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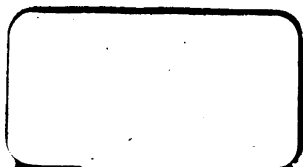
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BROKEN AWAY

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BY

BEATRICE ETHEL GRIMSHAW



THE
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only as that
"best!"
Beatrice Ethel
Lane.]

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CHAPTER I

“ARE those women gone yet?”

It was the voice of the master of the house. The deep well of the staircase, over which he leaned, carried his words in a sepulchral whisper down to the hall below. Another whisper, thinner in tone, came up from the spot, three stories beneath, where a white cap and apron gleamed through the dusk. There was broad daylight everywhere outside, but the hall was always in semi-darkness.

“No, sir. Just going, sir” — hastily, as a door opened on an intervening landing.

A smell of tea and hot cakes floated up to Stuart Rivington's nose as he cautiously projected it over the banisters; a gush of chatter and laughter, and a rustle of skirts, swept aloft on the draught caused by the open door.

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“ . . . Not a word of truth in it, of course. I only mention it to show how uncharitable . . . Poplin? *never*, my dear woman! Every new Vice-Queen tries to bring it in for the good of the country, but it does n't *look value* for the money it costs, so . . . Paying her great attention, no doubt, but we all know *he's* what you call a *Toy!* . . . Second and fourth Thursdays; don't forget. . . . All really *dying* to see Mr. Rivington's new book; when is it to . . .”

The cackle died away on the lowest flight of stairs; the door banged, and the parlourmaid ascended towards the drawing-room to clear away the *débris* of half a dozen relays of tea.

“Kate!” called the master of the house once more, shouting boldly over the banisters this time, as one unashamed and free. “Tell your mistress to come up to the smoking-room at once; I want her. And tell her to bring me up a cup of tea, — a decent cup, — and some of the company cake; not the other, mind!”

“Yes, sir,” replied the imperturbable young person addressed, — she had lived long enough in the house of “the leading Irish novelist” to work out in her own mind a kind of theory as

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to literary men, which classified them among semi-responsible beings ; arriving, in fact, at the conclusion that "Great genius is to madness close allied," although she had never heard of that wise saying. Therefore, nothing Mr. Rivington chose to do ever astonished her.

Eva Rivington, who had been expecting the message, filled a huge ornamental china cup from the mantelpiece with the contents of the last-brewed pot of tea, added generous cream and sugar, and cut several wedges off her most elaborate chocolate cake. There was a cloud on her pretty face as she collected her load on a tray, and prepared to ascend the stairs ; and she glanced anxiously into a mirror on the landing, as she reached the top.

"I really look pale !" she murmured to herself. "Oh, poor Stuart ! how will he take it ? I won't say a word until he has had his tea ; he will be cross waiting for it. . . . This thing on my 'at home' day, of all days !"

She set down the tray for a minute, and arranged the fair curls on her forehead becomingly, frowning at the dark shade of anxiety she noticed under her brown eyes. Then she

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opened the door of the attic smoking-room, and went quickly in.

The room was low-ceiled and long, quaintly shaped into many corners, and pierced down one side with three large dormer windows, overlooking the green tree-tops of the square outside. It was furnished in the semi-Oriental style common to modern smoking-rooms, and possessed a big leather-covered divan, on which Rivington was reclining as his wife entered. A sturdy square table, covered with papers, in one of the windows, spoke of recent work ; the pens were lying about still wet, and the blotting paper supported a pile of numbered sheets.

Rivington, lying just where he had pitched himself loosely down like a collie, his grey tweed arms and legs sprawling widely, and his ruffled brown head falling almost over the edge of the couch, looked most unlike a bookworm or a scribbler of any sort. His pleasant grey eyes neither wore nor needed glasses ; his face was tanned with the sun ; his strong shoulders had not the suspicion of a stoop. Only something a little dreamy and far-away about the expression of the eyes and forehead marked him out

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from the successful young stockbroker of Dame Street, or the hunting and cricketing country squire.

He sat up at sight of his wife, and, possessing himself of the tea-tray, began to eat, drink, and talk with equal rapidity.

“Good girl, Eva ; that’s the sort of cake — you’re too thrifty with that company stuff of yours, mostly ; and I never can find your keys. This is a decent cup of tea — three-quarters of a pint at least. I’ve been dying for some this two hours ; thought those old tabbies of yours would never go. That beast of a publisher wrote by the 4.30 post again, ‘Oliver asking for more’ — I should think he cleared enough out of my last to do him for some time. I did another chapter this afternoon ; but June’s not the best weather for sticking in the house to write. . . . What’s the row with you ? You’re very quiet.”

Eva was sitting on the floor, her head leaning on the couch. She let it sink still further back, as she answered wearily : —

“I’m tired, Stuart. Tired of everything, — housekeeping, and shopping, and visiting, and

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seeing callers, and getting dresses tried on, and — and — *everything!*”

“All of us do get tired of everything sometimes,” said Stuart, wisely. “Especially people in society, if I’m any judge of the faces I see about me every day. If I wrote society novels, from which the Lord preserve me — that reminds me; where’s my manuscript?”

“Here,” said his wife, holding up a roll of paper, and sitting upright.

“Take a cushion; take two or three,” said Stuart, amiably, “if you *will* sit there. Now, go ahead. Molière’s housemaid was nothing to you, Eva — ‘you’re the guiding star of my existence,’ as Henry Esmond said when he was drunk. I am only drunk on your excellent tea, but —”

“I really think *you* might know it was David Copperfield, not ‘Henry Esmond,’” interrupted Eva, a little sharply. Her nerves were wound up to a high pitch, and she snatched at the relaxation.

“All the same a hundred years hence, — Thackeray or Dickens or I,” observed Stuart, with charming modesty. “Well, you’ve read those twenty chapters; what’s the demand total?”

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The words were light, but the tone somehow did not match them. Eva did not answer immediately ; the room grew suddenly still, till the man on the divan could hear the ticking of the watch in his waistcoat, and the faint rustle of his wife's silken tea-gown, as it rose and fell rapidly over her bosom. His hands shut tightly, with the instinctive gesture of one who faces a crisis, as he turned and looked at her. She was fumbling at the elastic band that tied up the roll of papers, but she raised her head and met his eyes at once.

What was there — what could there be — in her look that carried him back to Scotland and last autumn, when they two had been staying together in a little Highland village? A half-forgotten scene flashed back to his memory like lightning ; a morning when he had contrived to drive a fish-hook deeply into his hand, and when, after hours of searching, it became manifest that no doctor could be found that day. The hand had swollen terribly ; something had to be done — and Eva — Eva, who hated the sight of blood, and could not bear to witness the execution of a marauding wasp — had solved the difficulty by

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cutting out the hook with her own hands. The operation was not an easy one; and Stuart remembered well how her lips had quivered, though her fingers were perfectly steady; and how she had looked up once in the midst of her work, hearing him suddenly catch his breath, and mutely asked pardon with her eyes for the pain she was giving. That look was in her eyes again to-day; and the author's heart felt heavy when he saw it; for the experience of several years had taught him the accuracy of his wife's judgments.

"Stuart — we have always told each other the truth," she said, with the quietness that comes of repressed emotion. "*This book won't do.*" And she turned away those pitying eyes of hers, and looked out at the fiery sunset, which did not interest her at all.

Stuart pulled himself together, and asked coolly, —

"Quite certain?"

"Yes." She was looking at the floor now, and speaking rapidly. "It is good, of course, — you could n't do *bad* work, — but it is a step back. You are losing your grip. Your manner-

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isms have increased, and your characters are getting misty. It is clever, and interesting, but it is not worthy of you, and if you publish it, everyone will say you are getting written out."

There was silence for a moment. Rivington mechanically finished his cup of tea—which might have been water, or wormwood, for all that he tasted—and set it down. His wife, glancing at him under her long-lashed eyelids, saw that his face had whitened as if with physical pain, and knew that her words had struck hard. The knowledge was not easy to bear; but she refrained—as a weaker woman could not have done—from rushing into consoling sophistries and flatteries. Truth to tell, the manuscript, at first perusal, had startled her with its weakness, and her resolve not to let her love blind her judgment held fast; although she would not have been a woman had she not longed to undo her words as soon as they were fairly spoken. In silence she watched the war of emotions on her husband's face, thinking, for the thousandth time, how good a man he was to look on, even now, with that cloud of pain and confusion darkening his countenance. There

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were people who said that Stuart Rivington's eyes were too blue, and too quick of motion, for the eyes of a strong man, and that it was well his narrow mouth was shaded by its thick curling moustache. But to Eva's sight her hero was as handsome as he was famous, as strong in soul as he was pleasant in character, and the distinct falling off in his work displayed by that last book struck her as not only terrible, but unnatural.

Crash! went the cup on the floor. Eva started, but said nothing; what was the loss of a porcelain cup, in this crisis that had come upon the house? Rivington did not appear to notice that it had fallen; he stared absently at the pieces as he spoke:—

“I did guess something of this, Eva,—I'm not quite a fool,—but you know I'm always down in the mouth about my books at first, and then they turn out all right afterwards, and so — Well, you've never been mistaken yet; I believe you're right. ‘The Purpose of Philip’ is damned rubbish (don't mind my swearing, child, it does me so much good!) as far as it goes. And *this* is as far as it will go!”

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He took the manuscript from her, and tore up the chapters one by one. The work took some time, and he was quite warm before it was done. When the room was strewn with white fragments, he got up from the divan, and began walking up and down with his hands behind him, kicking the paper like autumn leaves as he went.

"Don't interrupt me. I'm thinking," he said.

After about five minutes he stopped, pulled the disconsolate little figure up off the floor with a mighty swing, and dropped her on the divan.

"Look here, Eve!" he exclaimed, catching her by the shoulders and swaying her about in his excitement. "I've got it! I have it! Now listen here — what do you think is the meaning of my failure?"

"Well, the story seemed *artificial*, somehow," answered Eva, dubiously. "That's all I can say. It did n't ring right."

"Good girl; just hit the nail on the head," declared the author, who looked quite cheerful now. "Listen here! What were you doing all to-day?"

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“Seeing visitors. What has that —”

“Never mind. And I was at the club, talking about — oh, the newest plays, and the latest yacht races. What are you engaged for to-morrow?”

“Lady Le Smythe’s ‘at home’ — and so are you, please — opera in the evening; the day after, there’s a dinner party, and a heap of calls, and — oh, I forget what!”

“And you’re dead tired of it all, so you said. I’m sick of it ten times over, I know. Now look here, Eve — *why do we do it at all?*”

“Stuart! everyone does, and must.”

“Why?”

“Well, because — because — I don’t quite know. To make friends for their children, mostly.”

“Only we have n’t any.”

“Well, then, because you would n’t keep your own friends if you did n’t.”

“How many visiting acquaintances have we, at a guess — about four hundred? Yes? and how many do you care about ever seeing again? Thirty? that’s above the mark, I think. Very well. Now, Eva, my idea is just this — that

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those four hundred people, all as like as peas (on the surface, of course), and this wretched round of society life that we can't escape from, are eating all the reality and force out of me. If I'm not to be a 'has-been' before I'm thirty-five, we must do something. *Let's run away!*"

"Stuart — if you would mind not shaking me *quite* so much; you never know what you're doing when you get excited, and you're pinching me. Run away? where to? how? when? and — oh, Stuart — what *will* your mother and mine say?"

"Something unparliamentary. Anyway, I did n't marry Mrs. Burke, and you did n't marry Mrs. Rivington, senior. Now just listen till I explain."

CHAPTER II

BUT before the explanation could be spoken, a knock sounded at the door.

"Come in!" cried Rivington, savagely. He detested interruptions of all kinds. At twenty-eight, this man had not yet learned to bear patiently with the smaller ills of life. The loss of his entire private fortune, or the trial of some serious personal accident, he could have faced with composure if necessary; and he had taken the hard blow which his wife's unwilling hand had been forced to deal him that morning, as a brave man should. But that breakfast or dinner should be five minutes late when he was hungry, — that the rain should come down and spoil a projected excursion to Howth or Bray, — that some unexpected interruption should break him off for a moment from an interesting conversation, — these were the things that Stuart Rivington found "very tolerable, and not to be endured."

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"Hang the woman; what does she want now?" he muttered quite audibly, as the parlourmaid presented her expressionless face at the door, concealing behind a faultlessly respectful demeanour her unholy joy in the surmise that "Master and Missus had been havin' a row."

"If you please, sir, Mr. Moore is downstairs."

"Eva, you are n't going down! Tell him we're not at home, Kate!"

"If you please, sir, it's the mistress's 'at home' day."

"Then I suppose you'll have to go; but I'm not going to stir. You can tell him I've got a bad attack of divine *afflatus*, and must work it off at once. Moore ought to know all about that — I don't know, though! Say, Eva — don't you think *his* last was rather below the mark?" — confidently.

"Decidedly," said Eva, looking after Kate's departing form. "He got a terrible slating from the critics, did n't he? And, you see, Stuart, I did not want *you* to go any further along that road. To be sure, Mr. Moore is ten years older than you, and has written much more — but I look on him as a warning. He has gone over

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the same old ground again and again till the public are getting tired out, and he never had your wonderful gift of plot. There's something gone very wrong with him, too, of late, or I'm much mistaken; he has evidently a weight on his mind."

"Speculation," suggested Stuart, "or a girl."

"I *must* go down, now, I suppose. It really is n't fair to call so late on an 'at home' day. We can finish our talk later on" — and Mrs. Rivington's sea-green train slid across the polished wood of the door-sill, and rustled down the stairs.

There is something just a little desolate in the aspect of a drawing-room recently deserted by guests. The groups of chairs drawn closely together, where some interesting piece of gossip has evidently been in progress; the armchair and the little ottoman away in a corner by themselves, suggesting *ille et illa*; the uncompromising row of five or six seats facing all one way, where visitors who were strangers to one another have evidently sat — all these suggest in a minor way "the banquet hall deserted," and are rather depressing in their effect. And Alfred Moore,

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sitting in the midst of Mrs. Rivington's disordered drawing-room, and meditatively leaning forward on his stick, looked like the very spirit of melancholy. He was a big brown man, with very dark untransparent eyes, and a heavy beard, which made him look older than his thirty-seven years. His dress was almost obtrusively perfect — unlike the happy-go-lucky Stuart's free-and-easy attire — and his boots were the envy of every young man of his acquaintance.

"How do you do, Mr. Moore?" asked his little hostess, favouring him with a most gracious smile, which the amiable hypocrite thought to be less of a falsehood than the conventional "So glad to see you!" forbidden by her conscience.

Mr. Moore resumed the seat he had vacated on her appearance, and remarked, staring blankly at the wall, that the day was warm, but one expected heat at that time of the year; that everyone was going out of town; and that the strawberries were ripe up the Liffey already. Then he subsided into silence, and Mrs. Rivington was fain to sustain the conversation in a jerky and catechetical manner, wondering some-

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what wrathfully the while what on earth the man had come for.

By-and-by, however, he brightened up, and began to lead the direction of the talk himself, in a manner that caused Mrs. Rivington — who was certainly no fool, if she did idolise her own captured genius rather beyond the bounds of reason — first to wonder vaguely, and then to choke with inward laughter at the obviousness of the device; tempering her amusement with the reflection that all men, no matter how clever, were just such fools as this one.

As the unfortunate author's conversation had been carefully selected, and prepared with a regard for natural effect that had caused him no little trouble, it were surely a sin to let it be lost to an admiring world. We therefore report it *in extenso*, leaving out the answers, which were of no account until the climax was reached.

“Yes, it is rather a noisy street. But don't you think this extreme sensitiveness to noise is one of the strongest signs of national decadence? Shows a loss of nervous force, you know.” . . .

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“And I have always imagined, for my part, that we suffer as a nation from want of systematic outdoor exercise.” . . .

“Yes, but we really do not take so much as the English, though we are very energetic once in a while. It is *systematic* exercise we want. Golf is certainly a great boon; and tennis was a still greater one, in its prime. I am glad to see the increase of golf-playing.” . . .

“Certainly it does — every age and every degree of strength. But it is a bit expensive, you know, for anyone who is at all hard up. And it is just the hard-up, hard-worked people who need it most. Now take the young shopman, or clerk, for example, when he gets an afternoon off — how can he afford subscriptions, and railway fares, and caddie’s fees, and balls, and clubs, and so forth? Or indeed one might say the shopgirl, for she wants the exercise still more. Working girls get so little exercise. Now, look at the daily governess, for example — what a life she leads! white slavery, nothing less.” . . .

“Exactly; their employers are very hard. No wonder they are delicate, as a class.” . . .

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Then the profound and astute Alfred Moore turned off the tap of his fluent conversation, and waited for results. Mrs. Rivington glanced at his dark massive face eagerly watching her, and choked back the laughter in her throat; strangling also the malicious little demon that bade her turn the subject off, and see the blankness of defeat gather on the face before her. Like a good-hearted little woman, she said what she had been led on to say, and did not even smile;—

“Yes; that nice little May Miller who was staying with me this spring—you remember her, I suppose?—was quite broken down with overwork when she first came. Poor child! it is hard on a gentlewoman born and bred to have such work, and among such people! But she is a plucky little soul.”

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Moore, with an air of elaborate indifference, “she seemed a nice sort of girl. And her employers, you said, were very vulgar people? Derry, or Lurgan, or somewhere of that sort they lived, did n’t they?”

But Eva Rivington could endure no more with a sober countenance. Six years of Stuart’s

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society — Stuart, who knew not the meaning of reserve or *finesse*, but plunged head-first into every social mystery, tore every Gordian knot in pieces, and banged open every shut door — had not been without their influence on her originally shy and silent nature; and it might have been her husband himself who broke out at this point with: —

“Mr. Moore, if you ask me straight out what you want to know about Miss Miller I shall be only too glad to tell you. But don’t leap in the dark, and undermine me as if I were a hostile camp! I am not quite such a Gorgon!”

After which beautifully feminine confusion of metaphor, she burst out laughing.

Moore, who was naturally a secretive man, and really liked plotting and “undermining” — as Mrs. Rivington had called it — in search of information, better than asking plain questions, was somewhat taken aback. He chewed his beard for a minute before answering, and shot an unfriendly look at the bright little figure opposite him. But he was hungry and thirsting for news of blue-eyed May Miller, who had shaken him out of himself so suddenly, that

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spring, during her three weeks' visit, and then vanished northward out of his sight, leaving him with a strangely heavy spirit, and a pen that seemed to creep on a broken wing. He had tried for a month, with gradually decreasing resolution, to forget all about her — and the net result of his efforts was this visit to Mrs. Rivington, the sole link between his *inamorata* and himself. He would have preferred to get the girl's address in an accidental manner, if possible, but as it seemed this was not to be, he must get it in any way he could. So he answered Mrs. Rivington's question after only a brief pause.

"I would like to know who Miss Miller's employers are, and where they live."

"The address is Mrs. Mulvaney, 5 Chatsworth Villas, Shambles Road, Portadown," replied Mrs. Rivington, writing it down for him on a slip of paper. "And now, Mr. Moore, won't you tell me why you want it?"

Mr. Moore would much rather have done nothing of the sort; but the circumstances hardly permitted of a refusal. And then, everyone knew that you could trust Eva Rivington —

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all the more because she never told anyone so. And the thing had been weighing on his mind for so long, and spoiling his work, and — and —

Out it all came, in a burst of rapid speech, — the old story that looks so bald in print, that seems so exquisitely ludicrous to all the world, save those most concerned, — that causes nods and giggles, and nudges and winks, wherever it is met with, — that makes a young man look absurd, and an old one idiotic, — the story-telling of the most sacred and solemn feeling known to human nature, that marks the life it touches with either a crown of sunlight or a scar of fire.

Mr. Moore's language was not eloquent; not nearly so expressive and touching as the words he put into the mouths of his own fictitious characters — he was celebrated for the vividness of his love scenes, and the masterly analysis of passion which they displayed. It is a strange thing, by the way, that one never seems in real life to meet those wonderful people who are roused to eloquence by a thrilling or trying crisis. Most of us ordinary mortals find our natural eloquence — if we have

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any — a *minus* quantity on such occasions. Do you remember, reader, how you carried yourself in that crisis to which you can hardly look back even now without a *serrement de cœur*? By all the laws of fiction you should have spoken fluently and well, while keeping complete command of yourself; you should have said exactly what you wanted to say, in the most appropriate manner, and “the other person” should have chimed in at precisely the right moment, with precisely the right answer or remark. As it was — well, you did not know then, and you hardly know now, what was said or done. The nicely prepared speeches, somehow or other, never saw the light at all, their place being taken by short, bald, ill-constructed remarks, that in some manner got to the point, but that would look exceedingly poor in print. And ever after that you knew, what you did not know before, that the fire of strong feeling, whether sorrow, joy, anger, or fear, dissolves in its flame the formal frames of sentences, and leaves only their intangible essences behind — essences that cannot be reproduced in cold type, or with pen and paper.

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Even so, Alfred Moore's story was but ill told ; yet Eva Rivington knew, as she listened, that it was very sober earnest with him, about this little governess girl. She did not like the man, and her husband, with characteristic un-reasoning vehemence, had cordially hated him from the first day they met. But she was woman enough thoroughly to enjoy the prospect of putting her finger into a love affair ; and that was evidently just what Mr. Moore required her to do.

"You see," he ended, after nearly a quarter of an hour's explanation of a fact that was sufficiently obvious from the beginning — "I — I'm just as bad as I can be ; it's no use arguing. And if you really think she *did* give me encouragement," — Mrs. Rivington had not said so, but she smiled assentingly, — "why, I don't see why it is n't — why I should n't, well, write to her, don't you know, and try and wake her interest up a bit."

"Why not ?" asked his hearer, who could not quite understand the doubtful tone in his voice. "And then, next time I ask her down here —"

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"That's just it," broke in Moore, disconsolately. "I can't say anything to her. It's confoundedly hard on a fellow; I declare it is. But you know I've not got anything except what I make by my books, and — and — Mrs. Rivington, you won't tell anyone? on your honour — no, now, you needn't mind my asking you to promise; I always think it's best to be on the safe side. Well," — without noticing the slight frown that his last demand had caused, — "it's this way. You know, I suppose, that my last book — 'Children of the Century' — did n't — well, was n't quite up to the mark, or something; anyway, it did not sell as quickly as the last; and Billison's — the syndicate people, you know — I declare they've had the impertinence to offer me a lower price for the one I've got in hand now!"

Mrs. Rivington could have told him that "Children of the Century" was not the beginning, but the end, of a series of decadent works. Alfred Moore had begun writing novels in his very early twenties, and had turned out two a year ever since, the quality not improving as time went on. It was whispered that the for-

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tune made by these — not a very large one at best — had been swamped by injudicious speculation. If that was the case, his future looked dark indeed.

“And, of course, I don’t think plot was ever my strong point — more analysis of character, and so on — which makes it all the harder to hit the public taste. It’s certainly degenerated of late years! So the long and the short of it is, if I’m ever to have the right to speak to May Miller, I *must* write a screamingly successful novel, and — and — do you think your husband would collaborate with me? No, wait — don’t answer yet — it might be just as good for him as for me; it would make a success of curiosity, anyhow; the public would like to see two leading men in harness together. It’s only the plot I want — I could do most of the donkey-work — and Rivington’s ideas are always so marvelously original.”

Eva Rivington’s slightly tip-tilted nose curled almost visibly upwards as Moore spoke of “two leading men.” Did he dare to rank himself with Stuart?

“It is not the slightest use discussing that

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point, Mr. Moore," she said coldly. "My husband would never collaborate with anyone. He has the greatest objection to the idea."

Her tone was so absolute in its finality that Moore veered round and tried another tack.

"Well, then, do you think — supposing, of course, I — a — offered an equivalent — he would — well, give me a plot? It would be nothing to him, and it would be —"

But Eva Rivington had sprung from her chair, and was facing him with glowing eyes.

"Mr. Moore, have you come here to insult my husband? If you expect to make a success by *picking his brains*" — she was too angry to choose her words — "I can assure you you will do nothing of the sort. Why, he has not even told *me* the idea that he—"

She broke off short. But Moore caught up her words.

"The idea that he — oh, so he has got something special on hand, then, has he?"

Eva had recovered herself now. Since she had told half, he might as well know the whole; it could not really do any harm.

"Yes, he has," she said rather defiantly.

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“Something he says is beyond anything he ever attempted yet; indeed, he was almost afraid to touch it, and is half-way through another book at present. He is keeping this till he is at his very best. When he writes it, it will give him a rank among the first novelists of all the world, in all time — I would stake my life on that!”

Her face glowed as she spoke; and Moore, noting the rapt absorption of her expression, said craftily,—

“Of course you have seen it, as you keep his commonplace-book for him?”

“No,” said Eva, innocently. “He thinks it too precious to show anyone; it lives in a sealed envelope, and he says he will never open it till he feels equal to do the conception justice. I know it is extremely original, at all events.”

Then, coming down from the clouds again, she saw that her visitor was preparing to depart.

“Must you go? Well, remember, if I can help you about May Miller, I shall be only too glad to do so. Good-bye.”

CHAPTER III

JUNE is a treacherous month in Ireland ; it is seldom that one can count on many consecutive days of bright weather at midsummer time ; and often the brightest morning, with the barometer at "set fair," will turn to a very November day before three o'clock. The afternoon of Eva Rivington's 'at home' day had been bright, though chilly ; the evening that followed was wild and wet, with fierce drifts of rain flying down every street, and a howling wind that sounded unspeakably dreary in the long lonely twilight. On such a night one regrets the comfortable lamp-lit dark of February ; the bank of ferns in the fireplace looks cold and smells of damp earth ; summer clothes feel poverty-stricken, and it seems impossible to believe that to-morrow's dawn may bring a blazing sky and airless streets, and cause us to fling wide the windows, and court the air from which we shiver away to-night.

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Alfred Moore had a handsome set of rooms in Baggot Street, furnished with a lavish regard to comfort; but they seemed very cheerless when he reached home that wet evening, after a tasteless restaurant dinner which he had little heart to eat. He flung his dripping overcoat on to the umbrella stand, feeling a vicious pleasure in the thought that someone else would have to hang it up; shut the cold daylight out of his drawing-room, and lit a couple of gas-lamps. Then he flung himself down on the sofa, and took up a novel, telling himself that he was too tired to go out that evening — he would stay in and read.

He turned over page after page, reading every line slowly, and sometimes speaking a word or two aloud, to persuade himself that he was taking in the sense of what he read. And all the time, as his eyes passed down the pages, his brain kept struggling blindly in the dark, — struggling against something that was creeping towards it, nearer and nearer; that would not be thrust out of sight; that could not be fenced off to-night with the lath dagger of an ordinary occupation, as he had fenced it off often enough

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before. Moore had drugged his brain with books of late ; had read early and late, in bed, in railway carriages, even when walking out of doors ; but the drug — like intoxicating drink, which as a vice had little temptation for this dark, cold nature — had lost its power, as all drugs do. To-night the veil which it interposed between himself and the shadow that haunted him was thin as midday haze ; and he felt, wordlessly and despairingly, that the struggle had come upon him at last. And the name of the shadow was — Failure.

Perhaps self-deception, in its completest sense, is less common than the world in general supposes. Mrs. Rivington, together with many others in Alfred Moore's circle of immediate friends, never doubted that the author's satisfaction with his obviously decadent work was undimmed and complete. And Moore would have said as much himself to anyone who asked. But nevertheless, certain not-to-be-ignored facts had been pressing hard upon him of late years. There were fewer letters from editors wishing to secure serial rights ; fewer agreeable notices among the bundles sent him

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by press-cutting agencies. His books had never enjoyed a very large sale ; and "Children of the Century" showed a distinct falling off. To all this, Moore had deliberately closed his eyes, weaving (as George Eliot says) an ingenious web of probabilities between himself and the truth. But the cumulative force that lurks unsuspected in all long trains of trifling yet similar incidents, had arisen unexpectedly and smitten him, as such force will do. To-night the fear of coming failure lay heavy on him, and his heart felt cold.

There are very few of us who have never known the bitterness of looking forward with reluctant eyes, day by day, and hour by hour, to the cup that we know relentless Fate is pouring out for us. Often it may be forgotten ; often the head may be turned away, and the eyes shut, and the ears filled with music and laughter, so that the approach of that slow sure foot be not heard. Yet none the less surely the veiled form pauses beside us at last, and waits, with the cup in hand, for us to drink. And once the ice-cold rim is pressed upon our lips, we know that all the bitterness it holds must be swallowed, drop

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by drop, be we kings, or saints, or warriors, or crowned with the regal crown of undying beauty, or gilded with the halo of world-wide fame. Fate knows no narrower distinctions, and listens no more to entreaty, than her sister Death.

And, for all the struggles of this man, for all his strength and his despair, the bitterness of the cup of humiliation was on his lips to-night.

Failure! failure! failure! The word rang in his ears almost aloud. How he had clung to his fame! how he had delighted in every line of press notice that had been his during all these years; gloated over every portrait; thrilled with satisfaction at every whisper and pointed finger! And was this to be the end, — a brain run dry, a fancy withered; slow drudgery of grinding out, for his daily bread, work from which all savour had flown away, — then the gradual lessening of even those opportunities, the swift descent into a hack writer adapting other men's ideas by the ream for a pitiful wage? Was all this before him? was there no escape?

Slowly and relentlessly the pitiless truth beat itself in upon his brain. He was written out — written out more completely than any author of

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whom he had ever heard or read. His brain was perfectly barren of ideas. As a novelist of repute his career was run.

Unless — unless he could get a plot; something totally new and original; something that would spur his flagging remnants of imagination as a draught of strong spirits spurs the body — something, in fact, such as Stuart Rivington had found. (How he hated that man; how successful he was, how proud, how self-sufficient!) If he had only that — well, his hand had not lost its old mechanical cunning, probably; it was ten to one he could score a hit that would render him independent for the rest of his life. His dark eyes burned beneath their heavy lids as he thought of his rival's probable success.

Even if he had known of the scene between Rivington and his wife that afternoon, it would have comforted him but little. In truth, Rivington's case was not Moore's case. The intense if fitful energy of the younger man, — his seemingly bottomless fund of imagination, — his delicately fibred mind, steeped through and through with culture and learning, — all forbade the possibility of such a misfortune as had come upon

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Alfred Moore. The latter's facile pen and coldly introspective turn of mind had hit the taste of his own generation; now that generation was growing old, and a new one "who knew not Joseph" was stepping into its place. Even had his powers remained at their best, his downfall had been sure. As for Rivington's trouble, his wife, who understood him better than any other living creature, knew, in the midst of her sorrow at the cloud that had fallen upon them, that it was only a mist passing across the sun. But the sun of Alfred Moore was fast setting.

His appeal to Mrs. Rivington had been only a forlorn hope at best; he had not expected much from it. Still, its ill success made him feel like a drowning man who has clutched at a straw, and found it fail. Look where he would, there seemed no hope now. And the bitterest thought of all was that of May Miller. Moore had long since given up asking himself indignantly if he were mad, at his age, to give in to an infatuation about a curly-headed little governess; long since ceased to look back to the tepid fancies of his early youth, and wonder if he could be the same

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man who had been content to dangle agreeably about half a dozen women at a time, distributing his favours with careful impartiality. Never in his life before had he been indifferent to appearances in such matters; the fear of looking ridiculous, the dread of being entrapped into matrimony, had always been foremost in his mind. Now, there was no folly that he would not have committed to advance himself in May Miller's eyes; and as to being entrapped — who would call the gate of Paradise a snare?

And all this had come at a time when it was almost certain that he would probably have his work well cut out for him in future years if he were even to support himself!

He got up from the sofa, and began to tramp round and round the centre-table. In all the novels he had written, none of his heroes or heroines ever descended to such a *banal* act as "pacing up and down the apartment" — somehow, he had always been of opinion that that kind of thing was only to be found in penny novelettes. If he had been feeling a little less at the moment, his introspective mind would have seized at once upon this interesting refuta-

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tion of previous ideas ; but he had got beyond the stage of self-consciousness, — beyond all outside circumstances, — and had come to the point when there was nothing in God's great universe but one fierce burning pain, with himself as centre.

Wordless emotions took hold of him, and shook him like so many hurricanes, as he paced unceasingly round and round, and up and down. He wanted May Miller — he wanted a sight of her gleaming hair, a touch of her hand, only a single word from her lips ! The longing was like some living thing ; it took hold of him and raked his very soul with red-hot claws, until he dropped face downwards on the sofa, and buried his head in a pillow, in the vain effort to hide himself from himself. And he would never have her ! Some instinct told him that she was not, of all others, the woman to barter even the pitiful living she possessed already for such chances as he could offer her. He knew, as well as if she had told him herself, that gold-haired May was one of those who are only to be bought ; that she knew the market value of her beauty as well as she knew the price of a

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basket of roses ; that her visits to good-natured Mrs. Rivington, in the Dublin season, were made with the serious object of finding a likely purchaser, and emancipating herself from that drudgery of governess-work which was all her slight education had fitted her for. She was very young ; she had many years before her in which to accomplish her wishes. Was it likely that she would give herself to Alfred Moore, the written-out novelist, past the prime of youth, past the zenith of power ? And yet, for all that he knew her to be mercenary and money-seeking, he loved her not a whit the less.

By-and-by his pain and despair exhausted themselves, as all strong emotions will, and left him beaten and wearied, but quiet for the time. And now the little grain of hope, hidden at the bottom of his Pandora-casket of evils, began to assert itself. Had he not taken things a little too hardly ? The end was not yet ; he had certainly a year or two before him in which to make fresh bids for popularity, before his public utterly failed him. May Miller, buried in provincial Portadown, was not likely to have many

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“chances.” If only this strange numbness of imagination and heaviness of hand would leave him, he might yet keep on — if he only had some stimulus, such as . . .

It all came back again to the same point — Stuart Rivington’s plot.

CHAPTER IV

MEANTIME, in Stuart Rivington's house, an animated discussion was in progress. With his usual elasticity of mind, the author had already accepted the fact of his own apparent decadence, and was setting to work to have the matter remedied as soon as possible. Eva, still a little touched with compunction for the part she had been obliged to play that afternoon, had bestirred herself to superintend the preparing of a specially choice dinner, and had personally warmed her husband's claret to the exact shade of temperature he liked ; so that he looked upon the world through the rose-coloured spectacles placed over most men's eyes by a thoroughly satisfactory meal, when he stretched himself on the smoking-room sofa and lit a cigar, preparatory to expounding his views to his wife. The latter, who had characteristically selected an ordinary chair, and was quietly

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at work on some prosaic task of mending, looked tired after her busy day ; but she would have been seriously fatigued indeed on any night when she failed to act her part of listener as thoroughly as Stuart could desire. Truth to tell, the great novelist was almost as great a talker. His conversation was never flat or commonplace ; but there were people who found his flow of words oppressive, and pitied " poor Mrs. Rivington " for the floods of conversation in the midst of which she lived. They might have saved their pity. Eva Rivington had done what few women do — counted the cost seriously and impartially before she married the man she loved, and risked enduring his faults ; and she had never had cause to repent her act, even though it had involved the stifling of more than one talent that she herself possessed. She did not need the example of Carlyle and his wife to teach her that the helpmeet of a man of genius must be his shadow, rather than his attendant moon.

" I told you this afternoon we ought to run away," said Stuart, scratching a red-headed match along the delicately tinted wall as he

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spoke. "Now, I'm going to explain. I've got an idea that minds are more like bodies than people think. You can feed them, you can starve them, you can shut them up in prison, or take them out for exercise ; you can train them like a tug-of-war team — or you can let them get all flabby and out of condition — and so on. Well, I think my mind has got a bit run down, and wants change of air."

"Do you mean that you are going to some seaside place, as we always go?" asked Eva, somewhat puzzled.

"No, goosey ; that would only be change of air for the body. What I mean is to go away from civilisation altogether, — get into a new sort of world, and brace up my brain with a perfect change of atmosphere. My idea is this: let us leave society for as long as we feel inclined, — for always, if we like, — go and live in a cottage somewhere, and just be peasants for a while !"

"Peasants — that would be all very well for ourselves ; but I don't think I should like to be on intimate terms with people who live all in one room, and consider soap and water a luxury," observed Eva.

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"Yes, that is a drawback," said Stuart, thoughtfully. His mind had been pulled up short in the midst of a wild career among sturdy farmers and labourers in frieze, and blue-eyed colleens in scarlet petticoats and Connemara cloaks. "The peasants are n't essential, however. We might go somewhere where there were no other houses, and take our bicycles with us to fetch provisions when we needed them. Eva! would n't it be creamy?"

"Probably," smiled the young woman, without lifting her eyes from the shirt on her knee; for she was just in the heart and centre of a fine bit of mending. By-and-by, however, the shirt slid out of her fingers, and she looked up with a serious expression.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Stuart, curiously. Eva did not answer; but the seriousness in her eyes deepened, while a wistful smile crept about her lips, and she looked far out into the royal-red sunset that poured through the dormer window.

"What is it?" inquired the great novelist again, twitching her sleeve unceremoniously.

"Not e'en the dearest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh,"

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says the poet; but if Stuart's knowledge of his wife was limited to such an extent, it certainly was not his fault. He found her modes of thought and traits of character highly interesting as a rule, and anatomised them with cheerful eagerness, almost as freely as he tore to pieces his own.

"You are like John in 'The Wide, Wide World,'" answered Eva, fencing him off. "What are you thinking of, Ellen? Then don't think of it.' I was only — reflecting on the vanity of human wishes."

"What wishes in particular?" persisted Rivington, emphasising his question with a jerk of the chin which he had planted on his wife's shoulder, as she sat beside him; a habit which Eva declared he had picked up from his favourite book of devotion — "Alice in Wonderland."

Her lips quivered, and she bent her eyes on her crumpled train, smoothing out its shining green folds with absent-minded care.

"You don't know all the dreams I used to have long ago, Stuart — and this was one of them; or something very like it."

"What? to run away and live in a cottage?"

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"No — not exactly — but to *break away* — to live my own life — to see Nature and God as they are, not as we in our little cliques and 'schools of thought' imagine them. . . . I wanted a life of adventure — you can't tell how the longing for it used to pull at my very heart-strings! I wanted to live for myself, and work out my own life; to be — well, what you would call a New Woman, I suppose! You don't know how the passion for absolute freedom sometimes takes hold of a girl!"

She was speaking with a fire and vehemence that were strangely unlike her usual "pansy-faced sweetness" — as Stuart had once described it. His eyes glittered with the spirit of his craft as he listened.

"And then?" he asked eagerly.

"And then!" went on Eva, suddenly dropping back into dreamy softness, "I met you, and it was all over . . . all over. You know, when a woman really loves, and happily, her ambition dies. If she is unhappy in her love — well, she turns to ambition only; and whether it satisfies her or not, I don't know, thank God. But sometimes, I suppose, to everyone, the ghosts of

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the old ideas will come back for a minute, if just to —”

At this moment she caught sight of her husband's face in the glass. What special emotion its expression aroused in her, let the man who understands women say. Only her acts remain on record; and they were as follows: To spring from her seat; to jerk her husband's head from its inquisitive position with a suddenness that struck the chair-back against his chin; and to walk out of the room, observing gustily: —

“ You may talk to yourself. I am not going to let you cut me up into copy. One might as well live with a microscope ! ”

Stuart Rivington kicked a box of cigarettes off the mantelpiece with his foot (being too lazy to rise) and gathered up the nearest of the shower that scattered over the floor.

“ She's beautifully incomprehensible,” he observed, as he lit the weed. There was a distinct tone of satisfaction in his voice; it was obvious that he considered his wife a more complete specimen of womanhood, gifted with such a quality in its highest degree, than if she had been unpleasantly reasonable.

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"And now," he went on, collecting his energies to leave the soft embrace of the divan, "I will just trot round to the O'Connells and see what Terry says."

Half a dozen doors further down the square a blaze of gaslight streamed into the violet gloaming; lace curtains fluttered from long windows, and the sound of talk and laughter rippled out in waves across the street. Stuart pushed open the unlatched hall door, and walked past the footman, unannounced, to the threshold of the drawing-room, where he paused for a moment to look about him, and to perform that ceremony without which no true Briton can face a foe, meet an inamorata, or greet a friend — namely, the adjustment of his perfectly straight and immaculate tie.

Terry, otherwise Euterpe O'Connell — so named by an inconsiderate if scholarly father, who had long since made the last slow journey up Sackville Street and Rutland Square — was seated at the piano, taking off her gloves and bracelets. She was apparently about thirty; her figure was as slim and flexible as a blue-bell stalk; her face was as bright as a daisy,

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and her hair was like a double handful of crinkled copper-beech leaves. She wore a curious, daring dress of shot silk that glimmered bronze and green, with embroidered borders of golden brown lizards, quivering their loosely sewn spangled scales at every movement of the wearer. There was quite a large group of girls and men about the piano; it seemed that one of the fashionable "boy-and-girl" dinner-parties had taken place that evening.

"Now, do let us have your song, Miss O'Connell!" "Please, Terry—the lovely 'Swan Song' you promised!" "Awf'ly anxious to hear it—won't move an eyelash while you're singing!" came to Stuart's ears as he stood in the doorway.

"It is very classical," said Terry, seriously, depositing her gloves on the music-stand, whence they were eagerly snatched by a couple of attendant youths, whose faces were split with anticipatory smiles of intellectual delight. "This is the prelude."

She played several bars of wild, wandering, mournful music, and then sang, in a solemn contralto, like the tones of a church organ, —

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“ ‘The swan, who, living, had no note,
The swan, who, living, had no note, —”

The air sobbed and wailed about the room; two elderly ladies got out their pocket-handkerchiefs and took off their glasses.

“ ‘When dying, op’d his silver throat,
And . . this . . is . . what he said,’ ”

went on the singer, trembling on a low soft note. Then a pause. The girls looked as if they were in church, and the young men put on a stony grin of delighted expectation.

“There . . .” shrilled the voice in a far-up note. (One old lady began to sniff.) “. . . are more geese than swans, more fools than wise!” sang Terry, loud and swiftly, on a rapidly descending chromatic scale, and with a startling leap at the end. A crash of chords concluded the song, and a roar of laughter followed.

“Too bad, too bad!” “Just like you, Terry!” “So that was the swan’s song!” “Had he been reading Carlyle — ‘Forty million people in the country, mostly —’ ”

“No, young man,” said Stuart Rivington’s voice solemnly, over the shoulder of the last

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speaker, — a long-haired youth with a dress-suit that had not come from Poole's, "you don't finish that hoary 'allusion' save over my dead body. Recollect, I was a journalist once myself."

The youth blushed with pleasure at the implied accusation of journalism, and moved away to make room for Rivington, whose sudden uninvited advent had caused little surprise; for the O'Connell household — being connected with him by ties of cousinship — knew his eccentric habits thoroughly.

"Can you spare Terry to the Missus to-morrow? — I suppose you would n't like to have her 'forcibly elicited' now, as our cook said about an aching tooth yesterday," — asked the newcomer of Mrs. O'Connell, whose generous figure occupied an armchair close to the piano.

"Oh, indeed, Stuart, if you're wanting her badly, just take her along with you now, and we'll spare her to you," replied that amiable lady, waving her fan limply. "It's too hot to refuse anybody anything."

"Oh, if I may have her now —" said Stuart, coolly, drawing Terry's hand through his arm. . . .

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It was all done in a minute. The amused and astonished guests had hardly time to exclaim, ere Rivington and Miss O'Connell vanished through the drawing-room doorway; and ten seconds later, their heads passed the window outside.

"Stuart, you are a terrible person," remarked Terry, composedly, as they hurried down one long side of the silent square, the girl's heels click-clacking on the pavement, and her russet hair faded to grey in the thin moonlight. "What if anyone meets us?"

"They will merely say: 'There is the half-lunatic, half-criminal vagabond known as Stuart Rivington, eloping with a charming young woman. What fun!'" answered Stuart, glibly, as he fitted his latchkey into the lock.

"Look here, Terry *mia*," he said, as they passed through the long dark hall, where ghostly cloaks and coats hung like limp suicides along the wall, and a solemn clock ticked reproachfully at them (is there anything in nature more aggressively respectable and monitorial than your big hall clock?), "I've got a great plan on hand, and you must help the Missus and me to carry it out. Just sit down on the stairs a

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minute till I explain. I'm getting written out, my dear cousin, and I've had to think of some immediate way of remedy — and it seemed to Eva and me that the best thing would be for us to take a cottage in some highly uncivilised spot, replete with every ancient inconvenience (to make a parody of the usual advertisement), 'where I could heal me of my grievous wound,' and spin copy like a spider that has lunched on a bee. Dost thou like the picture?"

"You're so sudden, Stuart," objected Terry, laughingly. "You do *everything* with a bang! Give me time to take in the idea. It sounds well enough. What does Eva think?"

"I don't exactly understand Eva's position at this juncture," said Stuart. "She seemed so pleased that she went out of the room and banged the door. Oh, no, don't worry — she really wants to go, only she had to be a little incomprehensible about it, just to keep up the stage character of her sex. Terry, do you know I've got a theory about your sex? I don't believe women really *are* incomprehensible; I fancy they 'let on' to be, because they think it pays, and —"

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"Do you know I've got a low dress on, and no cloak? Come up to the drawing-room," said Terry, rising with a rustle of silk and a swirl of flounce that almost overflowed the limits of the staircase.

"Who's down there?" called Eva's soft voice from above.

"Only me, flirting with Terry," replied her husband. "Shall we come up?"

"*Terry?* Oh, yes, by all means! Where did you catch her? Come up, and let us discuss the great question of running away," answered Eva, sepulchrally, over the banisters.

In the drawing-room, under the white glare of the cluster of crystal lilies that held the electric light, the conclave made themselves comfortable with easy chairs and stools, and began to talk. They talked on till the noises of the city died away outside; till the moon completed her short journey over the farther side of the square, and dipped behind a cluster of grim chimney-pots with cowls that looked like curtseying Chinamen; till the latest carriage had long rolled away from the O'Connells' house, and the winking lights in all the windows were going out one

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by one. At the last, everything was settled. Terry — who was a landscape painter of no mean ability, and had, in pursuit of her vocation, explored every part of the counties Dublin and Wicklow — was to start forth next day, with *carte blanche* as to car-hire, and look up the cottage desired. Stuart was to go out and “buy things” — as he expressed it, vaguely ; that was a task in which his soul delighted. Eva was immediately to see to the making of appropriate clothes for herself, and to hunt up and mend all her husband’s oldest garments.

“You ought to wear something quite unfashionable, Eve,” suggested Stuart with interest. “Tight sleeves, of course, and short skirt, and a great pocket on each side, and make it of homespun, you know — the stuff that has such a jolly smell of turf. I mean to wear a jersey all the time, and I shall not take a single collar with me !”

He ran his hands through his hair, and chuckled softly.

But Eva was very silent.

“What’s the matter, little fowl ?” asked her husband, lifting her head up delicately by one

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ear, and a hand under the chin. "Why are your little feathers ruffled up, *mon petit chou*?"

"They are n't ruffled," said Eva, with a smile. "I want to go very much — it will be lovely, I think, only — only — you would think me silly if I told you!"

"Which of course means that you wish me to entreat you to tell. What's the demnition row?"

"I can't tell, really; only that I have a curious sort of — of fear about going. I don't know what I am afraid of, but I *am* afraid. If I were given to presentiments, I should think this was one. Don't laugh, now, Stuart!"

"My dear child, I'm not going to laugh; you may have a presentiment every five minutes, if they give you any pleasure. But you know, we don't live in the *Family Herald*, so you can't exactly expect me to allow the state of your liver (saving your presence) to upset our plans."

"Now you *are* laughing at me; but don't mind me, Stuart — I'll come in spite of my presentiments; I don't really believe in such nonsense."

"You will have quite a second honeymoon,"

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observed Terry, as she rose, and enwrapped herself in an Indian rug off the sofa, preparatory to accepting her cousin's escort home again.

Stuart leant his head against the back of his chair, and began to spout Walt Whitman : —

“ ‘ Shine, shine, shine !
Pour down your warmth, great sun,
While we bask, we two together,
Two together !
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
Day come white, or night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
If we two but keep together ! ’ ”

“ For heaven's sake, don't quote *that* ! ” said Eva, suddenly.

“ Why ? ”

“ Don't you remember the terrible end ? It's not lucky, Stuart ” — half-laughing, but turning her face from the light.

“ My child, I think it is fully time you were in bed. Say good night to the lady, like a good little girl, and run away. Now, Terry, let me take you home.”

And thus was the Hegira of Stuart Rivington arranged.

CHAPTER V

IF Alfred Moore had not been possessed of a sound constitution, and a healthy capacity for sleep under almost any circumstances, the night that followed that stormy evening would have been a *nuit blanche*. But he slept — such sleep as men enjoy when a strong frame has managed to triumph for the time over a torn spirit, and bound it down with fetters of unconsciousness that only half constrain it. There are many, very many, who know that sleep, through which the pain of the mind pierces constantly, like the pain of the surgeon's knife felt dully through an insufficient dose of chloroform. All night long, though the clocks did not measure out the endless hours to his ear, and the cock-crow passed unheard, Alfred Moore tossed and turned, and wrestled with the vivid dreams that tried to bring his vague trouble home to him, and fought against the waking that threatened every now and then to take him by the shoulders and

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thrust him face to face with it once more. When the day came, he lay and dozed as long as he could, clinging desperately to the feeble anodyne of sleep ; but at last the full roar and rattle of the late morning traffic outside, and the increasing sounds of household work within, tore the last rag of defence away, and he rose and dressed.

After breakfast, when he had put on his hat and wandered aimlessly out into Stephen's Green, things looked a little brighter. It is in that half-hour after rising that troubles generally look worst ; and a man who has eaten his breakfast finds the silver lining of the cloud much more easily than he could do when fasting.

After all, he told himself, the future was not the present ! How many men of his acquaintance there were who lived with the sword of Damocles (he tried to think of a fresher simile, being something of a purist in style, but failed) hanging over their heads in one form or another, and yet contrived to get on very cheerfully ! There was O'Donnell, whom you met everywhere — at the Castle, in the clubs, on every racecourse in the country — there was not

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a jollier companion in Dublin, and yet everyone knew the man was bound to go bankrupt within a few months at most, and reduce his family to beggary. Then there was that Government office fellow, who was reputed the champion tea-drinker and gossip-purveyor of the capital — well, *he* had incurable heart disease, and might drop off at any moment, and yet he seemed to take things pretty coolly on the whole. And the sun was very bright on the silly ornamental duck-ponds in the Green, and the trees were still youthfully and freshly clad, and the sky was dappled royal blue and snow ; and . . . well, the world did not look quite so dark as it had looked an hour ago.

Moore lit a cigar, and walked up and down by the centre fountain, thinking. This odd paralysis of his mental powers could not be so complete as it appeared. True, since his last book was finished, several months ago, he had hardly put pen to paper ; but that came of a certain laziness — weariness — he did not know exactly how to classify it, and it did n't matter what the name was, hang it all ! At all events, the thing was existent, and had kept him from doing any

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real work almost all that year. But was that a reason for making certain that he *could* not do any ?

"There's no time like the present," said Moore to himself, throwing away the stump of his cigar, and turning his face towards Baggot Street. "I'll go home and try a short story."

As he went on his way, he tried, half consciously, to begin thinking of his story, and to recall the state of absent-minded absorption in which he had often and often, in the years gone by, paced these very streets. But it would not come. He noticed everything and everyone he passed with absolute clearness ; he even observed the wares in the shop-windows, and heard the low whistle of an idle schoolboy, kicking his heels in the hall of one of the houses, as he waited for the hour of starting to school. And even when he had reached his rooms, had sharply ordered the servant out of his sitting-room, locked the door, looked out his best pen and smoothest paper, and started to write, his mind remained provokingly alien to his task. But the thing *must* be done, he told himself fiercely ; and he forced himself to begin.

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Two hours afterwards he gathered up half a dozen sheets of blotted, interlined manuscript from his writing-table, and read them over aloud. Then he tore them across, again and again, and tossed the fragments at the grate — which, after the manner of such fragments, they did not reach; scattering themselves instead all over the hearth-rug. It was true; he could not write — there was not a single workable idea in his barren brain. He had had no staff to lean on save his pen, and that had failed him.

Had such a thing ever happened, in such a terribly sudden manner, to any man before, Moore wondered vaguely, in the midst of his battle against the darkness that was creeping over him once more. And what, in the name of Heaven, was he to do with his life now?

We are made up of strange contradictions. This dark, reserved, almost sullen man was one of those — there are many — who feed their minds habitually upon the unwholesome airy food of day-dreams, until the spirit craves them to such an extent that it faints and dies without. And in Moore's case, the dream had been — first, increasing popularity, and second, domestic

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happiness — after the pattern of his own fancy. Day after day, year after year, he had looked ahead into the future, and seen himself grow more and more celebrated ; had seen the “ local ” taint disappear from his fame, the world ringing with his name and the titles of his works, dramatists struggling for the right to adapt them to the stage, interviewers calling almost daily at his house . . . a foolish dream, if he had known the limit of his powers ; but how many of us learn that, until the moment comes described by Mrs. Browning : —

“The first time Nature says plain No
To some great Yes in you, and walks upon you
In gorgeous sweeps of scorn — ” ?

And the other dream ?

It had been a vague one, if pleasant, for the last few years. It had comprehended a handsome town house (no “ love in a cottage,” suburban or otherwise, would have attracted this man) with a stately drawing-room, where the great ones of the earth would gather in pleasant condescension, and talk “ shop ” — especially shop about Alfred Moore. It comprehended also a well-ordered dinner-table, and household arrange-

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ments gliding upon oiled wheels ; the whole guided unobtrusively by a woman, — young and handsome, of course ; adoring, probably ; meek, preferably ; and moneyed, possibly : a being, except so far as the first clause went, most thoroughly unlike May Miller !

Both these dreams were ruthlessly torn away by the misfortune that had fallen on him ; and Alfred Moore felt strangely cold without the protecting mantle they had wrapped round him. What was he to do with his life ? it seemed all grey, beside and before. He had had so little trouble in his thirty-seven cold solitary years, that this blow struck as hardly as if he had been only twenty. He did not know himself ; he wanted, bitterly and intensely, to find again the contented prosperous man who used to look out at him from his toilet glass every morning, and whom he had so strangely lost during these last few weeks. It seemed like a breakdown in the machinery of Providence that he — he, Alfred Moore — should not be happy — should be indeed most unhappy, and full of black foreboding !

He had gone out again without noticing it, in his absorption of despair, — he had left his own

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street behind, and was heading, as if consciously, for the square where the Rivingtons lived. He might as well walk past their house as anyone else's, he supposed ; so he strolled on, passing the O'Connells' house on the way.

Terry, seated in the drawing-room balcony, which overhung the street, heard his footstep, and looked out through the trails of Virginia creepers that climbed all over the open ironwork. The O'Connells' house was in the quietest corner of a quiet square, and every foot on the pavement could be heard. Eight years before, there had been a step that often came up to that door ; a step that Terry would have recognised a hundred yards distant ; a step that now trod the soil of countries " far and far away." . . .

Never again, Terry, never again ! You heard the last of that step years ago ; it has never passed by your door since, and never will. If it came, you would hear it though you were deep asleep ; though the roar of a hundred carriages were filling this quiet square. You cannot, and could not, mistake any other foot for that one ; is it not then full time that you gave over looking out from your balcony, or your bedroom

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window, every time a slow, steady man's step passes down the square? Can it be that you, the brilliant pet of society, the most light-hearted and light-footed dancer in this sad, merry capital of ours, will be content to wear ashes in your heart until they gather in your bright brown hair as well? . . .

Seeing Moore pass below, Terry leaned out across the balcony rail, and called gaily to him.

"A great piece of news, Mr. Moore!"

"What is that?" asked her hearer, somewhat carelessly, stopping under the window. He was not particularly fond of Terry O'Connell; and he was disinclined for any sort of conversation to-day.

"You are going to be left in sole possession of Dublin. Stuart Rivington is going away."

"Going away!" echoed Moore, with sudden interest. "Where to?"

"Ah, that's telling," said Terry, sagely. "Fact is, I don't know myself, until I've found out. Mr. and Mrs. Rivington are going to bury themselves in the wilds of the Wicklow Mountains — Stuart says for ever, but I've my doubts about that. I've been deputed to hunt up a perfectly

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secluded spot, and I'm starting in half an hour. They are going to leave society, and cast off civilisation as a garment. Sounds well, does n't it?"

"What's the reason of all this?" asked Moore, knitting his heavy brows thoughtfully.

"Had n't you better come in? In a hurry, are you? Oh, well, it's only to gather fresh material," answered Terry, who had no mind to give unnecessary details. "You see, Mr. Rivington intends to strike out in a new line now, and astonish everyone."

"He does, does he?"

"When are we to hear anything of *your* next book, by the way, Mr. Moore? We are all dying to know what it is to be. Shall you — well, of all the impolite men I ever saw! he has simply walked away!"

Moore was thinking very little of Terry's possible opinions about his politeness or impoliteness as he hurried away down the square, heading he knew not exactly whither. Her words had stung him like so many wasps; the contrast between Stuart Rivington's lot — happy, comfortably off, in full possession of his genius,

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and married to the woman he loved — and his own dark prospects, seemed almost too much to be borne. Into his mind, as he walked swiftly down street after street, came a foolish little fragment from one of Hans Andersen's fairy tales: "*If this gets any worse,' she said, 'I shall not be able to bear it.' But it kept on getting worse, and she had to bear it.*"

It would keep on getting worse. Rivington — of whom he had always been so bitterly jealous — would write an undeniable masterpiece, and snuff out his waning fame like a tallow candle. He would never regain even the position he had lost. He would grow poorer, year after year; his coats would be frayed at the collars and cuffs some day, and his trousers fringed at the ends; and he would have to pretend he did not think overcoats healthy in winter, and did not like gloves. He would live in a single room in a back street somewhere on the north side, and no one would ever ask him to dinners or dances; he would always have to travel in the dirty cattle-van conveyances which do duty for third-class carriages in Ireland; he would have to smoke plug tobacco, and learn the way to slink up to

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Nelson's Pillar by Moore Street, and to Stephen's Green along the by-ways near the markets, for fear of meeting decently clad acquaintances. He would see May Miller driving towards Grafton Street in her own carriage, clad in the furs, decked with the jewels, and accompanied by the rich husband that her beauty had bought for her. . . .

It was too much. Moore had reached that stage when the temptation to buy forgetfulness for a moment, at any price, sets its talons into the strongest. And he was not strong enough to resist. When the waters of Lethe are so easy to procure, and so effectual in their results, it takes a stubborn will to choose unadulterated pain instead. Moore did not so choose. He walked into the nearest bar, and drank a strong tumbler of whisky and soda, following it up by another. And then he did a thing that was new to his temperate habits; he bought a good-sized "pocket-pistol," well filled, and took it away with him.

He had not drunk enough to intoxicate him, unaccustomed as he was to spirits,—of which he had always rather disliked the taste,—but

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he had had quite sufficient to throw a rosy veil over everything that troubled him, and make all pleasant things seem infinitely more possible than all unpleasant. Back again to Baggot Street he went, got out his pens and paper again, and began to write with what he was quite sure was a return of his old inspiration. How the words flowed from the pen! how fluently the dialogue seemed to slip off the tip of the nib, almost without his assistance! To be sure, there seemed to be some little difficulty about the punctuation; he noticed, with a slight uneasiness, that there was not a single full stop in several sheets, and that he had some difficulty in locating the beginnings and ends of his sentences. But what fire there was, what power, what wit, in the tale he was writing!

The pocket-pistol was finished by the time he had got to the end of his composition. He did not exactly know why he had ended it at that point, but it was done; there could be no doubt about that. He got up and leaned against the mantelpiece, reading the manuscript aloud with a force of dramatic action that swept several ornaments off the shelf.

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"It's good, my boy!" he said aloud — "it's damned good, Alfred Moore! You're a clever fellow, upon my soul you are. As for Rivington — who cares about him and his niminy-piminy Miss Nancy books? Say, I'm sleepy. I wonder why I'm sleepy. Better lie down on the sofa and sleep a little, Moore, my boy; much better; you're tired — that's a good fellow."

He got to the sofa in two irregular strides, and fell asleep almost at once.

The landlady, coming in later on, picked up the scattered sheets he had left on the floor, and laid them in a pile on the table beside the empty whisky-bottle, which significant object did not cause her to turn an eyelash. She had been letting rooms to single gentlemen for thirty years.

Late in the afternoon Moore woke up. He felt cold, in spite of the warm June day; he was faint with hunger, yet the thought of food sickened him. The late sunlight was slanting through the Venetians in long dusty rays; crumbs and scraps of torn paper strewed the carpet. The room looked dreary and depressing. He gathered the sheets of manuscript

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together, and read them over, with a beating heart. When he had done he dropped them on the floor, and sat dumbly staring at the wall — he had not even the heart to tear them up.

Meantime, the preparations for departure into the wilderness went briskly on in the Rivington household. Stuart, whose idea of Paradise would probably have been defined somewhat thus — “A place where you can do everything you want the very instant it comes into your head” — chafed exceedingly at the inevitable four or five days’ delay that came between the formation of his idea and its actual carrying out. But Terry, with all her good-will and energy, could not find just the right sort of cottage at once in the wild and little-inhabited Wicklow Mountains, and almost a week had passed before her telegram, despatched from Roundwood — “Got cottage, absolutely savage place, see you to-night” — brought peace into the novelist’s household.

That evening another council was held in the smoking-room, with the assistance, on this occasion, of a friendly M.D. from the square, Harold Craven by name, who had always had a great deal of admiration, and a little amiable contempt, for

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Stuart. He was of the observant, emphatic, unself-conscious type that reads life in large print, works hard when it works, and plays well when it plays; helps itself to such good things of this world as it desires, and holds on to them with a certain healthy selfishness of its own; gives a hand to those who need when they cross its path, yet seldom steps an inch aside from that clear upward way for man-friend or woman-lover. A type that "goes far;" and that meets with much liking, and little love.

"How are you going to arrange about furniture?" asked the doctor, when Terry had successfully passed through Stuart's bombardment of questions.

"Yes," said Eva, looking up from her lazy posture on a pile of cushions, and taking a stick of pineapple rock out of her mouth, "it's fully time some one thought about that. How far is the nearest station?"

They were all lounging in various free-and-easy *poses*, and eating sweets steadily; as Rivington's guests usually did, following the fashion of the house. Those who had known Eva before her marriage declared that they were

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never able to get over the strangeness of seeing that precise little person act the Bohemian so easily as she did ; and in truth, there was a certain exquisite neatness and delicacy about the perfectly dressed fair head, the consciously pretty hands, and the immaculately unruffled dress, that clashed rather piquantly with her lazy Latin-Quarter attitude at present. Perhaps she knew it, perhaps not. At all events, she did not even raise her head to discuss the great furniture question ; though it was obvious that her housewifely soul was stirred.

“ Now, listen ! ” said the novelist, hastily stowing his lump of preserved apricot in one cheek, like a sailor chewing a quid — “ I want to state right here, as the Americans say, that I am running this show myself, and *I* am going to do the furnishing, absolutely and entirely, every bit, altogether, wholly, solely, and completely ! ”

“ You ’ll let my brothers and me help you with the carting, and all that, Stuart ? ” inquired Terry.

“ Only too glad if you ’ll take that off my hands for me. I ’ll get the things, and have them sent to the nearest station — twelve miles

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away, isn't it? You can see them brought up the mountain, and when they arrive, I'll 'fix' them myself. Now, Eva, you need n't trouble to take your candy out again. It will be a great surprise for you when it's all done, and I am going to let myself loose for once, and revel in furnishing like a lady art decorator in a fashion paper."

"Am I not to help either?" asked Terry.

"Certainly not. This is going to be a grand *renaissance* of the primitive instincts of untrammelled Man; and petticoat influence would spoil the show. Every man is crushed down and stamped on by his womankind, or by the opinion of other people's womankind if he has n't any of his own, when it comes to furniture. I am going to rise above the mists of prejudice, do the thing according to the noblest instincts of my own soul, and show the world a two-roomed cottage furnished as all the men in the country want to furnish their own homes, and dare n't!"

"I think I understand," said Craven, emphatically, stretching out his hand to Rivington with an expressive look. Soul met soul in that gaze; as Alfred Moore would have said.

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"The Emancipation of Man," he added after a minute, looking with a world of thought in his eyes at a painted drain-pipe in the corner.

Eva looked slightly suspicious; but she said nothing; and Terry was innocently busy jotting down estimates on a piece of paper, and had not taken in the gist of the conversation.

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It was a week later.

The sun had been up since three o'clock, and had climbed far above the chimneys of the square; and the shadows were short and black, though the rattling can of the morning milkman was only now signalling on area gates and steps. The leaves of the laburnums inside the square, drenched with dew, trailed their pointed green fingers listlessly across the railings that held them in bondage, and the yellow cataracts of their flowers shook out heavy crystals in the face of the peering sun. There was a ring of soft haze about the lapis-lazuli sky; the noises of the city sounded sharp and clear on the hard white roads. The day was as fair as a June morning could be.

Stuart Rivington, unpoetically engaged in

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pumping up the back tire of his wife's bicycle, as it stood leaning on the kerb, was muttering Tennyson to himself as he worked,—

“ . . . And on thy heart a finger lays,
Saying — ‘ Beat quicker, for the days
Are pleasant, and the woods and ways
Are pleasant, and the beech and lime
Put forth and feel a gladder clime.’ ”

“ There are lots of ‘ good times ’ in the world, and I’ve got hold of one of them to-day. It’s not yesterday I’m chewing the cud of, or to-morrow that I’m watering at the mouth for — I *have* to-day ; and, oh, Lord ! it’s a good thing to be living ! ”

He detached the pump, stuck it back in its clip, and sat down on the last step of the hall-door flight to wait, whistling softly to himself an air that he honestly supposed to be Rubinstein’s well-known *Intermezzo*, and that probably made him quite as happy as if it had been anything fairly like that merry-hearted melody.

By-and-by Eva appeared on the door-step, clad soberly all in thin grey homespun, with a soft green ribbon knotted under her wide collar. She had a lunch-basket in her hand, which she

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strapped, in a sober, business-like manner, on the carrier of her husband's bicycle. Then she led her own into the middle of the road, mounted it like a bird hopping on to a twig, and with a backward glance, and a call of — "Come on!" flitted away out of the square, followed by her husband.

As they glided down Baggot Street, where their way led them before long, a grey, unshaven face looked out from an upper window. It was Moore. He flung down the sash as he caught sight of them, and leaned out eagerly to watch them down the street, his teeth tight clenched together, and his eyes lowering under their heavy brows. Unseeing, the two adventurers pedalled swiftly on, and vanished round the corner, in a dazzle of sun and shining steel.

All the long June day they rode on, taking the world easily, and often stopping to wander away into some pretty sun-steeped wood, where Stuart was anxious to hunt for wild strawberries, or to explore the bed of a stream whence a water-rat had scuttled, yet making steady progress on the whole. At noon — the dining hour of all simple, primitive folk — they paused, on a

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stretch of wild open moorland, to look for a spot where they might comfortably rest and eat. They found it in a deep cup-shaped hollow, where the long grass and ling made soft cushions, and the blue sky arched all round like the roof of a tent, and the sea-like murmur of the wind in the bracken rose and fell in the wide moorland air, where other sound there was none.

“‘God made the country, and man made the town,’” quoted Stuart, with one eye on Eva’s lunch basket. “It’s a nice little diluted sort of heaven up here. What have you got to eat?”

Eva, her mind considerably divided between the contents of the basket and the beauty of the place, and her body vacillating between desire to drop back restfully into the deep-cushioned ling, and lurking fear of earwigs, was too well occupied to reply. But she extracted a couple of sandwiches, and threw them to the transcendental being who was waiting impatiently beside her, letting off stray scraps of philosophy, mingled with very mundane greed.

“I believe Thomas à Kempis knew what he was talking about when he said that the less he

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was with men in general the more improved he felt. (You have n't put nearly enough mustard in these; I do think you might have remembered how much I want.) But I sha'n't do any work till I feel it actually boiling over inside me; I shall wander about, and think and think, until — Only hard-boiled eggs and cream cheese besides? Well, hand over the claret, and we'll make the best of it. I would n't have minded carrying a bigger parcel if you could have made some treacle tart. We'll have that to-morrow; I ordered lots of golden syrup, and there'll be a jolly turf fire when we arrive, — I ordered that too. Did you ever think, by the way, that love is always like fire; only there are two kinds, inside and out? When a man's in love, it is like a fire burning him away, and making him wild and mad and restless; when he is married, the love is still a fire, but it's burning comfortably in his own fireplace, and he sits down and warms himself at it. I don't think women's love ever quite answers to that description; it's like sunlight — quite away outside, and never burning you up, but just smiling and warming everything."

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"There's where you are wrong," said Eva rather suddenly. "Some women's love *is* like fire; and it burns a whole lifetime, which a man's never does, if he can't get what he wants. I'm sorry for those women; you see it in their eyes."

"What does it look like? and how do you know all that?" asked Stuart, half interested, and half piqued, at this sudden glimpse of an unknown corner in his wife's mind.

"It is hard to describe," answered Eva, slowly, "but — you know the look every mother has, and especially every young mother? — a sort of mingled sweet and bitter, — a look as if she knew many sad things, and had learned what endurance meant, but as if there was good at the bottom of all? Well, that is it — only without the happiness. They look as if *they know*; as if they had learned to bear things, and say nothing; there is a depth in their faces that one never sees in the bright young girls whose eyes look *out* all the time, and are just like clear windows in an empty room. And as to how I know all that — well, thank Heaven, I was n't born a man, and don't have to wait and *learn* every-

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thing like a lesson out of a book ; saving your presence, sir ! ”

Stuart laughed, and peeled another egg.

“ I wonder where Moore is, and what he’s doing, poor devil,” he observed. “ *He* was in a pretty serious way, and all about that yellow-headed May Miller ! What a rotten bad piece of work his ‘ Children of the Century ’ was ! Thank goodness, I’m not afraid of deteriorating like that ; I knew all along that last attempt was n’t up to the mark, and I’ve every faith in this experiment of mine.”

“ Yes, poor fellow, he seems to have reached the end of his tether,” said Eva, easily, contemplating, not without satisfaction, the green clocks on the slender grey silk ankles stretched out in front of her, and wondering, with a pleasant touch of self-righteousness, whether Moore’s wife — if he ever got her — would remember to wear his favourite colours after six years of matrimony.

“ I think we might soon be getting under way again,” she added presently ; and so the subject passed lightly off.

It was part of Stuart’s humour not to tell his

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wife where the cottage was situated, or when they were drawing near it ; so it was with some astonishment that she heard, late in the afternoon, when the sun was beginning to slope redly down towards the west, and the stray bushes of peach-scented gorse were casting long black shadows on the sparkling sandy road, that the journey was almost done. They were far up in the mountains now, nearly sixteen hundred feet above sea-level. The last village had been passed hours ago ; and they had had a walk of nearly a mile up a smooth deceptive hill that was unrideable even for two such steady climbers as these. They were on one of the famous "military roads" that cleave the mountains of Wicklow, far up where no other roads pass for many a mile, and which were made in the troublous rebel times, to open up these wild fastnesses, then inhabited by robbers and outlaws. Now the roads lie useless and empty ; there are almost no dwellings near them ; the barren land affords only scanty pasture to a few half-wild sheep, and cannot be ploughed or sown ; the gradients are far too steep for wheeled traffic ; and only an occasional cyclist of an adventurous

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turn of mind disputes possession of these finely surfaced highways with the infrequent wanderer on foot.

Where the Rivingtons were walking, there did not seem to be a sign of life, save for the whistling plover, most melancholy of birds, that swept past now and then in the reddening sky. Wave after wave, the great moor swelled round them like a sea, tossing its heather-crowned billows far away to the horizon, where purple summits cut the glowing clouds. Great piles of rocks, as large as dusky elephants, were flung together in the hollows, and stood out upon the heights. Here and there a runnel of crystal-brown water cut through the lichened grey, and made a chain of emerald down the mountain side. It was unspeakably wild and solemn ; and there seemed no sign of any human dwelling, near or far away.

They turned a corner, however, and behold ! sheltered by a rough cairn of bracken-feathered rocks that might have been thrown together by the hand of the giant Fin MacCoull, a tiny cabin. The thatch on the roof was suspiciously new — Eva guessed at once that it

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had been impossible to find a habitable building, and that an old ruin had been roofed over afresh — the whitewash gleamed like pearl; the brambles and long grass that had been cleared away from the door were still lying in a heap at one side. A thread of blue smoke curled out of the chimney, and the door was hospitably open.

“I arranged to have everything left ready, and the fire lit and banked up this morning. A fellow from Roundwood stayed here last night,” said Stuart, leading the way in.

There were only two rooms in the cottage. The first had a huge dark open fireplace, with a chain hanging down the chimney, supporting a kettle. There was no grate; the glowing turf fire was built on the hearth. Beside it lay the *batterie de cuisine*, — a frying pan, a saucepan, a teapot, some knives and forks, two or three spoons, half a dozen plates of enamelled tin, three blue cups, and a couple of jugs. The floor was covered with gay crimson matting; the dark rafted roof arched above, unceiled. The walls were hung with matting of a soft nut-brown, giving a curious ancient-tapestry effect.

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Big brass-headed nails were boldly driven in every here and there, and there were no pictures. There was a square sturdy kitchen-table, stained brown, without a cloth ; three Windsor kitchen chairs with arms ; two brown lockers, and a pile of dark blue satteen cushions in a corner. This completed the furniture.

“You see,” explained Stuart, “that locker holds eatables, and this one papers, and so on. Those nails are meant to hang everything on that gets in the way. There’s almost nothing to clean, and no draperies or gimcracks to catch dust. Here’s the bedroom. Look — bed, two chairs, table, glass, two big lockers, and lots of hooks ; same matting, you see. An idea of my own ; it keeps out draughts.”

“What will you do if Terry comes to stay a day or two ?” inquired Eva.

Stuart fairly beamed with satisfaction.

“That’s all provided for. Look here !”

He walked out, and round to the back of the cottage. A substantial stone pigsty stood there, built in a lean-to against the house. He opened the door and struck a match ; Eva, speechless with bewilderment, looked in. The pigsty was

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nicely lined and floored with fresh boards, and held a sailor's hammock, rolled up with three or four brown charity blankets. There was not room to stand up, but the building gave a good eight feet of length for the hammock.

"You're not going to treat Terry like a pig, are you?" queried Eva.

"Oh, no; I shall sleep in this place myself if we've a lady guest, and any man can easily put up here. The stream makes a lovely pool away at the back, just big enough for a bath."

"The idea is rather startling, but it does not look too bad. Shall we have tea now?" asked the mistress of the mansion.

"Yes, rather! I'm starving. Hurry and boil some potatoes; and there's bacon there to fry. I'll go and put the bicycles away."

The joyous sense of freedom which had taken hold of "Ireland's greatest novelist" the moment he left town behind him, became still more prominent at tea. Eva, daintily picking her food behind the teapot, stopped aghast, with her fork in the air, to see her husband calmly eating mashed potatoes with his knife.

"I never tried it before," he explained glee-

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fully. "I always wanted to eat with my knife, but I never got a chance till now! It's really very nice, and saves a lot of trouble."

He paused for a minute to drink his tea out of the saucer; recommending the process vigorously as he stopped to refill it, and declining to be satisfied until Eva had done the same, and hypocritically pronounced it a capital plan. After tea, he sat down on the floor by the fire, with his head against the wall of the ingle-nook, and stared long and silently into the glowing caverns of the peat. Eva watched him anxiously; she knew these silent, absorbed fits, and never broke into them by speech unless it was absolutely necessary. Quietly she busied herself about the cottage, putting away the clothes that had been sent by cart, washing up the tea-things (which task, to do him justice, Stuart would not consciously have left to her), and, when all was done, slipping quietly off to bed alone. Another woman might have stirred up the motionless figure on the hearth, telling him that he must be stiff and tired, that the fire was going out, and the night was chilly up in this mountain air. Eva knew better, however;

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she had learned how cautiously the mind of a man of genius must be handled.

Late that night, when her husband had at last followed her, and was lying quietly asleep, his great chest and shoulders heaving with the slow quiet breath of a body in perfect health, Eva sat up and looked out of the tiny square of window, across the rugged moor, drenched in a flood of cold white moonlight. The silence was deathly; her ears tingled with the weight of that utter stillness. There was not even a stir of wind; the bracken plumes on the cairn of rock stood erect and motionless; the moonlight lay in unwavering patches among the tufts of gorse and heather. The mountain sheep were all sleeping; there was not so much as a whirling bat abroad.

All of us are seized at times with inexplicable impulses, but we generally prefer to keep them private. Eva was considerably vexed next morning when her husband woke up early, and discovered that she was sleeping with her head wrapped up cravenly in the bed-clothes.

CHAPTER VI

SUN in the valleys and on the tablelands of the Wicklow hills, — sun steeping every spike of budding heather, and every upstanding slab of worn grey granite, in liquid gold, — sun basking on the patches of bare earth and moss, and bringing out the strong, wholesome odour of the soil ; lighting up the creases of the great hills' robes of many-shaded velvet ; blazoning out the gorse in splendid gold. A royal day, indeed !

Fog in the city ; a thick dry summer haze that had crept up from the evil-smelling Liffey, and tarnished all the beauty of the June morning, making its splendour look dingy, dusty, and tawdry, along the busy streets. Dim yellowish light in Alfred Moore's sunless rooms, where the heavy window-curtains fell half across the panes, shutting out much of the airless, ugly day. He had once been fastidious about the arrangement of every detail in his sitting-room, but of late his indifference to his surroundings

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had become so obvious that the landlady took advantage of the fact, and snatched what she told herself was a well-deserved rest from "them finickin' perticularities" of her lodger.

To-day he had not gone out in the morning, but had stayed at home in an armchair, smoking and desultorily reading. It is a bad sign — a very bad sign — when a man in the prime of life, in full health, and possessed of many acquaintances, takes to staying indoors, and doing nothing during the early hours of the day. It generally means that there is "something wrong with the works," — that the spring of life is weakened, and that all actions and thoughts that require independent decision have become a weariness.

Moore had made up his mind on a certain matter the night before. But from sheer apathy his resolution relaxed again in the morning; and it was not till late in the afternoon that he found himself raised on the crest of a fitful impulse so far as to leave the house and wander out towards Merrion Square. Once on foot, it was just as easy to go on as to stop. He found himself at last on the threshold of the house he

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had resolved to visit. It was that of a famous specialist in nervous and mental diseases — Dr. Harold Craven, Stuart Rivington's friend.

There were, of course, a good many people in the ante-room, and he had to wait for an hour or two. He did not think of anything very definite during that long period of sitting still; even the old novelist-habit of observing the people about him, and trying to read their histories in their faces, seemed to have deserted him. He only knew that they were tiresome, ugly people, all alike, and that he would probably hate them for keeping him waiting, if he had energy enough. There were tired, worn faces in that room; eyes that looked out darkly and hopelessly from wasted orbits, the abiding fear in their gaze telling of the skeleton horror that faced them in the night-watches and the lonely evenings; there were faces that had become hard and set as steel, with cold, brave eyes and sharply closed lips, — such as these had looked their terror in the face, until they knew its features line by line, and defied it to make them quail, — there were faces that were merely a little weary and strained; all ages and

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conditions of life, from the silk-clad woman of fashion to the pale, ill-dressed shop-boy, were represented, for Dr. Harold Craven's name was one of rapidly increasing fame. But Moore saw none of these things ; he was only on the alert for his turn to come, and eager for an opportunity (which he was unable to make) of privately tipping the servant, and getting in before his time.

At last, however, the summons came, and he went out into the doctor's room. As he followed the servant, something of his old determination and force seemed suddenly to come back, and he felt himself capable of stating his case with clearness—which he had almost feared he would be unable to do.

A well-groomed, rather plump, rather grizzled, youngish man was Dr. Craven, with strong plain features, and kindly eyes. He had a loud, cheerful voice, and a breezy, almost nautical air, which was distinctly delusive, as he had never been to sea in his life. He was tactful enough to betray no knowledge of his patient's identity, though he recognised him at once. Dr. Craven's patients were not often anxious to have their personality unnecessarily thrust forward. But his keen pro-

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fessional eye recognised at once the signs of trouble on Moore's face,—the sharpened features, unconsciously knitted brow, dull staring eyes, and down-curved mouth,—and besides the trouble, a darkened, swollen look that told of the remedy that had been employed. He asked a question or two, and Moore answered, in a set speech which he had been preparing during the long wait in the ante-room.

“I wish to know if you can tell me any probable reason for sudden failure of one's imaginative powers. I'm engaged in literary work, and during the last six months or so I have found my ideas failing. Lately it has got worse; I literally can't write at all. There is nothing whatever wrong with my brain, of course; but I thought it best to ask your advice. It is a most curious thing altogether, and I can't account for it.”

“Ye-es,” said Dr. Craven, his steel-grey eyes piercing Moore's half-conscious guard like two steady rapiers. There was a minute's silence. He inducted the novelist into a seat that faced the window, and commenced a series of casual questions, rambling about from one subject to an-

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other, in a manner just a little at variance with his watchful face. Moore, tired out by a sleepless night and worn with headache, relaxed the guard he had been keeping over every word, and gave himself up to the pleasure of what seemed simply a friendly conversation with a cultivated man.

At last there was a pause, and Dr. Craven, looking steadily at his patient, delivered his opinion : —

“ Well, now, these little matters are difficult to *define*, of course, and I can’t say either that you’ve anything wrong with you, or that you haven’t. Just a little *care*, you know; don’t get over-excited or annoyed about anything, and don’t drink or keep late hours. I’ll give you a tonic, and you might take a holiday at the seaside, if you feel inclined.”

This seemed rather indefinite, and Moore made an effort to elicit something in the way of fact.

“ Do you think I shall be able to write again pretty soon? It’s only a temporary trouble, is n’t it?”

“ Oh, yes, yes, just so; you won’t be troubling yourself about all that six months hence. Cheer-

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ful society, you know; don't worry about anything; get that tonic, and call again in a week or two. Good-morning!"

As the hall door closed behind Alfred Moore, the doctor looked out into the passage.

"No more, James?"

"No, sir."

"Get me the law directory from the middle book-case, and bring me some note-paper."

Ten minutes later a square envelope, addressed in the doctor's hand to "Martin Moore, Esq., Q.C.," and marked "Private," was on its way, *via* the corner pillar-box, to Alfred Moore's only surviving relation. And Alfred Moore was walking slowly back towards home, telling himself that Dr. Craven was an absurdly overrated man, and evidently did not know his business. Why, he had left his patient no wiser than he had found him!

Which was exactly what Dr. Harold Craven had intended to do.

At all events, the visit had, to a great extent, lightened the load on Moore's mind. If Dr. Craven looked at this matter so coolly, there could not be anything amiss with his brain, as

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he had lately almost tortured himself into fearing there was. He only wanted a good idea for a plot, and a long rest, free from worry and anxiety, in which to work it out. Things were bound to come right in the end. Might he not think after all of May Miller?

In any case there could be no harm in writing to her, and trying to find out if she had really any lurking *tendresse* for him, as her smiling reception of his attentions during the spring had seemed to suggest. But what could he write to her about?

Most men, under such circumstances, would have been content to open fire with an ordinary conversational letter, inquiring after the girl's rather uncertain health, retailing bits of local news, hoping for a repetition of the past visit, and so on. But there was a nasty little twist in Alfred Moore's character that always inclined him to do things in an elaborately crooked way, if such were possible, rather than in a plain and ordinary straight line. Therefore he thought out a plan of action that was ingenious, but not ingenuous, and proceeded to carry it through at once. He walked into a jeweller's

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shop, and purchased a gold brooch of the well-known "Mizpah" pattern, rather similar to one that Miss Miller was in the habit of wearing; and taking it home, wrote the following letter: —

DEAR MISS MILLER, — I found the enclosed brooch a day or two ago in Merrion Square Gardens, where I believe you used to play tennis during your stay with Mrs. Rivington. I think it must be the one I have often seen you wearing, so I hasten to return it to you.

Hoping you are well, I remain, dear Miss Miller,
Yours sincerely,

ALFRED MOORE.

"She'll send it back next post, with a letter to say it is n't hers, and I can easily manage to work up a series of letters out of that," said Moore to himself, chuckling over his own ingenuity as he held the brooch over the flame of a candle to blacken it — having already bent it a little out of shape. "Then, if things look well, I can have business in Portadown, and carry the affair through in no time. Oh, you're no fool, my boy!"

Rather a surprise awaited him in Miss Miller's

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answer, which arrived in a couple of days. It ran as follows:—

DEAR MR. MOORE,—So *very* many thanks for finding my brooch; I was quite *distressed* about its loss! I missed it that morning after playing in the Square, and never saw it again. It was very fortunate your finding it in such a way, and I am much obliged to you. I am well enough, but Portadown is such a *deadly* place, no one to speak to, and the children are so tiresome sometimes! I look back with such pleasure to my delightful visit to Dublin, and the *many kind* friends I met when there!! I hope you are going to bring out another *great book* soon, your last was so interesting, though almost too clever for poor little me to understand! I do not believe in learned women, you know, I am the *real old-fashioned sort!*

With many thanks,

Yours very sincerely,

MAY MILLER.

Moore's jaw dropped with astonishment as he read through the epistle; but at last a light broke on him, and he burst out laughing.

"Smart little puss!" he said—"thinks I really found the brooch—means to hang on to the bit of gold anyhow—won't let go a good

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thing! That's the kind of girl I like! She can't really think it's hers, even if she has lost the other; it's half as large again. Good sort of wife to have; she would n't let money slip through her fingers, I'll go bail."

He took the apparently cordial tone of the letter with a grain of salt. The girl was a notorious little flirt, greedy for admiration of every sort; she might simply be desirous of adding another scalp to her stock of trophies — and this was a part that Moore, like most men, strongly objected to play. However, he knew that he must be content to risk something; so he wrote again, after an interval of a few days:

DEAR MISS MILLER, — I was glad to hear from you, and to know that the brooch is yours, as I had surmised. I am also very glad to see that you have not forgotten your Dublin friends. As to my books, I am at present engaged on one which is progressing swimmingly, and promises to be the best thing I have yet done. My publisher has already offered me very high terms for it. "Children of the Century," which you are kind enough to admire so much, is going capitally; I think of bringing out another edition very soon. I have already cleared a big sum from it. It's a little tire-

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some sometimes to be such a busy slave of the pen, however. I think of retiring from the field of literature for good in a few years' time, to live on the royalties coming in from my various books, added to what I have already saved.

This pretty web of falsehood concluded with a few carefully chosen expressions of friendship. The reply elicited was, as Moore had hoped, decidedly warmer in tone, and even contained a hinted inquiry as to whether he ever visited the North of Ireland. This he thought it most prudent for the time to ignore; and merely wrote another letter, couched in that tone of playful friendliness that implies so much when used between man and woman. So matters went on for some weeks, the two playing each other like skilful anglers. At last, however, it seemed to Moore that the time had arrived for definite action, and he decided to go up to Portadown at once, and spring a surprise visit on Miss Miller. There was no reason whatever why he should not first inform her of his coming by letter; but it was one of Alfred Moore's least agreeable peculiarities that he loved to take people by surprise in various amateur-detective ways. He

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delighted in observing his acquaintances through lighted windows, from cabs, or at places of public resort, when he himself was unseen ; he always read postcards, and observed the addresses of letters, when he got the chance ; and he often followed people stealthily about the streets of town, and watched them in and out of houses, " to see what they were up to," as he phrased it. Therefore, it seemed both agreeable and exciting to him to visit the girl by surprise ; and he decided to do so on a certain Saturday morning, some three weeks after the sending of the brooch.

CHAPTER VII

ON Friday night he looked out the clothes he thought he would require, and packed a week's supply in his portmanteau — over the initials of which he pasted a large label, in pursuance of the idea of secrecy and cunning which was warming the cockles of his heart so pleasantly. Then he hunted up the trains in *Baird's Guide*, and neatly wrote down all particulars on a slip of cardboard, which he placed in his waistcoat pocket, along with a diamond ring — showy, but not too dear — that he had bought in the afternoon. After which, he went to bed.

In the middle of the night, when every sound of traffic was dead, and not even the footstep of a stray homeless beggar shuffled by, he awoke into broad, staring consciousness. He could see the flicker of the gas lamp outside; he could hear the faint whisper of the trees along the canal, swinging their heads together, and mur-

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muring of all the sin and misery, the wakeful wickedness and hot-eyed grief that lay silent and invisible, all around their towering trunks. He could feel his own heavy breathing lift the coverlet up and down, rustling the silk of the eider-down quilt with monotonous regularity. *But he had lost himself.* He did not know who he was, or where he was lying.

The feeling was one that had just grazed past his consciousness more than once during the last few weeks; now it had come full face upon him, and flung him down under its terrible weight. His mind was chained in invisible bonds, as the body is chained in a nightmare. He lay awake there with every sense on the alert,—every faculty so quickened that he could actually hear a night-moth walking up the paper of the wall, and see its shining eyes half across the room,—yet he had absolutely lost all sense of time, place, or identity.

“Who am I?” he heard a voice saying, by-and-by, over and over again. “Who am I? Alfred Moore. Who is Alfred Moore? Where is he? What is it? Oh, my God, my God, *what is it?*”

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Then he became aware that his lips were moving, and that he must have been speaking himself; that passionate, unfamiliar voice was *his*! What did that mean? who was he? And again the old round went over, and yet again, until it seemed as if the very sweep and rush of all eternity had caught him up in its terrible heart, and was dashing him on, lost and blind, into the blackness of utter space and nothingness. He heard himself praying wildly to God to let it be a dream,—to let him wake,—and while the very words were on his lips, something came upon him, and struck him into darkness.

When he opened his eyes, it was broad daylight, and quarrelsome sparrows were chattering on the window-sill. Tradesmen's carts had begun to rattle past; and the bells of the early tram-cars jangled down the street. He raised his head, and looked round the room. He was lying on the floor, where he had flung himself in the night; his head was cut, and bleeding a little; it had struck the leg of a heavy chair. His mind was perfectly clear, and the strange confusion of the night seemed only like a dream. Perhaps it *was* a dream — a disagreeable nightmare. He

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had taken supper late last evening; that was foolish; he would not do it again. And now he would get up and bathe his head, and see about catching the train to Portadown. *Mention this to Dr. Craven?* who said so? Nonsense! he was quite capable of looking after his own constitution, even if his nerves were a little broken down.

He had never felt cooler or more self-possessed than on this morning, when he was going to take his fate in both hands, and wrest an answer, good or bad. He tied his tie with even more perfection than usual, and paused to deliberate seriously between his fawn spotted corduroy waistcoat and the one that matched his suit, finally deciding on the latter as less conspicuous in appearance, if less becoming. He took a hand-glass, and carefully examined the top of his head, where there was a thinning patch of hair, and more than a streak of grey. What on earth had brought so many white hairs there of late, at his age? He must really get a restorer; a young fellow like him should not show a grey hair for years to come. What was thirty-seven? The full prime of life! he was still going up the hill.

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When a man begins to tell himself that he is in the prime of life, the crow's-foot graves wherein will soon lie buried all the glad unconsciousness of youth are generally half dug.

And what of Dr. Craven's letter to Martin Moore?

That eminent Q.C. duly received it on the morning after it was sent. He was at breakfast, looking over his letters; and, noticing one in the pile marked "Private," and addressed in a strange hand, he selected it to read first.

Its contents caused him to stare and frown, and finally to drop the letter in complete dismay.

"What in Heaven's name is to be done about this?" he grumbled. "Says he has n't told Alfred himself; did n't think it advisable; traces of a delusion, probably harmless; leaves me to act as I think right, being his only relative! Why, I'm only second cousin to the fellow after all. Still, if Craven's right — and he generally is, they say — I must step in, I suppose . . . What's that postmark — *Nice*? and not Katie's own hand!"

Dr. Craven's letter was tossed across the table, and Martin Moore tore open the *Nice*

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envelope, with a cold fear stabbing suddenly at his heart. He read the brief note, clutching the paper unconsciously tighter and tighter, and crumpling the sheet up fiercely when he had reached the laborious, ill-educated signature — that of his wife's maid.

“She took bad yesterday, and is quite of her hed to-day pleas come over if you can sir.”

The words danced before his eyes. Was this to be the end of his wife's summer holiday, — a holiday that his own extra work had perforce made a solitary one? Why had n't the fool of a maid telegraphed? were there no friends of his wife's in the town? what was the next boat he could catch to England?

Martin Moore sprang from his half-finished breakfast, thrust the rest of his letters into his pockets, and rushed into the hall to find a railway and steamboat guide. Dr. Craven's letter fell unheeded to the floor; it had utterly slipped out of his memory.

And for the next six weeks, while he watched through sleepless nights, and dragged through long terrible days of anxiety and fear, at the bedside of his almost dying wife, no thought of

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Alfred Moore ever crossed his cousin's mind. Busy Dr. Craven was content with the precautionary action he had taken, and almost forgot to notice that his patient did not come back a second time. And Alfred Moore himself, well occupied with his deep-laid plots for securing May Miller's hand by fair means or foul, troubled himself little about the strange symptoms that had affected him for a time, and that now seemed to have passed away. He did not attempt to write, but that, he told himself, was because he wanted a complete rest. As for the terrible depression that had so haunted him at first, where was it? Gone, apparently; he had slipped back without effort into his old pleasant fool's paradise, and was feeding himself once more on the poisonous honey that is gathered in the spacious gardens of so many a *Château en Espagne*.

The strange night that had preceded his journey to Portadown troubled him not at all as he sped along the Great Northern rails; he had forgotten it before the train was fairly out of Amiens Street Station. All the way he thought of May Miller, of the pretty way she

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coiled her yellow hair, of the soft white neck that rose above the low-cut collars she fancied ; of her little dimpled fingers, and caressing dainty ways. The heroines of his novels were usually tall and dark and stately, with mystical sea-green eyes speaking mutely of a sad and stormy past ; and the heroes generally loved them for their lofty minds, and spoke of "stepping together onward to a higher plane." But somehow, when it came to his own actual, visible love affairs, Moore felt rather glad on the whole that *his* heroine was neither green-eyed nor mysterious, and did not know a higher plane from a lower hand-saw !

While he was whirling rapidly northward, bent on his surprise visit, May Miller was, strangely enough, thinking very deeply about him. She was sitting cross-legged on the bed in her own room,—it was Saturday, and the children had been asked to spend the day at an uncle's, so she had a much-valued holiday,—looking out at the view from the front, which was not exceedingly cheerful, consisting as it did of a half-built row of yellow brick villas and the dead wall of a private garden. May Miller

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had reached, and passed through, something of a crisis in the last few days, and she was still feeling rather sober about it all.

She had had little doubt of late that Alfred Moore was "serious;" and the necessity of making up her mind about accepting or rejecting him had pressed hard upon her. True, she might do better in time—but the time seemed long coming, and the children were tiresome, and their mother vulgar, and she was very desirous of the glory of "getting engaged." On purely abstract grounds, the acceptance of Moore seemed to need no consideration.

But purely abstract conditions are not often attainable in this imperfect world. There was a *tertium quid*—there generally is. In this case the obstacle was aged just twenty, had dark, soft eyes, and a dangerous smile, was as conceited and as impulsive as youths of twenty generally are, and had not a five-pound note "to his name," nor any prospect of obtaining one. Just such a lad, in fact, as the average girl is perversely and unwisely certain to fall in love with. And he himself had fallen in love—very much in love, after the manner of his age

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and temperament — with pretty mercenary May. It was as foolish a business as well could be. There was not the remotest chance of a wedding ever growing out of it, unless the boy had suddenly developed the energy, talent, and will that Nature had not originally given him, and cut out a career for himself; and no one knew this better than May, for all that his dark bright eyes were so apt to haunt her in her dreams by night, and come between her thoughts and the schoolroom slates by day. Alfred Moore's last letter — which was warmer even than he thought — had awakened the girl to the absolute necessity of making up her mind at once.

It is only the very strong or the very weak who can root out the flower of a foolish or unworthy love — paradoxical as this may seem. The strong hand has nerve to hold the knife, and cut deep into the quivering roots, once for all, facing determinedly the agony of the moment. The weak hand, driven by necessity, plucks at the flower; and its shallow root, ill nourished by the poor soil in which it has grown, loses hold at once. It is the every-day woman nature, strong enough to love deeply,

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yet not strong enough to turn the knife against its own heart, that fails in such a moment, and pays dearly for its failure in the years that follow. May Miller's very weakness and selfishness were her strength at this juncture; she feared exceedingly to give way to this useless and impossible love of hers; and its root was slight enough to yield to her undecided hand. In the last week, she had put the dark-eyed lad who formed the sole romance of her life, outside her heart. She had cried a little in her own room at night, and had kissed his photograph before she burned it up, and written him a pretty pathetic little letter that brought him rushing wildly and imprudently up to Chatsworth Villas, only to be told "Not at home" by the servant, and frowned on by the lady of the house. And already she was reaping her reward, as she told herself with a little glow of approval; she hardly cared about him now at all, and could consider her bigger "catch" with an unprejudiced mind.

The postman's knock sounded as she sat there, and broke into her reverie. Would there be a letter from Moore? The servant was

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coming up to her room, slowly and heavily, and evidently pausing on the way. May twisted her handkerchief into a rope, and bit the end impatiently.

“How dare she stop to examine my letters?—Come in! Thanks. No, I don’t want anything; you can go. . . . Only from that silly Will after all! what can he have to say now?”

She read the letter through slowly, her cheeks dimpling a little now and then. It was so pleasant to see how the boy suffered; especially when she was not really to blame.

But the latter part of the letter chased the dimples suddenly away. It ran as follows:—

“I have heard about the *great catch* you think you have made, the rich novelist you met in Dublin, who writes to you all the time, and *sends you preasants*. Perhaps he is n’t such a great catch as you think. I asked a big book-seller in Belfast, and he says the fellow’s novels sell less and less every year, and the last one was a downright frost. If you will *sell yourself for money*, you ought to make sure he can pay up honestly.”

May frowned a good deal over the letter, and

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pouted angrily at the absent Will ; but she could not doubt the good faith of the statement — Will never lied.

“ I will try and find out about that,” she resolved. “ If it is true, he has treated me shamefully. Oh, my head’s aching with all this bother ; I must go out for a walk.”

And she tossed on her sailor hat, and left the house, passing the road that led from the station some five minutes after Alfred Moore’s train had come in.

CHAPTER VIII

It would be too much to say that Moore was actually disappointed when he saw May Miller's trim figure walk briskly into view, just as he came out of the station ; but he was certainly a little taken aback. After his usual fashion, he had elaborated a neat and ingenious plan for obtaining what he desired,—a sight of the little governess, and an opportunity to speak to her,—and he was almost sorry to find it was not needed. He had intended to buy a large notebook and a pencil in the first stationer's shop, select an upper storey window at some point of the town that commanded a view of Shambles Road, and purchase from the owner of the house the right of spending an hour or two in that window, on business "connected with the Government." He had planned to take notes in an open and important manner, and impress the owner of the house with the idea

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that he was a detective of some kind; there might be some possibility of obtaining stray fragments of useful information in that manner, apart from the dignity that the statement would cast about him. It seemed, however, that none of this manœuvring was to be necessary after all; there was the object of it walking down the road in plain view, and quite unaccompanied.

Moore got in a direct line behind her, and followed her for nearly a mile, out into the open country, on a road that was probably dreary and hideous in the dull part of the year, but that now, in the full flush of a brilliant July day, with purple vetch and golden trefoil splashing the rank grass by the wayside, and drifts of dazzling white sweeping across the summer blue above, was a pleasant place enough for a late morning stroll.

The girl walked briskly along, swinging a jaunty little cane as she went, and looking neither to right nor left. She was not a lover of Nature, unless in the form of woolly water-colour drawings, produced according to the printed recipes given away with moist-colour paint-boxes. Those were useful and desirable

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things; you could keep them in a portfolio, and give them away to your men friends. But Nature herself, in all her varied moods, May Miller found supremely useless and uninteresting.

What was she thinking of as she walked quickly on through the breezy sunlight, pointing her patent leather toes smartly out, so as to let the rays dazzle on her new paste shoe buckles?

She was dreaming about Alfred Moore and his fancy for her, and wondering how she would figure in his next novel, if he happened to put her in. (She said "put her in," much as she said "pass remarks" and "a gentleman friend of mine," and remained unashamed.)

"I'll see he *does* put me in, if I marry him," she thought. "It would be a lovely thing to be a real heroine, and I'm sure I am a great deal better worth writing about than those 'high-falutin'' creatures he generally describes. Men don't *really* like 'high-falutin'' girls."

May Miller had never heard of Andrea del Sarto and his wife; but I have no doubt she would have recognised a kindred spirit in the

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mediaeval Mrs. del Sarto, and pronounced her an extremely sensible woman.

“Let’s see,” she mused — “suppose he was describing me now ; what would it be like ? — ‘ Our heroine tripped lightly athwart the sod ’ ” (alas for Alfred Moore’s coldly polished purity of style ! if he could only have read his *inam-orata’s* mental conception of it !), “ ‘ her *svelte* graceful figure, erect as a dart ’ ” (May was five feet two, and as plump as a pigeon), “ ‘ swaying with every breeze like a lily on its stalk. She was dressed in a charming yet simple *toilette* of old rose cambric with *nœuds* of cerise ribbon, and a real sable collarette. A smart sailor *chapeau* sat upon the Psyche-like knot of her golden hair ’ ” (this was fatally correct, as May still clung to the frizzetted “bun,” and wore her hats like a saintly aureole). “ ‘ Her sapphire eyes looked thoughtfully out to the horizon ; her charming mutinous mouth was pouted into a pretty *moue*. Alas,’ ” she sighed . . . “ Good heavens, Mr. Moore, how you did startle me ! ”

The last sentence was quite unpremeditated. Alfred Moore had suddenly come up beside her, and held out his hand.

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THE girl turned round and faced him, pulling herself together with all the decision she possessed ; for she felt instinctively that a crisis in her life had suddenly leaped out on her, before she was fully prepared to meet it. Such things astonish sentimental eighteen, dreaming over its novels — those wonderful novels wherein all the perplexities and troubles of life fit neatly into each other like a Chinese puzzle at the last, and form a pretty, pleasing whole ; and where all the great catastrophes and striking scenes are skilfully led up to for pages beforehand, so that one knows quite well what is coming, and thinks that if one were only the heroine, one could act quite as effectively and wisely as that amazing young person always does !

But this was no scene out of a novel ; it was the prosaic country road along which she reluctantly toiled with “ those stupid children ” every day ; and she was not dressed in her best (a fact which sent a keen pang through her vain little heart ; though if she had known how pink and white and soft and pretty-pigeon-like she looked, even in her washed-out cotton, she might have felt consoled), and here was Alfred Moore,

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probably going to ask her to marry him, before she had had a chance of making up her mind, after that letter from Will!

Was it the remembrance of her boy-lover's fresh young face and impulsive speech that made Moore's few grey hairs, and the stray, slight wrinkles under his eyes, show up so strongly in the pitiless glare of the noonday sun, and his slow, careful sentences sound so chilly?

And yet they were not chilly by any means. The man was almost visibly trembling with mingled emotion and nervousness; he twisted his gloves in his hands till he nearly tore them, as he spoke some commonplace words of greeting; and if his sentences were a little too measured, it was only because he could not trust himself to use any but those he had already prepared.

"May I accompany you in your walk?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like," said May, with elaborate carelessness. "I was just going to turn home, though."

"Can't you sit down and rest on this stile

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first? You are a good way from Portadown," suggested Moore, planting himself across the path with an air that looked like calm decision, though in reality it was only desperation.

"Oh, yes," replied May, with the air of one constrained by inevitable circumstance; and sat down on the lowest step of the stile, Moore standing close beside her.

An inquisitive field-mouse, whose nest was situated hardly a yard behind May Miller's skirts, scuttled out of the hedge, and surveyed the situation cautiously. It was not good enough, he decided; better run down among the blackthorn roots and visit the mole who lived in the bank; perhaps those dangerous creatures would go away soon.

But they did not go away. The grey-coated gentleman peered out through the leaves every now and then impatiently, wondering if they had taken root on the stile, and what they could find to chatter about for so long. It seemed to him that the big dark creature never stopped talking, slowly and steadily, and the little fair one said almost nothing. The sun had passed the zenith, and begun to creep down again, be-

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fore the bright-eyed watcher got a chance to come out from his retirement; and he looked after the retreating forms of the interlopers with a "Fuff!" of disgust as he gained his castle at last.

"I hope they may quarrel over every grain of corn in their nest, and bite each other's ears off!" ran his thoughts, as he went to sleep.

If they were not biting each other's ears, they were at least not in an amiable frame of mind, to all appearance, as they walked back towards the town together. Both voices were somewhat high-pitched; May looked "upset" — to use her own phraseology, and Moore's face was dark and impatient.

"Do you think it fair treatment, may I ask," demanded the man, in a tone that he meant for cool satire, but that came too near an absolute snort to be correctly classified thus — "to encourage me in every possible way, and then throw me over in the end? You know very well —"

"I did n't, and have n't, thrown you over," retorted May, hastily and ungrammatically. "You know I told you I liked you, and so I do. And

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I said only a minute ago that I *would* marry you, if — if — ”

“ Oh, yes ; I know you did ; I’ll put it in plain words for you. *If* you found I had money enough to satisfy your ambition ! and you are n’t sure I have, apparently. Might I inquire if you doubt my word when I tell you — ”

“ It’s too serious to be a question of people’s words,” declared May, looking up at him with a glance that was perfectly unaffected for once, and that showed a strange hardness in the pretty blue eyes. “ Other people have told me your books are n’t doing well, and that your last one hardly brought in anything. You must give me some *proof* that you’ve even enough to keep me comfortably. I’m tired of being poor ! I won’t marry anyone to slink about back streets in a three-year-old jacket, and peel my own potatoes ! ”

A shadow of compunction crossed Moore’s mind as he thought of the gloomy forebodings that had assailed him of late. But he drove it away almost without an effort ; his fierce resolve to win this woman in any way, and at any price, swept back upon him like a wave, drowning all

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else. Her frankly mercenary words did not hurt him in the least; money-loving as he himself had always been, he saw no blame in a purely venal nature. Neither did her distrust of his statements shame him; it only struck him as a proof of a keen business head, and increased his admiration for her. But the wavering reluctance in her face sickened him; it looked — it looked —

“——!” said Moore to himself, with a vigorous oath — “I will have her, if the devil himself stood between.”

“Look here, May!” he said aloud, in as conciliating a fashion as he could manage. “Let’s come to an understanding. There’s a book of mine just begun; I can run it through in three months. I’ve got a magnificent plot for it — something real startling, I can tell you; bound to go — and I swear to you I’m certain of a big sum for it the moment it’s done. Come, now — if I can show you my publisher’s letter when I get it, proving all this, will it be settled between us?”

“Yes,” said May, rushing blindly at her fence. “Yes, it will; I will be engaged to you then if you like.”

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They had reached a shady spot where the riotous wind was held off by high banks and hedges, and tall rosy foxgloves stood up unshaken in the grass. Moore did not answer the girl at once; he stood silent just for the space of a second or two, staring fiercely and absently at a tangle of white convolvulus bells that swung lightly down from an overhanging bough. Then he caught the little pink and white figure in his arms and kissed it, raising his head to laugh loud and long, in a way that made May break from his hold and shrink aside.

“What are you laughing at?” she stammered.

“Only at the thought of the good time coming!” said Moore, loudly. “At my plot, too — it’s such a good one, May; put away in a sealed envelope, not to be touched till I’m ready. I’ll open it this week and start work. Oh, such a plot! such a fortune as it’ll make for me! You shall have sealskins and a carriage and diamonds, May; don’t you love diamonds?”

“Yes,” said the girl, rather faintly, wondering at the strangeness of his manner.

“Here’s the first of them,” went on Moore,

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pulling out the ring he had bought, and forcing it on to her hand — on the wrong finger, but he did not seem to notice that. “Keep it; there’ll be plenty more by-and-by. Remember — three months — it’s such a short while, you’ll not have time to ‘take the rue’ — three months, and we’ll fix the wedding day. I’m going now, May; I must get that plot and set to work at once — there’s no time to lose; no time at all. Good-bye, my lassie” — with a sudden touch of softness, as he bent to kiss her again, more gently this time. “Good-bye, May; I’m gone.”

And he was. Without another word, he flung off down the road, making with great strides for the railway station, and never looking behind.

May Miller stared after him in deep perplexity. How odd he was! Were men in love always so strange? How far had she committed herself to a promise? how much did she like him? what would be the end of it all?

The hard, money-loving glance crept over her face again, deforming all its prettiness.

“In any case, I’ll hold on to the diamonds; *that’s* something,” she said.

CHAPTER IX.

SUCH a summer had not been known for years.

Even rainy and uncertain July for once lost its character, and showered on the world day after day of pure gold, of clear, bright heat that made town pavements hot and wearisome and town houses stifling; but that here among the eternal hills, holding up their green chalice hollows in purple hands towards God's free heaven, made existence in itself a joy.

The old, old pleasures! the simple delights that thrilled the spirits of men who wandered—

“Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy,”

in the days when all the world was young; that stirred the strong heart of mediæval Piers the Plowman, and the spring-like soul of quaint old Chaucer—what better can the onward march of civilisation offer us, even yet? Good Mother Nature holds out her hands to us still, full of the innocent joys of sense that depend

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for their very existence on the simplest, most primitive feelings and impulses of humanity. One of the keenest delights the world can offer is that shared by the very dog that runs barking along the road, playing wildly about in excess of spirit and activity — where is there a more exquisite thrill of pleasure than that aroused by the mere exercise of physical strength or daring? The delightful electric tingling that rushes along the spine, and catches at the throat, as the horseman sets his teeth and thunders straight at a splendid leap, — the strangely pleasurable fear, that is not at all akin to dread, coursing along the veins of the athlete who stands with every nerve at high tension, waiting for the signal to start in a race that he knows will be hard and fierce, — the exultation of the practised swimmer, as he fights through the waves of a stormy sea, — how strong and satisfying such pleasures are! And always, while suns rise and set, and the earth swings round through space, into season after season, there is the splendid pageant of the sunset, and the solemn mystery of dawn, and the eerie sights and sounds of velvet-grey twilights, and the terrible solemnity

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of the lonely stars that look down on dark mountain lakes and God-forsaken moors, in the hours when all things known, and all things not of evil, are asleep. Still, for those who prefer them, and can understand them best, there will never be wanting the "beauty" of painted canvas and limelight in a glaring theatre, or the intellectual delights of eating partly decayed birds, and creams frozen into flavourlessness, to the accompaniment of general speculation about the relations existing between *her* husband and *his* wife, and the latest theory concerning the amount of "past" permissible and pardonable to man or woman about to marry.

On one of these splendid mornings, Stuart Rivington — who had been consistently idling in a hundred different ways, during the week or two of his stay at the cottage — informed his wife and Terry O'Connell, the latest addition to the party, that he intended to open his sealed envelope in a day or so.

"I'm nearly ready for it," he explained. "I've been thinking and thinking, and letting the thing simmer in my head, all this time; and before the end of this week I know I shall be

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quite prepared to make a start. The *scenario* is all written out in that paper, — names of characters and everything, — and upon my sacred word of honour, Eva, it's the grandest idea ever a novelist had. The only fear I have is that it is *too* grand for me," he went on, piling apricot and raspberry jam on his bread and butter — they were finishing their early dinner — and regarding the combination with absent-minded greed.

"No fear of that, Stuart; I have an idea you are going to 'get there with both feet,' this time," said Terry, with one of her irresistible, twinkling little laughs, — somehow, Terry's slang never sounded vulgar, though it was frequently very unconventional.

She had risen from her seat, and was standing over by the window, where the sunlight gilded the crinkled brown of her hair, and strongly outlined the well-poised figure, in its dark cotton frock. Her brother and sister artists — especially the former — were wont to say that Terry O'Connell's head was better set on her neck, and her neck on her shoulders, than any other head and neck in the capital; and they were right — the trite yet expressive simile

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of the stag occurred to everyone who looked at her critically.

"She has *lines*, my dear, lines!" declared the School of Art students to each other, when Terry was obliging enough to assist them with a private "pose" of half an hour or so. "She could not sit or move awkwardly if she tried. But we haven't got a G. F. Watts here to do her justice."

"I hope I am," said Stuart, rather seriously, in answer to her remark. "It will be something to have lived for, if I can carry out that conception of mine."

"It is well to have something to live for," said Terry, lightly, the lines round her mouth hardening a little. Then she turned her face out towards the sweep of the moor, humming a little French song of De Musset's: —

" 'La vie est vaine,
Un peu d'amour,
Un peu de haine,
Et puis — bonjour!

" 'La vie est brève,
Un peu d'espoir,
Un peu de rêve,
Et puis — bonsoir! ' "

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"That's what I call a *whining* song," declared Stuart, rather scornfully. "What if life is short? Does it make it any longer to sit down and snivel about it? I've no patience with De Musset, and Heine, and all that breed. What I like is the splendid spirit of the old Norsemen, who could look Death straight in the eyes and smile at him, and who thought it far better to meet one's fate splendidly on the battle-field at five-and-twenty than drag on till they were old and listless, and had sucked all the juice out of life, like an empty orange. I tell you, it's *pluck* that this age wants, — sheer, simple courage, of the sort that does n't feel impelled to sit on the housetops and yell, every time it eats sour grapes and gets its teeth set on edge, or run about the streets showing its burned fingers and howling, when it's been playing with fire."

"You might have made a good enough Norseman yourself, Stuart," said his cousin, tapping absently on the window-pane, in apparent emulation of a swaying rose-brier outside. "But you have n't escaped the taint of the age altogether, as it is."

"No — or else I'd be jolly well sure not to be

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picking my character to pieces now with you. It's our self-consciousness in these days that eats into our strength. There's nothing so fatal."

"Are n't you rather hard on yourself?" queried Eva, more with the idea of drawing him out than with any intention of joining in the discussion. She liked to see these two intellects strike fire from each other; for Terry, when she dropped a certain veil of gay frivolity that usually hung like a curtain over her mind, sometimes said memorable things.

"He is, and he is n't," said the girl. "He has the saving grace of always being able to make himself rise to an emergency. He could die very decently."

The most strong-minded woman in the world shrinks at the mention of death in connection with the mortal creature she loves. Eva suddenly found an errand in her bedroom, and sat down on the floor, with her head on the quilt, where the rest of the conversation from the outer room was inaudible. She was, however, young enough, and happy enough, to find a certain morbid pleasure in fancying the details of

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the very horror she shrank from ; and across her mind flitted a vision of a pathetic death-bed, and a lonely grave, with herself weeping over the new-laid sods, beside the splendid monument that a nation's admiration would have raised.

"How I should *hate* being measured for my mourning!" she thought, "and what a little while it would be before Mother would fold it all away in her own wardrobe, and take it out sometimes and cry over it, and put my portrait beside his, in a black velvet frame! And they would just add a line on the monument — 'Also his wife,' and the date — only a few months after!"

Meantime, Stuart, looking very much alive indeed in the careless costume of knickerbockers and jersey that showed off every sweeping line of his fine athletic frame so well, was bringing out his bicycle, and preparing to mount.

"Eva!" he called, "I'm off for a long run ; give me some meat biscuits, and don't expect me back till you see me."

"Where are you going? is it too far for me?" asked his wife, coming out. "Dr. Craven may be

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driving up early to-day, and he could take care of Terry."

"Too far! I rather think so; I'm on the scorch this morning, and may go a hundred miles or so," answered her husband. "Good-bye, girls; don't get into mischief, and mind you keep the fire in for the evening."

He was off as he spoke, whirring down the steep road like a flying partridge, his cranks and handlebar flashing brilliantly in the sun. How the white highway flowed away underneath him like a river! how the wind sang in the spokes, and shrieked in his ears! how the pedals leaped up and down, fast as the great cranks on a flying railway engine! The pure cool air that blew across the moor was like a breeze straight from the sea; there was not a speck of dust on the soft grass by the wayside, — how could it rise, up here where wheels and hoofs were well-nigh unknown? — the sky was blown free of all but tiny flakes of cloud. A clear, clean day; a royal morning of God's own making, unsoiled by man's grimy fingers, and unpoisoned by the breath of his reeking factories and towns.

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Stuart fled faster and faster still down the long hill-side, going he knew not where, intoxicated with the splendour of the day. He possessed in full the artistic temperament,—the intense sensuous joy in beauty of every kind, that can revel in a ray of sunlight filtered through green leaves, and ascend on a bar of solemn organ music, heard amidst a dim mediæval glory of sapphire and ruby windows, to the very gates of heaven. A fatal gift—for does it not bring also the capacity for infinite pain; the certainty of hours of dark depression in the mist and rain of sordid winter cities; the assurance of dead heart-sinkings, calling on the lonely soul to curse God and die, in the spirit-searching hour that comes “’twixt the midnight and the mirk”? Many a time had Stuart Rivington faced such moments, and painfully called all the forces of his being into action to fight them through—almost failing at times; for the weakness and the strength of genius had come to him hand-in-hand. But in such hours as this of splendid sensuous happiness, when he revelled alike in his own strength and in the beauty of the world that seemed his alone, he was fully repaid.

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Alas, for the prose of life! how it mixes with, and mangles, the poetry! It came upon Stuart Rivington very suddenly at this juncture, in the shape of a most unromantic thorn, which punctured his tire, and obliged him to check his speed and dismount. He pulled out his repair case, with a muttered scrap of profanity on his lips, and wheeled the machine round the sharp corner he had just reached, intending to place it on a convenient bank.

As he came into sight of the stretch of road beyond the turn, his eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped.

“Well, I — never!” he said.

Right across the whole of the narrow road lay a young fir-tree, newly cut down, and blocking up the entire way. The strange thing was that there were no other trees in the neighbourhood, and no stump visible. Also, the road at that point skirted a deep ravine, thickly sown with sharp boulders.

“By Jove, if my tire had n’t struck work, I’d have been going ‘knicketty-knock’ down those rocks like a pebble in Carisbrooke well,” observed the cyclist, considerably startled.

CHAPTER X

MEANWHILE, the morning was passing away very pleasantly in the cottage. The expected guest had not come after all, but Eva and Terry were rather glad than otherwise. Stuart had on different occasions cordially invited various friends of his to share the very limited accommodation of the house (usually telling his wife afterwards that he could not imagine why he had asked them, and only wished it was possible to get out of the invitation), but they had none of them materialised so far, much to little Mrs. Rivington's relief. She had not attempted to explain to Stuart that a guest sleeping in the sitting-room would be decidedly inconvenient, and that the difficulties of housekeeping, when one lived six or seven miles from the nearest village, and had to rely on a weekly donkey sent up from Roundwood with a couple of loaded creels, were indefinitely increased by casual hos-

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pitality — he had never shown that his intellect was equal to the strain of such common household details. So, when it became evident that chance was going to leave the little party entirely to its own resources, the housekeeper's heart was quietly rejoiced within her, but she said nothing.

As for Terry, she was, as usual, a decided acquisition. Stuart had always been fond of her in a comfortable, cousinly way, and Eva — reserved and sensitive as she was — had opened out to this brilliant wayward woman from the first day of their acquaintance. A staunch friendship had gradually grown up between them, developing later on into the calm and steady affection that only two strong natures can feel for each other. Stuart encouraged the friendship as much as possible, from a variety of motives. He liked Terry himself, and found her good company; he was glad to have a companion for his wife's solitary hours, which were rather many at times; and he also enjoyed the psychological study presented by the peculiar spectacle of two women who were as real and steady friends as any two men could be.

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Perhaps Eva had caught something of her husband's analytical habits during the past week or two of seclusion from the world; for on this particular morning she watched Terry critically, as the girl (no one could ever call her anything else, though she had reached the trying third decade) moved about the cottage helping her hostess with the light tale of house-work demanded by Stuart's masculine furnishing. Terry had odd, restless fits sometimes, and she seemed to have come upon one to-day. Every now and then she would stop in her work, and stand looking out of the back door at the silent little brown stream that slipped under the clumps of green and gold furze, whistling sharply to herself, and tapping her smart tan leather boots on the threshold; or she would suddenly catch up her ample cotton skirt, and begin dancing in the middle of the kitchen floor, lightly and unconsciously as a flower shaken by the wind — making strange graceful figures and steps of her own, and humming wild mournful Irish airs that wove themselves in with the dance, and seemed to take away all the merriment and *abandon* usually associated with flying foot and waving

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drapery, leaving something that, as Eva rather pettishly exclaimed, was "a veritable Dance of Death."

"Terry, if you don't stop that dreadful dancing to *Savourneen Deelish*, I shall take my bicycle and ride down into Lough Tay!" she declared. "It's the kind of thing a woman would dance over the grave of her lover after she had gone mad. I don't know where you get such horrible ideas."

"It shall not be frightened, then, poor little dear!" said the guest, stopping abruptly. "I'll go out in front and do some sketching; I have been neglecting my paint-box shamefully since I came here, and there are 'bits' by the dozen. Now don't say it; I know. You are so much in love with Mother Nature in all her glory, up here, that you feel sickened at the nasty little technicalities of painting — the choosing and suppressing and contriving, and the dab of gamboge for the sun on the whins, and the squint-and-string performance with a pencil, to get relative distances. So am I; but the pot must boil, my dear Eva; so go away, and thank goodness your husband does n't have to write shilling shockers

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or topical specials, and leave me to libel the Wicklow Mountains for half an hour."

"I'll get the griddle ready and make some soda bread; there's a bowl of buttermilk that may as well be used up," said Eva, turning into the cottage.

Some little while later, the griddle-cakes made and put away, she returned to the door; but Terry was gone. Her brushes and paints lay on a flat, lichen-broidered stone; her canvas, hardly begun, and still wet, was on the easel. She could not be very far away. Eva picked up her skirts, and stepped into the sea of heather that edged the narrow road, looking sharply about her as she crushed through the stiff masses of budding green. Was that a gleam of scarlet, under the shelter of the little turf stack in the hollow? Yes,—Terry's neck-ribbon, beyond doubt.

There was a long strip of grass just here, formed by a rising bank, that led up to the turf stack. Eva walked silently along it to the end, and stopped, feeling, for once in her well-ordered little life, thoroughly perplexed.

Terry was lying face downwards on the short

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grass under the lee of the stack. Her hat was thrown off, and her loose wavy hair, half escaped from its pins, had fallen on to her shoulders. She seemed motionless, except for the slight rustle of her dress as it moved with her slow deep breathing. She was not crying, and her hands lay loosely on the grass, unclenched.

“What can be the matter with her?” thought Eva, and so thinking, bent forward to look closer. A loose sod of earth slipped as she moved, and rolled off the bank. Terry sat up at once, and looked at her, with a face that seemed to Eva almost that of a stranger. It was quite calm, but perfectly colourless; the changeable hazel-grey eyes burned darkly under their level brows, and the mouth was set like steel.

Stuart Rivington's wife was not a commonplace woman, and she did not act in a commonplace manner. Instead of making alarmed inquiries about sunstroke, suggesting sudden illness, or offering cups of tea, she stepped down beside Terry, and, assuming the place of the elder by virtue of her matronhood, took the girl's hand, saying simply, —

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“Terry, my dear, can’t you tell me?”

Terry leant against the stack, and looked determinedly at the wall of forget-me-not coloured sky in front, her breast heaving rapidly. Presently she spoke, still looking away from the face of her friend.

“You will only think me the worst sort of a fool if I do, Eva. I’ve thought that of myself any time these seven years.”

Eva did not speak, but she held closely the slender chilly hand that lay in her own warm fingers.

“Eva — don’t think I’m always like this when I’m alone, or often — Heaven forbid! It’s not once in six months now-a-days — I declare that’s the truth. You never knew it before; and they don’t ever think at home that I — that I — have n’t — forgotten. I *have* forgotten — almost always — but just sometimes, like this, it comes back again, and then. . . . How can I tell *you* what it’s like? You, who have had the man you loved all your own for six years, and never thought of anyone else!”

“How was it?” asked Eva, gently.

“He was an engineer — Elliot Ritchie,” said

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Terry, in the hard expressionless tone that comes of repressed pain. "He came to Dublin eight years ago, to do something or other connected with a canal. My brother Harry was at the same work, and somehow he — Mr. Ritchie — got intimate with us all and used to be about the house a great deal. And he went to all the dances in our set, and he and I always danced together, and . . . he went away again. There is n't anything more to tell."

"But there *must* be! Terry, he cannot have known you and not cared about you. How *did* it happen?"

"Did you never hear that old song? —

"O love for a year, a week, a day,
But alas for the love that loves away!"

asked Terry, scornfully. "That was it. He did — oh, yes; he went about as far as he could go without 'committing himself,' as men say; and people said he was evidently pretty hard hit. But it was 'a week, a day,' with him. He got orders to go to England rather suddenly, and he went. He sent me a letter; such a nice polite letter, beginning 'Dear Miss Terry,' and

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ending — ‘Always yours most sincerely.’ I did not answer it; there was n’t time, anyhow; and what could I have said? So—he went; and that was all.”

“And you never saw him after that?”

A red flush crept over the girl’s face, and she began plucking at the daisy heads in the grass.

“Yes, I did — the night he left. Eva, Eva, I was mad that night! I could have killed myself and him — *and her*; for I always suspected there must have been someone else. I walked up and down my room nearly all day, with the door locked; I said I had a headache, when they sent up to know why I wouldn’t come down to lunch. I could not have looked at food; but I remember I was as thirsty as if I had had a fever. When it got dark — it was in February — I put on a black waterproof and a thick veil, and went out in time to catch the mail to Kingstown. Then I stayed on the pier to see the boat go. Oh, how I’ve hated that dreadful pier ever since! it was so dark and windy, and the sea was thundering outside the harbour, and all the lamps fluttering on the

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platform . . . and there was a woman saying good-bye to someone ; she held on to his arm till the very last, and looked up at his face, and I . . . hid round the corner of the ticket-house, and watched Elliot cross the gangway, all alone. Then the bell rang, and the people came on shore, and the paddles began to go round — and it was all over. Eva, you *can't* know what it is to see someone leave you like that ! it's as if the terrible, hateful steamer had a cord running right into your heart, and was tearing it out, flesh and blood and all, as it went. I ran round to the East Pier then — it was quite dark, and beginning to rain, and there was no one about — and I got over the wall, and sat down among the stones — they were all white with foam, and the sea was roaring in over the rocks below — to watch the last of the light. And when it was quite, quite gone, I went mad for a little, I think ; at all events I lay among the stones in the rain, and never wanted to get up again. . . . Did you ever hate the life in yourself, and want to throttle it like a wild beast, when you think that it *won't* go out, for all your longing, — not for forty or fifty years, perhaps ? That was what

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I felt. But—one does n't die, except in novels. Here I am at thirty, very well and healthy and—happy, as people go; for it is n't a merry world at best. That is all, Eva; it's a common story enough, is n't it? only, unfortunately, I am one of the few unlucky people who don't, and cannot, 'love for a week, a day.' There are some of that sort; God help us all! . . . You might give me a hand up; I'm stiff sitting here, and I'd like to go in."

"I do not understand it at all," said Eva, thoughtfully, as they walked back to the cottage together.

The shadows of the peaceful July evening were growing long and blue, when a dazzle of shimmering steel glinted out at last far down the road, where Eva had been looking every now and then during the last hour, her little bronzed hand held above her eyes to shade them. Not anxiously looking, however; her excursions to the door were rather the outcome of a certain delight in the dramatic fitness of the situation. Like all women, she was a little bit of an actress; like most women, she had once had secret, romantic aspirations after just such a scene as

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this, — a little white cottage with a curl of blue smoke rising from the chimney ; a far-off figure coming home in the cool of the evening ; a white-aproned presentment of herself standing at the door ready to welcome him, and serve the meal prepared by her own hands. Such pleasures are among those that our plutocratic civilisation makes impossible to most ; but none the less, there are many women who, in their handsome city houses, waited on by soft-footed servants, would gladly exchange all the cumbrous splendid machinery of their daily lives for just a taste of these unknown simple pleasures of primitive humanity — the sweet dependence of the breadwinner on the mistress of the home for all bodily comfort ; the making bright of the hearth, when the hour comes that will bring back the tired worker ; even the welcoming face at the little cottage door, looking down the shadows of the darkening road. “ Love in a cottage ! ” — the ideal of the girl at school ; the unheard-of impossibility to the finished young woman of the world ! How foolish our complex civilisation has made the idea ! And yet, so far as Eva Rivington’s gentle little heart was concerned, she had never been

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better pleased with the world than on that sunny evening when the glitter of her husband's bicycle crept slowly up the long white hill, below her watching eyes.

He was powdered with dust when he came in ; hair, moustache, clothes, shoes, were white as those of a miller ; his face was burned dark red, and his eyes shone brilliantly blue from under their whitened brows. He looked decidedly tired, but infinitely content. When he had washed away the dust, and changed his grey tweeds for a pair of old cricketing trousers and an aged smoking-jacket, lifted the potato-pot off the fire, helped Eva to dish the supper that was lurking in various corners of the huge fireplace, and taken the first edge off his colossal hunger, the women demanded an account of his day's ride.

“How far did I go ? Oh — everywhere ; I don't know ; seventy miles or so, I dare say — you see, I went backwards and forwards, and crossed my own tracks ; I was exploring. First, I went down through Glenmacnass — that *is* a jolly place, Eva, and not so far from here ; you must see it soon. It's a great lonely valley, all black and purple and green, with little grey specks of sheep

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crawling about; and there's a long white waterfall that gallops right down one end. Then there was Laragh — the dearest little sleepy village, lying in a tangle of trees and bracken, with a big brawling stream running through; and all the dogs lying asleep in the middle of the road, and all the people leaning dozing over their half-doors. And then I went switchbacking along the Vale of Clara, up and down, and the mountains were all purple and gold in the afternoon sun, and the river was just singing away quietly below, and there were rows and rows of pines, frowning down on the frivolous little beechwoods and bilberry bushes below, — Oh, you should have seen the bilberries I got; I lay down flat among them with my face up to the sky, and ate them in handfuls — ”

“ I shall never get the stains out of your suit, you wretched man ! ” sighed Eva ; but he ran on as if he had not heard.

“ And there were no people all the way, or almost none — I hate people sometimes. And when the road was good I went till I could n't sit straight in the saddle, and all my lungs had got into my throat — ”

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"They *couldn't*! I've had ambulance lessons," put in Terry.

"I don't care, they did, and I liked it. It's just grand to ride yourself clean out, especially when you do nine miles under half an hour on those roads. Then I went down to the river, and found a place where there was just a little waterfall, and bathed there. Eva, if you've never sat where a waterfall could run down your back when you were hot, you've never been in paradise on earth! Well, I went up that valley again then, and into all sorts of places, I don't know where. There was a deep valley that had a long white thread of a waterfall dropping down a whole mountain-side — Carraway — Seeds, I believe, they call it —"

"Perhaps you mean Carroway-Stick," suggested Terry. "I know the place."

"Yes, that was it. And then I climbed up the hill, and sat and looked down for ever so long, and thought —"

"What?" asked Eva as he paused.

"That's telling," said Stuart, with a sudden seriousness of manner. "Big things. And a

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long, long time! . . . I shall write day and night for weeks when I begin, I know that."

"Nothing else?" asked Eva, pausing as she lifted the tablecloth up before shaking it at the door.

Stuart had not meant to tell her of the peculiar incident that had marked the beginning of the day; but it ran off his facile tongue before he knew.

"Yes, such an odd thing! I stopped to mend a puncture; and by Jove, just round the corner, on the downhill, I found a big fir-tree laid right across the road, as if it had been put there to trip me up. Odd, was n't it?"

Eva's eyes dilated ever so little.

"I don't *quite* like that," she said after a pause.

CHAPTER XI

DR. HAROLD CRAVEN was taking a holiday.

Greystones — the little white town that nestles under the southern side of Bray Head — was the spot he had selected, and he was well satisfied with it. He had been worn out in body and mind when he came down to the clean, windy village, with its sandy streets and thick fuchsia hedges, its rows of thatch-roofed cottages, tenanted by unfashionable visitors with families of sun-burned children, and its ramparts of stern grey rock dropping sheer down into jade-green sea; but a week or so of the cool salt air and quiet living had made a new man of him. He could sleep soundly at night, without an uneasy fear of the clanging bell that so often roused him from his hard-earned slumbers at home; he had lost the restless feeling that there was some neglected or forgotten duty waiting for him, if he could only remember it, and had

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settled down at last into happy idleness, his mind fairly out of harness.

"Thank God, there aren't many people I know here," he observed to himself, strolling along the harbour wall one clear hot morning. "If I had gone to Bray, now, I shouldn't have been able to put my nose out of doors without running across a patient, and then good-bye to all hope of peace. One never can get the public to understand that a busy man wants to drop his profession when he is holidaying. I haven't seen one of my patients, praise be to Providence, since — By Jove! *Ginger!*"

A big, red-headed man had just landed from a smart little yacht that lay close to the pier, and was walking up the steps.

"*You, Doctor!*" he exclaimed with almost equal amazement. "Strange thing to meet an old friend's face the very moment I land in Ireland!"

"I was just thanking Heaven most piously that I hadn't seen one of my patients for a fortnight," observed the doctor, with a comical twinkle in his eyes. "But you're a very old one."

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"That's so," said the other, keeping step with him along the quay. "Not so old, though, that I'm ever likely to forget the way you pulled me through that fever of mine, when everyone else had given me up. You've got on wonderfully since those days, Hal; I feel quite proud to have been through Trinity with you."

"Come and lunch with me at the hotel, and tell me about yourself. Been in England all this time?"

"Ginger" threw back his big head and laughed.

"That is humiliating. Did n't you chance to hear of the Schreckstein Tunnel?"

"Why, yes, I think so — and you were on that job?"

"Rather, considering that I managed the whole show. But that's out of your line. My last piece of work was a bridge at Nice — lovely place, but a trifle hot just now, and too many invalids about. Poor Martin Moore has been there for weeks, looking like a ghost; his wife is n't out of danger yet."

A sudden leap of memory stirred the doctor's mind.

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"Now wait a minute!" he said rather precisely, "how long has he been there?"

"Since the 30th of June. He arrived the day after I did — telegraphed for by his wife's maid. Do you know him?"

"Very slightly," said Dr. Craven, with a pre-occupied expression, pulling out his pocketbook, and beginning to look through it.

"Thirtieth of June; that corresponds!" he exclaimed. "Have you been in Dublin?" The Doctor seemed to have suddenly jumped out of his holiday frame of mind, and was speaking now with the peculiar brief *netteté* that characterised his professional manner.

"'Sorra a fut.' Just landed now, I tell you; came over in Macnamara's yacht."

"Are you going there?"

"Maybe aye, maybe no. I'm on my holidays."

"Well, I wish you would, like a good fellow, and look up that old chum of yours, Alfred Moore."

"What for?"

Dr. Craven paused a minute. They had reached the hotel, and were sitting at a side-

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table in the dining-room, waiting for their lunch. He glanced round quickly, to see if there was anyone within earshot.

“ Well — I suppose you know — or possibly you don't — that professional etiquette among medical men demands that they shall rigidly respect a patient's confidence. There are exceptions to that rule, however ; and Alfred Moore is one, in my opinion. He came to consult me on the 27th of June ; and from what I observed, I considered it necessary to write privately to his cousin, Martin Moore, who was his only relation in town. He must have got the letter on the same day as the telegram about his wife, and of course neglected it altogether. I did n't hear anything about Mrs. Moore, and did not think it necessary to do anything further, being extremely busy. But if Alfred Moore has been left to himself all this time . . . Ginger, I know you're safe, and an old friend of his ; try to get me any information you can about him, if you're going on to town. It's hardly important enough for me to break up my holiday ; but I'd be easier in my mind if I knew what he had been doing of late. I would ask my *locum tenens*, only in a case

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of this kind a personal friend of the patient's is best."

"You mean he's not responsible?" asked the other man in some amazement.

"Pretty much that. It's a case of a single delusion; no ordinary person would find it out, and he is quite unconscious of it himself; but — you understand me, Ginger — it's a peculiar delusion; and, under certain circumstances, *might* work mischief."

"Well, I am d——d!" observed Ginger, softly. "Alf Moore! — By the way, I *did* hear something about him, in a letter from a friend; I'd forgotten all about it, and it isn't much. He went off to the Wicklow Mountains rather suddenly a few days ago; shooting, or fishing, or something. Why, what's the row?"

For Dr. Craven had pushed back his untasted lunch, and sat staring blankly at his friend.

"The Wicklow Mountains!" he said. "I have been too careless over this, Ginger, I'm sadly afraid. There may be mischief — and if there is you must help me through; it will take more than one to stop it."

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"I'm hanged if I know what you're talking about, but I'm game for anything you like," answered Ginger, promptly.

"I am sorry — I might have done something!" said the other, uneasily. "Finish your lunch, and let us get out and talk this over at once; it won't stand delay."

CHAPTER XII

WHILE Fate was thus twining the threads of alien lives into those of Stuart Rivington, his wife, and his cousin, the three were very happy in their mountain solitude, and had almost forgotten the world below. A few days passed by after the incident of the fallen pine-tree (which had made little impression upon anyone), and the weather began to show symptoms of breaking. There was a distinct smell of coming rain in the air one morning, when Stuart went out to the cottage door; the far-off hills looked transparently clear and vivid, the near ones had taken on a heavy purple, and the soft grey sky was bending low over the earth.

"There's going to be wet," said the novelist, coming in. "I'm not sorry."

"Why?" asked Terry in surprise; it seemed odd to wish for a deluge, in the middle of these wilds — and ill-natured, too; had not she a fine

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canvas half-finished, a decided advance on anything she had ever yet done? and how could those flying lights and shades, those almost impossible emeralds and umbers and ultramarines, be "faked up" in a small cottage, on a pouring day? But Stuart, with the self-absorption of genius, had forgotten all about Terry's pretty dallyings with art. She was useful to him when he wanted a listener, or a B pencil, or a little music, or a *corpus vile* on which to test the contents of his literary notebook. But sympathy, apart from mere professional interest of a chilling and vivisectioning kind, was not in Stuart Rivington — even where his wife was concerned. Most of his friends never discovered this defect; and those who did generally forgave it easily, for the sake of his personal charm. He was such a "bonnie lad," as his Scottish nurse had been used to say, not very many years ago, — his smile was so sweet, and his eyes so blue, and his easy flow of pleasant egotistical talk so attractive, that no one ever expected warmer human sympathy from him. But at this moment Terry felt a little annoyed with him.

"I think I'm ready to start at my book," ex-

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plained Stuart, with a rapt expression on his face; unconsciously destroying the beauty of the door-stone which Terry had been carefully whitening, by leaving two muddy footprints on it as he stepped back into the cottage.

"As for us, we can look out of the window," observed his cousin, a little shortly. Eva lifted large eyes from her sewing. She could never understand her husband's disputes with Terry; not having studied the repellent force occasionally exerted by hidden similarities of character in members of the same race.

"Yes," said Stuart, absently. "Women are odd creatures," he went on, suddenly warming to his subject; "they can always find house-work to do, even in a place furnished like this."

"You think you know everything about women," observed Terry, who seemed a little "on the sharps." "No man ever did; not Shakespeare, or George Meredith, or" — with a low curtsy — "Stuart Rivington. Any woman in the world would say that, if she told her real opinions."

Stuart's pride was piqued.

"Eva! is that true?" he demanded eagerly,

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ready to defend his judgment of the sex to the last. Ninety-nine novelists (male) out of a hundred pride themselves on their accurate understanding of feminine character.

"Well — just a *little* true," amended Eva, divided between affection and pride of sex. "You aren't quite infallible."

"Give me an instance!" demanded the novelist, up in arms. "Ask me a question, and see if you can puzzle me!"

"I will, if you like," said Terry, busy cleaning her brushes. "Eva may judge."

"Well?"

"I've thought of something, — a very simple question. Suppose a brother and sister, both very ordinary people, staying in a big house where there are lots of housemaids and parlour-maids, and footmen, and grooms, and gardeners. The man, in the usual course of things, will have noticed in a day or two exactly how much good looks every woman servant about the place possesses. What about the girl?"

"The girl! Oh, well, I should think she won't observe to anything like the same extent; women have such a tremendous sense of rank,

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—like that old story of the French countess, who said, ‘You don’t call *that* a man?’ when her friend remonstrated with her for having a footman in attendance while she dressed in the morning. No — the average girl would n’t condescend to observe what shape of nose a footman had, or if he had one at all. Of course I’m not talking of the Aurora Floyds.”

“Is he right, Eva?”

“No,” said the little woman in the easy-chair, smiling. Terry followed up her smile with a peal of laughter.

“Oh, you men who know everything about us!” she said. “That’s one of the little conventions of womanhood, which no one ever even mentions, so completely is it carried out! The average girl, my dear Stuart, has every bit as quick an eye to note good looks in the lower class as *you* — only she pretends she has not; that is her little sacrifice to the proprieties. *Va donc!* What do you know? My mother had a handsome boot-boy three years ago; I could draw his face at this minute, though I never spoke half a dozen words to him. Eva, my dear, what house in Dublin is

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it that has the butler with the handsome black eyes?"

"Mrs. Morton's," replied Eva, calmly and promptly. Stuart stared.

"I give in," he said blankly — "you women are too many for me altogether."

"We are too many for ourselves," answered Terry. "Can you tell me, after all that, why so many women fall most deeply in love with *ugly* men? I'm sure I can't. I suppose the God who made us understands us; no one else does. And I suppose he knows why he made us at all; I don't know that either. I'm going out for a walk."

Somewhat abruptly, she snatched her hat from its perch on one of Stuart's countless pegs, and was gone.

"That discussion has done me good," said the novelist, who was walking restlessly up and down. "Eva, give me pens, ink, and paper — that's like a French exercise, is n't it? Is it that you have the blotting paper, or has the daughter of my father's sister taken it to clean brushes? — I have an idea, a plot, some thoughts; thou hast a blouse, some pins, and

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a pattern on the table; she shall take them away, and put them in the bedroom, so as to let me sprawl all over the place. That's right. Make me a good cup of tea, and keep quiet, and don't let me be disturbed by anyone."

"That is so likely!" laughed Eva.

But Stuart did not even hear her reply. He had dropped into a deep basket-chair, taken out his penknife, and, with lingering delight, was cutting open the blue sealed envelope that had lain so long untouched in his locker.

"I've forgotten some of the details," he said, "but I have the central idea pretty clear. I shall only need to run over this quickly. Eva, listen! I've never told you yet, but I want you to hear now."

And he read aloud the sketch he had made of his plot, trying not to chuckle audibly, which he felt would be undignified, but swelling all over with delight and pride. That was indeed a plot! the novelty of the central idea was as striking as its powerful development; it was bound to create a "boom" that would shake the very Wicklow Hills!

"The critic on the hearth," as Stuart was

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accustomed to call his wife, said absolutely nothing till the reading was over. Then she walked across the room, and dropped an agitated kiss in the middle of her husband's untidy fair head.

"Stuart, it's *just grand*," she said, her voice perceptibly trembling. "My dear, dear boy, you'll take the world by storm with that, if you only handle it right! Why, the very wording of that *scenario* itself is a poem. You are going to make a fresh departure, and jump a dozen steps up the ladder at once. I don't believe Meredith or Thomas Hardy or Kipling will be in it with you!"

"Well, that's a large order," said Stuart, pensively, "but I think I shall make the 'Kil-yard' school sit up. They're about played out now, and it's time someone struck a new note. You see if I don't start a fresh fashion with this."

"'All can raise the flower,
For all have got the seed,'"

quoted Eva. "I don't mind that, so long as you are the first. Are you going to begin now? All right, then; I'll leave you to yourself."

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She went into the next room, and shut the door, after which she knelt down on the floor, and applied her eye to the keyhole. Stuart was better left alone, but she was anxious to see how he got on, being familiar with the sufferings he usually endured when commencing a book. She could only see the chair in which he sat, and in a few seconds he got up, and passed out of her range of vision. Tramp, tramp, tramp — he seemed to be walking restlessly up and down. Now he kicked the fire-irons with a clatter as he passed the hearth; now he paused and flung open the window; now he lit his pipe — she heard the scrape of the match, and the first long puff. He passed into sight again, and stopped dead, staring at nothing, with his hands in his pockets, the newly lit pipe hanging down from one corner of his mouth, unsmoked; he seemed to have forgotten it. For perhaps ten minutes he stood thus, perfectly motionless, frowning absently at the wall; and Eva, watching him with the eye of a hawk, thought to herself that his soul was as plainly absent from his body, and cruising about by itself in imaginary regions, as if its wanderings had been visible.

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She was not alarmed when he sat down, and laid his face on his arms, with a tremendous sigh ; but when he got up again, and deliberately knocked his head against the mantelpiece, using a very audible and rather ugly word, she fidgeted, and moved her hand towards the lock. He sat down again immediately, however, re-lit his pipe, and commenced smoking furiously ; and in about a quarter of an hour Eva had the satisfaction of seeing him take up his pen and begin to write at railway speed.

“ I’ll have to type all that for him when we get back to town, to judge by the rate he’s scribbling at,” she observed regretfully, as she got up from her uncomfortable position, and took a book out of the locker to read.

Terry came home by-and-by with the report that rain seemed threatening, but had not come down yet ; and the two sat together in the bedroom talking quietly.

“ A great event occurred when I was out,” observed Terry. “ I saw a man.”

“ Did you ? a cyclist ? ”

“ No, nor a gamekeeper ; a tramp, I should think. He was a good way off, in the heather ;

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I could only see that he was very rascally and unkempt-looking, with a big black beard. He seemed to be going up this way; did you see him?"

"I think you'd much better not take those long walks by yourself. No, I did not; I've been watching Stuart all morning."

The rest of the day was passed by the two women in reading, gossiping, and strolling about the road near the house, looking for bilberries. Stuart never lifted his head from his writing, and could hardly be persuaded to drink the cup of strong soup Eva placed by his elbow at dinner time. All the afternoon he wrote steadily on; but at sunset he put his pen away, and proposed a walk down to the river for watercress.

"I want to blow the cobwebs away," he said briefly. He was very silent and unsociable while they were out, picked quite as much poisonous water-parsnip as cress, and never seemed to notice the strange wild glory of the stormy-looking sunset.

"He is always like this when the writing fever is on him," explained Eva, as she and Terry followed back to the house, "and you

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mustn't be surprised if he is a little cross for the next day or so."

The warning was timely. Stuart went into something very like a rage when he reached the cottage kitchen ; his *scenario* was not to be found, and he was quite certain that he had left it on the table.

"Of couse I *can* do without it now, but I had n't finished with it," he declared pettishly. "I never saw such a place for losing things. Eva, you've been tidying, you *know* you have!"

"I have not," declared Eva. "You were the last to leave the house."

"Both window and door are open ; it may have blown out," suggested Terry.

"It couldn't ; there's not a breath of wind. It's a most mysterious thing ; one would think the paper had been bewitched away."

"Let me look for it ; you know I can always find your things," said Eva. Terry assisted in a thorough search ; every corner of the little cottage was ransacked, but not a trace of the paper could be found. Stuart went to bed early, in a very bad humour, declaring that he did not particularly want the paper, but that the loss of

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it had put him out of tune, and he could write no more that night.

Terry was tired, and slept soundly ; but Eva, who had caught something of her husband's excitement over the new book, woke up restlessly every hour. During one of these fitful awakenings, a strange faint noise crept to her ears from outside the cottage ; a low, purring, crackling sound, that cut the intense stillness of the mountain night with a distinct rivulet of life. But *what* life ? and why did her heart feel suddenly chilled, and her spine creep as if with trickling drops of water, when she lifted up her head to listen ?

It grew slowly louder ; the crackling rose to snapping, and the purr broadened into a roar. A faint, pungent smell began to fill the air ; a light that was too red for dawn stole into the dark.

Eva sprang from her bed with a cry.

“ Fire, fire ! ”

CHAPTER XIII

SMOKE was curling in through the open window, and little fiery flakes spangled the darkness outside its panes.

Eva flung a blanket about her shoulders and rushed into the kitchen, where she met Stuart, a weird figure in scarlet sleeping-suit and long, upstanding hair, running in from his out-door dormitory.

"Hurry up and get out in front!" he cried. "Throw some of your clothes through the window, and tell Terry not to stop and dress; you're in no danger, but your things may be burned up."

Terry, strangely clad in a coloured quilt, with all her short, wavy hair falling loose about her face, came out of the bedroom as he spoke.

"Where has it caught?" she asked. "I don't see any fire; it's all outside."

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“Hurry, hurry ; get out, and don’t stand talking,” ordered Stuart, snatching up an armful of dresses and shoes, and flinging them over the threshold of the front door. “It *has* caught from outside ; I don’t understand how. Get on more clothes when you’re out of the way of the fire, and help me to carry water.”

Eva stopped for an instant to roll a couple of small tin tubs out at the door, and then ran after them herself. Out in the still, damp night, on the patch of grass that fronted the cottage, the two women huddled into their clothes, and ran down to the stream, carrying the tubs. Stuart was already busy flinging pail after pail of water on the blazing thatch and over the lean-to pigsty, where the fire seemed to have begun. He looked like a demon out of *Faust* as he fought the flames in his scarlet garments, with smoke-blackened features and eyes that shone out startlingly from their dark surroundings. No one spoke ; the work was too hard and too anxious for that. The flames roared like a gale of wind ; the thatch crackled ; the water hissed as it fell every now and then in feeble bucketfuls upon the blazing mass. Straws and bits of

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paper lying near the cottage were caught in the eddying draught of air and sucked up by the fire. The thatch was very thick, and blazed steadily; a quarter of an hour's hard work with buckets and pails failed to diminish the flame in the least.

"I'm afraid it's no go," called out Stuart at last, dropping his bucket with a rattle. "We might as well work with teaspoons. Knock off, you two; it's no use fagging yourselves for nothing. The cottage must go."

But before Eva could reply a sudden peal of thunder ripped up the sky above their heads, rattling away into range after range of distant hills. And as the roar died out, a straight sheet of rain dropped down from the starless black overhead, and hissed upon the burning roof like a hundred engines letting off steam. Stuart, Eva, and Terry were wet through in half a minute; and the fire — which had not been a tremendous one after all, never having caught the walls or the rafters — flickered, sank, and died out almost at once. The rain, which was tropical in its violence, still hammered down upon the dry earth and baked rocks, and dripped

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steadily in long black streams off the charred roof. It became imperative to seek shelter ; so the three amateur firemen gathered up their clothes, and hurried into the cottage.

There had not been any damage to speak of after all. The pigsty was a little scorched on the outside, and its thatch was all burned off ; and as to the roof of the cottage, there was not a straw left on it. But the boards and rafters underneath were strong and new, and the rain was stopping ; it seemed as if the rest of the night might be spent in comfort, without fear of any further riot on the part of unruly elements. That was what Eva said, at all events ; and when Stuart told her she was talking Daily-Telegraphese, she was too cold, and too thankful for the shelter of the house at last, to think of a suitable retort.

“ Go and take your wet clothes off at once, you two,” said the master of the house, “ while I build up a good fire in the kitchen. We ’ll have something hot to drink, and then you can get to bed again.”

He was piling up turf as he spoke, and looking for some cooking utensil to do duty instead

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of the kettle, which, during the excitement of the last half-hour, he had allowed to sail away down stream. The sods burned merrily soon, and made a comfortable glow for the two half-frozen women, who crouched on the hearth close by the flames, their tired faces whitened by the cold glimmer of dawn that was stealing in through the windows.

"Now," said Stuart, busy brewing whiskey punch, "let's try and make out, if we can, where the fire came from; it won't do to have a repetition of this. It is really the merest chance that the smoke did not stupefy us all in our beds; and in that case, of course, we should have been roasted alive."

"I can't understand it," said Eva, leaning her head against the ingle-nook. "The fire in the kitchen was dead out when we went to bed."

"Yes, and even if it had n't been it could not have lit the thatch," said Terry.

Stuart paused in the act of mixing his punch.

"It's very odd," he observed musingly. "I don't see how, or why, anyone could have deliberately set the place on fire, and yet —"

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“Terry, that tramp!” exclaimed Eva. “Do you remember? You said you saw an odd-looking man wandering about yesterday afternoon, but afterwards we were all so busy hunting for that paper of Stuart’s that no one thought any more about it. Do you think he could have been a burglar, and set the thatch on fire to chase us out and take anything there was?”

“My dear Eva, drink up your punch and go to bed, and don’t talk nonsense!” said her husband. “No, it won’t go to your head, and it won’t make you sick; you both want it after that wetting, and the chill you have got. Really, Eva, your burglar must be a very determined sort of person if he wandered up into these mountain fastnesses, and set fire to the cottage, with the object of stealing our basket chairs and willow-pattern plates!”

“All the same,” said Terry, thoughtfully, “the thatch must have been lit from the outside. It began at the pigsty, didn’t it?—or the ‘annexe bedroom,’ as you call it. Did you hear nothing?”

“Don’t think so; I was sleeping very soundly.

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Oh, yes ; I did wake up once and hear some scuffling, but it might have been a sheep."

"Will you come out and look round?" asked Terry, eagerly. She loved excitement, and this matter began to grow interesting. "There ought to be footsteps somewhere at the back ; the stream keeps the earth always moist there."

"All right," said Stuart, opening the back door and peering out into the rosy-white dawn. "There's plenty of light now, and the rain has stopped."

They went out to the back of the cottage, almost too preoccupied with their search to note the sweet fresh scent of the wet grass and heather, or the cold current of sunrise wind that swept across the moor, and scattered the rose-lit water-drops in showers from the gorse.

"Under the wall—look there, Stuart," directed Terry. "The rain did not last long enough to wash out any marks your 'sheep' may have left."

Stuart bent his tangled yellow head close to the ground, and lifted it up again suddenly, with an exclamation.

"By Jove, Terry, you're right! Look here!"

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He pointed to an unmistakable footmark on the soft earth beside the wall; the print of a heavy foot, thickly nailed.

"Someone *has* been here. That's not my boot; it's two sizes larger. Come over and look at it, Miss Sherlock Holmes."

Terry knelt down beside the footprint, and examined it in silence. Then she rose, and stood looking at it, with clasped hands.

"Well — what's the result?" asked Stuart, impatiently.

"It was no tramp, at all events," answered Terry. "That's a gentleman's shooting-boot. He must have been standing quite close to the pigsty wall. And . . . look here."

She held out a couple of half-burnt matches, which she had picked up from the ground.

"Could anyone have been lighting a pipe or cigar in the shelter of the wall?" suggested Stuart, chewing his moustache thoughtfully.

"Not with the wind blowing straight on it. Come here a minute, Stuart."

She pointed to two more prints in the earth, which had escaped her cousin's notice at first. They were only half footmarks, as it were; the

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heel was not visible at all, and the toe was deeply pressed into the ground.

"He has stood here on tiptoe. If he were two or three inches taller than I am, he could just about have reached the thatch with one hand, standing in that way."

"Well — what do you think of it all?"

"I think . . . I don't know what to think. It looks very strange, and I don't exactly like it."

The misty white dawn had filled the valley like a sea; the strangely jumbled purple peaks beyond were flushing lava-red. A silence fell on the two figures standing by the cottage wall; Terry turned her head to look down the long hollow of the hills that lay to the left, and Stuart seemed to be listening to the whistle of the wind among the piles of granite rock beside the stream.

Fear walks abroad more openly in the lonely hours when day is looking silently down upon a sleeping world, than in the darkness of midnight, for it is in those hours that life and strength are at their lowest ebb. Death takes most victims then; despair clutches most

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strongly at the hearts of hunted creatures, brute or human; and strange fears lurking in dim corners of the mind look worse than in the kindly darkness that half hides their ugliness. Neither Terry nor Stuart spoke again, until a step on the grass made them both turn sharply round.

It was Eva. Her face was white, her eyes wide open, and her lips had fallen apart. She clutched her husband's arm with a grip of iron, and whispered, looking nervously about:—

“Stuart, I've heard all you two said. I don't like it—I don't like it! Let's go away, dear, to-day; I'm frightened. Oh, Stuart, don't stay! Do you remember that tree laid across the road? There's something wrong. *There's death in the air!*”

She broke down, and began to sob bitterly.

The sight recalled her husband to himself. Nothing inclines a man so much to disbelieve his own fears as the sight of a woman giving way to the very same apprehensions. Stuart simply lifted his wife up in his arms, and carried her into the cottage.

“You are a silly little woman,” he said,

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gently enough. "You've been upset by the fire and the fuss, and you're ready to scream at your own shadow. Never mind Terry's nonsense; go to bed and have a good sleep. I'll do all the cooking and everything this morning, and you needn't get up. No, Eva, I'm not going to talk; you're frightened and hysterical, and you must try and go to sleep. If you get up, or say another word, I'll make you drink all the whiskey that's left in the bottle, and then I rather fancy you'll have to stay where you are!"

He shut the door of the bedroom, and went back to his cousin.

"Come in, Terry," he said. "Don't bother any more about the footsteps and the matches, and all the rest of it. Ten to one it was nothing but a gamekeeper from Luggela, tramping to Roundwood, and trying to look in at the windows and see what idiot had taken this cottage. He's sure to have been smoking, and I suppose that's what did the mischief."

"But —" began Terry, doubtfully.

"Now, my dear girl, don't begin theorizing again," said Stuart, rather shortly. "I don't

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want to think about that, or anything else but my book; can't you see how all this sort of thing puts me off? I'm going to lie down before the fire here, and try to get some sleep; and I would recommend you to go off and do the same. I'll send for a thatcher this afternoon, and we'll have the place all right by to-morrow. As to going away because the thatch happened to catch a spark — I hope you'll try and put Eva off *that* silly notion. It would be the ruin of my work if I moved back to town now."

CHAPTER XIV

"MAY I have the loan of your bicycle?" asked Terry.

The morning sunshine had grown hot and clear; breakfast was long over, and Stuart had settled down to work under the shelter of the turf stack behind the house. Eva, who still looked a little pale and worried, though the incident of the fire was now some days old, was lying on her bed reading.

"What do you want it for?" she asked in reply, somewhat doubtfully. "I don't mind lending it, of course, but you know you only learned to ride it last week, and you can't be very safe among these stiff gradients yet."

"Oh, nothing in particular," said Terry, with a rather elaborate air of carelessness. Then, suddenly changing her manner, she pulled a letter from her pocket, and held it out.

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"Only to post this at Laragh," she said, simple candour beaming from every feature. "Just a line to Maggie Verner; I haven't heard from her lately."

"Can't you let Stuart ride down to Roundwood with it to-night? he is going to fetch me up some flour."

"No I'd like to have the ride. I can manage it well enough; I could walk the distance if I had to, and I'll jam on the brake whenever there's a down-hill."

"You will have to walk most of the way home."

"I don't care; I would like the tramp very well. May I have the machine?"

"Yes, if you don't kill yourself with it. Good-bye; good luck."

"Only *au revoir*; there's no young Lochinvar waiting for me round the corner," said Terry, gaily, as she went out. Eva noticed rather sleepily that her cheeks were brilliantly pink, and her eyes as bright as the pools of the trout-stream outside; also that she had put on a certain dainty bluebell-colored blouse that had not seen the light since she came to the cottage.

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But the morning was too hot, and the hum of the wild bees in the grass too sleepy-sounding, for keen observation to be desirable. Eva sank lazily back into the warm whiteness of the pillows, and closed her eyes.

After an hour or so Stuart's head was thrust in through the window, and a scented bunch of golden trefoil flew right into the sleeper's face.

"Wake up!" came from the head that now obscured the little square of light. "It's absolutely wicked to be asleep in the house at mid-day, when you might just as well be taking the good of the air out here. Come on, Eva; I want you. How slowly you get up! one would think there were yards and yards of you. I could n't imagine where you had gone to; I was just speculating as to whether it was time to go and drag the washhand basins for you, when I discovered you *asleep, indoors!*" — with a fine touch of scorn.

"What do you want?" asked Eva, coming out with her hat in her hand.

"I want you; come along like a good little cat, and bring your knitting or something that's soothing to look at — and fill the dinner-basket;

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I mean to sit and write in that odd little gorge that runs away from the road a bit beyond us; and we won't be back till four or five o'clock."

"I have it ready," said Eva, slinging the strap of the basket round her husband's neck. "Are you getting on well?"

"Yes — no — I don't know. It's too recently written for me to tell; one wants to get far enough off to reach one's proper focus before one can judge. I'll tell you the day after to-morrow. Where's Terry gone?"

"Off to Laragh to post a letter, she says. She seemed rather odd in her manner; I could not quite make her out. I almost think — but that's impossible."

"Who was the letter to?" asked Stuart, curiously.

"Maggie Verner. You know you brought up one from her this morning."

"Verner — Verner" — mused Stuart — "Oh, sister of Dr. Craven's, is n't she? Well, Terry seemed in pretty high feather over the letter."

"She told me Mrs. Verner was at Greystones, and when I asked her what the news was, she only said Dr. Craven was there, and had met

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an old friend yesterday or the day before, and that they had gone off to look for lodgings in some village or other, telling her they meant to spend a few days fishing in Wicklow."

"How you do confuse your pronouns! Now, I would like to know who the friend was. . . . or is it Craven, maybe? Terry is a great flame of his. But it's no business of ours, anyhow."

"Not a bit," agreed Eva, who had been thinking of nothing else all morning. She liked the little doctor, and was hoping against hope that Terry's behaviour might augur good to him.

They walked along silently until the gorge of which Stuart had spoken was reached. It was a curious place, more like a little *cañon* than anything else. The sides were very steep and rocky, — almost perpendicular, in fact, — and hung all over with pendent tufts of plummy fern, and trails of star-blossomed creeper. The bottom was marshy, but a few feet up there was a little plateau carpeted deeply with fine emerald grass, and sown with rose-coloured saxifrage, yellow trefoil, and white scented orchis. A few flat-topped boulders lay among the flowers; they had evidently fallen at various periods

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from the top of the *crevasse*, where stones of every size lay jumbled about the brink.

Having entered this secluded spot by an easy natural pathway that sloped down from the level tableland above, Stuart ensconced himself comfortably in a cool corner, with his back against a big stone, not forgetting first to uproot several cushions of moss, and make an easy seat for Eva, some few feet away.

"I won't have you within reading distance, *petite*," he said amiably, flattening down her pretty coils of hair with a heavy-handed caress, after the manner of man all the world over (was there ever a male creature who did not think that a woman's head should be stroked in exactly the same way as a dog's?) "I know you *would n't* read over my shoulder as I wrote, but the very idea that you were within eye-shot would put me out. Just sit and crochet, and wander about as you like; only don't go away too far, and don't speak to me, or else I'll kill you!"

"Very well," said Eva, smilingly, taking her seat.

All the rest of the morning Stuart wrote on

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industriously, pausing for only a minute to bolt a sandwich and a tin mugful of water by way of dinner. Eva mentally calculated the amount of cold meat in the cottage, and resolved to have "high tea" in the evening; her husband's irregularity in the way of meals during these red-hot fits of writing always worried her. The afternoon crept on; she was tired of knitting, and she had finished her books and papers. She got up quietly, and crept towards the end of the gorge.

"Eva!" said Stuart, in a low, preoccupied tone — "don't go. I want you. Just lie down on that patch of grass over there for a minute, — quite flat, — throw your head back, and fling your arms out, and try and look *dead*. My heroine has been murdered, and I want the picture to help me. Pull down your hair, and let it loose on the grass. All right; stay that way for a little. . . . I think you may get up now. Do you feel stiff?"

"No."

"Then you can help me with something else. Stand up and listen."

"What to?" asked Eva, ungrammatically.

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"Oh, I don't know — anything — the bees, the wind — only listen awfully hard; think there are hoofs on the road, a long way off, and you are listening to hear what they are — you're expecting a message, you know — oh, good! that's it — keep that way, so that I can look at you now and then; it helps me to think."

"That was good acting," he said by-and-by, suspending his busy pen. "I don't want you to do any more. Really, one would have thought you *did* hear something!"

"So I did," answered Eva, looking rather thoughtful. "I was trying to make out what it was. It sounded — it sounded like someone laughing, very low and softly; but it wasn't a *nice* sort of laugh."

"Fancy — fancy," said Stuart, burying himself in his manuscript. Eva, released from her part of literary lay-figure, — one by no means unfamiliar to her, — wandered off down the gorge again, and began making a bouquet of the wild-flowers that hung from every crevice of the rocks. She meant to weave them into a coronet for Terry's hair; both of them had fallen into the habit of wearing bracelets,

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wreaths, or necklaces of flowers now and then, half for pure love of the blossoms, and half out of liking for the unconventionality of the adornment. Stuart delighted in it too, though he did not extend the idea to himself. In his first enthusiasm for country simplicity, he had been very anxious for Eva to walk about without shoes or stockings, and had even gone so far as to dispense with those fetters of civilisation himself for a day or two. But, finding at the end of this time that his mountain wanderings were sadly restricted by the loss of his boots, — since a bed of stones in the road was a terror to be carefully skirted round, a single step in the heather provocative of pricks and scratches, and a stroll up the bed of the stream limping and hobbling misery, — he silently gave up the struggle, and returned to his sturdy brown leather, and warm heather wool.

Sitting in a bed of crude green sorrel leaves, a few of which she was slowly eating as she worked, Eva twisted her yellow irises, with their lance-like leaves, into as pretty a crown as ever graced the head of ancient wood-nymph. Then she rose, and began shaking her skirts

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free of litter, her eyes wandering down to the open end of the gorge, and her lips absently humming a mournful little song, as one often may do when happy and unoccupied in mind.

“‘O, waly O! but love is bonnie
A little while when it is new,’”

she sang; “If I had only a foot or two of bouquet wire, I could have made a better thing of this. I wonder how Stuart is getting on —

“‘But it grows old, and waxes cold,
And fades away like morning dew.’”

I think I had better go back and — oh! what was that?”

She dropped her flowers, and flew back along the gorge, her heart beating as if it would choke her. A rattling crash from Stuart’s end of the glen had struck her ear,—a huge dull thud, followed by a sudden cry,—then silence.

The sight that met her eyes when she turned the corner caused her for an instant to stagger back against the rock, and catch at it for support. A great stone had fallen from the edge of the glen upon the little plateau where her husband was seated, and had rolled off

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again into the marshy ground below, knocking him over as it went, and half burying him in a shower of loose earth and pebbles. He lay almost over the edge of the plateau, his eyes half shut, and his head drooping backwards. His mouth was gaping horribly open, and blood dripped slowly from a cut on his forehead.

Eva was on her knees beside him in an instant, tearing at the loose earth and stones, and choking back the screams that rose to her lips, for fear she might not have strength enough to lift the *débris* away in time. She feared — she did not dare to think what, his face was so still and white.

At last — at last — all cleared away, and her husband's form fully visible! No more blood, thank God! but what was wrong with his leg? was it broken? it lay under his body at a terrible angle; and he had not yet recovered consciousness. She dashed water in his face from the marshy pool below; she felt his heart. Yes, it was beating; but how to move him? How could he ever be brought up to the house?

She burst into wild tears of fright, sobbing and wailing until the rocky sides of the lonely

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gorge caught the sounds, and echoed them mockingly back again. She ran up to the top of the glen, and looked around the great empty sweep of heather hills. Not a living creature in sight, save the fierce black-faced sheep and the whistling plover. "Phew, phew!" the birds called mockingly as they flitted above her head. Eva hated the plover-cry all her life after that day.

When she ran back again, she found that her husband had opened his eyes. He was very pale, and evidently in great suffering, but quite able to speak.

"I'm not dangerously hurt, I think," he said, "but I can't move; this leg is a good deal damaged. Eva, you must take my bicycle, and ride to Roundwood for a doctor; there may be one in the neighbourhood. Give me the shawl you brought out, and help me into this corner; I will stay till you come back."

"Oh, Stuart! can't I get you up to the house in any way?"

"I have no doubt, if we lived in a novel, that you would carry me up on your back," said her husband, trying rather feebly to jest, with

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lips that were ashen-grey. "As it is, you can only do what I said."

"But why do you want to be moved? it will hurt you terribly; and you are quite well where you are!" entreated Eva.

"Will you do what I tell you?" said Stuart, rather sharply. "It's only a couple of yards. Take me under the arms, and pull back when I move."

Eva, inwardly protesting at the apparently useless suffering involved, did as he requested, and succeeded in moving him into a sheltered corner of the glen.

"Now go," he said, rather faintly, when the shock of the removal was past. "I am all right. Take care of yourself, little girl, and don't ride too fast; more haste, worse speed."

Eva ran down the glen, and disappeared round the corner panting and sobbing, but in full possession of all her nerve and courage nevertheless.

The moment she was out of sight her husband pulled a revolver from his pocket, examined the chambers, cocked it, and looked warily up at the verge of the glen.

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“Thank God, she suspects nothing,” he murmured to himself. “But I saw the face — I can’t be mistaken.”

He fixed his eyes on the sky-line, and watched, praying wordlessly but fervently the while that the pain of his thigh might not overcome his senses. Never in all his life had he needed them more.

And while he was watching the line of rock and heather above, a dark shadow crept slowly and noiselessly round the corner of the glen from below.

CHAPTER XV

STUART sat up in his corner, his back braced against the rock, and kept his eyes fixed on the opposite verge of the ravine, some thirty feet above his head. When the stone had fallen past him, a few minutes before, there had been no time for more than a half-spring to one side, before the accompanying mass of rocks and earth struck him down; yet in that instant he had seen — so clearly as to leave no possible doubt about the matter — a fierce head above the rock, and a pair of hands stretched out in a way that spoke unmistakably of deliberate intent in the overthrow. The moment he fully recovered his senses, his mind flew back with telegraph speed along the events of the last few weeks, and pieced them together by the lurid illumination of the deed that had just been attempted. All became plain to him in a few moments, although logical proof there was really none. The

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apparently trivial incidents of the blocked-up road, the fired thatch, the stolen paper, at once became links of the same chain, and he understood that Alfred Moore, mad either with rage and jealousy, or with true mania, had been on his track for weeks, and was there above his head now in the gathering twilight, bent upon sending his soul back to its Maker before the great earth had swung an hour further on in its pathway through eternity.

Drowning is not the only form of imminent death that wakes up long-buried memories, and calls out strange incongruities of thought. All sorts of recollections and images flashed through Stuart Rivington's mind as he sat against the rock, his teeth set in a hard close grin that bristled his moustache out like the hairs on the lip of a fighting dog, his revolver tight clenched in his hand. The night that Lallie died — why should that rush into his memory now? Lallie was in heaven these ten years, poor little soft-haired lassie — the only woman he had ever looked at, before Eva came to teach him how he *could* love. She had died, — died in the evening, when a stormy yellow

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sunset was growing pale low down among wild grey clouds in the west,— and Stuart Rivington, only a street or two away, had heard the news, and sat by his attic window half the night, listening to the stormy winds that were crying up and down the lonely darkness, and lashing the autumn boughs with gusts of fierce rain. In the great emotions of life we go back of necessity to simple and primitive forms of thought; that evening Stuart's only conscious feeling had been an empty ache of sadness for the childish soul swept up to heaven in the storm of such a wild wet night; he had fancied her voice sounded in every wail of the wind, and the shriek of the tortured trees fell on his overstrained senses like a song of cruel triumph over that little bit of earth's gladness and sunlight swept out alone into the darkness of eternity.

All this rushed back upon his mind in the dew-scented twilight of the mountain glen, even while he glanced yet again at his revolver to make sure that all the chambers were loaded. Was it not likely, in very truth, that *his* soul would make that lonely rush up to the stars

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within a few minutes? that long before any help had arrived from the village, Ireland and Europe, and the world on whose broad bosom they lay, would be nothing but one tiny fleck of fire in a huge eternity of darkness, surrounded above and below by the awful endlessness of infinite space — while *he* —

Rivington set his teeth a little closer and stroked the trigger of his revolver.

“Not yet, if I can help it,” he said to himself. “I’m not afraid to die, thank God; but Death is an uncommonly ugly fellow when he shoves his face right into yours like this. Looks as if I hadn’t much chance, crippled this way, but I’ll let daylight into the beggar if I can, at least.”

A faint rustle in the grass caught his preternaturally sharpened ears. It might have been a bat alighting, or a frog hopping out of the marsh, or a water-rat taking a short cut home. But Stuart knew it was none of these, and turned his head and hand round as sharply as a wild cat. None too soon! Alfred Moore’s ragged and unkempt form stood out in the faint red glow of the sunset, crawling stealthily

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towards him, only twenty paces down the glen.

"If you come a step nearer, I'll drill half a dozen holes in you," observed Stuart.

Moore moved a little to one side, and inspected the other with horrible coolness. He was torn and sunburned like any gipsy tramp, and his hair hung down to his coat-collar; but he spoke with studied restraint and elegance.

"Oh, no, Stuart Rivington, you won't do anything of the kind," he said. "In the first place, it might be very awkward for you. Who is to prove you did not murder me, if you shoot me? We are quite alone up here, and if you did n't kill me outright, I should make a point of testifying to 'wilful murder' with my dying breath. You would not like to be hung by the neck till you were dead, my dear Rivington. Besides, you're a very bad shot, you know, though you do carry your shooting-iron about, and practise on bottles and bits of paper."

"What do you mean by all this tomfoolery?" demanded Rivington, rather wrathfully. He could not make up his mind whether the man

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was mad or not. Moore's next speech, however, settled that question.

"I mean to kill you," he said, quite pleasantly. "It is necessary, I'm afraid, although it is a difficult thing to do in a really safe manner. You see, you stole my brains somehow or other, — I've not been able to make out the rights of that yet, — and you put them all into a plot, and kept it in a sealed envelope. Then I had no brains, — that is quite clear, — and I couldn't write when I tried, which was dreadfully annoying. You've no idea how annoying, unless you felt it yourself — and then, they sit in dark corners of the room, and you see their eyes, though your own are tight, tight shut; and they come nearer and nearer, nearer and nearer to you, until — oh, what I meant to say was, you took all my brains away, but I got them back, through the window, when you were out. And now I must get yours, you know; that is only fair, and things that are equal to the same thing are always equal to the right-angled triangle of a —" He paused just for an instant, and then went on glibly.

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"She won't marry me till I do, but there's no difficulty about that now. Of course you must be dead before I can get your brains, and I do not exactly like the idea of killing anyone. But when I came to think it out, I understood that a thing is only wrong when you believe it so. Right and wrong are purely subjective phenomena, you know; and I knew that I could kill you without really minding it at all; so that made it all right. I hope I'm making myself perfectly clear?" he asked, with somewhat anxious politeness. Then, without pausing for an answer — "Of course, I had rather it had been a simple, obvious-looking accident, because I must be careful, very careful — I don't want either to be hanged by the neck till I am dead; they would never give me time to explain. But this is as well as I can manage it now. I see that you are unable to get up, but I'm afraid your injuries are not of a mortal nature. You will excuse me if I see about setting that matter right at once."

He bowed, and went calmly back down the glen. Stuart levelled his weapon to shoot, but lowered it again. Was it not perfectly true

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that he might be accused of murder if he killed this wretched lunatic? Who was to prove the story he would tell?

In another minute he cursed his own indecision.

"Better be tried for murder than be murdered myself!" he said. "I'll fire next time I see him. I wish to heaven I was a decent shot!"

Almost as he spoke a big stone smashed down into the turf in front of him, after rebounding off the projecting rock-face above his head.

"No go!" said Stuart, grimly. "I calculated for something of that kind."

He waited, every fibre of his frame strung up to the tense steadiness that comes of instant danger. It was not long before Moore's gaunt form appeared against the sky-line, on the opposite verge of the ravine. The light was getting very uncertain now, but Stuart trusted to luck, and, raising his revolver, fired on a momentary aim. He missed, fired again, missed again, and then stopped, remembering that his revolver had just six chambers, and could not be re-loaded, the cartridge-box being up at the cottage.

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Moore gave an unearthly hoot of joy, and began to dance about on the edge of the cliff; but suddenly checked himself, with the curious restraint he had displayed all through the scene. It was evident that he felt his madness, without actually realising it, and did not wish to act the undignified part of a raving lunatic. He picked up a boulder as large as a horse's head, and hurled it with amazing strength right across the ravine, where it fell at Rivington's feet. Then he sat down on a larger stone, and held tightly to it with both hands, to prevent a repetition of his former war-dance, grinning and snarling with vexation the while at the ill success of his attempt. Stuart fired his third shot, and chipped a splinter off the stone on which the maniac sat.

"Bad shot!" said Moore, contemptuously.

"If *I* had a revolver, I'd have written my name in bullets on you by now."

Stuart was conscious of a rather ill-timed sting of mortification. No man likes to be called a bad shot, even by a lunatic; and it was quite true that this other was a marvellously accurate hand with the revolver. He took very careful

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aim while Moore was bending down for another stone, and pulled the trigger again. The cartridge missed fire; and this incident annoyed him so much as to send his next shot quite wide of the mark. Only one was now left, and he resolved to keep that for the last extremity.

Down in the ravine the gloaming had already gathered; but at the summit, the after-glow of a rosy sunset flung into strong relief the long black figure of Alfred Moore, as he paused for a moment with his arms clasped round a second great stone, and grinned down at the helpless figure of his victim. Little curdled flakes of creamy gold sailed high above his head in the faded blue; poppy-red breakers of sunset cloud swept across the sky behind him; a belated wood-pigeon, its crop full of unlawful peas, called out a pleasant "koo-kurroo!" as it steered for the grove of pines that lay below. If Stuart had been capable of noticing irrelevant matters, he would probably have admired the artistic contrast between the peaceful beauty of the scene, and the red-hot struggle for life that was proceeding in the midst of it. But, as

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things had fallen out, his attention was fully occupied with purely personal details.

He fired his last shot, and hit. Alfred Moore dropped the stone he was holding, with a loud "How-ow!" and began shaking his left arm, from which the blood dropped slowly, trickling down the fingers. He seated himself on the ground, and began to examine his wound. It was not apparently serious, for he twisted the coat-sleeve tightly over it, fastened it down with a pin, and rose almost immediately.

"I shall make sure of you this time," he said loudly. "I should have thought a man of your logical capabilities would have understood the necessities of the case without all this discussion. I intend to take a stone in each hand, and come down with them myself by the nearest way. It is rather risky, but I am not myself to-day, — rather often I'm not myself, and naturally I'm not so careful of another man as I would be of Alfred Moore, — so I don't mind making the attempt. Do you know, that's what has bothered me all along; I could not always make out who I was, after you took my brains away; and it was really embarrassing

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sometimes. She gave me a kiss before I went back to the station, and I did n't enjoy it a bit, because it was not I who got it at all. And when I try to think it out, there are all sorts of odd fireworks in my eyes, — enough to make your head ache, — so I go and have a drink, and then I don't care who I am."

He was walking round the top of the glen as he spoke, with a heavy stone in each hand. Stuart did not know what was coming next, but he did know that his revolver was empty, that he was crippled, and that the end could only be a matter of minutes now. The high-strung nervous temperament may stumble over small matters, but it never fails to answer to the spur of urgent necessity. Stuart Rivington gave a last look at the dappled fire of the evening sky, a single sharp sigh for the glorious young life that must so soon be struck out into darkness, and faced his fate like a man.

"God take care of Eva!" were the words on his lips, as a black indefinite mass hurtled down from the cliff above, and fell almost across his feet.

A soft, sickening crack mingled with the

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thud of the fallen body, and then in an instant followed deathly silence. Stuart's half-bewildered senses told him that Alfred Moore was lying at his feet, skull shattered in on the boulder he had thrown down a few minutes before; but realisation came slowly, and it was some time before he fully understood what had happened. Then he comprehended that the maniac had actually leaped down from the edge of the cliff, with some wild notion of taking him unawares, and ending his life with the stone that was still fiercely clutched by the dead hand. Moore's skull was literally split in two; the white edges of bone gleamed horribly among the brown hair, and the blood rushed out through the matted locks, gluing them together, and darkening all the grass about the shattered head.

The gloaming deepened in the narrow glen, and gathered into dark; the little owls came out from the wood, and whistled eerily through the impenetrable blackness of the moonless August night. The wounded man and the dead lay together, and no sound of human help came up from the empty valley below.

CHAPTER XVI

AND what about Terry? how had she been spending the long hot day that had brought such dire events in its train, up here at the solitary cottage?

Terry, as Eva vaguely surmised, had not started for Laragh without a more definite object than the posting of her letter to Mrs. Verner. The letter was indeed lying in her pocket,—a commonplace epistle enough, asking no questions, and giving little news,—but it was not exactly with the idea of impressing the local postmistress by means of her Dublin finery that Miss O'Connell had taken such pains with her toilet that morning. Perhaps a sentence in the letter she had received from her friend might have had something to do with the matter.

“Dear Harold is looking so much better since he came down here,” the letter ran. “He is staying at the big hotel, but intends leaving

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almost at once for some fishing place in County Wicklow, near where you are staying; he has met an old friend here, — Mr. Elliot Ritchie, just home from a long stay on the Continent, — and I think they mean to persuade some Dublin man to join them, I don't quite know who, and go up into the mountains for some fishing."

"Where do people generally stay when they come fishing about here?" pondered Terry. "I don't know what sort of fish they get, or where they get them, and I hardly like to ask, Stuart is so sharp. It must be either Roundwood or Glendalough, I suppose; there is nowhere else to put up at. Well, if it's Roundwood, I am certain to hear about them from Stuart or the donkey-boy; if it's Glendalough, I shall not hear anything. I'll go down to Laragh and find out; that's only two or three miles from Glendalough, and I can go on if necessary."

Terry knew every road and glen of importance in the whole county almost as well as her cousin; her industrious sketching excursions, taken hitherto on an antiquated tricycle, having introduced her to many almost unbeaten

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tracks. She had therefore no fear of losing her way, as she steered the tricky steed lent her by Eva down the mountain road, and began her journey. By dint of putting the brake on liberally wherever the downward gradient grew too steep, she kept the speed within the limits of her erratic steering; and the sinfulness of tearing a new fifty-shilling tire into rags by this method did not trouble her, because she did not know anything at all about it.

When she reached lazy little Laragh, she posted her letter, and contrived to obtain a passable view of herself in a small dark shop-window. The rather indistinct picture given back by the shadowed panes was a pleasing one, — a dazzle of white and blue, and loosely curling brown hair, and wind-shaken draperies winding about a small graceful figure, resting against the glittering handlebar of its steed. Terry smiled a little to herself as she prepared to mount again, by the simple process of leaning against a wall and pushing off.

“Thank heaven, I was n’t born into the generation that classed women of thirty as old maids, and made them dress in grey print and

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black bombazine," she thought. "A woman's real life doesn't generally begin much before twenty-three nowadays, whereas long ago all the romantic adventures and great passions were reserved for young persons of sixteen or seventeen!"

Just at this period of her thoughts she became conscious of a little gentle elation, as she remembered Eva's speech of the day before, —

"You are better-looking now than you ever were, Terry. You are one of the people who develop late."

Was she, indeed? Had eight years of constant late hours, crowded dancing-rooms, and all the other wearing necessities of a busy social life, not stolen away a little of the bloom that was on her cheeks, the light that was in her eyes, in the days when Elliot Ritchie loved her? Perhaps they had; but a handsome woman is a handsome woman always, unless that fatal enemy of beauty, accumulating flesh, steps in; and she very seldom begins to "go off" before forty, though the fresh dewy loveliness of the merely pretty girl may vanish for good ten years sooner. Terry O'Connell, at

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thirty years of age, was a woman whom most men would turn their heads to look at in a crowded street; and — like every well-favoured member of her sex who ever existed outside the pages of a novel — she knew the fact. She was not of a self-analysing nature, or she might have wondered, while she flitted fast towards shadowy Glendalough, among ranging hills that opened out before her as she went, why the thought of her own fairness should give her such pleasure now, in the moment of Elliot's return, when it had once seemed hateful to her, by reason of its powerlessness to keep him at her feet. That he had come back to Ireland for her sake she did not even attempt to believe; she knew him too well. Yet the old thoughts of eight years ago, which had sent a needle-point of pain through her every time she caught sight of her own face in a glass, were now as though they had never lived. She did not argue with herself; she did not reason that Elliot Ritchie was nothing to her, and that the attractions he had so easily left behind him long ago could not bind him now that he had returned; she did not even rage, as she

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had done many and many a time in these past years, over her own folly in continuing to nurse a snake in her bosom despite its poisonous tooth. She only knew that there was yellow sunshine all through the valley, and that the hills about her were spreading out their great velvet-clad and shadow-dimpled shoulders on every side, closing in the narrow ribbon of road until all the distant world of roaring towns and chattering human creatures seemed an impossible dream of some bygone existence — that she was strong and happy, and that the pure cool breeze from the Lake of the Seven Churches was painting roses on her cheeks — that the world was a good and a happy place, and that Elliot Ritchie was somewhere among these very Wicklow hills on this very day!

By-and-by the hotel at Glendalough came into sight, a round tower peering out of dark firs behind it, a wild mountain river rippling over great boulders underneath its perky modern walls and windows. The obvious course that presented itself was to walk in and ask for the visitors' book; there was nothing extraordinary in such a request, and no one could tell whose

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name the inquirer might be seeking. But the act seemed to require an amazing amount of bravery. Terry felt more inclined now to turn and ride home again than to go into the hotel. Taking her courage in both hands, however, she entered, and made her request, unreasonably convinced, as she scanned the volume with a very warm countenance, and what she felt to be an extremely stagey smile of indifference, that the stony-eyed waiter who had attended to her knew exactly what name she was looking for.

It was not there; and Terry felt instantly justified, and mistress of the situation. She was not afraid of the waiter now. She asked for some bread and cold meat and a bottle of lemonade, parcelled them up on her bicycle, remarked that the day was fine, and the river seemed very low; and then wandered leisurely onwards to an inviting pine-wood a mile or two beyond, on the shore of the larger lake, where she sat and feasted, with a hearty enjoyment of her dinner, and a lazy delight in the scented, soft brown carpet on which she sat. It seemed a pity to go home before dusk, so she spent the

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afternoon wandering and climbing about the shores. She waked up four-syllabled echoes from the gloomy overhanging hills, whose rocky feet ran sheer down into the fathomless black water of the lake. She climbed into St. Kevin's Bed, and decided that it was not much wonder the stony-hearted saint had hurled fair Kathleen of the unholy blue eyes down into the lough when she came to call on him, since there was obviously not room for two people to sit in the cave. Then she went down to the shore again, got out her sketch-book, and became thoroughly absorbed in stocking it with dainty bits of colour, and fleeting effects of light and shade, until the diminishing lances of gold on the onyx-brown of the open water warned her that it was time to move. And then this creature of strange impulses — who had been thinking all afternoon (or so she told herself) of her sketch-book and her bicycle and her little Scotch songs, which she was humming gently as she sat in the bracken, busy with her brushes — suddenly laid her ruffled curls down on the soft mat of faded moss that dimpled beside her, and pressed both comely bronzed hands over

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her face, drawing long sighs that shook her as the sunset wind was shaking the willows on the shore.

"Oh, I am glad! Oh, I am glad!" she whispered over and over again. "I'm not going to think sensibly to-day, — I want just this one day to be silly and happy, and believe everything I like. I will not think at all — why need I? I'm happy, and O God, O God! how often are we ever happy here? Isn't that enough for once!"

She lay quite silent for a few minutes, and then got up to collect her various *impedimenta*, and start home before the light should fail.

There was a great deal of walking to be done on the way back. Terry was rather tired, too, and her arms grew weary of pushing her bicycle up the long-backed ranges of hills, so she stopped to rest fairly often. It was dark when she reached the top of the last slope, and saw the orange square of the cottage window glint out in the distance. A very few minutes' riding brought her to the door; she dismounted, leant her machine against the wall, and went in.

The sight she saw struck her dumb with

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amazement and dismay. A bright light came from the inner room, showing the figure of her cousin lying on the bed, with his wife seated in an easy-chair beside him. There was a smell of antiseptics in the air; a basin of water and some bandages were visible on the kitchen dresser, and a strange figure sat beside the little turf fire, looking into the glow of the red-hot ashes.

“What *has* happened?” asked Terry in a dismayed whisper.

“Oh, that’s you, Terry?” came a voice from the bed, rather feeble, but not in any way suggestive of immediate dissolution. “I’ve got smashed up, and Craven there has been setting me to rights; he’ll tell you all about it; he says I’d better not talk any more than I can help.”

“Dr. Craven!” exclaimed Terry, — “you up here?”

He had arisen from his seat as she spoke, and now came forward a little wearily. The lamplight fell full on his pleasant, plain face and deep-set grey eyes. Terry flushed slightly as she recognised him. Dr. Craven was gen-

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erally set down as one of her admirers, and the events of the day had made her feel peculiarly sensitive to emotional influences.

"Come out on to the . . . lawn," he said with a comical twinkle in his eyes. "I don't want to disturb my patient by talking."

They went on to the "lawn," — a patch of rough grass sentinelled all over with sturdy yellow ragweed, — and sat down on a big stone that Stuart had rolled up there for a seat.

"It wants some explaining," began the doctor, slowly punching holes in the turf with the heel of his shoe. "I'll begin at the beginning. There's no necessity now to make a secret of anything, Lord knows. You knew Alfred Moore?"

"Yes," said Terry, wondering at the change of subject.

"He's dead, poor fellow! killed himself this afternoon, not half a mile from here, after doing his best to kill your cousin. You can exclaim as much as you like. It's quite true."

He went on to indicate briefly the story of Alfred Moore's gradually acquired delusion,

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hastened at the critical point of development by his sudden descent into habits of intemperance; of his solitary journey into the mountains in pursuit of Stuart, when his madness was full upon him, yet kept in check by the cunning of the true lunatic; of the attempt he had made to crush his unoffending victim with a rock that very afternoon; of Eva's flight down the mountain side for a doctor, all unknowing as she was of the terrible struggle going on in the glen; of how she had met him walking up from Roundwood — too late, alas! — bent on finding out Alfred Moore's movements, and preventing the mischief which had actually occurred; of how he had taken the bicycle, and hurried up to the cottage as fast as he could; found the lunatic dead, and Stuart insensible; removed him to the cottage with the assistance of the donkey-cart, and had him revived and on the bed by the time Mrs. Rivington arrived.

"He was a good deal knocked about," went on the narrator, — "slight dislocation of the thigh, serious bruises, and the muscles of the leg rather badly torn. I've only just finished putting him to rights. I can tell you, Miss Terry,

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that little wife of his is a brick; no hospital nurse could have helped me better. She had everything at hand the minute I wanted it, and did exactly what I told her without a word. Poor little woman, I declare the tears were standing in her eyes most of the time. She knew it was a nasty business for him; but he did n't see her face, and she spoke to him quite cheerfully. Give me that sort of a woman, if I am to have untrained help, — why, Elliot Ritchie would n't even stay in the house; walked out here and lit a cigar. He said it gave him a headache to see unpleasant sights. Not that he was wanted."

"*Elliot Ritchie!*" replied Terry.

"Yes, he's here; came up with me; did n't I tell you that? I believe we're both going to stay for a day or two; I'm to sleep in my patient's room, and turn you and Mrs. Rivington into the kitchen, and Ritchie's greatly pleased with the notion of camping out in that extraordinary pigsty arrangement. I believe he's gone round to look at it now."

CHAPTER XVII

A SUDDEN silence followed Dr. Craven's words. Terry seemed to have lost interest in the subject of conversation. She played absently with a tall head of ragweed that stood stiffly up in the windless dusk beside her, and made no attempt to bridge over the gap that had opened in the midst of this apparently sociable interview. Dr. Craven ransacked his brain for something pleasant to say, uneasily conscious of the sudden constraint that had fallen on his companion, and certain in his own mind that he was boring her. He was always disagreeably anxious lest he should bore Terry O'Connell, whenever they met. Every remark he made sounded commonplace in his own ears, and every little interval of silence impelled him to rush in with the first sentence or idea that happened to come uppermost in his mind, lest she should take advantage of the pause to end the

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conversation. And, clear-headed man of the world though he was, he could seldom recollect more than the merest outlines of any interview or scene in which Miss O'Connell had taken part, all his energies being usually employed in the effort to make a good figure in her eyes, despite the melancholy conviction that she did not think enough about him to know whether he talked up to the high-water mark of his best or not.

It was therefore without much surprise that he saw her rise from her seat, and turn to go indoors, before his frantic grapplings in the recesses of his mind after some memorable remark had succeeded in hooking anything.

"Are you going in?" he asked, in a voice that was meant to be pleasantly indifferent, but that only contrived to be stony.

"Yes; I think I want some supper; I'm very hungry."

"Of course you must be!" exclaimed Dr. Craven, in sudden self-reproach, "and I've kept you talking out here all this time! Can't I get anything for you?" rising from the stone seat, and following her in.

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"*Hang* the man, why could n't he stay where he was?" Terry's inner consciousness remarked. Aloud, she only said:—

"Oh, I need n't trouble you. I know where everything is."

"Ritchie and I had a pretty decent feed just before you arrived; I hope we haven't cleared out everything," observed the other, anxiously, blocking up the doorway.

"Thanks, there's all I want."

"Do you know Ritchie? Mr. Rivington does, I think."

"I do—at least I used to," said Terry, coolly.

"Very decent fellow, Ritchie. He's only just come back from the Continent. Going to take a holiday in Dublin, and then go on to South America, so he tells me. His work takes him all over the world, apparently."

"Yes?"

She was sitting on a "creepy" stool by the hearth now, drinking buttermilk out of a tin mug, and looking at him very pleasantly over the rim. The doctor wondered vaguely what colour those strange eyes of hers really were, and thought, without even a scintilla of amuse-

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ment, that a pretty face looked still prettier in such a position.

"He's a clever fellow," went on Dr. Craven, feeling somewhat encouraged, "the —"

"Would you mind coming in here for a moment?" said Eva's voice from the inner room; and Terry's companion broke off at once.

"I'll be back by-and-by," he said, turning towards the bedroom. "Tell Ritchie when he comes in not to make any unnecessary noise. The fact is, Mr. Rivington has had something of a nervous shock, in addition to his injuries, and I don't want to see his temperature running up two or three degrees before morning, as it may if he is too much excited."

"Very well," said Terry, possessing herself of half a cold pie, and eating hastily, with the aid of a spoon and saucer. She was faint with hunger, but she did not wish to be found in the house when the visitor should reappear. A sudden desire for solitude had seized her, increased all the more by the occasional sounds at the back of the house, which told that Ritchie was walking about there.

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Her hasty meal finished, she snatched the blue Connemara cloak that hung on the wall, wrapped it round her, and ran out of the cottage, down the dim white streak of road that cleft its way through the indefinite shadowland of grey heather and rock lying all about the little islet of light in which the cottage stood. She was afraid to go very far away, and she did not want to sit still, so she walked up and down under the stars, now slow, now fast, feeling the darkness wrap her round like a friendly shield, and the chaos of her mind settle gradually down into quiet and order.

Into her heart, by-and-by, there crept a strong conviction, born she knew not whence, but pressing itself on her with a force that could not be denied. *It was not well that Elliot Ritchie had come back.* In spite of the throbbing joy that still caught at her throat whenever she let herself think, — in spite of the golden sunshine, not all sent down from the splendid summer blue, that had filled this long, long day, — it was not well. He had been the evil genius of her life. He had played with her heart, had given tinsel for her gold,

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and left her for another woman. Of that last she had always been certain, and vague rumours that had reached her ears long ago, had gone far to prove the truth of the conjecture. Who was that other? Where was she? Why had he not married her? and why had he now deliberately returned to Terry's neighbourhood, and accompanied Dr. Craven up to this mountain wilderness, where constant association with her was a matter of course?

Whatever these things might mean, the Paradise was broken up. The tide of the great world and its emotions had flowed even into this quiet spot; the days of peace were over.

She could not make up her mind to go back. There was an odd repulsion at work within her that seemed to chain her feet to this one stretch of road, where Elliot Ritchie was not, and keep her from approaching nearer to the cottage, where he undoubtedly was. True, she had gone down to Laragh that morning with the vague hope of meeting him, or at least hearing something about him; but then, as she told herself, only the *idea* of Elliot had been at Laragh, while the concrete reality was at the

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cottage. If she had actually believed him to be in the hotel, the chances would have been fifty to one against her going within a mile of it.

Up and down, up and down, she walked; and now the late-rising moon began to lift a silver rim above the serried line of the dark violet hills, and the ghost-like bats dipped in and out of the spreading rays, and the corn-crake that lived on the grassy slope near the stream swelled out his throat to begin his nightly litany, — “Tsake-tsake, tsake-tsake!” . . . What was that tall dark figure, crossing the moonlit grove of ragweed by the cottage? Not Stuart; he was unable to move; not Dr. Craven; he was shorter by a head than this intruder upon the solitude of the road. It was Elliot. He was coming towards her, and she must collect her wits sufficiently to speak to him.

The moonlight fell full upon his face as he advanced, tall and gaunt and hatless, his red hair making the pale features beneath still paler. A fine face, if not exactly a handsome one; strong lines, decided contours, no super-

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fluity of flesh; light eyes that looked straight out at the world with an absolute indifference to the world's return glances, warm or cold; sharply cut mouth that seemed well able to shut in its owner's secrets. A man of mark, evidently; a man to admire in certain phases of his character, certainly; a man to love? . . . Well, the man whom *some* woman cannot care for has yet to be found.

"I thought I should discover you here, Miss O'Connell," he remarked, as soon as he came within speaking distance. "Walking in the moonlight, as usual! I suppose I may come too?"

He spoke as if the summer nights of eight years ago, when they two had strolled under the moon in the high-walled garden of the O'Connells' house, were but a few weeks old. A blind, strong instinct snatched at Terry's very heart-strings while he was speaking, — an instinct that she could not understand, yet that spoke louder than reason or even passion, entreating her to answer coldly, to go back to the house, and to break the spell that held her — now, while the tide paused at the turn, and the

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one chance of breaking loose from the chain of old follies, given to every mortal once, and only once, still trembled in the balance. She hesitated an instant before her reply came; but when it reached her lips it was, —

“Certainly; I shall be very glad.”

And up and down, up and down, two figures now paced in the moonlight instead of one.

Eva Rivington, looking out of her window, saw, and gave a sigh of which she hardly knew the meaning.

“What will come of all this, I wonder?” she thought, as she moved back again to Stuart’s bedside. He was sleeping now, and she began quietly to collect the few things that she and Terry needed, and convey them into the outer room.

Dr. Craven was there, sitting in the big arm-chair, his head leaning back against its cushions. He looked decidedly tired; and Eva’s womanly little heart swelled with compassion as she thought of his long walk and hard ride, and of the steady hands and head that had done such good service that evening. Fifteen years’ hard work — ending in success

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as a brain and nerve specialist, who yet did not disdain to take a good deal of general practice as well — had left very definite traces on the doctor's quiet face. He had the thoughtful, out-looking eyes, the wise reserve, the cool self-belief, of the successful medical man; and there was also the strong tenderness that only the face of the practised doctor ever shows. No medical student, no newly fledged M.B. or M.D. owns that look. It is the development of years of constant contact with sorrow, pain, and fear, and comes only of an infinite patience with, and pity for, suffering human nature. In Harold Craven's face it was the look of one who had seen into all the dark and shameful places of the world, all the blackness and misery of the many Valleys of Shadow that hem round the gilded mountain-tops of our civilisation, and had yet found light through all, and good at the end of all.

“If I had never met Stuart, I think I should have liked to be a doctor myself,” thought Eva. “We others talk and preach and write, and invent nice, neat little bits of benevolence to perform, and try to ‘have an influence,’ and

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‘set an example,’ while *these* men — yes, and women too nowadays — go to work with head and hands, and brain and soul, just to set right the things that are wrong in the world. They carry life and death in their hands; yet they actually give away more of their time and skill than any other profession in the world. We are all chasing shadows, and feeding ourselves with dreams in these days; but men like this are *real*, through and through. One thinks of them when everything else seems selfish or artificial, and everyone seems to be living in cobwebs of mist they have woven for themselves!”

“I’m afraid this sudden incursion will rather inconvenience you, Mrs. Rivington,” observed the subject of her thoughts at this juncture.

“Not at all,” said Eva, brightly. “We are used to roughing it, you know; and after all there is much more accommodation here than one would get on an ordinary yachting trip. Miss O’Connell and I intend to hang up a couple of hammocks in this room and sleep capitally; and I’ll arrange you a shake-down beside Mr. Rivington. Do you think — is it very —”

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"Oh, no reason for serious anxiety," answered Dr. Craven, cheerfully. "I don't, you know, disguise from you the fact that your husband has had a pretty severe shock, what with the accident, and the strain of mind that came after; but I hope we'll have him all right again very soon."

"How long can you stay with us?"

"A week or so; my holiday is almost up. Ritchie can probably keep you company a good deal longer, however."

"Oh — Mr. Ritchie!" said the little hostess rather discontentedly. "He seems very gentlemanly, but I don't know much about him. Stuart appeared anxious to keep him, however."

"He's a good sort of fellow," said Dr. Craven, thoughtfully. "Very odd, but clever, and as straight as they make them . . . yes, I'm sure of that."

Eva frowned a little. There was something in the tone of the last sentence that jarred.

"I will call the others in now," she said abruptly. "It is time we were all settled down for the night; I don't want Stuart awaked again."

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT night, when everyone had gone to bed, and the two hammocks slung in the kitchen for Mrs. Rivington and Terry were only dark shadows standing out dimly in the glow of the dying fire, a whisper crept across the room.

"Terry!"

"What?"

"Why is n't Mr. Ritchie married — or *is* he?"

"No. It's not exactly a question of national importance, anyhow."

"Who was she?" persisted Eva, ignoring the indifferent tone.

"She?"

"You know what I mean perfectly well."

"I dare say I can guess," still more carelessly, but with a sudden restless twist that set the hammock swinging. "He was — not exactly

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engaged — to an English girl, ten years or so ago; and she threatened him with breach of promise — ”

“ *Oh!* ”

“Vulgar animal she must have been! So he went over to Liverpool, or wherever it was, and tried to patch things up. But she wouldn't hear of anything but his marrying her, and he didn't think that quite good enough, so she brought her action, and got several hundred pounds' damages.”

“A very discreditable affair,” commented Eva.

“I don't know that; the girl must have been a regular harpy. At all events, it disgusted him pretty thoroughly with the sex, and he went off to make railways in Africa. Then he stayed on the Continent for some years, and then he—he came back here.”

“What for?”

“How on earth should I know? A holiday or something. The Macnamaras brought him in their yacht, and Dr. Craven asked him to come up here to-day. That's all I know; I didn't put him through his catechism.”

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There was something in the air that warned Eva to steer clear of all reference to that unlucky day of confidences made under the shelter of the turf stack. She merely remarked that it was getting late, and that everyone ought to be asleep, and, rolling herself up in her blankets like a plump little caterpillar in its chrysalis, closed her eyes.

Early next morning, while she was engaged in putting the room to rights, and Terry was just completing her toilet by tying the laces of a pair of long-legged boots, an idea struck her, and she instantly proceeded to put it into execution, remarking wisely to herself that "turn about was fair play."

"Will you knock at Stuart's door, if you're ready," she said; "and tell Dr. Craven you will show him the bathing pool up the stream? He will never find it for himself from Stuart's directions."

Terry, who was all meekness this morning, — her very hair was brushed into submissive smoothness, as far as was possible, and she had put on a plain serge gown, devoid of "frills," — did as she was requested. Dr. Craven, well

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pleased at the summons, appeared in a *négligé* toilet, consisting principally of Stuart's old clothes, and followed her out into the dewy freshness of the morning.

They said very little as they walked up the rough bank of the stream together, the morning wind stirring their hair, the glory of the young day making a new world out of the eternal hills and old grey rocks, and dew-misted miles of heather, coloured faint amethyst now with the first opening of the heather-bloom. Dr. Craven was feeling ten years younger than he had been a couple of days before. He told himself that it was the bracing air of this mountain fastness, and the delightful quiet. Highly oxygenated atmosphere always made one feel unreasonably happy, he thought; and then, with peculiar inconsequence, he reflected that prematurely grizzled hair was not a pretty thing, and made a man look like an old fogey before his time.

As for Terry, she walked steadily up the bank of the stream, singing half under her breath. The cheerfulness of Terry's songs generally varied in inverse ratio to her own.

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This morning she could not have been very unhappy, for she was singing, —

“ We toil through pain and wrong,
We fight, and fly.
We love, we lose — and then, ere long,
Stone dead we lie.
O life, is *all* thy song
Endure — and die ? ”

“ Where are we going, Miss O’Connell ? ” asked the doctor. He did not much care for his companion’s choice of a song.

“ Going ? ” repeated Terry, absent-mindedly. “ Oh, I beg your pardon. We are nearly there. It is just round this next corner; and if you don’t say it is the finest swimming-bath you ever saw, Dr. Craven, I shall not think much of your taste.”

They turned the corner as she spoke, and came upon a curious scoop-out in the deeply sloping bank, some ten yards by six. Further away, in the main channel of the stream, the water gurgled noisily among green-haired stones, and spread itself out in grey-brown shallows, dimpled by the irregular flow of the current. But in the tiny bay that ran underneath the shadow of the great furze-clumps on

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the bank, there was clear five feet of liquid amber, with golden sand and stones below, and fairy fleets of lemon-hued gorse-blossoms drifting about the unrippled surface of the water.

"This is splendid!" said Dr. Craven. "I suppose you are quite familiar with it yourself?"

"Not very," said Terry. "Eva and I mostly ride down to the lake and have a decent swim. This is Stuart's particular property. He found it out, and it suits him capitally, as he is much too lazy to go so far as the lake of a morning. But you can't swim much in it."

"It's a very poetical bathroom, at all events. Might I trouble you to send Ritchie up here if you meet him? This is just the savage kind of a place to delight his soul. I believe Ritchie would comb his hair with a furze-bush, in preference to the proper instrument, if it were possible. The effect of his foreign uncivilised wanderings, I suppose!"

"I'll send him up. I hope you'll enjoy yourself. There are water-rats in the bank that always make Mrs. Rivington scream, but they're really very harmless creatures. I'll

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have breakfast ready by the time you are in. Wait till you taste my hot griddle-bread!"

She was away again now, swinging down the rough river bank with the step of an Andalusian mountain-girl; nobody in Ireland walked better than Terry O'Connell. Dr. Craven sat down in a clump of bracken, and watched her till she disappeared. Then he began thinking seriously.

"I am in love with that girl," he said to himself, stating the fact as coldly as was possible. "My pulse is a good ten beats above normal, just because I was alone with her for five minutes or so. Well, it's a fever that must run its course; and what the end will be, Lord knows. Now, I'll have my dip. Poetical, but 'just what you'd know,' uncomfortable. The soap is sure to get lost, and one could n't stand safely on those slimy stones. I'm afraid I'm not quite young enough to change my nature and become an interesting savage! . . . And I suppose," he added, quite inconsequently, "she would certainly make me clear out my study, and get new furniture to half the house; and she'd tidy up all the things in my con-

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sulting-room — ugh ! That's what women *are*. They can't know how a man feels about these things; and the very best of them don't understand letting one alone. . . . There are compensations for everything !”

Terry, meanwhile, had returned to the house in search of the other guest. She had not much looking to do. Elliot Ritchie's lengthy form, topped by a fiery head and a large smile, appeared on the front “lawn” as she reached the cottage.

“What are we to do with this fellow Rivington?” he asked. “Mrs. R. says he seems very well this morning, and that he demanded his pen and ink the minute Dr. Craven was out of the house. She's afraid to let him write without the doctor's permission, and he's raising a row.”

Indeed, Stuart's voice, upraised in voluble argument, was distinctly audible through the window.

“I tell you *I want to write*. Can't you understand plain English? and don't you know that if I *am* ill, it will make me worse to be worried like this? I've got some ideas, and I

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can't wait till Craven comes back. I must put them down now before I forget. Good heavens, Eva, don't you *know* that I shall forget if I can't get my pen and paper for a minute?"

Ritchie sat down outside the window, and lit a cigar. His yellow-brown eyes twinkled with amusement.

"Just listen to the beggar," he remarked. "One would think it was a question of incalculable importance whether he got his blessed novel written or not."

Terry felt a sudden hot rush of anger against this man who took other people's ambitions so easily, and was so calmly satisfied with his own career. When one loves, every defect in the character of the creature loved cuts like a knife.

"I don't think you understand," she said rather coldly, "what a position Stuart holds in the literary world. He has quite cut out Hall Caine and Hardy, and is running Rudyard Kipling very close as regards general popularity."

"Really," said Ritchie, making rings in the air with cigar smoke, and looking at them

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attentively. "What time do you breakfast here?"

"As soon as Dr. Craven comes back from the river," replied Terry, dropping the subject of Stuart's literary reputation, since it was so obviously uninteresting. "By the way, he asked me to tell you to come up and join him. Along the bank, you know, and just past the second bend of the stream. I showed him the way; but it is not difficult to find."

There was a certain self-conscious hesitation in her mind, born of the intuitive feeling that Dr. Craven had very much enjoyed that short walk. Elliot Ritchie seemed to observe it. A new expression crossed his face, and he favoured Terry's down-bent head with a gaze as hard and unwinking as that of a yellow-eyed hawk. When she looked up, however, it was a perfectly inexpressive countenance that met her nervous gaze.

"Very well," said Ritchie, calmly, making his way through the *parterre* of tall weeds. "I'll be back pretty soon. Why the deuce does n't Rivington cut down all this rubbish, I wonder?"

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"He says it's only wild cineraria, and very picturesque," replied Terry, looking round, as she turned into the cottage, at the glow of the morning sun on the nodding gold heads of the flowers . . . or was it at the diminished outline of the tall figure that was striding away up the river-bank, never glancing back until it disappeared behind a cluster of wind-lighted willow-bushes?

She went into Stuart's room then, and found him sitting up in a dressing-gown, very much excited, and thirsting for ink. Eva, nearly reduced to tears by the impossibility of satisfying him without disobeying Dr. Craven, — who had declared that he must not, and should not, write for a day or two, — was wavering between the bed and the writing-desk, like a dog between two bones.

There was a vein of iron underlying the many softer strata of Terry's character, and it came to the surface just now. Every human mind is furnished with certain fine fibres that float out across the gap separating soul from soul, and learn, by the touches that meet them in the darkness, where lies the softness that can

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be overmastered, and where the firmness that opposes an inviolable barrier to all will outside its own. Terry's mind, iron though its substratum might be, had lately felt conscious of the near neighbourhood of tempered steel; and it was therefore with all the more force that she felt the conviction of her own strength *here*.

"Stuart," she said very quietly, "lie down and stop talking, please. You are behaving like a child. You know very well that we cannot disobey important orders in such a way."

There was nothing remarkable about the words; but Stuart stopped in his querulous complaint, looked at her in some surprise, and lay back on the pillow.

"There's no getting over you women — talk of the softer sex!" he said.

Terry went into the kitchen, and stood staring out of the window down the valley. Her mind had just crossed swords in a sudden, short, and decisive clash with that of Ireland's greatest literary genius, and had come off victor. She could bend the will and the life

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of strong-hearted Harold Craven round her finger. But once within sight of Elliot Ritchie's cold, pale eyes, her very soul went forth from her keeping, and her neck was under his foot.

"What kind of a God is it that has made us so!" she said, tearing the leaves of the iris plant in the window to lace-like strips as she stood.

Dr. Craven, when he came back, went in to see his patient, and quieted down the restless novelist wonderfully, by promising him that he should write again in a couple of days. Then he joined the breakfast party in the kitchen, and was loud in praise of Terry's griddle-bread, and Eva's delicately cooked mountain trout.

"We shall eat you out of house and home, Mrs. Rivington," he said.

"That reminds me," interrupted Ritchie, suddenly. "I'm going to do a bit of useful work for Mrs. Rivington. We're too many for comfort in this tiny place. I mean to construct a 'dug-out' in the side of this little hill for a bedroom; and then you can have your one sitting-room free. It'll be capital

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fun. I can get it done by to-morrow afternoon, if we all lend a hand. Craven and I will manage the digging. You and Miss Terry can help with the carrying and so on, and Miss Terry herself will do the roof with me."

"A very good idea," said Eva. "Stuart will be delighted. He can watch you out of the back window all day."

"I shouldn't put *Miss O'Connell* to such work as handling furze boughs," said the doctor, rather pointedly.

"She can wear gloves," replied Ritchie, with perfect amiability, speaking for, and deciding for, Terry, as if she had not been there.

Dr. Craven looked at him, and "said nothing, very emphatically" — as Eva afterwards described it. A sudden silence fell upon the little company.

CHAPTER XIX

THE "dug-out" was begun next day, a few tools having been sent for from Roundwood. Elliot Ritchie pressed the whole household into his service, and directed everything, working at the same time with a steady energy that accomplished marvellously large results in a marvellously small time, — or so at least it seemed to these unlearned people who kept him company. Dr. Craven was vaguely uneasy, during the first day, concerning various matters that he could not well have defined, if asked. His old friend Ritchie was not particularly cordial to him, for one thing; but then, how can a man make himself agreeable, or why should he, when he is up to the elbows in turfy mould, and wants all the breath he has got for the direction of two incompetent female workers tying up bundles of heather beside him? Again, Ritchie was splendidly in his element

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here, both mentally and physically. Not one of his three assistant workers could have planned this little piece of primitive building that was so simple to him, any more than they could have lifted the weights he handled so easily. But what was there mortifying in all this, to any man of sensible character? It is a small mind that grudges another person the possession of great strength, or of peculiar ability in some one line of work, when the individual making the comparison is conscious of fair average physical powers, and special mental greatness in his own sphere. . . . Still, when the "other fellow" is in his element, and you have no chance to make a show in yours, — it being conspicuously absent, — and there is a good-looking girl in the neighbourhood, who obviously admires *his* strength and ability, and enjoys being ordered about by him . . . there certainly is a rub somewhere.

Dr. Craven's thoughts ran much after this fashion, as the day wore on, and the work of constructing the dug-out proceeded. The labour was a good deal harder than it had looked at first. A high perpendicular bank

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had been chosen for the carrying out of the plan. The earth, sheeted with planks, was to form three sides of the room. The fourth side was to be built from the front, and the roof would be added when all was complete. The two men did the digging, which was not difficult, in the soft turfy soil. Eva and Terry cleared away the loose earth, and piled it away at one side in a clumsy but useful wall which was to shelter the doorway from the cold north-east winds. The day was somewhat grey and overcast, and oppressively warm. Everyone worked in a minimum of clothing, — the two men in flannel shirts and knickerbockers, with sleeves rolled up to the shoulder, and necks open; the women in loose cotton gowns, pinned up over their underskirts in the pretty natural manner that fashion has so often striven in vain to imitate successfully. The whole atmosphere was a strange one to Dr. Craven, accustomed as he was to civilisation in its most cultivated and conventional limits, and small as his leisure had been of late years for getting into touch with unsophisticated Nature in any form. He enjoyed it in a way, however. He had

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nothing of the artistic temperament about him, but he could not help liking the rough picturesqueness of the scene, — Elliot Ritchie, a great rugged figure wielding a gleaming spade, and looking for all the world like the typical gold-miner of sensational tales, in his blue shirt and high boots; pretty Terry, her dimpled white arms streaked with brown, and her face flushed with exertion, dabbling her pink cotton gown recklessly with the earth she was carrying to and fro in its gathered up lap; Eva, neat of hair and shoe as ever, wearing a big apron, and perhaps working too deliberately to accomplish very much, although her portion of the wall looked decidedly more secure than Terry's. There was a curious sense of simplicity, and of broad, slow-moving ways of thought and life in the very air; something, too, of primitive passions, in their full depth and force, unmodified and unsmoothed by the countless outside touches and distractions of the ordinary world, as known to the upper classes.

There is that about the presence of death (and especially sudden death) in a small and isolated community, that seems to tear

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away the overlying strata of convention, and bring life down to the bed-rock level of plain human nature. The body of ill-fated Alfred Moore had been quietly removed in a cart, and taken down to be confined at Roundwood, a day or two before; but the sensation of his terrible end had not yet faded out from the minds of the few who had been so closely connected with the catastrophe; and they felt all the more closely bound together by the common association. Yet there was something in the air that troubled Dr. Craven, and he frowned a little, unconsciously, as he handled his spade.

Things were not much better later on, when the sun was getting low, and the tired amateur labourers knocked off work. Their dinner had been fragmentary and hurried, so a heavy tea had to be prepared, everyone helping in the cooking; and, of course, Elliot Ritchie knew how to make wonderful German cakes, and could do eggs in marvellous ways, and worked as hard as a sea-cook in a galley, Terry O'Connell acting as assistant, while the doctor looked on with his hands in his pockets, con-

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scious that he could pull a man through a fever, or restore a broken-down nervous system to health, but that he could do nothing with an egg except eat it. He was not a particularly vain man, and had nothing of the craving desire to snatch a leading place that so often besets inferior minds; but it was a little hard to feel how poor a figure his book-learned, city-bred self seemed to cut, up here in these wilds.

The construction of the "dug-out" went on swimmingly, and a very few days saw it finished, and possessed of a strongly bolted door and neat little window, glazed with two inestimable squares of glass left behind by the workmen who had originally restored the cottage. When the inside had been walled with boards, and roofed with a thick furze and heather thatch, it was pronounced by Eva perfectly dry and safe for sleeping. Stuart was so taken with this addition to the bedrooms that he entreated to be allowed to have it himself; and as his injuries were progressing very favourably, and he was able to dress and sit about the house, the exchange was made.

On the night that saw the end of the building

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work, another colloquy took place in the cottage between Eva and Terry, at the mystic hour of hair-brushing, when feminine hearts are accustomed to open. There was no candle in the room. The moon poured in at the window, silvering the flaxen locks that Eva was plaiting over one shoulder, and throwing a grey reflection into the corner where Terry's blue dressing-gown draped an indolent heap in a chair.

"I want to talk to you, Terry," said Eva, indistinctly, through her hair.

"I'm quite agreeable."

"How is all this going to end?" asked the little matron, a trifle severely. "Are you going to marry Mr. Ritchie?"

The tumbled heap in the chair murmured something like — "He has n't asked me."

"I think it's fairly clear he means to. Honestly, Terry — Terry, dear! — do you think he deserves to have you? Do you find *you* have n't changed at all in eight years, now you've met him again? I never knew him when you first were friends, but I am certain that you could n't have judged him reasonably

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then, if he was the same man he is now. Don't you *see* he has n't, and probably never had, an atom of a heart, and that he is essentially just as selfish as they make them? Besides, he does n't really — can't really — ”

“Oh, I know what you are going to say; you need n't have stopped. He does n't really care about me. But I think he — he has given me as much as he — as he *could* give to anyone, you know. Mind, I don't say I'm going to marry the man. I'm only discussing the way things stand at present.”

There was something in the nervous, trembling tone — in the words, which apparently feared to speak too plainly of facts that were already patent — that silenced Eva's proposed remonstrances. She felt, as only those who have tried to interfere with the course of a love-affair can feel, the iron intensity of the passions men attempt to mould like clay, in accordance with temporary worldly needs. With a sigh, she looked out of the window into the purple-black of the midnight sky, scintillating with stars, and was silent.

Somehow or other, all talk of Dr. Craven's

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going back to town died out after this. He had already come near the limit of his holiday, and he was not a man who usually allowed considerations of personal pleasure to interfere with his practice. But just at present, he seemed even to his own astonished self to have no conscience. He wrote off asking his substitute to remain in charge for another week or two, and settled down calmly to enjoy himself where he was. Stuart Rivington was getting on capitally. He could not walk yet, but Ritchie had contrived an ingenious arrangement of rollers and levers on one of the chairs, by means of which he could move about; and he had begun to write with absolute fury. Eva was a little alarmed at his intense absorption in his work, when day followed day of steady writing, and Stuart seemed unconscious for hours at a time of the presence of any one else in the house. Dr. Craven, however, said that it would not harm him. He would probably come out of the writing fit rather thin and exhausted, but nothing worse.

It was about this time that Stuart insisted on the whole party going out exploring almost

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every day. He said he preferred to be left alone, and was much happier when he knew that they were enjoying themselves cycling about Glendalough and Glenmalure, rather than dancing attendance on him. So, morning after morning, the bicycles were wheeled out after breakfast, and spun away down the mountain side, glittering visibly in the sunlight for a mile or more, until they slipped into a patch of firwood, and left the novelist totally alone in his far-up eyrie. And under these circumstances, the novel progressed so speedily and so well that Stuart before long declared himself ready to read the first chapters of the work aloud.

It was on a cool, still evening, just after sunset, that he produced his manuscript, and requested the doctor to help him out on to the lawn, and spread a rug or two for him to sit upon. Ritchie had lit a fire on the grass half an hour before, by way of making things look sociable and pleasant, and the knotted lumps of bogwood were blazing up steadily under the dusky blue of the evening sky when the little party came out. They settled themselves on

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the grass, leaning back to back for support in the comfortable way all outdoor-living people know, and prepared to listen. The men lit cigars to keep away importunate midges. Somebody produced a box of sweets, and handed it about; cushions and rugs were moved and re-arranged. It was some little time before everyone had settled down, but at last the blissful warm laziness and silence that come of long physical exertion, followed by a comfortable meal, crept over the little party, and there was a great stillness, broken only by the soft puff of the cigars, and the steady *chirr* of a neighbouring grasshopper who had suddenly waked up, and taken the light of the bonfire for the rising of the sun.

Stuart moved a little nearer to the glow of the flames — for the fast-falling dusk had crept up like a sea all round their little islet of light, since he took his seat — and began to read.

He was a splendid reader, and he enjoyed delivering his own story as only an enthusiastic author can. Minute after minute, quarter after quarter of an hour passed away, and not a

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movement came from one of his hearers. Only for the glitter of their eyes in the dancing firelight, and for the four intent faces turned steadily towards his own, he might have thought them asleep. And so indeed their bodies were, for their minds were rapt out of the mortal frame, and carried away hither and thither, wherever he would, by the mere magic of his words.

On and on he read, and the stars marched across the sky above, and the river whispered softly below, where the night-wind hurried fragments of faded bracken and withered flowers down the banks into its murmuring current.

“I am everlasting,” said the whisper. “You die, you flitting human shades, who have troubled my solitude all these weeks, — you fade away and drop down the stream of death like these withered flowers. But my voice sings on day and night, century after century, as it sang long ago when the world was young, as it will sing in days to come, when all of you are only handfuls of earth and dust, blowing about the windy autumn woods, and darkening the long, rank grass on forgotten graves.”

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Was there another whisper in the air ? fainter than the river murmur, too faint for any mortal ear to catch. . . .

“There is that in man stronger than Nature and all her forces. There are words being spoken to-night, light as withered leaves floating down the river, but strong to ring out through years and generations yet unborn ; vital with a force that will move the world and its million hearts, long after the lips that speak them have crumbled into dust.” . . .

CHAPTER XX

HE ended at last; and there followed, first, a deep silence, and then an eager chorus of exclamation, protest, entreaty.

"Oh, that's not *all* you've written, Stuart!"

"Go on, Rivington, do! it's out and out splendid!"

"It's inhuman to stop at such a point. Have you really no more?"

Eva said nothing; but that, perhaps, was because she had got away into a patch of flickering shadow, and was rapidly making her pocket-handkerchief an eligible candidate for the wash.

The author, his fair hair ruffled up all over his head, and his mouth twitching with sternly repressed exultation at the effect of his reading, looked round the little circle somewhat regretfully, loth to break up his audience.

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"That's every line, so far," he said. "I think the title will be 'Coronation.' I've been reading for two hours. My throat is as dry as the road to Roundwood."

"It didn't seem like an hour," declared Elliot Ritchie. "I say, old man, you have got the stuff in you, and no mistake! I never heard any novel that began in the least like that. I suppose one *would* call it a novel? It seems to be rather a class in itself. I should say it looked on human life from quite a new point of view. My dear Rivington, imagine having hit on something *new* in this *blasé* age!"

"Say burnt-up, for heaven's sake, or anything else you like — not *blasé*! Journalese always makes me sick," interrupted Stuart, characteristically. "Yes, I do think it's rather new. The plot is, at all events, if you can call it a plot. I suppose you have heard enough to guess at the central idea of the story by now."

Dr. Craven had disappeared during the last few moments, and now returned, carrying in each hand some long object that glittered gaily in the light of the fire.

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"We'll have a festival to celebrate the first reading of 'Coronation,'" he said. "Your wife sent to Dublin for several dozen of this the other day, at my suggestion, but it didn't arrive till this evening. I thought you would be the better of some, and as I knew you were certain to give away at least half of it, I advised Mrs. Rivington to order a double quantity."

"Good business!" commented Ritchie, promptly extracting a private corkscrew from his pocket. Dr. Craven looked at him critically. He did not like men who carried corkscrews.

Under the lonely stars, beside the crackling scarlet of the fire, and within sound of the whispering river, they uncorked their cityfied Clicquot, and drank it gaily, with a shameless disregard of dramatic unities.

"It should have been mead, or cider, or cowslip wine," remarked Stuart; "but champagne, in the midst of the Wicklow wilds! most inartistic! Why, it absolutely reeks of white damask and silver, and flowers and diamonds and tulle — taffeta — what-d'you-call-the-thing — and lobster salad, and — yes, another mug, please.

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I'd no idea champagne could taste so good out of tin."

"Success to 'Coronation,' the novel of the age!" said Ritchie, waving his mug in the air. And they drank and cheered for "Coronation" till the gold-brown trout in the river pools woke up, and rolled over in their sandy beds. Then the doctor took it upon himself to dissolve the meeting, and they all went to bed with the wonderful, weird romance of Stuart's story still treading a measure in their brains to the music of his voice.

After this came days of varied weather, with but little rain; and the four able-bodied members of the party were seldom within doors. Almost every morning they disappeared, not to return until sunset. And how busy they all were over important trifles, — how gay over infinitesimal pleasures! One morning they would go hunting for the smoke-blue beads of *frochans* (bilberries) that threaded themselves on thin green twigs all over many a sunny patch of mountain side. Blue-faced and fingered like ancient Britons, they would return in the evening, happy and hungry, and tell all kinds

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of exciting tales about the day's adventures, — how the doctor had discovered a wonderful patch of fat berries, and feloniously kept them to himself by lying *perdu* among the leaves, until he had transferred every one to his basket; in proof whereof, there was visible all of the choice "find" that Terry and Eva had not incontinently eaten up, — how a dead eel had been found lying on the edge of a pond, and Ritchie had aroused shrieks of mirth, and appeals to the memory of St. Patrick, by taking it for a snake, and killing it over again, — how Dr. Craven had been seized with the desire of finally casting civilisation behind him in one definite act, and to that end had solemnly removed his last and only collar, and burned it in the fire they lit to cook their dinner. Another day, they would all go bicycling, and return with tales of hairbreadth escapes, met with flying down mountain passes, marvellous punctures that Eva, the neat-handed, had mended in four minutes or less; unknown roads discovered, and strange ruins explored. And always, after supper, the little group gathered round the fire, and listened delightedly to a fresh chapter

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of "Coronation." What author could wish for a more appreciative audience than that formed by two brilliant men, and two clever women, all with minds lying at rest and fallow amidst the peaceful influences of an open-air life, and ready to soak in impressions like a sponge?

And what about Terry's affairs all this time?

Eva, deeply interested as she was in the development of her friend's fate, could not understand how things were going, or likely to go. *Tête-à-têtes*, of course, were of frequent occurrence during these rambling summer days; but if Elliot Ritchie assisted Terry to bring water from the river, and wasted half an hour in so doing, Dr. Craven, later on in the evening, might find her apparently quite well disposed to walk up and down the road and watch the sunset with him. One morning Eva's heart sprang up with sudden pleasure to see that a lilac-coloured "bachelor's button," which had appeared in Terry's hair at the breakfast table, had somehow managed to transfer itself to Dr. Craven's coat by the time the party assembled at the door to consult about the itinerary of the

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day. But that very afternoon, while they were fishing in a black, willow-fringed mountain tarn, some miles away from the cottage, she observed with considerable annoyance that Ritchie was putting worms on Terry's hook for her, and squeezing her hand, unrebuked, every time he took hold of her rod to show her how it should be struck when a bite seemed imminent. Conversations at night there were none. Terry went to bed either very early or very late, and carefully avoided all opportunity for the private talk that she suspected to be hovering in the immediate neighbourhood of little Mrs. Rivington's tongue.

Eva's sympathies, never strongly enlisted on Ritchie's side, became more and more alienated from him as the days went on. She did not understand his character at all; and the feminine dislike to what the feminine mind cannot gauge or estimate with certainty rose up strongly within her. He was amusing at times, even brilliant; witty in repartee, versatile in anecdote or allusion, when the fancy seized him. At another time, he would sit absolutely silent for hours, as though the company present were

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too much beneath his notice to be worth taxing his brains for, when he did not happen to be in the vein. Then, again, he would apparently be seized with an impulse to show his power over Terry, and would play with her as a cat plays with a mouse, suggesting a fancy for a particular view in the neighbourhood, and smiling in a way that made Eva feel absolutely murderous when Terry spent half the precious morning hours painting it for him; taking a seat in the cottage kitchen, just where the girl was out of eye-shot of his face, and watching her unconsciously move about until she was once more in a position where their eyes could meet; talking to her of his coming departure for South America, and the improbability of his return to Ireland at any future time, just to see the colour fade out of her lips, and her fingers begin nervously twisting her few simple rings round and round. As for the doctor, what he thought or felt, nobody knew. His calm grey eyes used to watch the two without a change of expression; his clean-cut mouth never compressed itself by a single hair's breadth, even when warm-hearted little Eva was driving

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her pink nails into the palms of her hands through sheer vexation and pity for him. Self-pity — that most weakening and insidious of defects — had no place in Dr. Craven's character.

One evening, when the cobweb-grey of the dusk was weaving itself all over the silent hillside, and the three visitors had gone out riding together, and not yet returned, Eva walked into the cottage kitchen, and sat down by her husband's armchair.

"I want to have a good talk with you, Stuart," she observed, putting her head comfortably down on his broad shoulder.

"You remind me rather of the days when I was a kid, and always used to answer any sudden endearment of my sisters' with — 'If it's upstairs, I won't!'" replied Stuart. "What do you want me to do for you, young person? That is generally the meaning of your 'good talks.'"

"I want you to do just what you like doing, — act the part of a special providence," said Eva, coaxingly.

"What about?" defensively.

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"Are n't you fond of Terry?"

"Of course I am. I've been in love with Terry all my life."

"Well, then, I want you to do something to help her. You don't wish her to marry that Ritchie man, do you?"

"Why not? He's a decent lot enough, and will have money."

"That's so like a man! You all stand up for each other like a pack of — of criminals. You *know*, as sure as you are sitting there, that he'd break any woman's heart in a year, though nine women out of ten would fall in love with him, heaven knows why!"

"So like a woman," murmured Stuart, retributively.

"And you know, too, that that little Dr. Craven is worth a hundred of him; and that Ritchie creature is simply poking red-hot needles into him every day of his life, showing off his power over Terry, though the other is much too plucky to let anyone see how it hurts. It's perfectly maddening, Stuart; and you must help me to set things straight."

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She kicked the table leg impatiently with her sturdy little shoe, and frowned till she looked like a plump thrush in a pet.

Stuart lit a cigar, and puffed at it thoughtfully.

"I don't like the job, little woman," he said. "I'm not for interference in these matters, as a rule. Besides, it's far more interesting to see the thing develop itself; and lots more artistic."

"All the same, you must do something," said Eva, positively. "You can easily contrive some way or other of throwing Terry and Dr. Craven together for a whole day, and so letting him have a fair chance to make running in his own way. She seems pulled to pieces in her own mind between the two at present; but if she is left to herself, she will take Ritchie if he asks her, because she can't get rid of the old illusion about him, and because she has no will of her own when he is about."

"I suppose I could manage it, if it's absolutely necessary," said Stuart. "It would be rather interesting, perhaps. Let me see. I could get a sudden relapse and keep Craven

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here after the rest of you have started off in the morning; and you could easily contrive some device to send Terry back to the house when you were well started. Yes, I'll do it. It would be good fun, if nothing else."

CHAPTER XXI

MAN proposes, and the weather, or the chances of the Stock Exchange, or the state of some unimportant person's liver, or something else equally irrelevant, disposes of his plans. Stuart's preconceived plot for bringing Terry and Dr. Craven together on the day following his wife's "good talk," fell to the ground, for the simple reason that the rain did so too. The morning broke bright and uncertain, with a strong scent of heavy moisture through the air, and an unnatural distinctness in the sounds of far-off bleating that came from the darkened hollows of the hills. No one seemed disposed to get ready the bicycles. The inhabitants of the cottage came out on to the lawn, looked away down the valley at the

"Ragged rims of thunder brooding low
With shadow-streaks of rain,"

and remarked that it was not good enough.

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"What shall we do?" asked Ritchie, suppressing a yawn.

Terry, at whom he was looking, did not answer. She spoke strangely little in these days. She loved to sit by herself in the chimney corner, looking into the geranium-glow of the burning turf, or to lean on the wall outside the cottage, gazing down the valley, far away, far beyond the purple rim of the sweeping horizon, into the unfathomable sky. She did not smile often, but her eyes were happy, although at times an inexplicable shade would trouble their limpid hazel-grey, and line the passion-flower mouth sharply at the corners, — for a minute. In those moments, it was as though a lurking trouble had suddenly risen up, and peered out through the windows of the soul with skull-like face, only to be thrust back and hidden away, as the curtains dropped again, and the sunshine of the outer world found once more a reflection bright as itself in Terry's eyes.

Eva sighed impatiently as she watched the girl's face, and noted how Elliot Ritchie's inscrutable bird-like eyes followed it here and

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there, and how Dr. Craven's steady gaze seemed momentarily to flicker, whenever he caught a stray glance from under Terry's long curved lashes. It might have been the brooding thunder in the air, or it might have been the curious feeling of constraint and watchfulness that seemed to have crept over the party; but, whatever the cause was, Eva felt nervous and unstrung, and jumped at the first reply that suggested itself to Elliot Ritchie's remark.

"Oh, can't you think of anything yourself, Mr. Ritchie?" she said hastily. "We mustn't go far from the house, and I have really used up all my invention."

Ritchie was seldom to be found at a loss, even in matters of trivial detail.

"I can suggest half a dozen things," he said promptly. "What do you say to manufacturing rush-lights? They are n't half bad when you use a lot, and it seems to me our supply of candles is rather an uncertain one."

"Capital," said Dr. Craven, with perhaps a little more enthusiasm than he felt. Some instinct of misguided generosity seemed to compel him to do his rival more than justice,

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even in trifling things. "There's a fine bed of fat rushes just behind the cairn, in that swampy bit. It will keep us employed when the rain comes down."

"Will you get us some?" asked Eva.

"Yes," replied the doctor. "I'll go now." Then, with a sudden impulse that seemed to take possession of him almost against his will, he turned to Terry and said coolly, —

"You'll come and help me, won't you, Miss Terry?"

It was all done in a minute. Terry had turned silently away from the cottage with him, and Elliot Ritchie had picked up Eva's knitting, and followed her into the house, winding the ball as he went; and the little cairn was crossed, and the lonely patch of bogland reached by himself and his companion, before the doctor had time to think what he had done. Then he pulled himself together, and realised that here was his chance, — his first and last, — and that he must speak now if ever.

Harold Craven had never feared to face any possibility with which his varied life had brought him into contact; and he was not afraid

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now to put his fate to the touch. He stood for a moment looking across the wide stretch of green ooze and rushes, where the silver-haired bog-cotton twinkled all about the edges of the pools; and then he turned to face the woman beside him, and said, —

“I’ve something to ask you, Miss Terry, and I would like to ask it now.”

But Terry put out her hands as if to keep him away, and looked at him with frightened eyes.

“Don’t!” she said; “don’t, Harold!” using his name unconsciously, in a way that made the doctor’s fingers shut suddenly and tightly over each other. “I can’t hear it. I—I don’t know what I would say if I did. No, you must not interrupt me, and you must not say it—!”

But Dr. Craven had taken her hands, and her voice died away as he spoke, quickly and strongly.

“I’m not going to be trifled with, Miss O’Connell. Since you know what my question is, I will have an answer.”

“It’s only for your own good,” said Terry, eagerly. “I—I could n’t tell the truth, *any-*

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how, no matter what way I answered. I could n't keep a promise, if I—if I made one. Oh, can't you believe me and let me go! Oh, if I could, I would. You are like no one else I have ever known, and a great deal too—too good. . . .”

She broke down, and began to cry. Then she snatched her hands from his, and ran towards the cottage. He heard the wooden door of the “dug-out” close sharply behind her, and knew that his chance had come and gone.

Had she refused him? Not finally, of a certainty; and she cared about him, surely, or she would not have used his Christian name. What was he to think?

Well, meantime, there were the rushes to be picked; and the rest of the party were doubtless waiting for them in the cottage. He gathered a good bundle, and went indoors. Terry was there before him, talking gaily, and seeming quite at her ease. Dr. Craven, however, having had considerable experience of womenkind, was not puzzled by this sudden change of demeanour. An irrelevant thought flitted across his brain as he joined the party, to the

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effect that the universal powers of acting possessed by women in general could not logically be ascribed to old-time necessities of self-defence, since the higher up in the social scale one went, the better was the acting done. The peasant girl, much nearer primitive Nature than her high-born sisters, possessed less of the simulative and dissimulative feminine faculties than they. It was an interesting problem. He decided to think it out by-and-by.

Meantime, Eva was melting dripping in a pot, and Terry was peeling rushes with slim, skilful fingers, throwing the strips of green rind carelessly about the floor. The operation looked interesting. Dr. Craven came forward and took a seat with the group at the window. Stuart was invisible, having shut himself up in Eva's room with his pens and paper.

Down came the rain by-and-by, hissing furiously on the dusty ground, and tracing coffee-coloured watershed maps all over the road. The morning settled into a sombre gloom of grey; the bracken tufts outside the windows shivered in the lashing rain; the

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stream rose higher in its bed, and boomed dully over the stones. It was distinctly good to be in the cosy cottage, peeling and steeping rushes, and hanging them up to dry, while the rain drummed on the roof, and sweet wet scents of spicy pine and peach-smelling gorse drifted in through the open window.

Just after dinner Stuart flung open the bedroom door, and walked in with what Eva described as "a very See-the-conquering-Hero air."

"Got through for the day, Stuart?" she inquired, rolling up the tablecloth she was removing.

"Got through for good," said Stuart, who was beaming all over, and had every single hair of his head on end. "'Coronation' is finished. Did it in a month; about thirty-three hundred words a day. Not bad, eh?"

"You don't think you've hurried it too much?" asked Eva, anxiously.

"No," replied the novelist, with sudden seriousness. "It's much the best thing I have ever done. I think, if anything, it has gained in vividness and directness, don't you know, by

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being written at such tremendous speed. All the same, I don't want to see a pen or an ink-bottle for the next six months. I really am rather sick of writing, now I come to think of it."

"No wonder," observed Dr. Craven, shaking the grease from his fingers as he drew a limp piece of rush-pith out of the tin dish on the hearth. "You've put a great strain on yourself this last few weeks, considering that you were so much below par, physically. I would n't advise you to stay here much longer. You want change and amusing society now."

"I'll think about it. I'm sorry 'Coronation' is done—in a way. I don't like the end of anything; it's melancholy. Did it ever occur to you, by the way," flying off at a tangent, "how *inarticulate* the sentiment of popular songs is? Just let a young lady get up in a drawing-room and sing, —

" 'Gl — br — to pri
Aa — sa — my lo
Oh, never, nevermore!'

which is pretty much the style they do sing, and half the guests feel the tears coming into

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their eyes at once, while the other half murmur delightedly 'What a *sweet* song!' It is n't the words they mean, because they have n't heard them; it's just the general tone, and the 'never, nevermore!'"

"You seem in a very 'nevermoring' humour," observed Terry. "You'll make us all melancholy. I wish the rain would stop, and let us out for a walk."

"It *has* stopped," announced Stuart, banging open the latticed window joyfully. "Look at the sun out there. It'll break that bank of grey cloud before it sets. We'll have a lovely evening yet."

The sporting instincts of the doctor suddenly woke up in his heart, and suggested that the sound of a reel running out under this still cloudy sky, and the sight of an agitated line making long pencillings in the rich brown stream behind the house, would be exceedingly grateful. He took his rod down from one of Stuart's innumerable hooks, and went out — hatless, as the inhabitants of the cottage generally were, unless the sun was beating down too fiercely upon the sandy road and mica-

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frosted heaps of rock. There was no sun at all, this soft grey afternoon.

By-and-by, Elliot Ritchie and Terry drifted away somehow or other, nobody knew where or when; and Stuart was left alone with his wife.

Perhaps it was a little selfish, but Eva for once forgot Terry and her affairs, and returned to the subject that was never very far from her thoughts, — Stuart's novel. They spoke of the sensation it would probably create; of the big cheque to come in from the publisher; of the press cuttings that would flock through every post, — laudatory, sneering, abusive, indifferent, — no, not the last, this time. No reviewer could treat "Coronation" indifferently, however he might be moved to slate it! They talked of ill-fated Alfred Moore, and his last work, — "Children of the Century," — upon which the touch of mental decay had already been so plainly marked; of his wild jealousy against Rivington; of his hopeless love, and terrible end —

"And that reminds me," said Eva, "that I saw something about May Miller in the paper the donkey-boy brought up yesterday. She is

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engaged to be married, — some old flame, I think, a boy without a *sou*. They will live in lodgings, I suppose, and grow worse off every year; and poor pretty May will be glad if I send her an old dress occasionally, or a last year's hat."

"Poor pretty May!" echoed Stuart. "She deserved a better fate."

"How do you think those guests of ours mean to sort themselves out?" queried Eva.

"I believe Ritchie has made up his mind."

"Did it want much making?"

"I fancy it did. My idea is that he just drifted up here without any purpose, and then, that companionship and old association began to influence him, and poor Craven's evident fancy gave the finishing touch. I dare say he thought he could take a pride in Terry — I'm sure most fellows would — and show her off; and he means to gather her and stick her in his coat, so to speak. Oh, he likes her, I'm pretty sure; but Ritchie never was one to let himself go over anything except his work."

"I don't know that Dr. Craven is either," said Eva, consideringly, "but he is too strong

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not to suffer a great deal. . . . I wish — well, it's no use wishing. Life is n't a three-volume novel, unfortunately, where everything turns out just the way it ought to."

"Give me some tea, and don't moralise," said the author of "Coronation."

The doctor had not had much sport, but the best part of the river was still before him; and the sun was obligingly hiding itself behind a curtain of granite grey, faintly dappled with watery primrose. He reeled his line in, and tramped on down the bank, his boots crushing almost noiselessly through the short wet grass.

Rounding a clump of trembling aspen, he bethought himself that he wanted a few of the leaves, to show Terry O'Connell how curiously they were balanced on their stalks. They had recently been discussing the history of the aspen, and the many strange fables that had clustered about its name. He laid down his rod, and took out his knife to cut a small branch. . . .

No, he certainly had not meant to act the

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part of a spy. That was what he told himself, hours afterwards, when he was able to think about the matter coolly. But, somehow or other, his moral senses slipped into abeyance for the time, and his punctilious habits of honour were forgotten, when he looked through the branches of the aspen, and saw Terry O'Connell and Ritchie sitting together on a great fallen tree-trunk, out of ear-shot, but full in view, even to the folds of Terry's peach-pink dress, and the wandering tendrils of her crumpled hair.

Ritchie was speaking, slowly, and without apparent agitation. Yet it was obvious that he had something of importance to say, for he held the girl's hand closely in his, and watched her downcast face intently, till the colour in her cheeks rivalled that of the gown she was absently plaiting and twisting with her unoccupied hand.

Then came a pause. Terry spoke; very briefly, and without looking up. Elliot Ritchie raised his head, and looked exultingly at the insentient trees and bushes round him. His yellow eyes were more than ever like a hawk's.

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It needed no possibility of hearing to know that his question had been asked and answered, — ah, how differently to that other one! Could it be that only the morning of this very day had heard it spoken?

When a man has asked such a question, and obtained such a reply, while sitting beside the woman whose love he has won, the rules of the game generally demand that she shall allow her head to drop on his shoulder. Ritchie had played this particular game several times in the course of his wandering career, — witness the incident that had suddenly withdrawn him from Ireland eight years before, — and, being quite familiar with its customs, he shifted his shoulder conveniently near to the tendrilled head beside him, and looked at it complacently.

But Terry, all in a moment, slipped from her seat to the ground, and dropped the “little head, sunning over with curls,” upon Ritchie’s knee, laying one hand beside it, in an attitude of such absolute ~~render~~ tender unconscious grace, that the man behind the aspen trees could look no more. He walked rapidly away, careless whether he was heard or not, up

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the river-bank, among the rain-starred furze and heather, through the copse of silent red-stemmed pines, and out on to the bare hillside, where not a living creature was in sight, save the always wandering, always melancholy plover.

“There let the wind sweep, and the plover cry,
But thou — go by.
Child, if it were thine error or thy crime
I care no longer, being all unblest,
Wed whom thou wilt, for I am sick of time
And I desire to rest.”

The words slid vaguely through his consciousness as he surmounted a heathery height and stood still, with his face to the fire-lit west. At such a moment, in such a solitary spot, most men would have instinctively sat, or even lain, upon the breast of kind old Mother Earth, in the posture natural to sorrowful humanity all the world over, hiding the face from the pitiless empty sky, and the aching heart from itself. Harold Craven stood, and looked at the stormy sunset, with grave eyes that saw nothing but that scene on the bank of the river; listened mechanically to the plover-call, with ears that only heard the echo in his own heart, — Never, never, never.

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Not in life, not in death. On the other side of the ivory gates, when his long day's work was over, it would not be his face that she would look for, beyond the waters of the shoreless sea. Never, never! Yet he would look for hers, first of all human faces; would look for it, and follow it, even were it to the depths of the bottomless gulf of night. That was love, as it had come at last to him.

Meantime, he had his life to live, and his work to do; and she was to marry Elliot Ritchie.

When Pandora's casket of evils was opened, and its sorrows and miseries let loose upon the world, hope, left at the very bottom, proved an antidote to all. There was no hope in the depths of Harold Craven's Pandora-box. But there was something better yet; something beyond hope; something that no pain or despair could take away. He had courage, the best of the gifts that God has given to man, and the one that, first and last, stands him in the truest stead.

The sun went down, and the dusk crept up; and he turned to walk back to the little cottage, where so many merry hours had been spent,

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and where so soon the silence of the eternal hills would once more resume its reign. And as he went, he turned his thoughts deliberately away from that dead summer's dream towards the great city beyond the hills, and the work he had so long neglected there; while out of some long-forgotten recess of memory drifted the lines, —

“Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone, —
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own.”

THE END.

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