirs to pause upon. Still they must fight on to the last; there is no going back—there is nothing for them to go back to. There is no hope in life for them but the vague hope of a husband. So they keep on to the last,

becoming gradually more spiteful and puerile, their ideas of life and things growing gradually narrower, until, in their thirty-fifth or fortieth year, they fall into the autumn heaps, to lie there forgotten, or to be blown hither or thither by every wind that blows.

Two of Lord Rosshill's daughters had determined to try their luck again, and a third was undecided; the Ladies Cullen said that they had their school to attend to and could not leave Galway; poverty compelled the Brennans and Duffys to remain at home. Alice would willingly have done the same, but, tempted by the thin chance that she might meet with Harding, she yielded to her mother's persuasions. Harding did not return to Dublin, and her second season was more barren of incident than the first. The same absence of conviction, the same noisy gossiping and inability to see over the horizon of Merrion Square, the same servile adoration of officialism, the same meanness committed to secure an invitation to the Castle, the same sing-song waltz tunes, the same miserable, mocking, melancholy, muslin hours were endured by the same white martyrs.

And if the Castle remained unchanged, Mount Street lost nothing of its original aspect. Experience had apparently taught Mrs. Barton nothing; she knew but one set of tricks—if they failed she repeated them: she was guided by the indubitableness of instinct rather than by the more wandering light that is reason. Mr. Barton, who it was feared might talk of painting, and so distract the attention from more serious matters, was left in Galway, and amid eight or nine men collected here, there, and everywhere out of the hotels and barrack-rooms, the three ladies sat down to dinner.

Mrs. Barton, who could have talked to twenty men, and have kept them amused, was severely handicapped by the presence of her daughters. Olive, at the best of times, could do little more than laugh; and as Alice never had anything to say to the people she met at her mother's house, the silences that hung over the Mount Street dinner-table were funereal in intensity and length. From time to time questions were asked relating to the Castle, the weather, and the theatre.

Therefore, beyond the fact that neither Lord Kilcarney nor Mr. Harding was present, the girls passed their second season in the same manner as their

first. *Les deux pièces de résistance* at Mount Street were a dissipated young English lord and a gouty old Irish distiller, and Mrs. Barton was making every effort to secure one of these. A pianist was ordered to attend regularly at four o'clock. And now if Alice was relieved of the duty of spelling through the doleful strains of 'Dream Faces,' she was forced to go round and round with the distiller until an extra glass of port forced the old gentleman to beg mercy of Mrs. Barton. At one o'clock in the morning the young lord used to enter the Kildare Street Club weary. But not much way was made with either, and when one returned to London and the other to a sick-bed, Olive abandoned herself to a series of flirtations. At the Castle she danced with all who asked her, and she sat out dances in the darkest corners of the most distant rooms with every officer stationed in Dublin. Mrs. Barton never refused an invitation to any dance, no matter how low, and in all the obscure 'afternoons' in Mount Street and Pembroke Street Olive's blonde cameo-like face was seen laughing with every official of Cork Hill and the gig-men of Kildare Street.

In May the Bartons went abroad, and Olive flirted with foreign titles—French Counts, Spanish Dukes, Russian Princes, Swedish noblemen of all kinds, and a goodly number of English refugees with irreproachable neckties and a taste for baccarat. In the balmy gardens of Ostend and Boulogne, jubilant with June and the overture of Masaniello, Milord and Mrs. Barton walked in front, talking and laughing gracefully. Olive chose him who flattered her the most outrageously; and Alice strove hard to talk to the least objectionable of the men she was brought in contact with. Amid these specious talkers there were a few who reminded her of Mr. Harding, and she hoped later on to be able to turn her present experiences to account. There was, of course, much dining at cafés and dining at the casinos, and evening walks along the dark shore. Alice often feared for her sister, but the girl's vanity and lightheadedness were her safeguards, and she returned to Galway only a little wearied by the long chase after amusement.

The soft Irish summer is pleasant after the glare of foreign towns, and the country, the rickety stone walls and the herds of cattle, the deep curved lines of the plantations of the domain lands, the long streaks of brown bog, the flashing tarns of bog-water, and the ruined cottage, lay dozing in

beautiful silvery haze. There was much charm for Alice in these familiar signs; and, although she did not approve of—although she would not care ever to meet them again—the people she had met at Ostend and Dieppe had interested her. She had picked up ideas and had received impressions, and with these germinating in her, a time of quiet, a time for reading and thinking, came as a welcome change after the noise of casinos and the glitter of fireworks. The liberty she had enjoyed, the sense it had brought with it that she was neither a doll nor a victim, had rendered her singularly happy. The plot of a new story was singing in her head, the characters flitted before her eyes, and to think of them or to tell Cecilia of them was a pleasure sufficient for all her daily desire. Olive, too, was glad. The sunlight has gone into her blood, and she romps with her mother and Milord amid the hay, or, stretched at length, she listens to the green air of the lawn, her dreams ripple like water along a vessel's side, the white wake of the past in bubble behind her; and when the life of the landscape is burnt out, and the day in dying seems to have left its soul behind, she stands watching, her thoughts curdling gently, the elliptical flight of the swallows through the gloom, and the flutter of the bats upon the dead sky.

But the thoughtless brain, fed for many weeks upon noise and glitter, soon began to miss its accustomed stimulants, and Mrs. Barton was quick to comprehend sudden twitchings of the face and abrupt movements of the limbs. And, keenly alive to what was passing in her daughter's mind, she insisted on Olive's accompanying her to the tennis-parties with which the county teemed. Sir Charles, Mr. Adair, and even poor Sir Richard were put forward as the most eligible of men.

'It is impossible to say when the big fish will be caught; it is often the last try that brings him to land,' murmured Mrs. Barton. But Olive had lost courage, and could fix her thoughts on no one. And, often when they returned home, she would retire to her room to have a good cry.

'Leave me alone, Alice; oh, go away. Don't tease me, don't tease me! I only want to be left alone.'

'But listen, dear; can I do anything for you?'

'You! no, no, indeed you can't. I only want to be left alone. I am so miserable, so unhappy; I wish I were dead!'

'Dead?'

'Yes, dead; what's the use of living when I know that I shall be an old maid? We shall all be old maids. What's the use of being pretty, either, when Violet, though she be but a bag of bones, has got the Marquis? I have been out two seasons now, and nothing has come of all the trying. And yet I was the belle of the season, wasn't I, Alice?' And now, looking more than ever like a cameo Niobe, Olive stared at her sister piteously. 'Oh yes, Alice, I know I shall be an old maid; and isn't it dreadful, and I the belle of the season? It makes me so unhappy. No one ever heard of the belle (and I was the belle not of one, but of two seasons) remaining an old maid. I can understand a lot of ugly things not getting married, but I—'

Alice smiled, and half ironically she asked herself if Olive really suffered. No heart-pang was reflected in those blue mindless eyes; there was no heart to wound: only a little foolish vanity had been bruised.

'And to think,' cried this whimpering beauty, when Alice had seen her successfully through a flood of hysterical tears, 'that I was silly enough to give up dear Edward. I am punished for it now, indeed I am; and it was very wicked of me—it was a great sin. I broke his heart. But you know, Alice dear, that it was all mamma's fault; she urged me on; and you know how I refused, how I resisted her. Didn't I resist—tell me. You know, and why won't you say that I did resist?'

'You did, indeed, Olive; but you must not distress yourself, or you will make yourself ill.'

'Yes, perhaps you are right, there's nothing makes one look so ugly as crying, and if I lost my looks and met Edward he might not care for me. He'd be disappointed, I mean—but I haven't lost my looks; I am just as pretty as I was when I came out first. Am I not, Alice?'

'Indeed you are, dear.'

'You don't think I have gone off a bit—now do tell me? and I want to ask you what you think of my hair in a fringe; Papa says it isn't classical, but that's nonsense. I wish I knew how Edward would like me to wear it.'

'But you mustn't think of him, Olive dear; you know mother would never hear of it.'

'I can't help thinking of him. . . . And now I will tell you something, Alice, if you promise me on your word of honour not to scold me, and, above all, not to tell mamma.'

'I promise.'

'Well, the other day I was walking at the end of the lawn feeling so very miserable. You don't know how miserable I feel; you are never miserable, for you think of nothing but your books. Well (mind, you have given me your word not to tell anyone), I saw Captain Hibbert riding along the road, and when he saw me he stopped his horse and kissed his hand to me.'

'And what did you do?'

'I don't know what I did. He called me, and then I saw Milord coming along the road, and fled but, oh, isn't it cruel of mamma to have forbidden Edward to come and see us? and he loving me as much as ever.'

This was not the moment to advise her sister against clandestine meetings with Captain Hibbert; she was sobbing violently, and Alice had to assure her again and again that no one who had been the belle of the season had ever remained an old maid. But Alice (having well in mind the fate that had befallen May Gould) grew not a little alarmed when, in the course of next week, she suddenly noticed that Olive was in the habit of going out for long walks alone, and that she invariably returned in a state of high spirits, all the languor and weariness seeming to have fallen from her.

Alice once thought of following her sister. She watched her open the wicket and walk across the meadows towards the Lawler domain. There was a bypath there leading to the highroad, but the delicacy of their position in relation to the owners prevented the Bartons from ever making use of it. Nor did Alice fail to notice that about the same time, Barnes, on the

pretence of arranging the room for the evening, would strive to drive her from her writing-table, and beds were made and unmade, dresses were taken out of the wardrobe, and importuning conversations were begun. But, taking no heed of the officious maid, Alice, her thoughts tense with anxiety, sat at her window watching the slender figure of the girl growing dim in the dying light. Once she did not return until it was quite dark, and, reproaching herself for having remained so long silent, Alice walked across the pleasure-grounds to meet her.

'What, you here?' cried Olive, surprised at finding her sister waiting for her at the wicket. She was out of breath; she had evidently been running.

'Yes, Olive, I was anxious to speak to you—you must know that it is very wrong to meet Captain Hibbert—and in the secrecy of a wood!'

'Who told you I had been to meet Captain Hibbert? I suppose you have been following me!'

'No, Olive, I haven't, and you have no right to accuse me of such meanness. I have not been following you, but I cannot help putting two and two together. You told me something of this once before, and since then you have scarcely missed an evening.'

'Well, I don't see any harm in meeting Edward; he is going to marry me.'

'Going to marry you?'

'Yes, going to marry me; is there anything so very extraordinary in that? Mamma had no right to break off the match, and I am not going to remain an old maid.'

'And have you told mother about this?'

'No, where's the use, since she won't hear of it?'

'And are you going to run away with Captain Hibbert?'

'Run away with him!' exclaimed Olive, laughing strangely. 'No, of course I am not.'

'And how are you to marry him if you don't tell mother?'

'I shall tell her when the time comes to tell her. And now, Alice dear, you will promise not to betray me, won't you? You will not speak about this to anyone, you promise me? If you did, I know I should go mad or kill myself.'

'But when will you tell mother of your resolution to marry Captain Hibbert?'

'Tell her? I'll tell her to-morrow if you like; that is to say, if you will give me your word of honour not to speak to her about my meeting Edward in the Lawler Wood.'

Afterwards Alice often wondered at her dullness in not guessing the truth. But at the time it did not occur to her that Olive might have made arrangements to elope with Captain Hibbert; and, on the understanding that all was to be explained on the following day, she promised to keep her sister's secret.

CHAPTER 25

Lord Dungory dined at Brookfield that evening. He noticed that Olive was nervous and restless, and he reminded her of what a French poet had said on the subject of beauty. But she only turned her fair head impatiently, and a little later on when her mother spoke to her she burst into tears. Nor was she as easily consoled as usual, and she did not become calm until Mrs. Barton suggested that her dear child was ill, and that she would go upstairs and put her to bed. Then, looking a little alarmed, Olive declared she was quite well, but she passionately begged to be left alone. As they left the dining-room she attempted to slip away; Alice made a movement as if to follow her, but Mrs. Barton said:

'Leave her to herself, Alice; she would rather be left alone. She has overstrained her nerves, that is all.'

Olive heard these words with a singular satisfaction, and as she ascended the stairs from the first landing, her heart beat less violently. On the threshold of her room she paused to listen for the drawing-room door to shut. Through the silent house the lock sounded sharply.

'I hope none of them will come upstairs bothering after me,' the girl murmured to herself. 'If they do I shall go mad;' and standing in the middle of the floor she looked round the room vacantly, unable to collect her thoughts. The wardrobe was on her right, and, seeing herself in the glass, she wondered if she were looking well. Her eyes wandered from her face to her shoulders, and thence to her feet. Going over to the toilette-table she sought amid her boots, and, having selected a strong pair, she began to button them. Her back was turned to the door, and at the slightest sound she started. Once or twice the stairs creaked, and she felt something would occur to stop her. Her heart was beating so violently that she thought she was going to be ill; and she almost burst out crying because she could not make up her mind if she should put on a hat and travelling-shawl, or run down to the wood as she was, to meet the Captain. 'He will surely,' she thought, 'have something in the carriage to put around me, but he may

bring the dog-cart, and it looks very cold. But if Alice or mamma saw me coming downstairs with a shawl on, they'd suspect something, and I shouldn't be able to get away. I wonder what time it is? I promised to meet Edward at nine; he'll of course wait for me, but what time is it? We dined at half-past seven; we were an hour at dinner, half-past eight, and I have been ten minutes here. It must be nearly nine now, and it will take me ten minutes to get to the corner of the road. The house is quiet now.'

Olive ran down a few steps, but at that moment heavy footsteps and a jingling of glasses announced that the butler was carrying glasses from the dining-room to the pantry. 'When will he cease, when will he cease; will he hang about that passage all night?' the girl asked herself tremblingly; and so cruel, so poignant had her suspense become, that had it been prolonged much further her overwrought nerves would have given way, and she would have lapsed into a fit of hysterics. But the tray-full of glasses she had heard jingling were now being washed, and the irritative butler did not stir forth again. This was Olive's opportunity. From the proximity of the drawing-room to the hall-door it was impossible for her to open it without being heard; the kitchen-door was equally, even more, dangerous, and she could hear the servants stirring in the passages; there was no safe way of getting out of the house unseen, except through the dining-room.

The candles were lighted, the crumbs were still on the tablecloth; passing behind the red curtain she unlocked the French window, and she shivered in the keen wind that was blowing.

It was almost as bright as day. A September moon rose red, and in a broken and fragmentary way the various aspects of the journey that lay before her were anticipated: as she ran across the garden swards she saw the post-horses galloping in front of her; as her nervous fingers strove to unfasten the wicket, she thought of the railway-carriage; and as she passed under the great dark trunks of the chestnut-trees she dreamed of Edward's arm that would soon be cast protectingly around her, and his face; softer than the leafy shadows above her, would be leaned upon her, and his eyes filled with a brighter light than the moon's would look down into hers.

The white meadow that she crossed so swiftly gleamed like the sea, and the cows loomed through the greyness like peaceful apparitions. But the dark wood with its sepulchral fir-tops and mysteriously spreading beech-trees was full of formless terror, and once the girl screamed as the birds flew with an awful sound through the dark undergrowth. A gloomy wood by night has terrors for the bravest, and it was only the certainty that she was leaving girl-life—chaperons, waltz-tunes, and bitter sneering, for ever—that gave courage to proceed. A bit of moss-grown wall, a singularly shaped holly-bush, a white stone, took fantastic and supernatural appearances, and once she stopped, paralyzed with fear, before the grotesque shadow that a dead tree threw over an unexpected glade. A strange bird rose from the bare branches, and at that moment her dress was caught by a bramble, and, when her shriek tore the dark stillness, a hundred wings flew through the pallor of the waning moon.

At the end of this glade there was a paling and a stile that Olive would have to cross, and she could now hear, as she ran forward, the needles of the silver firs rustling with a pricking sound in the wind. The heavy branches stretched from either side, and Olive thought when she had passed this dernful alley she would have nothing more to fear; and she ran on blindly until she almost fell in the arms of someone whom she instantly believed to be Edward.

'Oh! Edward, Edward, I am nearly dead with fright!' she exclaimed.

'I am not Edward,' a woman answered. Olive started a step backwards; she would have fainted, but at the moment the words were spoken Mrs. Lawler's face was revealed in a beam of weak light that fell through a vista in the branches.

'Who are you? Let me pass.'

'Who am I? You know well enough; we haven't been neighbours for fifteen years without knowing each other by sight. So you are going to run away with Captain Hibbert!'

'Oh, Mrs. Lawler, let me pass. I am in a great hurry, I cannot wait; and you won't say anything about meeting me in the wood, will you?'

'Let you pass, indeed; and what do you think I came here for? Oh, I know all about it—all about the corner of the road, and the carriage and post-horses! a very nice little plan and very nicely arranged, but I'm afraid it won't come off—at least, not to-night.'

'Oh, won't it, and why?' cried Olive, clasping her hands. 'Then it was Edward who sent you to meet me, to tell me that—that—What has happened?'

'Sent me to tell you! Whom do you take me for? Is it for a—well, a nice piece of cheek! I carry your messages? Well, I never!'

'Then what did you come here for—how did you know? . . .'

'How did I know? That's my business. What did I come here for? What do you think? Why, to prevent you from going off with Teddy.'

'With Teddy!'

'Yes, with Teddy. Do you think no one calls him Teddy but yourself?'

Then Olive understood, and, with her teeth clenched she said, 'No, it isn't true; it is a lie; I will not believe it. Let me pass. What business have you to detain me?—what right have you to speak to me? We don't know you; no one knows you: you are a bad woman whom no one will know.'

'A bad woman! I like that—and from you. And what do you want to be, why are you running away from home? Why, to be what I was. We're all alike, the same blood runs in our veins, and when the devil is in us we must have sweethearts, get them how we may: the airs and graces come on after; they are only so much trimming.'

'How dare you insult me, you bad woman? Let me pass; I don't know what you mean.'

'Oh yes, you do. You think Teddy will take you off to Paris, and spoon you and take you out; but he won't, at least not to-night. I shan't give him up so easily as you think for, my lady.'

'Give him up! What is he to you? How dare you speak so of my future husband? Captain Hibbert only loves me, he has often told me so.'

'Loves nobody but you! I suppose you think that he never kissed, or spooned, or took anyone on his knee but you. Well, I suppose at twenty we'd believe anything a man told us; and we always think we are getting the first of it when we are only getting someone else's leavings. But it isn't for chicks of girls like you that a man cares, it isn't to you a man comes for the love he wants; your kisses are very skim milk indeed, and it is we who teach them the words of love that they murmur afterwards in your ears.'

The women looked at each other in silence, and both heard the needles shaken through the darkness above them. Mrs. Lawler stood by the stile, her hand was laid on the paling. At last Olive said:

'Let me pass. I will not listen to you any longer; nor do I believe a word you have said. We all know what you are; you are a bad woman whom no one will visit. Let me pass!' and pushing passionately forward she attempted to cross the stile. Then Mrs. Lawler took her by the shoulder and threw her roughly back. She fell to the ground heavily.

'Now you had better get up and go home,' said Mrs. Lawler, and she approached the prostrate girl. 'I didn't mean to hurt you; but you shan't elope with Teddy if I can prevent it. Why don't you get up?'

'Oh! my leg, my leg; you have broken my leg!'

'Let me help you up.'

'Don't touch me,' said Olive, attempting to rise; but the moment she put her right foot to the ground she shrieked with pain, and fell again.

'Well, if you are going to take it in that way, you may remain where you are, and I can't go and ring them up at Brookfield. I don't think there will be much eloping done to-night, so farewell.'

CHAPTER 26

About ten o'clock on the night of Olive's elopement, Alice knocked tremblingly at her mother's door.

'Mother,' she said, 'Olive is not in her room, nor yet in the house; I have looked for her everywhere.'

'She is downstairs with her father in the studio,' said Mrs. Barton; and, signing to her daughter to be silent, she led her out of hearing of Barnes, who was folding and putting some dresses away in the wardrobe.

'I have been down to the studio,' Alice replied in a whisper.

'Then I am afraid she has run away with Captain Hibbert. But we shall gain nothing by sending men out with lanterns and making a fuss; by this time she is well on her way to Dublin. She might have done better than Captain Hibbert, but she might also have done worse. She will write to us in a few days to tell us that she is married, and to beg of us to forgive her.'

And that night Mrs. Barton slept even more happily, with her mind more completely at rest, than usual; whereas Alice, fevered with doubt and apprehension, lay awake. At seven o'clock she was at her window, watching the grey morning splinter into sunlight over the quiet fields. Through the mist the gamekeeper came, and another man, carrying a woman between them, and the suspicion that her sister might have been killed in an agrarian outrage gripped her heart like an iron hand. She ran downstairs, and, rushing across the gravel, opened the wicket-gate. Olive was moaning with pain, but her moans were a sweet reassurance in Alice's ears, and without attempting to understand the man's story of how Miss Olive had sprained her ankle in crossing the stile in their wood, and how he had found her as he was going his rounds, she gave the man five shillings, thanked him, and sent him away. Barnes and the butler then carried Olive upstairs, and in the midst of much confusion Mr. Barton rode down the avenue in quest of Dr. Reed—galloped down the avenue, his pale hair blowing in the breeze.

'I wish you had come straight to me,' said Mrs. Barton to Alice, as soon as Barnes had left the room. 'We'd have got her upstairs between us, and then we might have told any story we liked about her illness.'

'But the Lawlers' gamekeeper would know all about it.'

'Ah, yes, that's true. I never heard of anything so unfortunate in my life. An elopement is never very respectable, but an elopement that does not succeed, when the girl comes home again, is just as bad as—I cannot think how Olive could have managed to meet Captain Hibbert and arrange all this business, without my finding it out. I feel sure she must have had the assistance of a third party. I feel certain that all this is Barnes's doing. I am beginning to hate that woman, with her perpetual smile, but it won't do to send her away now; we must wait.' And on these words Mrs. Barton approached the bed.

Shaken with sudden fits of shivering, and her teeth chattering, Olive lay staring blindly at her mother and sister. Her eyes were expressive at once of fear and pain.

'And now, my own darling, will you tell me how all this happened?'

'Oh, not now, mother—not now . . . I don't know; I couldn't help it. . . . You mustn't scold me, I feel too ill to bear it.'

'I am not thinking of scolding you, dearest, and you need not tell me anything you do not like. . . . I know you were going to run away with Captain Hibbert, and met with an accident crossing the stile in the Lawler Wood.'

'Oh, yes, yes; I met that horrid woman, Mrs. Lawler; she knew all about it, and was waiting for me at the stile. She said lots of dreadful things to me . . . I don't remember what; that she had more right to Edward than I—'

'Never mind, dear; don't agitate yourself thinking of what she said.'

'And then, as I tried to pass her, she pushed me and I fell, and hurt my ankle so badly that I could not get up; and she taunted me, and she said she could not help me home because we were not on visiting terms. And I lay in that

dreadful wood all night. But I can't speak any more, I feel too ill; and I never wish to see Edward again. . . . The pain of my ankle is something terrible.'

Mrs. Barton looked at Alice expressively, and she whispered in her ear:

'This is all Barnes's doing, but we cannot send her away. . . . We must put a bold face on it, and brave it out.'

Dr. Reed was announced.

'Oh, how do you do, doctor? . . . It is so good of you to come at once. . . . We were afraid Mr. Barton would not find you at home. I am afraid that Olive has sprained her foot badly. Last night she went out for a walk rather late in the evening, and, in endeavouring to cross a stile, she slipped and hurt herself so badly that she was unable to return home, and lay exposed for several hours to the heavy night dews. I am afraid she has caught a severe cold. . . . She has been shivering.'

'Can I see her foot?'

'Certainly. Olive, dear, will you allow Dr. Reed to see your ankle?'

'Oh, take care, mamma; you are hurting me!' shrieked the girl, as Mrs. Barton removed the bedclothes. At this moment a knock was heard at the door.

'Who on earth is this?' cried Mrs. Barton. 'Alice, will you go and see? Say that I am engaged, and can attend to nothing now.'

When Alice returned to the bedside she drew her mother imperatively towards the window. 'Captain Hibbert is waiting in the drawing-room. He says he must see you.'

At the mention of Captain Hibbert's name Mrs. Barton's admirably governed temper showed signs of yielding: her face contracted and she bit her lips.

'You must go down and see him. Tell him that Olive is very ill and that the doctor is with her. And mind you, you must not answer any questions. Say that I cannot see him, but that I am greatly surprised at his forcing his way into my house after what has passed between us; that I hope he will never intrude himself upon us again; that I cannot have my daughter's life

endangered, and that, if he insists on persecuting us, I shall have to write to his Colonel.'

'Do you not think that father would be the person to make such explanations?'

'You know your father could not be trusted to talk sensibly for five minutes—at least,' she said, correcting herself, 'on anything that did not concern painting or singing. . . . But,' she continued, following her daughter to the door, 'on second thoughts I do not think it would be advisible to bring matters to a crisis. . . . I do not know how this affair will affect Olive's chances, and if he is anxious to marry her I do not see why he should not; . . . she may not be able to get any better. So you had better, I think, put him off—pretend that we are very angry, and get him to promise not to try to see or to write to Olive until, let us say, the end of the year. It will only make him more keen on her.'

When Alice opened the drawing-room door Captain Hibbert rushed forward; his soft eyes were bright with excitement, and his tall figure was thrown into a beautiful pose when he stopped.

'Oh, I beg your pardon. Miss Barton. I had expected your sister.'

'My sister is very ill in bed, and the doctor is with her.'

'Ill in bed!'

'Yes, she sprained her ankle last night in attempting to cross the stile in the wood at the end of our lawn.'

'Oh, that was the reason . . . then . . . Can I see your sister for a few minutes?'

'It is quite impossible; and my mother desires me to say that she is very much surprised that you should come here. . . . We know all about your attempt to induce Olive to leave her home.'

'Then she has told you? But if you knew how I love her, you would not blame me. What else could I do? Your mother would not let me see her, and she was very unhappy at home; you did not know this, but I did, and if luck hadn't been against me—Ah! but what's the use in talking of luck; luck was

against me, or she would have been my wife now. And what a little thing suffices to blight a man's happiness in life; what a little, oh, what a little!' he said, speaking in a voice full of bitterness; and he buried his face in his hands.

Alice's eyes as she looked at him were expressive of her thoughts—they beamed at once with pity and admiration. He was but the ordinary handsome young man that in England nature seems to reproduce in everlasting stereotype. Long graceful legs, clad in tight-fitting trousers, slender hips rising architecturally to square wide shoulders, a thin strong neck and a tiny head—yes, a head so small that an artist would at once mark off eight on his sheet of double elephant. And now he lay over the back of a chair weeping like a child; in the intensity of his grief he was no longer commonplace; and as Alice looked at this superb animal thrown back in a superb abandonment of pose, her heart filled with the natural pity that the female feels always for the male in distress, and the impulse within her was to put her arms about him and console him; and then she understood her sister's passion for him, and her mind formulated it thus: 'How handsome he is! Any girl would like a man like that.' And as Alice surrendered herself to those sensuous, or rather romantic feelings, her nature quickened to a sense of pleasure, and she grew gentler with him, and was glad to listen while he sobbed out his sorrows to her.

'Oh, why,' he exclaimed, 'did she fall over that thrice-accursed stile! In five minutes more we would have been in each other's arms, and for ever. I had a couple of the best post-horses in Gort; they'd have taken us to Athenry in a couple of hours, and then—Oh! what luck, what luck!'

'But do you not know that Olive met Mrs. Lawler in the wood, and that it was she who—'

'What do you say? You don't mean to tell me that it was Mrs. Lawler who prevented Olive from meeting me? Oh, what beasts, what devils women are,' he said; 'and the worst of it is that one cannot be even with them, and they know it. If you only knew,' he said, turning almost fiercely upon Alice, 'how I loved your sister, you would pity me; but I suppose it is all over now. Is she very ill?'

'We don't know yet. She has sprained her ankle very badly, and is shivering terribly; she was lying out all night in the wet wood.'

He did not answer at once. He walked once or twice up and down the room, and then he said, taking Alice's hand in his, 'Will you be a friend to me, Miss Barton?' He could get no further, for tears were rolling down his cheeks.

Alice looked at him tenderly; she was much touched by the manifestation of his love, and at the end of a long silence she said:

'Now, Captain Hibbert, I want you to listen to me. Don't cry any more, but listen.'

'I dare say I look a great fool.'

'No, indeed you do not,' she answered; and then in kindly worded phrases she told him that, at least for the present, he must not attempt to correspond with Olive. 'Give me your word of honour that you will neither write nor speak to her for, let us say, six months, and I will promise to be your friend.'

'I will do anything you ask me to do, but will you in return promise to write and tell me how she is getting on, and if she is in any danger?'

'I think I can promise to do that; I will write and tell you how Olive is in a few days. Now we must say good-bye; and you will not forget your promise to me, as I shall not forget mine to you.'

When Alice went upstairs, Dr. Reed and Mrs. Barton were talking on the landing.

'And what do you think, doctor?' asked the anxious mother.

'It is impossible to say. She has evidently received a severe nervous shock, and this and the exposure to which she was subjected may develop into something serious. You will give her that Dover's powder to-night, and you will see that she has absolute quiet and rest. Have you got a reliable nurse?'

'Yes, the young ladies have a maid; I think Barnes can be trusted to carry out your orders, doctor.'

'Oh, mamma, I hope you will allow me to nurse my sister; I should not like to leave her in charge of a servant.'

'I am afraid you are not strong enough, dear.'

'Oh, yes, I am; am I not strong enough, doctor?'

Dr. Reed looked for a moment steadily at Alice. 'Your sister will,' he said, 'require a good deal of looking after. But if you will not overdo it, I think you seem quite strong enough to nurse her. But you must not sit up at night with her too regularly; you must share the labour with someone.'

'She will do that with me,' said Mrs. Barton, speaking more kindly, Alice thought, than she had ever heard her speak before.

Then a wailing voice was heard calling to Alice.

'Go in and see what she wants, dear, but you will not encourage her to talk much; the doctor does not wish it.'

The room did not look the same to Alice as it had ever looked before. Her eyes fell on the Persian rugs laid between the two white beds and the tall glass in the wardrobe where Olive wasted half-an-hour every evening, examining her beauty. Would she ever do so again? Now a broken reflection of feverish eyes and blonde hair was what remained. The white curtains of the chimneypiece had been drawn aside, a bright fire was burning, and Barnes was removing a foot-pan of hot water.

'Sit down here by me, Alice; I want to talk to you.'

'The doctor has forbidden you to talk, dear; he says you must have perfect rest and quiet.'

'I must talk a little to you; if I didn't I should go mad.'

'Well, what is it, dear?'

'I will tell you presently,' said the sick girl, glancing at Barnes.

'You can tidy up the room afterwards, Barnes; Miss Olive wants to talk to me now.'

'Oh, Alice, tell me,' cried the girl, when the servant had left the room, 'I don't want to ask mamma—she won't tell me the exact truth; but you will. Tell me what the doctor said. . . . Did he say I was going to die?'

'Going to die? Olive, who ever heard of such a thing? You really must not give way to such fancies.'

'Well, tell me what he said.'

'He said that you had received a severe nervous shock, that you had been subjected to several hours' exposure, that you must take great care of yourself, and, above all, have perfect rest and quiet, and not excite yourself, and not talk.'

'Is that all he said? Then he cannot know how ill I feel; perhaps I ought to see another doctor. But I don't believe anyone could do me much good. Oh, I feel wretchedly ill, and somehow I seem to know I am going to die! It would be very horrible to die; but young girls no older than I have died—have been cut off in the beginning of their life. And we have seen nothing of life, only a few balls and parties. It would be terrible to die so soon. When Violet carried off the Marquis I felt so bitterly ashamed that I thought I would have liked to die; but not now—now I know that Edward loves me I would not care to die; it would be terrible to die before I was married. Wouldn't it, Alice? . . . But you don't answer me; did you never think about death?'

Then, as the thin wailing voice sank into her ears, Alice started from her dreams, and she strove to submit her attention to her sister.

'Yes, dear, of course I have. Death is, no doubt, a very terrible thing, but we can do no good by thinking of it.'

'Oh yes, we should, Alice, for this is not the only world—there is another and a better one; and, as mamma says, and as religion says, we are only here to try and get a good place in it. You are surprised to hear me speak like this; you think I never think of anything but the colour of a bonnet-string, but I do.'

'I am sure you do, Olive; I never doubted it; but I wish you would now do what the doctor orders, and refrain from talking and exciting yourself, and

try and get well. You may then think of death and other gloomy things as much as you like.'

'You don't understand, Alice; one can't think of death, then—one has so much else to think of; one is so taken up with other ideas. It is only when one is ill that one really begins to see what life is. You have never been ill, and you don't know how terribly near death seems to have come—very near. Perhaps I ought to see the priest; it would be just as well, just in case I should die. Don't you think so?'

'I don't think there is any more danger of your dying now than there was a month ago, dear, and I am sure you can have nothing on your mind that demands immediate confession,' she said, her voice trembling a little.

'Oh yes, I have, Alice, and a very great deal; I have been very wicked.'

'Very wicked!'

'Well, I know you aren't pious, Alice, and perhaps you don't believe there is harm in such things, but I do; and I know it was very wrong, and perhaps a mortal sin, to try to run away with Edward. But I loved him so very dearly, and I was so tired of staying at home and being taken out to parties. And when you are in love with a man you forget everything. At least I did; and when he asked to kiss me I couldn't refuse. You won't tell anyone, Alice dear, that I told you this.' Alice shook her head, and Olive continued, in spite of all that the doctor had said:

'But you don't know how lonely I feel at home; you never feel lonely, I dare say, for you only think of your books and papers, and don't realize what a disgrace it would be if I didn't marry, and after all the trouble that mamma has taken. But I don't know what will become of me now. I'm going to be dreadfully ill, and when I get well I shall be pretty no longer; I am sure I am looking wretchedly. I must see myself—fetch the glass, Alice, Alice.'

Olive lay whining and calling for her sister, and when Dr. Reed came he ordered several inches of the pale silky hair to be cut away and a cold lotion to be applied to the forehead, and some sliced lemons were given to her to suck.

The clear blue eyes were dull, the breathing quick, the skin dry and hot; and on the following day four leeches had to be applied to her ankle. They relieved her somewhat, and, when she had taken her draught, she sank to sleep. But as the night grew denser, Alice was suddenly awakened by someone speaking wildly in her ear: 'Take me away, dear! I am sick of home; I want to get away from all these spiteful girls. I know they are laughing at me because Violet cut me out with the Marquis. We shall be married, shan't we, the moment we arrive in Dublin? It's horrible to be married at the registrar's, but it's better than not being married at all. But do you think they will catch us up? It would be dreadful to be taken back home, I couldn't bear it. Oh, do drive on; we don't seem to be moving. You see that strange tree on the right, we haven't passed it yet; I don't think we ever shall. Whip up that bay horse; don't you see he is turning round, wants to go back? I am sure that this isn't the road; that man at the corner told you a lie. I know he was mocking at us—I saw it in his eye. . . . Look, look, Edward! Oh, look—it is papa, or Lord Dungory, I can't tell which, he won't lift his cloak.' And then the vision would fade, and she would fancy herself in the wood, arguing once again with Mrs. Lawler. 'No, what you say isn't true; he never loved you. How could he? You are an old woman. Let me pass—let me pass. Why do you speak to me? We don't visit, we never did visit you. No; it was not at our house you met Edward. You were on the streets; and Edward shall not, he could not, think of running away with you—will you, darling? Oh, help me, help me out of this dreadful wood. I want to go home, but I can't walk. That terrible bird is still watching me, and I dare not pass that tree till you drive it away.'

The two beds, with their white curtains and brass crowns, showed through the pale obscurity, broken only by the red-glowing basin where a night-light burnt, and the long tongues of flame that the blazing peat scattered from time to time across the darkened ceiling. The solitude of the sleeping house grew momentarily more intense in Alice's brain, and she trembled as she strove to soothe her sister, and covered the hot feverish arms over with the bedclothes.

'What sort of night has Olive had?' Mrs. Barton asked when she came in about eight.

'Not a very quiet one; I am afraid she's a little delirious.'

'Dr. Reed promised to be here early. How do you feel, dear?' Mrs. Barton asked, leaning over the bed.

'Oh, very ill; I can scarcely breathe, and I have such a pain in my side.'

'Your lips look very sore, dear; do they hurt you?'—Olive only moaned dismally—and, looking anxiously at her elder daughter, she said:

'And you, too, Alice, are not looking well. You are tired, and mustn't sit up another night with your sister. To-night I'll take your place.'

'Oh, mother, no! I assure you it is a pleasure to me to nurse Olive. I am very well indeed; do not think about me.'

'Indeed, I will think about you, and you must do as I tell you. I'll look after Olive, and you must try and get a good night's rest We will take it in turns to nurse her. And now come down to breakfast. Barnes, you'll not think of leaving Miss Olive until we come back; and, if any change occurs, ring for me immediately.'

When Dr. Reed arrived, Alice was again sitting by the bedside.

'And how is our patient to-day?'

'I cannot say she is any better; she has a distressing cough, and last night I am afraid she was a little delirious.'

'Ah, you say the cough is distressing?'

'I am afraid I must call it distressing; is that a very bad sign?'

'Probably there is not much wrong, but it would be better to ascertain the condition of the patient, and then we may be able to do something to relieve her.'

The doctor drew a stethoscope from his pocket, and they lifted the patient into a sitting position.

'I should like to examine her chest;' and his fingers moved to unfasten her night-gown.

'Don't expose me,' she murmured feebly.

'Now, Olive dear, remember it is only the doctor; let him examine you.'

Olive's eyes were a dull filmy blue, the lips were covered with sores, and there was a redness over the cheekbones—not the hectic flush of phthisis, but a dusky redness. And the patient was so weak that during the stethoscopic examination her head fell from side to side as she was moved, and when the doctor pressed her right side her moans were pregnant with pain.

'Now let me see the tongue. Dry and parched.'

'Shall I die, doctor?' the girl asked feebly and plaintively as she sank amidst the pillows.

'Die! no, not if you take care of yourself and do what you are told.'

'But tell me, Dr. Reed,' Alice asked. 'You can tell me the truth.'

'She'll get well if she takes care of herself. It is impossible to say.
No one can predict the turn pneumonia will take.'

'Pneumonia! What is that?'

'Congestion of the lungs, or rather an advanced stage of it. It is more common in men than in women, and it is the consequence of long exposure to wet and cold.'

'Is it very dangerous?'

'Very; and now let me tell you that it is all-important that the temperature of the room should not be allowed to vary. I attended a case of it some three or four miles from here, but the damp of the cabin was so great that it was impossible to combat the disease. The cottage, or rather hovel, was built on the edge of a soft spongy bog, and so wet was it that the woman had to sweep the water every morning from the floor, where it collected in great pools. I am now going to visit an evicted family, who are living in a partially roofed shed fenced up by the roadside. The father is down with fever, and lies shivering, with nothing to drink but cold water. His wife told me that last

week it rained so heavily that she had to get up three times in the night to wring the sheets out.'

'And why were they evicted?'

'Oh, that is a long story; but it is a singularly characteristic one. In the first place, he was an idle fellow; he got into difficulties and owed his landlord three years' rent. Then he got into bad hands, and was prevented from coming to terms with his landlord. There was a lot of jobbing going on between the priest and the village grocer, and finally it was arranged that the latter should pay off the existing debt if the landlord could be forced into letting him the farm at a "fair rent," that is to say, thirty per cent reduction on the old rent. In recognition of his protecting influence, the priest was to take a third of the farm off the grocer's hands, and the two were then to conjointly rack-rent poor Murphy for the remaining third portion, which he would be allowed to retain for a third of the original rent; but the National League heard of their little tricks, and now the farm is boycotted, and Murphy is dying in the ditch for the good of his *counthry*.'

'I thought boycotting was ended, that the League had lost all power.'

'It has and it hasn't. Sometimes a man takes a farm and keeps it in defiance of his neighbours; sometimes they hunt him out of it. It is hard to come to a conclusion, for when in one district you hear of rents being paid and boycotted farms letting freely, in another, only a few miles away, the landlords are giving reductions, and there are farms lying waste that no one dare look at. In my opinion the fire is only smouldering, and when the Coercion Act expires the old organization will rise up as strong and as triumphant as before. This is a time of respite for both parties.'

The conversation then came to a sudden pause. Alice felt it would be out of place for her to speak her sympathies for the Nationalistic cause, and she knew it would be unfair to lead the doctor to express his. So at the end of a long silence, during which each divined the other's thoughts, she said:

'I suppose you see a great deal of the poor and the miseries they endure?'

'I have had good opportunities of studying them. Before I came here I spent ten years in the poorest district in Donegal. I am sure there wasn't a gentleman's house within fifteen miles of me.'

'And didn't you feel very lonely?'

'Yes, I did, but one gets so used to solitude that to return to the world, after having lived long in the atmosphere of one's own thoughts, is painful. The repugnance that grows on those who live alone to hearing their fellow-creatures express their ideas is very remarkable. It must be felt to be understood; and I have often wondered how it was that I never met it in a novel.'

'It would be very difficult to write. Do you ever read fiction?'

'Yes, and enjoy it. In my little home amid the northern bogs, I used to look forward when I had finished writing, to reading a story.'

'What were you writing?'

'A book.'

'A book!' exclaimed Alice, looking suddenly pleased and astonished.

'Yes, but not a work of fiction—I am afraid I am too prosaic an individual for that—a medical work.'

'And have you finished your book?'

'Yes, it is finished, and I am glad to say it is in the hands of a London publisher. We have not yet agreed about the price, but I hope and believe that, directly and indirectly, it will lead to putting me into a small London practice.'

'And then you will leave us?'

'I am afraid so. There are many friends I shall miss—that I shall be very sorry to leave, but—'

'Oh, of course it would not do to miss such a chance.'

They fell to discussing the patient, and when the doctor left, Alice proceeded to carry out his instructions concerning the patient, and, these being done, she sat down by the bedside and continued her thoughts of him with a sense of pleasure. She remembered that she had always liked him. Yes, it was a liking that dated as far back as the spinsters' ball at Ballinasloe. He was the only man there in whom she had taken the slightest interest. They were sitting together on the stairs when that poor fellow was thrown down and had his leg broken. She remembered how she had enjoyed meeting him at tennis-parties, and how often she had walked away with him from the players through the shrubberies; and above all she could not forget—it was a long sweet souvenir—the beautiful afternoon she had spent with him, sitting on the rock, the day of the picnic at Kinvarra Castle. She had forgotten, or rather she had never noticed, that he was a short, thick-set, middle-aged man, that he wore mutton-chop whiskers, and that his lips were overhung by a long dark moustache. His manners were those of an unpolished and somewhat commonplace man. But while she thought of his grey eyes her heart was thrilled with gladness, and as she dreamed of his lonely life of labour and his ultimate hopes of success, all her old sorrows and fears seemed to have evaporated. Then suddenly and with the unexpectedness of an apparition the question presented itself: Did she like him better than Harding? Alice shrank from the unpleasantness of the thought, and did not force herself to answer it, but busied herself with attending to her sister's wants.

While the dawn of Alice's happiness, Olive lay suffering in all the dire humility of the flesh. Hourly her breathing grew shorter and more hurried, her cough more frequent, and the expectoration that accompanied it darker and thicker in colour. The beautiful eyes were now turgid and dull, the lids hung heavily over a line of filmy blue, and a thick scaly layer of bloody tenacious mucus persistently accumulated and covered the tiny and once almost jewel-like teeth. For three or four days these symptoms knew no abatement; and it was over this prostrated body, weakened and humiliated by illness, that Alice and Dr. Reed read love in each other's eyes, and it was about this poor flesh that their hands were joined as they lifted Olive out of the recumbent position she had slipped into, and built up the bowed-in pillows. And as it had once been all Olive in Brookfield, it was now all Alice;

the veil seemed suddenly to have slipped from all eyes, and the exceeding worth of this plain girl was at last recognized. Mrs. Barton's presence at the bedside did not soothe the sufferer; she grew restless and demanded her sister. And the illness continued, her life in the balance till the eighth day. It was then that she took a turn for the better; the doctor pronounced her out of danger, and two days after she lay watching Alice and Dr. Reed talking in the window. 'Were they talking about her?' she asked herself. She did not think they were. It seemed to her that each was interested in the other. 'Laying plans,' the sick girl said to herself, 'for themselves.' At these words her senses dimmed, and when she awoke she had some difficulty in remembering what she had seen.

CHAPTER 27

'Ah, *ce cher Milord, comme il est beau, comme il est parfait!*' exclaimed Mrs. Barton, as she led him to his chair and poured out his glass of sherry.

But there was a gloom on his face which laughter and compliments failed for a moment to dissipate—at last he said:

'Ah, Mrs. Barton, Mrs. Barton! if I hadn't this little retreat to take refuge in, to hide myself in, during some hours of the day, I should not be able to bear up—Brookfield has prolonged my life for—'

'I cannot allow such sad thoughts as these,' said Mrs. Barton laughing, and waving her white hands. 'Who has been teasing *notre cher* Milord? What have dreadful Lady Jane and terrible Lady Sarah been doing to him?'

'I shall never forget this morning, no, not if I lived to a thousand,' the old gentleman murmured plaintively. 'Oh, the scenes—the scenes I have been through! Cecilia, as I told you yesterday, has been filling the house with rosaries and holywater-fonts; Jane and Sarah have been breaking these, and the result has been tears and upbraidings. Last night at dinner I don't really know what they didn't say to each other; and then the two elder ones fell upon me and declared that it was all my fault, that I ought never to have sent my daughter to a Catholic convent. I was obliged to shut myself up in the study and lock the door. Then this morning, when I thought it was all over, it began again worse than ever; and then in the middle of it all, when Jane asked Cecilia how many Gods there were in the roll of bread she was eating if the priest were to bless it—if a Papist wasn't one who couldn't worship God till somebody had turned Him into a biscuit—a most injudicious observation, I said so at the time, and I must apologize to you, my dear Mrs. Barton, for repeating it, but I am really so upset that I scarcely know what I am saying. Well, Jane had no sooner spoken than Cecilia overthrew the teacups and said she wasn't going to stay in the house to hear her religion insulted, and without another word she walked down to the parish priest and was baptized a Catholic; nor is that all. She returned with a scapular

round her neck, a rosary about her waist, and a Pope's medal in her hand. I really thought Jane and Sarah would have fainted; indeed I am sure they would have fainted if Cecilia hadn't declared that she was going to pack up her things and return at once to St. Leonards and become a nun. Such an announcement as this was, of course, far beyond fainting, and . . . but no, I will not attempt to describe it, but I can assure you I was very anxious to get out of the house.'

'Cecilia going to be a nun; oh, I am so glad!' exclaimed Olive. 'It is far the best thing she could do, for she couldn't hope to be married.'

'Olive, Olive!' said Mrs. Barton, 'you shouldn't speak so openly. We should always consider the religious prejudices of others. Of course, as Catholics we must be glad to hear of anyone joining the true Church, but we should remember that Milord is going to lose his daughter.'

'I assure you, my dear Mrs. Barton, I have no prejudices. I look upon all religions as equally good and equally bad, but to be forced to live in a perpetual discussion in which teacups are broken, concerning scapulars, bacon and meal shops, and a school which, putting aside the question of expense, makes me hated in the neighbourhood, I regard as intolerable; and when I go home this evening, I shall tell Jane that the school must be put down or carried on in a less aggressive way. I assure you I have no wish to convert the people; they are paying their rents very well now, and I think it absurd to upset them; and the fact of having received Cecilia into the Church might incline the priest very much towards us.'

'And Cecilia will be so happy in that beautiful convent!' suggested Mrs. Barton.

'*C'est le génie du Catholicisme de nous débarrasser des filles laides.*'

And upon this expression of goodwill towards the Church of Rome Cecilia's future life was discussed with much amiability. Mrs. Barton said she would make a sweet little nun; Olive declared that she would certainly go to St. Leonard's to see her 'professed'; and Milord's description of Lady Sarah's and Lady Jane's ill-humour was considered very amusing, and just as he was

about to recount some new incident—one that had escaped his memory till then—the door opened and the servant announced Dr. Reed.

'Now, what can he want? Olive is quite well. He looks at her tongue and feels her pulse. How do you do, Dr. Reed? Here is your patient, whom you will find in the best health and spirits.'

As he was about to reply, Alice came into the room, and she tried to carry on the conversation naturally. But the silence of Mrs. Barton and Milord made this difficult; Dr. Reed was not a ready talker, and this morning his replies were more than ever awkward and constrained. At last it dawned on Alice that he wanted to speak to her alone; and in answer to a remark he had made concerning the fever dens in Gort she said:

'I wanted to ask you a question or two about typhoid fever, Dr. Reed; one of my heroines is going to die of it, and I should like to avoid medical impossibilities. May I show you the passage?'

'Certainly, Miss Barton; I shall be delighted to help you—if I can.'

As soon as Alice left the room to fetch her manuscript the doctor hurriedly bade his patient, Milord, and Mrs. Barton, good-bye.

'Aren't you going to wait to see Alice?' Mrs. Barton asked.

'I have to speak to the boy in charge of my car; I shall see Miss Barton as she comes downstairs.'

Mrs. Barton looked as if she thought this arrangement not a little singular, but she said nothing; and when Alice came running downstairs with a roll of MSS. in her hand, she attempted to explain her difficulty to the doctor. He made a feeble attempt to listen to the passage she read aloud to him; and when their eyes met across the paper she saw he was going to propose to her.

'Will you walk down the drive with me? and we will talk of that as we go along.'

Her hat was on the hall-table; she took it up, and in silence walked with him out on the gravel.

'Will I put the harse up, sor?' cried the boy from the outside car.

'No; follow me down the avenue.'

It was a wild autumn evening, full of wind and leaves. The great green pasture-lands, soaked and soddened with rain, rolled their monotonous green turf to the verge of the blown beech-trees, about which the rooks drifted in picturesque confusion.

Now they soared like hawks, or on straightened wings were carried down a furious gust across the tumultuous waves of upheaved yellow, and past the rift of cold crimson that is tossed like a banner through the shadows of evening.

'I came here to tell you that I am going away; that I am leaving Ireland for ever. I've bought the practice I spoke to you of in Notting Hill.'

'Oh, I am so glad!'

'Thank you! But there is another and more important matter on which I should like to speak to you. For a long time back I had resolved to leave Ireland a sad or an entirely happy man. Which shall it be? You are the only woman I ever loved—will you be my wife?'

'Yes, I will.'

'I was afraid to ask you before. But,' he added, sighing, 'I shan't be able to give you a home like the one you are leaving. We shall have to be very economical; we shall not have more than three hundred a year to live upon. Will you be satisfied with that?'

'I hope, indeed—I am sure we shall get on very well. You forget that I can do something to keep myself,' she added, smiling. 'I have two or three orders.'

She passed her arm through Dr. Reed's; and as he unfolded his plans to her, he held her hand warmly and affectionately in his: and as the twilight drifted it was wrapped like a veil about them.

The rooks in great flitting flocks passed over their heads, the tempestuous crimson of the sky had been hurled further away, and only the form of the

grey horse, that the boy had allowed to graze, stood out distinctly in the gloom that descended upon the earth.

CHAPTER 28

On the very first opportunity she could find Alice told her mother that Dr. Reed had proposed to her, and that she had accepted him. Mrs. Barton said it was disgraceful, and that she would never hear of such a marriage; and when the doctor called next day she acquainted him with her views on the subject. She told him he had very improperly taken advantage of his position to make love to her daughter; she really didn't know how he could ever have arrived at the conclusion that a match was possible, and that for the future his visits must cease at Brookfield. And when Alice heard what had passed between Dr. Reed and her mother she wrote, assuring him that her feelings towards him would remain uninfluenced by anything that anyone might say. All the same, it might be as well, having regard for what had happened, that the marriage should take place with the least possible delay.

She took this letter down to the post-office herself, and when she returned she entered the drawing-room and told Mrs. Barton what she had done.

'I wish you had shown me the letter before you sent it. There is nothing we need advice about so much as a letter.'

'Yes, mother,' replied Alice, deceived by the gentleness of Mrs. Barton's manner; 'but we seemed to hold such widely different views on this matter that there did not seem to be any use in discussing it.'

'Mother and daughter should never hold different views; my children's interests are my interests—what interests have I now but theirs?'

'Oh, mother! Then you will consent to this marriage?'

Mrs. Barton's face always changed expression before a direct question. 'My dear, I would consent to anything that would make you happy; but it seems to me impossible that you could be happy with Dr. Reed. I wonder how you could like him. You do not know—I mean, you do not realize what the intimacies of married life are. They are often hard to put up with, no matter who the man may be, but with one who is not a gentleman—'

'But, mother, Dr. Reed seems to me to be in every way a gentleman. Who is there more gentlemanly in the country? I am sure that from every point of view he is preferable to Mr. Adair or Sir Charles, or Sir Richard or Mr. Ryan, or his cousin, Mr. Lynch.'

'My darling child, I would sooner see you laid in your coffin than married to either Mr. Ryan or Mr. Lynch; but that is not the question. It is, whether you had not better wait for a few years before you throw yourself away on such a man as Dr. Reed. I know that you have been greatly tried; nothing is so trying to a girl as to come out with her sister who is the belle of the season, and I must say you have shown a great deal of pluck; and perhaps I haven't been considerate enough. But I, too, have had my disappointments—Olive's affairs did not, as you know, turn out as well as I had expected, and to see you now marry one who is so much beneath us!'

'Mother, dear, he is not beneath us. There is no one who has earned his career but Dr. Reed; he owes nothing to anyone; he has done it all by his own exertions; and now he has bought a London practice.'

'Then you do not love him; it is only for the sake of settling yourself in life that you are marrying him?'

'I respect Dr. Reed more than any man living; I bear for him a most sincere affection, and I hope to make him a good wife.'

'You don't love him as you did Mr. Harding? If you will only wait you may get him. The tenants are paying their rents very well, and I am thinking of going to London in the spring.'

The girl winced at the mention of Harding, but she looked into her mother's soft appealing brown eyes; and, reading clearer than she had ever read before all the adorable falseness that lay therein, she answered:

'I do not want to marry Mr. Harding; I am engaged to Dr. Reed, and I do not intend to give him up.'

This answer was given so firmly that Mrs. Barton lost her temper for a moment, and she said:

'And do you really know what this Dr. Reed originally was? Lord Dungory is dining here to-night; he knows all about Dr. Reed's antecedents, and I am sure he will be horrified when he hears that you are thinking of marrying him.'

'I cannot recognize Lord Dungory's right to advise me on any course I may choose to take, and I hope he will have the good taste to refrain from speaking to me of my marriage.'

'What do you mean? How dare you speak to me like that, you impertinent girl!'

'I am not impertinent, mother, and I hope I shall never be impertinent to you; but I am now in my twenty-fifth year, and if I am ever to judge for myself, I must do so now.'

Alice was curiously surprised by her own words; it seemed to her that it was some strange woman, and not herself—not the old self with whom she was intimately acquainted—who was speaking. Life is full of these epoch-marking moments. We have all at some given time experienced the sensation of finding ourselves either stronger or weaker than we had ever before known ourselves to be; Alice now for the first time felt that she was speaking and acting in her own individual right; and the knowledge as it thrilled through her consciousness was almost a physical pleasure. But notwithstanding the certitude that never left her of the propriety of her conduct, and the equally ever-present sentiment of the happiness that awaited her, she suffered much during the next ten days, and she was frequently in tears. Cecilia had started for St. Leonards without coming to wish her good-bye, and the cruel sneers, insinuations of all kinds against her and against Dr. Reed, which Mrs. Barton never missed an occasion of using, wounded the girl so deeply, that it was only at the rarest intervals that she left her room—when she walked to the post with a letter, when the luncheon or dinner bell rang. Why she should be thus persecuted, Alice was unable to determine; and why her family did not hail with delight this chance of getting rid of a plain girl, whose prospects were limited, was difficult to say; nor could the girl arrive at any notion of the pleasure or profit it might be to anyone that she should waste her life amid chaperons and gossip,

instead of taking her part in the world's work. And yet this seemed to be her mother's idea. She did not hesitate to threaten that she would neither attend herself, nor allow Mr. Barton to attend the ceremony. Alice might meet Dr. Reed at the corner of the road, and be married as best she could. Alice appealed to her father against this decision, but she soon had to renounce the hope of obtaining any definite answer. He had been previously told that if he attempted any interference, his supply of paints, brushes, canvases, and guitar-strings would be cut off, and, as he was at present deeply engaged on a new picture of *Julius Cæsar overturning the Altars of the Druids*, he hesitated before the alternatives offered to him. He spoke with much affection; he regretted that Alice could not see her way to marrying somebody whom her mother could approve! He explained the difficulties of his position, and the necessity of his turning something out—seeing what he really could do before the close of the year. Alice was disappointed, and bitterly, but she bore her disappointment bravely, and she wrote to Dr. Reed, telling him what had occurred, and proposing to meet him on a certain day at the Parish Church, where Father Shannon would marry them; and, that if he refused, they would proceed to Dublin, and be married at the Registry Office. In a way Alice would have preferred this latter course, but her good sense warned her against the uselessness of offering any too violent opposition to the opinions of the world. And so it was arranged; and sad, weary, and wretched, Alice lingered through the last few days of the life that had always been to her one of humiliation, and which now towards its close had quieted to one of intense pain.

The Brennans had promised to meet her in the chapel, and one day, as she was sitting by her window, she saw May in all the glory of her copper hair, drive a tandem up to the door. This girl threw the reins to the groom, and rushed to her friend.

'And how do you do, Alice, and how well you are looking, and how pleased I am to see you. I would have come before, only my leader was coughing and I couldn't take him out. Oh, I was so wild; it is always like that; nothing is so disappointing as horses; whenever you especially require them they are laid up, and you can't imagine the difficulty I had to get him along; I must really get another leader; he was trying to turn round the whole way—if it hadn't

been for the whip. I took blood out of him three times running. But I know you don't care anything about horses, and I want to hear about this marriage. I am so glad, so pleased, but tell me, do you like him? He seems a very nice sort of man, you know, a man that would make a woman happy. . . . I am sure you will be happy with him, but it is dreadful to think we are going to lose you. I shall, I know, be running over to London on purpose to see you; but tell me, what I want to know is, do you like him? Would you believe it, I never once suspected there was anything between you?'

'Yes, my dear May,' Alice replied smiling, 'I do like Edward Reed; nor do I think that I should ever like any other man half as much: I have perfect confidence in him, and where there is not confidence there cannot be love. He has bought a small practice in Notting Hill, which with care and industry he hopes may be worked up into a substantial business. We shall be very poor at first, but we shall be able to make both ends meet.'

'I can see it all; a little suburban semi-detached house, with green Venetian blinds, a small mahogany sideboard, and a clean capped maid-servant; and in the drawing-room you won't have a piano—you don't care for music, but you'll have some basket chairs, and small bookcases, and a tea-table with tea-cakes at five—oh, won't you look quiet and grave at that tea-table. But tell me, it is all over the county that Mrs. Barton won't hear of this marriage, and that she won't allow your father to go to the chapel to give you away. It is a shame, and for the life of me I can't see what parents have to do with our marriages, do you?'

Without waiting for an answer, May continued the conversation, and with vehemence she passed from one subject to another utterly disconnected without a transitional word of explanation. She explained how tiresome it was to sit at home of an evening listening to Mrs. Gould bemoaning the state of the country; she spoke of her terrier, and this led up to a critical examination of the good looks of several of the officers stationed at Gort; then she alluded to the last meet of the hounds, and she described the big wall she and Mrs. Manly had jumped together; a new hat and an old skirt that she had lately done up came in for a passing remark, and, with an abundance of laughter, May gave an account of a luncheon-party at Lord Rosshill's; and, apparently verbatim, she told what each of the five

Honourable Miss Gores had said about the marriage. Then growing suddenly serious, she said:

'It is all very well to laugh, but, when one comes to think of it, it is very sad indeed to see seven human lives wasting away, a whole family of girls eating their hearts out in despair, having nothing to do but to pop about from one tennis-party to another, and chatter to each other or their chaperons of this girl and that who does not seem to be getting married. You are very lucky indeed, Alice—luckier than you think you are, and you are quite right to stick out and do the best you can for yourself in spite of what your people say. It is all very well for them to talk, but they don't know what we suffer: we are not all made alike, and the wants of one are not the wants of another. I dare say you never thought much about that sort of thing; but as I say, we are not all made alike. Every woman, or nearly every one, wants a husband and a home, and it is only natural she should, and if she doesn't get them the temptations she has to go through are something frightful, and if we make the slightest slip the whole world is down upon us. I can talk to you, Alice, because you know what I have gone through. You have been a very good friend to me—had it not been for you I don't know what would have become of me. You didn't reproach me, you were kind and had pity for me; you are a sensible person, and I dare say you understood that I wasn't entirely to blame. And I wasn't entirely to blame; the circumstances we girls live under are not just—no, they are not just. We are told that we must marry a man with at least a thousand a year, or remain spinsters; well, I should like to know where the men are who have a thousand a year, and some of us can't remain spinsters. Oh! you are very lucky indeed to have found a husband, and to be going away to a home of your own. I wish I were as lucky as you, Alice, indeed I do, for then there would be no excuse, and I could be a good woman. You won't hate me too much, will you, Alice? I have made a lot of good resolutions, and they shall be kept some day.'

'Some day! You don't mean that you are again—'

'No; but I've a lover. It is dreadfully sinful, and if I died I should go straight to hell. I know all that. I wish I were going to be married, like you! For then one is out of temptation. Haven't you a kind word for me? Won't you kiss me and tell me you don't despise me?'

'Of course I'll kiss you, May; and I am sure that one of these days you will—'

Alice could say no more; and the girls kissed and cried in each other's arms, and the group was a sad allegory of poor humanity's triumph, and poor humanity's more than piteous failures. At last they went downstairs, and in the hall May showed Alice the beautiful wedding-present she had bought her, and the girl did not say that she had sold her hunter to buy it.

CHAPTER 29

At Brookfield on the morning of December 3, '84, the rain fell persistently in the midst of a profound silence. The trees stood stark in the grey air as if petrified; there was not wind enough to waft the falling leaf; it fell straight as if shotted.

Not a living thing was to be seen except the wet sheep, nor did anything stir either within or without till an outside car, one seat overturned to save the cushions from the wet, came careering up the avenue. There was a shaggy horse and a wild-looking driver in a long, shaggy frieze ulster. Even now, at the last moment, Alice expected the drawing-room door to open and her mother to come rushing out to wish her good-bye. But Mrs. Barton remained implacable, and after laying one more kiss on her sister's pale cheek, Alice, in a passionate flood of tears, was driven away.

In streaming mackintoshes, and leaning on dripping umbrellas, she found her husband, and Gladys and Zoe Brennan, waiting for her in the porch of the church.

'Did you ever see such weather?' said Zoe.

'Isn't it dreadful!' said Gladys.

'It was good of you to come,' said Alice.

'It was indeed!' said the bridegroom.

'What nonsense!' said Zoe. 'We were only too pleased; and if to-day be wet, to-morrow and the next and the next will be sunshine.

And thanking Zoe inwardly for this most appropriate remark, the party ascended the church toward the altar-rails, where Father Shannon was awaiting them. Large, pompous, and arrogant, he stood on his altar-steps, and his hands were crossed over his portly stomach. On either side of him the plaster angels bowed their heads and folded their wings. Above him the great chancel window, with its panes of green and yellow glass, jarred in an

unutterable clash of colour; and the great white stare of the chalky walls, and the earthen floor with its tub of holy water, and the German prints absurdly representing the suffering of Christ, bespoke the primitive belief, the coarse superstition, of which the place was an immediate symbol. Alice and the doctor looked at each other and smiled, but their thoughts were too firmly fixed on the actual problem of their united lives to wander far in the most hidden ways of the old world's psychical extravagances. What did it matter to them what absurd usages the place they were in was put to?—they, at least, were only making use of it as they might of any other public office—the police-station, where inquiries are made concerning parcels left in cabs; the Commissioner before whom an affidavit is made. And it served its purpose as well as any of the others did theirs. The priest joined their hands, Edward put the ring on Alice's finger, and the usual prayers did no harm if they did no good; and having signed their names in the register and bid good-bye to the Miss Brennans, they got into the carriage, man and wife, their feet set for ever upon one path, their interests and delights melted to one interest and one delight, their separate troubles merged into one trouble that might or might not be made lighter by the sharing; and penetrated by such thoughts they leaned back on the blue cushions of the carriage, happy, and yet a little frightened.

Rather than pass three hours waiting for a train at the little station of Ardrahan, it had been arranged to spend the time driving to Athenry; and, as the carriage rolled through the deliquefying country, the eyes of the man and the woman rested half fondly, half regretfully, and wholly pitifully, on all the familiar signs and the wild landmarks which during so many years had grown into and become part of the texture of their habitual thought; on things of which they would now have to wholly divest themselves, and remember only as the background of their younger lives. Through the streaming glass they could see the strip of bog; and the half-naked woman, her soaked petticoat clinging about her red legs, piling the wet peat into the baskets thrown across the meagre back of a starveling ass. And farther on there were low-lying, swampy fields, and between them and the roadside a few miserable poplars with cabins sunk below the dung-heaps, and the meagre potato-plots lying about them; and then, as these are passed, there are green enclosures full of fattening kine, and here and there a dismantled

cottage, one wall still black with the chimney's smoke, uttering to those who know the country a tale of eviction. Beyond these, beautiful plantations sweep along the crests of the hills, the pillars of a Georgian house showing at the end of a vista. The carriage turned up a narrow road, and our travellers came upon a dozen policemen grouped round a roadside cottage, out of which the furniture had just been thrown. The family had taken shelter from the rain under a hawthorn-tree, and the agents were consulting with their bailiffs if it would not be as well to throw down the walls of the cottage.

'If we don't,' one of the men said, 'they will be back again as soon as our backs are turned, and our work will have to be begun all over again.'

'Shocking,' Alice said, 'that an eviction scene should be our last glimpse of Ireland. Let us pay the rent for them, Edward,' and as she spoke the words the thought passed through her mind that her almsgiving was only another form of selfishness. She wished her departure to be associated with an act of kindness. She would have withdrawn her request, but Edward's hand was in his pocket and he was asking the agent how much the rent was. Five years' rent was owing—more than the travellers had in their purses.

'It is well that we cannot assist them to remain here,' said Edward. 'Circumstances are different, and they will harden; none is of use here. Of what use—'

'You believe, then, that this misery will last for ever?'

'Nothing lasts in Ireland but the priests. And now let us forget Ireland, as many have done before us.'

* * * * *

Two years and a half have passed away, and the suburban home predicted by May, when she came to bid Alice a last good-bye, arises before the reader in all its yellow paint and homely vulgarity. In this suburb we find the ten-roomed house with all its special characteristics—a dining-room window looking upon a commodious area with dust and coal holes. The drawing-room has two windows, and the slender balcony is generally set with flower-boxes. Above that come the two windows of the best bedroom belonging

to Mr. and Mrs., and above that again the windows of two small rooms, respectively inhabited by the eldest son and daughter; and these are topped by the mock-Elizabethan gable which enframes the tiny window of a servant's room. Each house has a pair of trim stone pillars, the crude green of the Venetian blinds jars the cultured eye, and even the tender green of the foliage in the crescent seems as cheap and as common as if it had been bought—as everything else is in Ashbourne Crescent—at the Stores. But how much does this crescent of shrubs mean to the neighbourhood? Is it not there that the old ladies take their pugs for their constitutional walks, and is it not there that the young ladies play tennis with their gentleman acquaintances when they come home from the City on a Saturday afternoon?

In Ashbourne Crescent there is neither Dissent nor Radicalism, but general aversion to all considerations which might disturb belief in all the routine of existence, in all its temporal and spiritual aspects, as it had come amongst them. The fathers and the brothers go to the City every day at nine, the young ladies play tennis, read novels, and beg to be taken to dances at the Kensington Town Hall. On Sunday the air is alive with the clanging of bells, and in orderly procession every family proceeds to church, the fathers in all the gravity of umbrellas and prayer-books, the matrons in silk mantles and clumsy ready-made elastic sides; the girls in all the gaiety of their summer dresses with lively bustles bobbing, the young men in frock-coats which show off their broad shoulders—from time to time they pull their tawny moustaches. Each house keeps a cook and housemaid, and on Sunday afternoons, when the skies are flushed with sunset and the outlines of this human warren grow harshly distinct—black lines upon pale red—these are seen walking arm-in-arm away towards a distant park with their young men.

Ashbourne Crescent, with its bright brass knockers, its white-capped maid-servant, and spotless oilcloths, will pass away before some great tide of revolution that is now gathering strength far away, deep down and out of sight in the heart of the nation, is probable enough; but for the moment it is, in all its cheapness and vulgarity, more than anything else representative, though the length and breadth of the land be searched, of the genius of Empire that has been glorious through the long tale that nine hundred years

have to tell. Ashbourne Crescent may possibly soon be replaced by something better, but at present it commands our admiration, for it is, more than all else, typical England. Neither ideas nor much lucidity will be found there, but much belief in the wisdom shown in the present ordering of things, and much plain sense and much honesty of purpose. Certainly, if your quest be for hectic emotion and passionate impulses, you would do well to turn your steps aside; you will not find them in Ashbourne Crescent. There life flows monotonously, perhaps sometimes even a little moodily, but it is built upon a basis of honest materialism—that materialism without which the world cannot live. And No. 31 differs a little from the rest of the houses. The paint on its walls is fresher, and there are no flowers on its balcony: the hall-door has three bells instead of the usual two, and there is a brass plate with 'Dr. Reed' engraved upon it. The cook is talking through the area-railings to the butcher-boy; a smart parlourmaid opens the door, and we see that the interior is as orderly, commonplace, and clean as we might expect at every house in the crescent. The floorcloths are irreproachable, the marble-painted walls are unadorned with a single picture. On the right is the dining-room, a mahogany table bought for five pounds in the Tottenham Court Road, a dozen chairs to match, a sideboard and a small table; green-painted walls decorated with two engravings, one of Frith's 'Railway Station,' the other of Guido's 'Fortune.' Further down the passage leading to the kitchen-stairs there is a second room: this is the Doctor's consulting-room. A small bookcase filled with serious-looking volumes, a mahogany escritoire strewn with papers, letters, memoranda of all sorts. The floor is covered with a bright Brussels carpet; there are two leather armchairs, and a portrait of an admiral hangs over the fireplace.

Let us go upstairs. How bright and clean are the high marble-painted walls! and on the first landing there is a large cheaply coloured window. The drawing-room is a double room, not divided by curtains but by stiff folding-doors. The furniture is in red, and the heavy curtains that drape the windows fall from gilt cornices. In the middle of the floor there is a settee (probably a reminiscence of the Shelbourne Hotel); and on either side of the fireplace there are sofas, and about the hearthrug many arm-chairs to match with the rest. Above the chimneypiece there is a gilt oval mirror, worth ten pounds. The second room is Alice's study; it is there she writes her novels. A table in

black wood with a pile of MSS. neatly fastened together stands in one corner; there is a bookcase just behind; its shelves are furnished with imaginative literature, such as Shelley's poems, Wordsworth's poems, Keats' poems. There are also handsome editions of Tennyson and Browning, presents from Dr. Reed to his wife. You see a little higher up the shelf a thin volume, Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*, and next to it is Walter Pater's *Renaissance*—studies in art and poetry. There are also many volumes in yellow covers, evidently French novels.

The character of the house is therefore essentially provincial, and shows that its occupants have not always lived amid the complex influences of London life—viz., is not even suburban. Nevertheless, here and there traces of new artistic impulses are seen. On the mantelpiece in the larger room there are two large blue vases; on a small table stands a pot in yellow porcelain, evidently from Morris's; and on the walls there are engravings from Burne Jones. Every Thursday afternoon numbers of ladies, all of whom write novels, assemble here to drink tea and talk of their work.

It is now eleven o'clock in the morning. Alice enters her drawing-room. You see her: a tall, spare woman with kind eyes, who carries her arms stiffly. She has just finished her housekeeping, she puts down her basket of keys, and with all the beautiful movement of the young mother she takes up the crawling mass of white frock, kisses her son and settles his blue sash. And when she has talked to him for a few minutes she rings the bell for nurse; then she sits down to write. As usual, her pen runs on without a perceptible pause. Words come to her easily, but she has not finished the opening paragraph of the article she is writing when the sound of rapid footsteps attracts her attention, and Olive bursts into the room.

'Oh, Alice, how do you do? I couldn't stop at home any longer, I am sick of it.'

'Couldn't stop at home any longer, Olive; what do you mean?'

'If you won't take me in, say so, and I'll go.'

'My dear Olive, I shall be delighted to have you with me; but why can't you stop at home any longer—surely there is no harm in my asking?'

'Oh, I don't know; don't ask me; I am so miserable at home; I can't tell you how unhappy I am. I know I shall never be married, and the perpetual trying to make up matches is sickening. Mamma will insist on riches, position, and all that sort of thing—those kind of men don't want to get married—I am sick of going out; I won't go out any more. We never missed a tennis-party last year; we used to go sometimes ten miles to them, so eager was mamma after Captain Gibbon, and it did not come off; and then the whole country laughs.'

'And who is Captain Gibbon? I never heard of him before.'

'No, you don't know him: he was not in Galway in your time.'

'And Captain Hibbert! Have you heard from him since he went out to India?'

'Yes, once; he wrote to me to say that he hoped to see me when he came home.'

'And when will that be?'

'Oh, I don't know; when people go out to India one never expects to see them again.'

Seeing how sore the wound was, Alice did not attempt to probe it, but strove rather to lead Olive's thoughts away from it, and gradually the sisters lapsed into talking of their acquaintances and friends, and of how life had dealt with them.

'And May, what is she doing?'

'She met with a bad accident, and has not been out hunting lately. She was riding a pounding match with Mrs. Manly across country: May's horse came to grief at a big wall, and broke several of her ribs. They say she has given up riding—now she does nothing but paint. You remember how well she used to paint at school.'

'And the Brennans?'

'Oh, they go up to the Shelbourne every year, but none of them are married; and I am afraid that they must be very hard up, for their land is very highly

let, and the tenants are paying no rent at all now—Ireland is worse than ever; we shall all be ruined, and they say Home Rule is certain. But I am sick of the subject.'

Then the Duffys, the Honourable Miss Gores, and the many other families of unmarried girls—the poor muslin martyrs, whose sufferings were the theme of this book, were again passed in review; their failures sometimes jeeringly alluded to by Olive, but always listened to pityingly by Alice—and, talking thus of their past life, the sisters leant over the spring fire that burnt out in the grate. At the end of a long silence Alice said:

'Well, dear, I hope you have come to live with us, or at any rate to pay us a long visit.'
