





# CLASHMORE

BY

EDMUND DOWNEY

("F. M. ALLEN")

Originally published 1903

Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co.

Digitally compiled 2022

Caoimhe Ní Chaoimh

This work is licensed under a  
Creative Commons “CC0 1.0  
Universal” license.



# CONTENTS

I. LORD CLASHMORE	1
II. THE SOLICITOR'S LETTER	9
III. "TO THE WEST!"	17
IV. A GRUFF FELLOW-TRAVELLER	29
V. LARRY FITZGERALD	37
VI. INTERVIEWING A SOLICITOR	45
VII. A CONSULTATION	55
VIII. DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND	65
IX. BROTHER AND SISTER	77
X. THE ROYAL MAIL-COACH	85
XI. A BREAK-DOWN	97
XII. IN THE PRIEST'S HOUSE	105
XIII. A SHARK AND SOME MINOR MATTERS	115
XIV. SOME DISCOVERIES	123

xv. ON THE ROAD TO DUNMORE	133
xvi. IN DUNMORE	145
xvii. THE LADY OF THE LAKE	153
xviii. A GOOD HATER	161
xix. IN RHI-NA-SHARK HOUSE	171
xx. AT THE FERRY	183
xxi. AN ATLANTIC WILD-FLOWER	193
xxii. AN OLD MAN'S TALE	203
xxiii. AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR	213
xxiv. UNREST	219
xxv. A MEETING AND A PROPHECY	227
xxvi. SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE	239
xxvii. THE OLD MAN OF THE BATHS	249
xxviii. A REBUFF	261
xxix. LOVE IN A MIST	271
xxx. THE BURNING OF THE BOATS	281
xxxi. A VISIT TO BELL LAKE	289
xxxii. A FAIRY GODMOTHER	299
xxxiii. THE WOODEN POST	309
xxxiv. CONVALESCENCE	321
xxxv. A TALE OF A TAX-CART	331

XXXVI. CRABBED AGE AND YOUTH	343
XXXVII. WILD WORDS	357
XXXVIII. IN COURT	367
XXXIX. ON A JAUNTING CAR	385
XL. A BIRD OF ILL OMEN	397
XLI. AFLOAT	413
XLII. IN THE CAVE	423
XLIII. AT PROSPECT HOUSE	437
XLIV. LORD CLASHMORE'S CONFESSION	449
XLV. A DISASTER	463
XLVI. IN GOOD HANDS	475





## CHAPTER I

### LORD CLASHMORE

Two bold headlands, rising sheer from the Atlantic ocean, mark the entrance to Tramore Bay. On the eastern headland stand two white circular towers, about sixty feet in height, and on the western promontory three pillars of similar build and similar hue. The summits of the eastern towers are not crowned either with lighthouse, flag or figure-head. A stranger in the land might at first be under the impression that he was gazing upon some of the famous round towers of Ireland, transplanted and whitewashed by a whimsical archaeologist. But, beyond rotundity of form, the structures at the mouth of Tramore Bay differ in every material point from the mysterious round towers; they are not hollow, their circumference at the base is not greater than their circumference at the top, and the cuniform cap which protects the head of the round tower is absent. The pillars on the western headland, in addition to their numerical strength, have an advantage over their eastern neighbours—namely, the presence on the summit of the central pillar of a man of iron. This figure is called

the "Metal Man," and furnishes the title for the district which he "rules as his demesne," it being known as the Metalman head. The Metalman's statue is about fourteen feet; but, as seen from the base of his pedestal, he appears to be the height of an ordinary clothes-wearing animal. A curious and somewhat startling effect may be produced should you descend one of the paths which nature has formed in the rugged cliffs. It is possible to descend far enough to cut off completely the view of the white pillar which supports the Metalman; and if, forgetful of the iron figure, you look up suddenly, you will be alarmed at beholding a man in sea-faring attire warning you angrily off the premises.

The existence of the pillars on the eastern and western headlands is easily explained. Tramore Bay lies close to the harbour of Waterford, on the south coast of Ireland, and from the sea a stranger might easily confound the entrance to the dangerous bay with the entrance to the safe harbour. Therefore the pillars were erected (in the early years of the last century) in order that some distinguishing marks might guide the mariner.

The space across the mouth of the bay, from the western to the eastern headland, is about three miles. The eastern arm of the bay is called Brownstown. Its neighbourhood is seldom visited by strangers. To reach it directly from Tramore town one has to overcome the difficulty of crossing a creek called Rhi-na-Shark—the river of the shark—which flows into the sea at the extreme eastern end of Tramore Strand. This creek though narrow is deep, and is sometimes considerably swollen, either by heavy rains or by the inrush of the ocean. Close

to Rhi-na-Shark—at the western side of it—is the Rabbit Burrow, a considerable cluster of conical hills of sand. Behind the dunes, to the north, is the Back Strand, a great drab stretch of yielding sand at low water, and a weary waste of salt water when the tide is at its full. In its bed myriads of cockles, mussels, and the minor shell-fish are discovered. A grand winding embankment miles in extent, marks the boundary of the Back Strand. Beyond the embankment, inland arc patches of semi-cultivated country, treeless, and wearing a look of hopeless desolation.

The heart of the sandhills lies a few miles distant from the little town of Tramore. One may travel for hours through the Rabbit Burrow and never meet a human being, nor hear any sound save the boom of the ocean or the shrill note of seagull or curlew. Vegetation is scant. Patches of natural grasses or clumps of sedge are met with here and there, or perhaps some straggling wild plants—asparagus, violet, scurvy-grass—which have a hard fight for existence. In the white powdery sands are found innumerable speckled shells of sea-snails, which have for ages sheltered no living crustacea.

In this wild and lonely region dwelt Henry Aylward, Viscount Clashmore. One of his ancestors, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, had built a goodly mansion under the shadow of the arm of the cliff which stretches itself out to Brownstown Head. Rhi-na-Shark House is situated about a mile from the creek, at the western side of it, and approach to the house from Tramore Strand is mostly barred by the creek. A round-about road, following the Back Strand embankment for a short distance, leads from Lord Clashmore's mansion

to the city of Waterford, some ten miles inland.

When it was known he had settled down in Rhi-na-Shark House, people wondered what demon of contrariness possessed a wealthy and distinguished nobleman to choose such a place for a permanent residence. All sorts of stories were set afloat about the Viscount, but, as he held practically no intercourse with his neighbours, he was by degrees more or less forgotten. Occasionally the tall figure of Lord Clashmore (usually shadowed by his man, Sam Backas) might be seen in the village of Dunmore, or in the town of Tramore—his property in the County Waterford lay between those two places—and now and again he ventured into the city of Waterford. His lordship visited no house, and rarely received a visitor at Rhi-na-Shark. Some gossips were uncharitable enough to assert that Backas was not only his body-servant and his steward, but his “keeper,” and that “the lord” was a harmless lunatic.

One wild April morning Lord Clashmore was seated in the library at Rhi-na-Shark House. Standing at a respectful distance from him was Sam Backas. The Viscount was a melancholy-looking man, tall, and rather slenderly built. He was in his fifty-eighth year. His once dark hair and his heavy moustache were almost grey. Sam Backas was a clean-shaven, angular-looking man, about ten years younger and some inches shorter than his master.

“This communication of yours, Backas,” said the Viscount, “puzzles me extremely. I can hardly credit it.”

“It is not likely,” said Backas, “that I would bring a foolish tale to you, my lord. I doubted it myself, and so long as I remained in doubt I did not speak.”

"Then you knew of it for some time?"

"I did, my lord; but I did not like to trouble you with a story I wasn't quite sure of."

"And what has established this certainty in your mind?"

"Well, my lord, a good many things. There is that extraordinary proposal of Mr. Charles M'Carthy. Where could he come honestly by the money that would purchase the lands of Drumglass? There is something strange, to put it mildly, my lord, going on between his nephews—those young M'Carthys—and himself. And I have now the testimony of Jack Corbett, your lordship's boatman."

"This Charles M'Carthy may have speculated successfully—one never knows what a business man may do nowadays. As for Corbett, I never liked the fellow. He has a shifty eye and a wicked one," said his lordship, a frown wrinkling his forehead. "His testimony, as you call it, would hardly convince me. I think I had better see McCarthy's father—old Simon the Terrible—myself, and ask him point-blank what he has to say."

"With all due respect to you, my lord—and you know that I wouldn't dare to put any views of mine in front of your lordship's views if I didn't think it was a case of life or death—I wouldn't advise you to say one word to old Simon M'Carthy. He would, of course, inform his grandsons—very lawless young men, I fear me—and neither your life, my lord, nor mine would be worth a day's purchase if those young men knew their secret was suspected."

"Oh, nonsense, Backas! What has caused this alteration in your opinion of the M'Carthys? You used to be

a warm friends of theirs, or rather a warm advocate.”

A strange look stole into Backas's eyes, and unconsciously he clenched his fists. “No one on this estate is a friend of mine, my lord,” said he, “who is not a humble and dutiful servant of yours. When I thought the M'Carthys were decent and honest people I was friendly with them; but knowing what I know of them now, I fear them more than poison.”

“But I really can't evict the old man.”

“Unless you get possession of his premises we can be certain of nothing. They are as dark as night. And if their guilty secret is discovered—as it will be—might it not come to light, my lord, that you knew of their deeds and allowed them to continue?”

“Compounding a felony, you mean,” said his lordship.

“Forgive me, my lord,” pleaded Backas.

“I see the difficulty of the matter,” said Lord Clashmore, in a tone which indicated that he was communing with himself.

“You see, my lord,” persisted Backas, “if you get possession of the premises it would be an easy matter to lay their secret bare. If I am wrong—and I'll pledge my life I'm not—it will be very easy for you, my lord, to compensate the old man. I know your lordship's kind heart, and I was about to suggest that you might put the old man into possession of that vacant farm of O'Neill's at Dunmore.”

“But why shouldn't the police be consulted about the affair, Backas?”

“Because, my lord, you might be dragged into it. The M'Carthys, if they found themselves at bay, would move heaven and earth to rake up matters which you might

not care to have brought into a police or a judge's court, my lord." Backas trembled as he spoke, fearing he had over-stepped his limit.

An angry frown wrinkled the Viscount's, face, but he checked his temper and said:

"Very well, Backas. I suppose it will be the easiest way, though I confess I hate the idea of it. Recollect, there must not, in the case of the old man or his granddaughter, be a shadow of harshness. They must be promptly installed in a new home—O'Neill's place, if you like—before any attempt be made to enter into forcible possession of their premises.

"And what if, after all, this proves to be a mare's nest?" said the Viscount, after a short pause. "Old M'Carthy must be informed that so far as he is concerned the disturbance will be only temporary—that I simply want to put a stop to nefarious practices, and that apparently I cannot act without being in possession."

"If he should give us trouble and defend his premises, my lord—as he may—what then?"

"We shall see, we shall see," said his lordship. "I suppose," he added with a sigh, "it will then be a matter for the authorities. But your apprehensions about your personal safety, Backas, will surely hold if I agree to your views as to evicting the M'Carthys"

"No my lord. At least, that is not the way I look at it. If they are put out the young men will know the game is up, and they will clear out of the country. If they remain here knowing that their secret is merely suspected, they will brood over what they will call their wrongs, and mischief will happen. The thing is to frighten them clean out of the country, my lord, before they get time to

brew mischief. I have thought it out carefully, I assure your lordship.”

“Well, I am aware you are a discreet fellow, Backas, and a shrewd one to boot, and it is only fair to admit that you seem always to have my interests at heart. All the same, it is many a day since I felt so uncomfortable.”



## CHAPTER II

### THE SOLICITOR'S LETTER

BREAKFAST was usually a dilatory meal at Number 99 Park Lane. The lady of the house, the Honourable Mrs. Aylward, found it the most convenient time of the day to chat to her only son, Frank. She was a busy woman of the world, and though Frank was a lazy young man, he was rarely to be found at home between the breakfast hour and the dinner hour. He lunched at his club when he was in town, and managed to dawdle most of his day there. He was noted for his strong radical opinions—opinions which his mother regarded with absolute horror, and which earned for him the sarcasm of most of his friends.

The Honourable Mrs. Aylward was the widow of an officer who had died almost penniless. Major Aylward's brother—Viscount Clashmore—was a very wealthy man, and though he and his brother had quarrelled, and had not communicated with each other for years before Major Aylward's death, the Viscount settled upon the widow an annuity of £2000 a year, and also arranged to provide for the education of her boy, and for his maintenance.

On the morning of Tuesday, the fourth of May, almost as soon as she arrived at the breakfast table, Mrs. Aylward said, "I have very startling news for you this morning, Frank."

"Startling news!" said young Aylward. "What is it, mother?"

"Last night," said she, handing him a letter of several sheets written in a round, legible, clerky hand, "this came by the post."

"Delightfully easy reading, anyhow," observed Frank Aylward. "Shall I read it now or leave it until after breakfast?"

"Just as you please, my dear," said his mother, as she poured out the coffee; "but think, if you once begin you will not leave off until you have devoured every word."

"Hugh Mason, solicitor, Waterford," said Frank. "That's my noble uncle's lawyer. What's in the wind now? Our allowance cut off?"

"Read it, Frank," said his mother. "I don't know how I managed to get through the night without communicating the contents to you. I waited up for you until half-past twelve, and then I felt so tired—I had such a weary day of it—that I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer."

"Poor mother!" said Frank, sipping his coffee. "Shall I read it aloud? it will impress itself better upon me if I do so."

"As you please, my dear. I don't think I have failed to grasp its contents, but perhaps your reading of it will throw some new light upon it."

Young Aylward read:

“MADAM,—I venture to address you as being the nearest relative of Lord Clashmore, with whom at present I have the honour to be in communication. It may possibly be that the intelligence which I have to transmit has already reached your ears. I observe that some account of the matter has already appeared in the newspapers, but such as I have seen is very vague, and in many respects misleading.

“As you are doubtless aware, it was his lordship’s habit to come to Waterford occasionally, accompanied by his steward, Samuel Backas. Sometimes he drove into town, and sometimes he walked along the beach at Tramore, and joined the train there. Last Friday he called at my office and instructed me to wait upon him at his residence the following day. His lordship returned to Tramore on Friday afternoon, journeying by a train which arrived in that town about five o’clock. He then walked up the Strand towards Rhi-na-Shark. I might remind you that the Strand extends in this direction for a stretch of about three miles, and at this time of year is almost deserted. His lordship’s custom was to cross the river of Rhi-na-Shark in his own boat, which was usually moored at the side nearest to Rhi-na-Shark House. This part of the Strand is almost always deserted. There is no other way of approaching Rhi-na-Shark House in this direction for miles, except by crossing the river, which is rather deep and sometimes turbulent.

“On Saturday morning I drove out by road to Rhi-na-Shark House, in order to receive his lordship’s instructions. When I arrived at his residence he was not there, nor had any tidings of him been heard since he had left home the previous morning. Of course, this was very

startling news for me. I interviewed all the servants, and then, at the suggestion of his lordship's butler, I went down to the ferry, which is situated about a mile from Rhi-na-Shark House and cross-examined his lordship's boatman, John Corbett. This man declared that he had expected his lordship to return between five and six o'clock. Corbett explained that he had been out fishing off the bay of Tramore, all the morning, and owing to an accident—the snapping of the mast of his fishing yawl—he had been unable to return in time, and had not arrived back at the ferry until nearly eight o'clock. He had expected to get a blowing-up from his lordship, who had (the man Corbett presumed) found someone to fetch the small boat across the narrow river, and (Corbett) had been afraid to go near the house until Saturday morning. He then learned that his lordship and the man Backas had not returned, and he supposed—as did the servants in the house—they had remained in Waterford for the night.

“The place, I may repeat, in the neighbourhood of this ferry is absolutely deserted, and no one, as far as I can ascertain, had seen his lordship later than half-past five o'clock. He was met then, about a mile up the Strand, by a Mr. M'Grath, who is well known in Tramore. M'Grath saluted his lordship, who returned his salute silently; and from that time up to the present moment of writing I have been unable to discover any tidings of the Viscount.

“Knowing how averse he was to anything like publicity about his affairs, I said nothing to anybody concerning the matter, but being gravely apprehensive, I consulted the county inspector of police privately, and

lie himself went over the ground, and is as much at a loss as I am to know what has become of Lord Clashmore, or of the man Backas. Of course, it may be that his lordship for some reason returned to Tramore, but we can find no trace of him there. His lordship's lonely manner of living has made our researches all the more difficult. The county inspector has several of his men engaged in the search, and has suggested to me that we should employ a skilled London detective. I thought it best, before doing so, to write to you. If his lordship disappeared for any reason of his own he would resent my instituting enquiries about him, and I am naturally anxious not to do anything which would be calculated to displease so honoured a client. At the same time, I am very uneasy, and would take it as a favour if you would instruct me in the matter. If you telegraph me 'Employ London,' I shall understand that you desire me to follow out the advice of the county inspector of police.

"Everything has been done, so far, to avoid publicity, and I sincerely trust the matter will be cleared up satisfactorily."

"This is a startler," said young Aylward, laying down the letter.

"What do you make of it, Frank? What shall I do?"

"Let us think over it. I know so little of my uncle or his manner of living, or the whereabouts of that out-of-the-world residence of his, that I don't feel equal to making up my mind in a hurry as to what ought to be done."

"Your uncle has been murdered, I have no doubt," said Mrs. Aylward. "Some of those rascally Irish have

thrown him into that outlandishly-named river, or have shot him and buried his body in the sands."

"What a blood-thirsty person you are, mother! I am afraid you are too fond of jumping to conclusions. I understand he had a most peaceable collection of tenantry surrounding him—people who regarded him as a kind of land-owning demi-god, or sphinx, or Timon of Athens."

"If there is one thing I cannot stand, Frank, it is your frivolous way of dismissing serious subjects. Possibly this may mean the most serious event in your whole life."

"How, my dear mother? I think the Viscount behaved almost admirably to you and to me in the matter of settlements, but I can hardly be expected to feel much interest in an old curmudgeon who never opened his lips to me but once, and then only to say some gruff things to me at my father's funeral."

"He was horribly distressed then. His lordship loved your father dearly, and was visibly shaken by his untimely death."

"He had a way of dissembling his love, it seems to me," said young Aylward. "But by the way, suppose anything has happened to him—which fate forbid!—what becomes of the title and the estate? They to to an unknown cousin of mine, don't they?"

"That is what I am hinting at, Frank; but you won't see it. The new Viscount Clashmore, with an income of twenty odd thousand a year, and large accumulated savings, I have no doubt may be you, my dearest boy."

"But mother, surely this is not so? I always understood there was a direct heir—the Viscount's son."

"Perhaps I am wrong in speaking to you like this,

Frank. It was your dear father's latest wish that I should never hold out any hope of the succession to you, but in my inmost heart I have often regarded you as your uncle's successor. I promised your father I would never speak to you on the subject unless I found there was an absolute necessity to do so. I think the time has now arrived when I should speak—though what I have to say may only disturb you, and lead to nothing but heart-burnings. Finish your breakfast like a dear boy—you are eating nothing—and then I will talk to you. And we can decide what we shall telegraph to your uncle's lawyer."





## CHAPTER III

### "TO THE WEST!"

MRS. AYLWARD was a handsome, well-preserved woman. She was in her forty-ninth year, but she might easily have declared herself to be nearly a decade younger. She was a busy woman, concerning herself with all sorts of fashionable philanthropic schemes, as well as being in constant attendance at the social gatherings of her own set.

One of many daughters of a Sussex squire, she had married in her twenty-third year, the Honourable Desmond Aylward, then a young lieutenant in a Lancer regiment. She had brought a very modest fortune to her husband, who was himself by no means a wealthy man, and up to the time of her husband's death, the Aylwards had found it no very easy matter to keep up appearances. Her husband was a proud man, and would never brook any help from his wealthy brother, Viscount Clashmore. There had been a coolness of long standing between the brothers, and during his married life the younger had rarely met the solitary and eccentric head of his house.

The widow's chief anxieties were centred in her only child. Frank disappointed her a good deal. He had failed to graduate at his university, and he showed a disinclination for work of any kind. He had no taste for the profession of arms. He could easily have found an entry into the diplomatic world, in which his uncle had once been a shining light, but he preferred to live an idle life. He had a talent for landscape painting, but it was not a talent sufficient to earn him distinction. He was fond of books and music, was a fairly good judge of a horse, and he handled an oar or a billiard cue well. Apart from the vice of idleness he had few vices, certainly no glaring ones. He was tall, good-looking, good-tempered, honourable, and, for a young man in his walk of life, remarkably unsophisticated.

Feeling that it was hopeless to induce him to make a mark for himself in the world, his mother made up her mind that the best thing to do was to marry him well; but Frank showed a strange distaste for female society. Mrs. Aylward did not despair. He was young, and all he wanted was some spur; she was convinced there was something in the young man if he could only be induced to cast the slough of indolence; in the pursuit of some eligible well-beloved he might be easily stirred to action.

One thing which irritated Mrs. Aylward was that Frank evinced no pride of birth. To her this was incomprehensible. She was herself an ardent lover of rank, and young Aylward came on both sides of old and honourable houses—indeed, on the paternal side of a house which had earned at one time considerable distinction. She could only impute this lack of family pride to obstinacy on the part of her son. He had sufficient measure

of *amour propre*; the higher pride he might possibly possess and yet desire to conceal it, or to ignore its existence. It was fashionable in certain male circles to scoff at the claims of blue blood, or to affect indifference as to the merits of an escutcheon.

Mrs. Aylward knew the pedigree of every family in "Burke," and could talk with enthusiasm at any time about aristocratic births, marriages, scandals or deaths. The peerage was the breath of her nostrils. Her close connection with it fascinated her, and it was a source of infinite disappointment to her that Lord Clashmore was a recluse, indeed a misanthrope, and that she could make small practical use of her relationship to the Viscount.

Frank Aylward had been brought up in the belief that he had little or nothing to expect from his uncle except a moderate allowance during the Viscount's life, and the probability of a legacy at his death.

Mr. Mason's letter had stirred the widow's blood, and sent surging afresh through her brain the wild hope, which she had often secretly entertained that she might live to see her beloved boy a Peer, even if only an Irish Peer. She was a wise woman, however, and knew how to keep her own counsel, and she was well aware how bitter it would prove were she to raise false hopes in the breast of her son. She had been slightly overcome by the intelligence conveyed to her by the Irish solicitor, and by his opening statement that she was the nearest relative to Lord Clashmore with whom the solicitor was in communication. There was no mention of the heir to the viscounty; he had always been a shadowy and mysterious entity. Did he exist at all?

After breakfast Mrs. Aylward and her son seated themselves at a window which afforded a pleasant prospect of Hyde Park.

“Now, mother,” said the young man, “let me hear this family history. I thought it was simplicity itself. It reads easily at any rate in Burke, Lodge, Debrett, or any Peerage I have glanced at. The first Aylward who distinguished himself was Hildebrand, a ‘Gentleman adventurer,’ who went to Ireland with Sir Walter Raleigh, and if I am any judge, he must have been an admirable land-pirate, for he seems to have snatched from one M’Carthy of Drumglass, in the county of Cork, some eight or nine thousand acres.”

“My dear Frank, he got a grant of these acres from his queen for his services.”

“I know you and I don’t agree on these points, mother, but it certainly seems to me that his services consisted merely in the killing of a good many natives—”

“Rebels, my dear. Be accurate, pray!”

“I won’t argue with you, mother; but, anyhow, Sir Hildebrand—for he was knighted by Elizabeth as well as estated—conducted a plan of campaign (as they call it in Ireland now) which had the merit of primitive simplicity. I suppose, having such a collection of open-air skeletons, he didn’t take the trouble to conceal any in the cupboard. These, I suppose, were reserved for later and more peaceable members of the family. But I was not aware of any of these ugly household gods.”

“Painstaking as those literary people are, they cannot be expected, nor would it be prudent for them, to take note of all the family skeletons,” said Mrs. Aylward, sententiously. “I will endeavour to be as brief as possible,

though I shall have to go back nearly a century."

A shade of anxiety passed over Frank's handsome face. He knew well his mother's propensity to dilate upon family histories. Still he told himself this was something with which, perhaps, he ought to be familiar.

"Your great-grandfather, the first Viscount Clashmore, was, as you are aware, Sir Henry Aylward, Baronet, who was made an Irish peer for his political services at the time of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland. He was a wealthy man, and owned several estates in his native country. A place of his, built by his father—this house with the outlandish name, Rhi-na-Shark—was a favourite retreat. It is situated in a wild and romantic district, and by all accounts, the Viscount was of a somewhat wild and romantic disposition. At any rate, he crowned his career by marrying one Mary M'Carthy, a peasant girl."

"My great-grandmother a peasant!" exclaimed Frank. "Nonsense, mother!"

"It is a fact, my dear boy."

"She is mentioned in Peerages as only daughter of Teague M'Carthy, Esquire, of Prospect House, County Waterford."

"Teague M'Carthy was a peasant farmer, and Prospect House, I rather think, was a mud cabin."

Frank rose from his chair as his mother spoke, and walking a few paces up the room as he stood before a portrait and gazed at it.

"This is a peasant girl!" he exclaimed, after a few moments. "I can't believe it. There is something in the face which never could have belonged to a plebeian, and I always understood it was considered an excellent

likeness of my great-grandmother.”

“Yes, that is so,” said Mrs. Aylward. “Mary M’Carthy was remarkably handsome—indeed, distinguished-looking, I am told—but she was a peasant, and in all probability a barefooted peasant, when she first attracted the eye of your great-grandfather.”

“Then they must raise some very remarkable peasants in Ireland,” observed Frank, returning to his seat. “And I always understood,” he added with a smile, “that I bore a strong resemblance to the first Viscountess Clashmore.”

“In some respects a remarkable likeness,” said his mother; “about your brows and eyes chiefly. But I suppose, my dear boy, a clever portrait painter can impart the necessary nobility or whatever you choose to call it, into the features of any good-looking young woman who happens to stray into the Peerage.”

“Well, mother?”

“Well, my dear, the first Viscount Clashmore suffered for his sin against *les convenances*, He declared that his wife was—as all Irish peasants are—the descendant of an Irish king, one M’Carthy, of Cork or Kerry, or some other barbarous region. But Lady Clashmore was not to be thrust violently upon an offended aristocracy; and her husband who was as proud as he was romantic, took her off—in a huff at something or other—to Italy, and lived and died there. There was only one child, a son, who was christened for his sins with that outlandish name of Teague, one of the M’Carthy family names.”

“And pretty fair evidence that my great-grandfather was fond of his wife, and was not ashamed to acknowledge her influence over him.”

"I believe they lived very happily together. This Teague—your grandfather—was a wild gentleman; and after his father's death he established himself at Clashmore Hall, in the County Louth, and dipped the estate as deeply as he could possibly manage to dip it. The only thing to his credit is that he wiped out as far as he possibly could the peasant stain by marrying Lady Gwendoline, daughter of the Marquis Morecambe, and by her he had two sons. I need hardly remind you that the present Viscount, when a young man, entered the diplomatic service, and was on the high-road to distinction in it when he—"

"Married another plebeian, I suppose," interrupted Frank. "That kind of thing, I am aware, has a tendency to run in the blood. I remember that he is stated to have married the only daughter of George Drake, Esquire. Was this Mr. Drake another of the noble band of bogus Esquires who flit through Debrett?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Aylward. "I believe this George Drake, Esquire, was a livery-stable keeper from Islington. Your uncle did not at first contemplate marriage with the lady, who was a ballet dancer or an opera singer—I forgot which. And this is what I have always blamed your dear father for."

"What on earth has my father to do with it?"

"I will tell you if you will have a little patience. Your father was the real soul of honour, and had very strict notions of morality. Indeed, he was somewhat Quixotic in this respect. Hearing of your uncle's marked attention to the actress, and also learning that she had his definite promise of marriage, he actually induced your uncle to keep that promise and marry this Martha Drake—"

or Marie de Montmorenci, as she was styled on the stage. In doing this he was well aware that he was cutting off from himself, or his possible heirs, all chance of succession to the Viscounty—or, at least, all probable chance. That was long before our marriage, I must admit.”

“I suppose he did what he thought was right. And it is most likely that if my uncle hadn’t married the actress he would have married someone else—possibly some one who would have brought him a large family of sons, all bars to our prospects.”

“My dear Frank, I am glad you consider things so lightly; I confess I cannot see with your eyes. But to my story. Shortly after the birth of your uncle’s child, a son, Lady Clashmore mysteriously disappeared. Your uncle and your father had a tremendous scene, I am informed. What passed between them I never could learn. All I know is that Lord Clashmore upbraided your father with having ruined his life. The Viscount retired, more years ago than I dare to count, to this Rhi-na-Shark, and there he has since spent his days, holding little communion with the outer world and none at all with his relatives or former friends. He seemed greatly stricken with grief when he attended your father’s funeral, but he made no communication to me—and, of course, I did not speak of it—concerning the cause of the quarrel between them.”

“Have you ever seen, or heard, otherwise of this heir to Clashmore—my cousin?”

“Never,” said Mrs. Aylward. “Nor, as I have told you, of his mother. The whole thing is wrapped up in mystery; but the present affair may clear up something.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, mother,” said Frank. “In-



stead of employing a detective from Scotland Yard, or from one of those private enquiry fellows, I'll go over to Ireland as a modern gentleman adventurer, and investigate the matter myself."

"You, Frank!" exclaimed his mother.

"Yes, I. It will give me something to do—something that will interest me. Perhaps I may come across my curmudgeon uncle, rescue him from dire peril, and discover that I am the real long-lost or long-forgotten heir to the title and lands of Clashmore."

"I wish you would not talk so flippantly," said Mrs. Aylward.

"But have you any violent objection to urge against my paying this surprise visit to Ireland?"

"I hardly see what good you can do there. You cannot fashion yourself into a detective; and, if he is only concealing himself, you might anger your uncle—a contingency which this Mr. Mason rightly dreads. Besides, you would be recognized, and if your uncle has been murdered by his tenantry they might not hesitate about injuring you. No, my dear boy, you mustn't think of such a thing."

"But no one could possibly know me. I could adopt some convenient *nom-de-guerre*—say, for instance, that of my haughty aunt, Lady Venables. You remember I used it before at the foot of those contributions of mine to the *Art World*."

"This kind of talk angers me, Frank."

"Don't be vexed, mother. I tell you it is a capital idea. Who can have more interest in searching for the lost man than his only nephew? This lawyer of his, Mason, could put me on the right track. I could appear

in Ireland disguised as a landscape painter—like the Lord of Burleigh, you know.”

“A very ill-omened affair that would be, considering certain family weaknesses.”

“The village maiden! Oh, my dear mother, there is no village maiden born that could have any attraction for me. I am not, I freely admit, a sycophantic lover of blood; but, apart from my own feelings, which are not quite so democratic as you seem to think, on such a subject I know what is due to you.”

“My dear boy!” said Mrs. Aylward, seizing her son’s hand and pressing it affectionately.

“Now, mother, let me have my way. I promise you I’ll conduct myself discreetly and creditably. This interests me”—he took up Mason’s letter which he had placed in the window-sill—“more than anything has ever interested me before. All I want is your consent and approval, and I’ll pack myself off to Ireland this afternoon.”

“My consent I can hardly withhold; but my approval is another thing.”

“Oh, I know it is my unlucky reference to the Lord of Burleigh which has upset you: but, trust me, mother!”

“Do as you wish, my dear boy. Of course I trust you, but I have my misgivings.”

“There is no need for any. Now I’ll go send a telegram off to this Mason, the solicitor, saying we are sending over a man privately. I can reveal myself to him when I arrive at Waterford. I expect he is a discreet fellow, or my crusty uncle would not employ him. His letter shows him to be a man of some acuteness, and he gives a clear-headed account of affairs. Don’t be half-hearted, mother. Say I may do this with your approval ”

“Very well, Frank. Be it so. Only, whatever you do, don’t bring back an Irish accent with you. I am informed it is most contagious—worse even than the Scotch brogue; and you know how insupportable you were last year after your return from your sketching tour in the Highlands.”



## CHAPTER IV

### A GRUFF FELLOW-TRAVELLER

FRANK AYLWARD arrived at Paddington Terminus at about half-past five on the same afternoon. As he walked up and down the platform at which the South Wales train was drawn up he caught sight of a bulky, ungainly, travel-worn leather portmanteau which lay on the platform, labelled in large letters "Charles M'Carthy, Waterford." Young Aylward was well aware that M'Carthy was not an uncommon name in Ireland, but in his new role of amateur detective, he was determined not to disregard any clue, however little it might appear to promise. He stood near the big portmanteau until the owner, having claimed it, instructed a porter to put it into a second-class smoking compartment. The owner of the trunk was a dumpy, blue-eyed man, about fifty years of age. He wore a full beard—a gaudy red beard. He was dressed fairly well. His clothes were of good material, though the cut of them was somewhat sloppish. Frank was puzzled to determine what might be the profession or business of Charles M'Carthy. Of course, the only connection in young Aylward's mind between Lord

Clashmore and the stout passenger was that about a century ago a Clashmore had married into a plebeian family named M'Carthy, belonging to the county of Waterford; and it might possibly be that the red-bearded man was a member of this family.

After some deliberation Frank resolved to travel to Milford Haven, if he could find a seat in the same compartment, with the stout, red-bearded man. He had a first-class ticket, and had ordered the porter to put his portmanteau and other paraphernalia into a first-class compartment, but this would not prove any obstacle to his travelling in the second class carriage. He waited until the train was about to start, and then entered the compartment which sheltered Mr. M'Carthy. He found the compartment had its four corners occupied. In one of the corners facing the engine the red-headed man was comfortably ensconced. As the train moved out of Paddington, Frank's four fellow-passengers busied themselves with newspapers and tobacco. Evidently they were all strangers, for no one spoke to the other. The journey to Gloucester was performed almost in silence. At Gloucester one of the passengers left the train, and Frank took his seat—the seat opposite Mr. M'Carthy. He was now very tired and easily fell asleep, and he did not awake until the train pulled up at Newport. Here another of the passengers alighted, and shortly afterwards, at Cardiff, another of them, leaving Frank alone with his *vis-a-vis*.

Mr. M'Carthy was apparently not loquacious; or perhaps, Frank reflected, he was a very shy man. He had not exchanged a syllable with anyone since the train had left Paddington.

As Cardiff was left behind, Frank resolved to break the ice. "Crossing to Ireland, sir?" said he.

"Aye," answered Mr. M'Carthy, indolently.

"What time do we get to Waterford?"

"About ten o'clock in the morning if we're lucky."

"What sort of a crossing is it?"

"Generally pretty rough," replied the red-bearded man, struggling with a yawn.

"Then you are in the habit of crossing, I take it, sir?"

"Aye."

"Pray excuse my questioning you, but I am a poor sailor and a little nervous about the voyage across the St. George's Channel."

"Then is this your first visit to Ireland?" said M'Carthy, asking a question for the first time.

"Yes," said Frank. "I am going to take a holiday in the south of Ireland. I am told it is a very picturesque part of the country."

"Here and there," droned M'Carthy, in a tone that implied his poor opinion of the beauty of the south of Ireland.

There was a silence for some moments, and this time the red-bearded man broke it.

"What part of the south are you thinking of visiting, might I ask?"

"I am proposing a rambling tour to myself—anywhere, everywhere, that there is anything to look at. I am in search of picturesque scenery."

"An artist, perhaps."

"Well, I try to flatter myself that I can do a little daubing."

"You're a Londoner, I suppose?"

“An unfortunate Cockney.”

“It’s a great place, London, and no mistake,” said M’Carthy; “but too big altogether for my taste. I wouldn’t live in it from a year’s end to year’s end if they were to crown me.”

“You get accustomed to its bigness,” said Frank, amused at the vision of a coronation conjured up by Mr. M’Carthy’s words. He was anxious to introduce a reference or allusion to Tramore, and follow it up by some remark concerning the disappearance of Lord Clashmore, but he hardly knew how to begin, and he was afraid that some untoward slip of the tongue might reveal his identity. After a short pause he spoke again.

“I am told the scenery about the coast of Waterford is very striking.”

“Devil a much I could ever see in it but rocks and water and bits of mountains here and there. It’s a poor part all along by the Atlantic—very poor land entirely.”

“You see I’m not thinking of the character of the soil. I’m thinking of the scenery merely; and rocks, water, and mountains are just what I’m looking for.”

“You’ll find plenty of them, then,” said Mr. M’Carthy. “The water is mostly salt, and the mountains as barren as your hat. Being a business man I haven’t much time for enjoying the beauties of nature.” He spoke a little scornfully.

“Then you live in the town, I presume?” ventured Frank.

“Town! I live in the city. Do I look like a countryman?” asked Mr. M’Carthy, his speech thickening with indignation.

“You’ll excuse me, I hope,” said Frank, “but a lazy



Londoner like myself is inclined to regard Ireland merely as a tourist country. One doesn't think about the cities and towns. Tramore is a picturesque spot, I understand. Do you know it?"

"Do I know it!" said Mr. M'Carthy. "Faith I do. I was born near it. I don't know much about the picturesqueness of it, but there's a fine strand and good bathing there, and a big bay—an ugly place in the winter time for a ship to stray into."

"There's a village there, is there not?"

"A village! A town, you mean. Ay, nice little town, but no trade in it worth talking of."

"Is there a decent hotel there?"

"You'll have no difficulty about that," answered Mr. McCarthy, oracularly.

Frank felt that he had now gone so far he might easily go a step farther.

"I suppose there are some nice country seats in the neighbourhood of Tramore?"

"A few. Not many."

"Doesn't Lord Clashmore live there?"

"Lord Clashmore? Oh, ay. That's the hermit. He does, I believe."

Frank had been watching Mr. M'Carthy's face eagerly as he put the last question, and it seemed to him that a curious gleam of uneasiness or suspicion was visible for a moment in his fellow-traveller's eyes; but the dim light of a carriage lamp was not sufficient to afford him any certainty on this point.

"Maybe 'tis going on a visit to Lord Clashmore you are?" said Mr. M'Carthy after a brief pause, a broad smile on his broad face.

It was now Frank's turn to be uneasy, but he bore himself well.

"I am afraid not," said he. "A poor landscape painter and a rich lord are too far apart for visiting. But I was told that there was some wild scenery in the neighbourhood of Lord Clashmore's house."

"And who told you so?" asked Mr. M'Carthy.

"A friend who was sketching in Ireland last year," said Frank. He was surprised how easily the lie flew to his tongue.

"A strange place for him to ferret out! It's out of all track."

"The very place an artist would naturally seek for."

"Well, if heaps of sand and very nasty rocks and an ugly tumbling sea and curlews and wild plover and seagulls and that sort are picturesque I won't say but that you'll find them in the neighbourhood. But it's a dreary spot. Go up to Lismore and down the Blackwater if you want scenery. There are more pictures in a yard of the Blackwater than you'll find in all Tramore."

"Thank you very much. I have a note of the Blackwater, and mean to visit it."

"Take my advice," said Mr. M'Carthy, "and don't bother yourself with Tramore or round about there. It might be lively enough in July or August, but at this time of the year 'twould give you the blues to be looking at it. And if you'll excuse me, my young friend, I don't think you mentioned your name, by the way?"

"No. I believe I did not," said Frank. He found it a very difficult task to utter the lie which followed. "My name is Venables—Francis Venables."

"My name is M'Carthy," said the red-bearded man,

“Charles M’Carthy,” stretching out his legs on the seat. “I’m well known in Waterford. I’m in the butter business there. And as I was going to say a few minutes ago, I’ll stretch myself out for a sleep now I feel drowsy.” He had now wrapped the lower part of his body tightly in his rug. Frank imitated the example of his fellow passenger. He was angry with him-self for having taken so much pain to pump a mere butter merchant; and yet he could not dismiss the feeling that his first mention of Lord Clashmore had disconcerted Mr. Charles M’Carthy.



## CHAPTER V

LARRY FITZGERALD

WHEN Frank (it will be more convenient for the present to refer to him by his Christian name) arrived on deck about eight o'clock next morning, he was five or six miles off the entrance of Waterford Harbour. Though the sea was moderate—that is, moderate for that portion of St. George's Channel which meets the in-rolling Atlantic—the steamer had plunged and tumbled a good deal during the early morning, and Frank had struggled through some weary and misery-laden hours.

The only other passenger who had yet ventured on deck was Mr. M'Carthy. The stout, red-bearded man was pacing the quarter-deck valiantly, a shawl pinned round his shoulders, and a cloth cap drawn tightly over his brow. He recognized Frank, and, approaching him, spoke to him in a cheerful and hearty manner. After enquiries as to how he had spent the night and how he felt this morning, Mr. M'Carthy began to enlarge upon the local lions.

“That's the Saltee Islands astern of us there,” said he, pointing out two great verdure-clad rocks which reared

their heads out of the yeasty waters. The big island, he informed Frank, was inhabited.

"It looks," Frank observed, "somewhat like the top of Ararat peeping out after the Deluge."

"That's the Hook Tower in front of us," continued Mr. M'Carthy—"that great lighthouse there which marks the entrance to the River Suir. We'll be inside the harbour in about twenty minutes now, and then you'll have smooth water."

As the steamer approached more closely to the Hook Tower, the red-bearded passenger pointed out the village of Dunmore at the opposite side of Waterford Harbour. Tramore, he explained, was some miles further round the coast to the westward, and the city of Waterford was situated about twenty miles from the mouth of the river.

As the steamboat entered the jaws of the Suir, Mr. M'Carthy informed Frank that he intended to have his breakfast in the saloon, and he invited the young man to join him; but Frank was too qualmish to think of feeding, and he decided to remain on deck. The captain, a handsome, bold looking mariner, was pacing the narrow bridge overhead.

When Mr. M'Carthy had gone below, Frank noticed a passenger emerging from the cabin who was apparently as poor a sailor as himself. This was a tall, slenderly built man. It was not easy to guess at his age. He might be forty. He was clean-shaven and had clean-cut features. A fawn-coloured overcoat, studded with a mother-of-pearl buttons, fitted his spare frame tightly. As he stood on the deck he tottered with the lurching of the ship. He was evidently good humoured for he laughed aloud at his inability to steady his sea-legs. He

carried a stout oak stick in his hand. Frank, who was watching this odd-looking passenger, was electrified by hearing a shout from the bridge.

"Yoicks!" roared the captain, making a speaking trumpet of his hands.

"Tally-ho, there!" roared the passenger back.

Frank could hardly understand this sort of salutation on the deck of a passenger steamboat, and he wondered what on earth it could, mean.

"Why the mischief don't you steer this old tub of yours straight, Captain?" roared the man in the fawn-coloured overcoat.

"We'll shake the hayseed out of your hair, my son," roared the skipper. "Steady there! Wey ho, my lad!" as the passenger, not being able to adapt himself to the motion of the ship, was very nearly sent sprawling upon the deck.

"Very rough country this, Captain," he cried. "Steady your old box, man! or I'll get your certificate of incompetency suspended."

"Go and pick cockles of the Back Strand!" cried the skipper. "You're not crossing the ferry at Rhi-na-Shark now, lad."

"What made you knock the jibboom out of the Con-nibeg Lightship?" shaking his stick at the captain. "Isn't the Atlantic ocean big enough for you?"

By this time most of the passengers on deck were interesting themselves in the conversation between the man with the walking stick and the captain of the mail boat. Evidently the former was known to some of them. One man exclaimed: "Bravo, Mr. Fitzgerald! Give it to him! She does roll, and no mistake."

“Well, bad luck to me, Mr. Power,” said he, “if I’ll ever cross the St. George’s Channel again. It’s after shaking the liver out of me.”

“Come up here, you scoundrel,” roared the Captain, “until I show you some of the landmarks of your native county! Come up, Fitz; I have something to tell you.”

Mr. Fitzgerald, aided by a couple of sailors, then mounted the steep ladder which led to the bridge.

This scene amused Frank considerably. It was so different from anything he had ever experienced in a passenger boat carrying her Majesty’s mails. The mention of the ferry at Rhi-na-Shark had riveted his attention. Who or what could Mr. Fitzgerald be? Here was already something to puzzle over.

Mr. M’Carthy now appeared on deck, and joined Frank.

“Can you tell me who is that gentleman on the bridge with the Captain?” asked the young man.

“He’s a Mr. Fitzgerald—Larry Fitzgerald. He belongs to Waterford.”

“A trader there?”

“Oh, dear, no! He’s a gentleman,” said Mr. M’Carthy. “That is to say, he doesn’t earn his living.” And then, fearing lest this explanation might be misunderstood, he added: “He’s a gentleman, anyhow—as decent and good-humoured a fellow as ever breathed, but fit for nothing but sporting and amusing himself. He knows everybody in Waterford from the lord down to the corner boy. . . . Well, Mr. Venables, what do you think of our river here?”

Frank expressed his sense of delight at the scenery which was now unfolding itself as the steamer paddled



up the river.

"And tell me," said Mr. M'Carthy, "if you don't mind my asking, do you live by this landscape painting?"

"Fortunately, I am not compelled to do so," answered Frank, blushing. "I have a little income of my own. Otherwise I'm afraid I'd find it very hard to paddle my canoe."

"After all," said Mr. McCarthy, "there's nothing like trade—good, honest trade. It keeps a man out of mischief."

"I suppose it all depends upon how you are brought up," said Frank.

"I don't know so much about that," said Mr. M'Carthy. "My father quarrelled with me because I went into business. He had an idea that commerce soiled the hands, and he is only a small farmer. But don't let me be bothering you talking about myself. Is there anything I could do for you in Waterford?"

Frank was astonished at the change in his fellow-traveller's manner. In the train he had been gruff almost to offensiveness. Now he was all civility and cordiality. Could it be, the young man asked himself, that Mr. Charles M'Carthy was one person in Great Britain and another person in his native country?

"It's very kind of you to ask," said Frank, half-amused at the notion of sheltering himself under the wing of an Irish butter-merchant, "but I really don't think you could do anything for me—except, perhaps, you might recommend me to a good hotel."

"There are several good ones," said Mr. M'Carthy. "Try Mullin's. Any of the jarveys that meet the boat will know it well enough."

“Thank you very much.”

“Now, do you mind me saying one thing to you, Mr. Venables? It’s as like as not that we’ll never meet again, and for that reason I suppose you may regard my advice as being disinterested. You’re an Englishman visiting Ireland for the first time. Now, don’t be suspicious of everybody you meet. You had something at the back of your mind about me when you spoke to me in the train last night. Oh, don’t protest against it—no harm done! You see, we’re quick to observe in Ireland, and there’s nothing to be gained by suspecting us. It’s better even to be deceived now and again than to go about with uneasiness in your mind about everyone you may not happen to know.”

“I am afraid you are ridiculously suspicious yourself,” said Frank, nettled at the proffered advice. “You are mistaken in supposing that I suspected you of anything.”

“Don’t be angry with me,” said Mr. M’Carthy suavely. “I have noticed that Englishmen when they come here for the first time are full of suspicions. You’ll do better, believe me, to abandon them; at any rate you’ll have a pleasanter time.”

“Hallo, M’Carthy! What the mischief brings you into this galley?”

Frank and his would be mentor turned round and saw Mr. Fitzgerald, who had descended from the bridge.

“I’ve been over in London,” said Mr. M’Carthy, “on business.”

“Well, I don’t suppose you were over there for pleasure,” said Mr. Fitzgerald “No one would dream of accusing you of taking a holiday, Mac.” He smiled pleasantly as he spoke.

“And what brings yourself here, Mr. Fitz?”

“I met a fellow from Cardiff last week, and he asked me to spend a few days with him up the Taff Vale, and like the fool that I am, I went. But never again!” he murmured, a comical expression on his face, as he placed the palm of one hand across the region of his stomach.

“So you’re a bad sailor?”

“The devil a worse!”

“Will you allow me to introduce a young London gentleman I met on the train? Mr. Venables, Mr. Fitzgerald.”

“Delighted to make your acquaintance, sir,” said Mr. Fitzgerald, extending his hand.

Frank shook the extended hand coldly, but Mr. Fitzgerald did not seem to heed the young man’s frigid manner.

“I say, M’Carthy,” said he, “that’s a queer story about Lord Clashmore. The Captain has just been telling me about him. I can hardly credit it. What the mischief have you done with his lordship?”

“I saw a paragraph about it in a London paper while I was over there,” said M’Carthy. “It looks very strange.”

“I wonder could himself and Backas have stumbled into that quicksand? They were always sceptical about the danger of it.”

“Oh, faith, you mustn’t ask me. Perhaps his lordship got tired of his hermitage, and quietly retired to some other of his a retreats.”

“I’ll be out Rhi-na-Shark way in a day or two. It’s infernally strange. It has given me quite a shock.”

Frank was naturally interested in this dialogue. It seemed to him that the ignorance concerning Lord Clashmore which the butter merchant had meant to convey

when the Viscount's name had been first mentioned by the young man must have been assumed. What could this mean? M'Carthy and Fitzgerald were two individuals upon whom it might be wise to keep an eye. Fitzgerald's manner of putting the question "What have you done with him?" might have some meaning, or it might be merely an Irish idiom for "What can have happened to him?"

He decided that he would adopt M'Carthy's advice as far as possible, and endeavour to avoid suspecting strangers with-out good reason. He would ascertain what Mr. Mason had to say first of all. The man who had written so clear an account of affairs within his knowledge must be a lawyer with a clear head.

## CHAPTER VI

### INTERVIEWING A SOLICITOR

FRANK drove from the steam boat to Mullin's hotel, which was situated on Waterford quay. He found he had an appetite now, and having appeased this he sauntered out in search of Mr. Hugh Mason. He had no difficulty in finding Mason's office in Quay street—a street which ran at right angles to the quay, about three hundred yards distant from his hotel. He walked into a passage, closed at one end by a green baize door. Pushing this open he found himself in an office, where there were two young clerks and a tall man of middle age, with a high forehead and a long, sharp nose. Frank shrewdly suspected that the tall man was Mr. Mason's managing clerk. He addressed him, saying he desired to see Mr. Hugh Mason.

“He's engaged,” said the middle-aged clerk, “and will be engaged for an hour or more. What's your business with him?”

“My business with him is strictly private,” said Frank, tartly. The voice of the clerk was rasping and his manner brusque, indeed almost insolent.

“Maybe you want to sell him a Bible or a sewing-machine on the instalment plan,” said the clerk, opening his mouth almost from ear to ear—as if his lips were india-rubber, and he wished to stretch them to their utmost limit—and shutting it again hurriedly and silently as one might shut a door that worked smoothly on its hinges

“You’re extremely rude, sir,” said Frank.

“It’s only a way of mine,” said the clerk “Don’t take offence, young man, for none is meant. If you want to see Mr. Mason you may have to wait a couple of hours”—here he opened his capacious mouth again and shut it again; Frank subsequently discovered that this was Mr. Weekes’s way manner of smiling or laughing—“whereas you have me in the flesh—Edward Henry Weekes—ready and capable of attending to any business concerned with the sacred majesty of the law in this kingdom of Ireland.”

“As I have already told you,” said Frank, “my business is strictly private, and with Mr. Mason only.”

“What name?” asked Mr. Weekes sharply.

“He will not recognize it. You had better let me write a few lines to explain my business. I suppose a note can be conveyed to your master?”

“Ho, ho, my young man!” said Mr. Weekes. “So I have raised your dander. I meant, as I have already assured you, no offence; but if you *are* anybody, will you kindly inform me how I am to discern between you and any other fellow who wants to waste the time of my masther?” He laid emphasis on the last word and thickened the last syllable of it. “You come here without any appointment, you give no name, you are plainly

English, and we have no business with England."

Here Mr. Weekes came to a dead stop, looked curiously at Frank, wrinkling his forehead, and sucking in his shaven checks. "Just one moment," said he, coming from his desk and opening the baize door. "Would you mind stepping out into the hall for a moment?"

Frank, his anger by no means appeased, did as he was desired.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Weekes, "you come from A. *in re* C.?"

"Yes. My credentials arc from the Honourable Mrs. Aylward."

"Dash my buttons!" said Mr. Weekes, "but that never occurred to me until I mentioned the name of England. Might I ask your name now?"

"I told you," said Frank, "that my business was strictly private. I am somewhat annoyed to find that evidently Mr. Mason has not kept it so. My name is Venables but that will not help you in any way. I shall produce my credentials to Mr. Mason only."

"You shall be conducted to him instantly, sir," said Mr. Weekes.

"I understood you to say that Mr. Mason was engaged for a couple of hours."

"A legal fiction, my dear, sir," explained Mr. Weekes, opening his mouth widely, and shutting it with the usual impassiveness. "The fact is I am a sort of a quickset hedge here. Wags have suggested that the door leading to my room should have printed upon it 'Beware of the Dog'; but jocose people ought to remember that, if I am the dog, I would be useless if I was prohibited from barking. But pray follow me, Mr. Venables, or I

shall be choking myself with ill-assorted tropes. It's an unfortunate habit of mine."

Mr. Weekes conducted Frank up two flights of stairs to a room on the first floor. He knocked at a door marked "Private," and a deep bass voice answered to his summons, "Come in." Mr. Weekes ushered the young man into the room, saying, "Mr. Venables from London, sir, in the C. case," and then, with a feeble smile—that is, with his lips stretched only slightly—he disappeared.

"Take a seat, my dear sir. Take a seat," said Mr. Mason in his deepest bass, indicating a comfortable chair by a sweep of his hand.

The solicitor was about five-and-fifty years of age. He was growing grey, and his carefully dyed side-whiskers only emphasized the whiteness and thinness of the hair of his head. Except for the whiskers he was shaven. He wore a mild and benevolent expression, and his manner, though a little pompous, was pleasant, especially after the uncouthness of his managing clerk. Mr. Mason was inordinately vain of his voice; he loved it better than any other sound. He knew, too, how to impress you with it. He rarely delivered himself of long speeches or allowed you to become weary of the monotony of his marvellously low register.

Frank decided he would reveal himself fully to the solicitor, so he took from his pocket a letter from Mrs. Aylward, declaring the bearer to be her only son, Frank, who was for the moment desirous of travelling under an assumed name, his purpose being to probe the mystery concerning Lord Clashmore's disappearance.

Mr. Mason puffed his cheeks as he read the note.

"Then, my dear young friend, you are my lord's nephew;



his only nephew, I believe. Allow me, my dear sir, to have the privilege of shaking hands with you," rising and extending a large white hand, "and of offering you a welcome to the distressful country. This is a very serious business, indeed, about your noble uncle," he continued, as he resumed his seat. "And what do you propose to do sir?"

"In the first place," said the young man, "I am desirous of going over the whole case with you, and then I shall expect you personally to instruct me how I may best proceed to investigate the matter for myself."

A look of uneasiness passed over Mr. Mason's face.

"I see, I see," said he, pursing his lips. "We shall have to summon my managing clerk, Mr. Weekes, and take him into our confidence."

"I object to your managing clerk's knowing anything about my affair, sir," Frank expostulated.

"But I fear we cannot get on without him. He has the matter at his fingers' ends."

"I understood it was strictly a private affair with you."

"Of course; but not so far as Mr. Weekes is concerned. He is my fidus Achates, sir. Your noble uncle trusted him; why should not you?"

"I hardly know what to say," said Frank. "It seems rather absurd that I must put myself in the hands of a stranger to whom I have an objection."

"Perhaps, not knowing you, he spoke roughly. He is a rough customer, my dear sir, and I am aware that he displays at times a bad manner; but he is the shrewdest man in this city."

"You see," urged Frank, "it is to you personally, Mr.

Mason, I look. Apart from other considerations, you were apparently the first over the ground the day after my uncle's disappearance."

"I!" exclaimed Mr. Mason. "Not I, my dear sir. That was Mr. Weekes. His lordship always preferred to give his instructions—where it was possible to do so—to Mr. Weekes; and I always humoured his lordship, especially as I knew he was in safe hands when he was dealing with my worthy factotum."

"Then it was Mr. Weekes, I take it, who wrote this letter to my mother, detailing what he had personally done, and signing your name to it."

"Precisely," said Mr. Mason.

"Then all I can say is that it is like his confounded impudence!" fumed the young man. "He professed to take me for a traveller in Bibles or sewing machines. I am not accustomed to have liberties taken with me."

"No, of course not, my dear young friend; but Mr. Weekes did not mean to take any liberties, and if he has unintentionally given you offence, he will apologize. But, my dear Mr. Aylward—"

"Venables, if you please," interrupted Frank. "I have a very strong objection to be recognized. And, understand me, I have no desire to listen to apologies from one of your clerks."

"My dear Mr. Venables, the fact is, Mr. Weekes must be taken into our confidence. It is impossible to go to work without him. Your noble uncle—"

"Yes, yes," said Frank, impatiently; "but I am not my uncle, and I object to a familiar person such as Mr. Weekes evidently is."

"Without him we shall be only groping in the dark.

Pray, believe me, it is so," said the solicitor plaintively—almost piteously.

"Of course, I will act upon your advice. There is no help for it, I suppose," said Frank; "but I must clearly stipulate your managing clerk is not made aware of my identity."

"No doubt he already suspects it."

"How can he? At any rate I will have my way in this matter. To you, and to you only, I am Frank Aylward. To everyone else connected with the case I am a friend of Mrs. Aylward's. To those who have no connection with it I am Frank Venables an artist travelling for pleasure in Ireland."

"Your wishes are law, my dear sir—statute law," said Mr. Mason in his best bass. "And now, with your permission, I will ring for Mr. Weekes."

The managing clerk quickly answered the solicitor's summons, bouncing somewhat unceremoniously into the room, and taking a chair without waiting to be invited to one.

"I think you know, Weekes," said the solicitor, "that this gentleman, Mr. Venables, comes accredited from Mrs. Aylward. He is desirous of having all the information we possess concerning Lord C.'s disappearance, and then he proposes to consult us about his own movements."

"In what capacity docs the young gentleman come?" asked Mr. Weekes.

"As a friend of the Honourable Mrs. Aylward's, and to investigate the case."

"He is not a professional detective?"

"Certainly not, sir," said the solicitor, with a show of

indignation. "Mr. Venables is a gentleman—an intimate friend of Mrs. Aylward's."

"Then I think that good lady, with all due respect to her, has made a mistake. You know my views, sir," addressing Mason, and ignoring Frank. "The matter is most puzzling, and requires a skilled detective. It is no ordinary case, and should not be played with. And our missing client is no ordinary person."

"You forget yourself, Weekes. You should not speak in that manner before this young gentleman."

"I am speaking in the interest of our client, Viscount Clashmore," said Weekes, in a somewhat grandiloquent manner. "His interests are paramount; and I repeat, sir, with all due deference, that what the case requires is a skilled detective. Our own police admit that they are foiled. Mr. Venables here is, you say, a gentleman; he is, moreover, a stranger. How can he be supposed to clear up a mystery which has baffled the police and bothered myself?"

Much as Frank disliked Weekes he could not but admit that the man was right. Had he, he asked himself, undertaken a task which would cover him with ridicule? So far, all the Irishmen he had met were utterly incomprehensible to him. Though they used English words and, as a rule, spoke them correctly, yet they seemed to talk another language. He felt almost as much out of touch with Ireland as if its inhabitants spoke a tongue unknown to him, and he was hopelessly at sea when trying to read their thoughts. Whether Weekes was a buffoon or an honest man or a crafty rogue he could not possibly decide.

"Mrs. Aylward," he said, "informs me that she has

as much objection to employing a detective as no doubt, Lord Clashmore would have. She considered that I was possessed of sufficient common-sense to do something towards clearing up the mystery. I have nothing else at present to occupy my mind. No one will suspect me, and they would inevitably suspect a professional detective. I am willing to listen to any advice or suggestions, though I do not promise to adopt them blindly; and I have, I will freely admit—indeed I may urge it—a strong desire to be of service to Mrs. Aylward in this matter.”

“There’s a good deal in what you say, young gentleman,” said Weekes, “and more in the manner in which you say it. I can easily see that you possess a very valuable quality—a capacity for enthusiasm. But you will pardon me for remarking that you are a stranger in this country, and that you are thin-skinned, and that you are very likely to be led astray by sentiment or temper. If a man were to tread on your corns—I speak metaphorically, of course,” he added, opening and shutting his flexible mouth—“you would probably knock him down; whereas a professional detective would only be thinking to himself how thick or how thin the souls of his aggressor’s boots were, and whether they were or were not the weapons worn by the murderer—recollect that I am uttering tropes—when he accomplished the foul and bloody deed upon his unfortunate victim.”

“I can only fail, Mr. Weekes”, said Frank, a smile upon his face. “If I fail, no one will be more upset than myself.”

“But recollect, young gentleman, we have an important client to consider. While you are failing, the scent may be growing weaker.”

“I appeal to Mr. Mason as an arbitrator,” said Frank, good-humouredly. “If he decides against me, I will return to England this evening. If he decides for me, will do my very best—and I can’t say more.”

“That’s spoken like a man, at any rate,” the irrepressible Weekes. “Well, sir, what do you say?” he asked, addressing the solicitor.

“You put me in a very awkward corner,” answered Mr. Mason. “But I think I will decide against you on this occasion, Weekes. I say, Go ahead, Mr.—Mr. Venables, and may good luck attend you!”

“I bow to your ruling, sir,” said Weekes, with a theatrical sweep of his head and hand. “And having done so, Mr. Venables will find me his most obedient and humble servant. If you will hand me those papers in your desk, sir, I will go over the whole matter with this young gentleman.”

## CHAPTER VII

### A CONSULTATION

AFTER going through the papers in the solicitor's possession, Frank found that nothing of new importance in them; their contents had been carefully summarised in the letter which his mother had received, and since that letter had been written no fresh facts had come to light.

Lord Clashmore and his man had disappeared as mysteriously and as completely as if they had been dropped by an unseen hand into mid-ocean.

"What occurs to me," said the young man, "is either that Lord Clashmore has hidden himself of his own free will, or that he has met with foul play. If he has disappeared on his own free will, we have to discover what could be his motive, and having discovered this we are, I suppose, at the end of our task. If he has met with foul play we ought, I think, to endeavour to discover in the first place what motive there could be for doing away with him."

"That is a very sensible way of looking at the matter, sir," said the solicitor. "What do you say, Weekes?"

"Merely that Mr. Venables' views are obvious, and

naturally they are the views which I hold, being largely a dealer in the obvious, and rarely concerning myself with the occult. In this case, however, there is a considerable amount of mystery of a peculiar character, and it must not be tackled in the ordinary cut-and-dried fashion."

This speech angered Frank, but he was learning gradually the lesson of self-control, and he merely smiled as he gazed at the didactic Weekes.

"Let us consider the first possibility. You are his lordship's confidant. Do you know of any reason why he should make away with himself in this fashion?"

"I know of none, certainly," answered the solicitor, shaking his head in a painfully solemn manner; "but you see, my dear sir, I can hardly be called his lordship's confidant. He was—I should rather say he is, for I cannot believe he has met with foul play—one who makes a confidant of nobody. I am merely his lawyer, and he has rarely consulted me about affairs of a private, or I should say an intimate character. Is not that so Weekes?"

"Well, yes," replied Weekes, speaking with some hesitation. "But as my own opinion is that he *has* met with foul play, I would prefer with all due deference to both of you gentlemen, to discuss the affairs from that point of view. As Mr. Venables correctly says, if his lordship has taken himself out of sight it is no business of ours to interfere."

"Has he had any trouble with his tenantry?" asked Frank.

"Well, hardly any," said the managing clerk. "Nothing to hurt. He certainly did surprise me by instructing us to—but am I right, sir?" appealing to Mr. Mason, "in disclosing his lordship's affairs to a stranger?"



“You are justified in saying anything to Mr. Venables that will throw any light on the subject. The Honourable Mrs. Aylward,” said the solicitor pompously, “has put the matter altogether into the hands of this young gentleman.”

“I was about to say,” resumed Weekes, “his lordship surprised us by instructing us to proceed with the eviction of one of his oldest tenants—to wit, Simon M’Carthy. When I say he surprised us I should explain to Mr. Venables that M’Carthy’s family have been on this land for about a century, though the present occupier is merely a tenant at will. He has frequently offered to purchase his farm—he holds about four hundred acres—but his lordship would never consent to parting with any of his property. The land McCarthy holds is not included in the Viscount’s entailed estates, and on one occasion I had the temerity to urge the sale of it, but I got a flea in my ear that day.”

“There were M’Carthys,” said Frank, speaking with some nervousness, “who in the early part of the century, I understand, were connected in some way with Lord Clashmore’s family. Is this Simon one of them?”

“He is. Without going into details about that connection, I may say that Simon is a very old man, bordering on ninety, I believe, and he has always been an excellent tenant. He lives on the farm with his three grandchildren, and is a most peaceable old party—a little dogmatic, and perhaps tyrannical in his own circle, but not a man of violence, by any means.”

“I suppose,” interrupted Frank, eager to catch the over-bearing managing clerk tripping, “one might be safe in assuming that a man of ninety was not likely to

be a violent and dangerous character?"

"You had better reserve your judgment on such points as these," said Weekes, "until you have become acquainted with the individual in question. Simon is a powerful old man; though, as I have hinted, he is not likely to be found behind a hedge with a masked face and a blunderbuss. He is the only tenant who has got into trouble with his lordship—how, I'm dashed if I know. But I think we may fairly dismiss him from the ranks of the suspected or about-to-be-suspected," added the managing clerk, stretching his mouth open and shutting it again.

"And what are the grandchildren like?" asked Frank.

"Two young men and a young lady. The young men are hard-working, hardy, decent young fellows, half farmers, half fishermen, and though it's something like a bull, half gentlemen, too. They have no occasion to adopt the amphibious business, for their grandfather is, by all accounts, a wealthy old customer."

"Perhaps those young men might reasonably be placed within the suspected area," suggested Frank.

"I hardly think so; but we must not allow our feelings or opinions—mine, I should say—interfere with business."

"What about the boatman—the man who was in the habit of ferrying Lord Clashmore across the river?"

"Jack Corbett? He's a curmudgeon," answered Weekes, "but I think his lordship trusted him so long that we may feel easy about him. He could have no object in losing a good berth, and he was aware that neither his lordship nor the man Backas was in the habit of carrying sums of money. However, we must watch everybody who was in touch with Lord C., without allowing our suspicions

to run away with us.”

“Tell me,” said Frank, “is this Simon M’Carthy related in any way to Charles M’Carthy, a butter merchant in this town?”

“This city, if you please,” said Weekes. “Yes; Charles is old Simon’s youngest son. Why do you ask Mr. Venables? and how on earth could you have become acquainted with our excellent citizen, Don Carlos of the Red Beard?”

Frank then related his adventure in the train, and gave an account of the conversation on the deck of the steamer between M’Carthy and Fitzgerald.

“This is very strange, indeed,” said Mr. Mason. “How odd, too, that Fitzgerald should have put such a question to M’Carthy!”

“That’s like Mr. Larry’s way,” said Weekes. “Just what he’d say to yourself, sir. Anyhow, it occurs to me that as our young friend here has made Larry Fitzgerald’s acquaintance he could do no better than renew it, and get him to act—unwittingly, of course—as a kind of guide, philosopher, and friend, to use an original phrase. There isn’t a man in Ireland or the next parish to it—which is in one direction, I believe, Nova Scotia—who could show him over the country better, and he is the most unsuspecting creature living. He knows every rood of ground on Lord C.’s estate, and for many a mile outside it.”

“But he might object to trapesing about the country with a stranger,” said Frank.

“Quite the other way. Nothing could possibly give him more pleasure. He has a passion for making new friendships, and the newest friend is always the dearest.

Moreover, he is about the only man in these parts who is free of Rhi-na-Shark house. Lord C. regarded him as a kind of natural curiosity, I think, and evidently had a fancy for him. Fitzgerald would be delighted to go poking about in search of his lordship, but, of course, he'd never discover anything. He is too simple. If you could get him to take you under his wing, Mr. Venables—of course, not letting him know what you are about—I'd have more confidence in your chance of making some discovery than if you were accompanied by the Liebig's extract of all the police in the county Waterford."

"I am inclined to agree with Mr. Weekes," said Mr. Mason—as a matter of detail the solicitor was rarely inclined to disagree with his managing clerk upon any point. "Mr. Fitzgerald is a very decent fellow, and his company would keep you amused, I expect. You will find it very dull work travelling through the country after coming fresh from London."

"That will hardly trouble me," said Frank. "I don't want to start by making a false move. This man Fitzgerald might hamper me."

"No; he will screen you," said Weekes, "and that's a consideration. A solitary stranger—an Englishman, too—poking about Rhi-na-Shark would be sure to attract attention, and he might possibly get into trouble. With Fitzgerald as your guide and friend you would be as safe as a house, and if you exercise ordinary discretion you should be as free from suspicion as if you were a mitred abbot. It's a good idea, and it was a lucky accident that introduced you to Master Larry. He can show you over Rhi-na-Shark house and its neighbourhood whereas if I took you there it might be a case of

raising the torch.”

“As I have already declared,” said Frank a little grandiloquently, “I came here to be guided by Mr. Mason’s advice, and as he advises me to foregather with this man Fitzgerald I will adopt the suggestion, reserving to myself the privilege of severing the connection should I find it useless or irksome.”

“I think that is what we should suggest ourselves, Weekes—eh?” said Mr. Mason.

“Yes sir. I think so.”

“Then how am I to scrape further acquaintance with Mr. Fitzgerald?” asked Frank.

“Where are you stopping?” enquired Weekes.

“At Mullin’s Hotel. Mr. M’Carthy recommended me to put up there.”

“You will be almost sure to meet Fitzgerald there this evening,” said Weekes. “He generally works his way round the principal hotels in the evening, seeking for someone to play billiards with, and he has a special weakness for Mullin’s table. Do you play billiards, Mr. Venables?”

“A little,” said Frank.

“Well, give him a game, if you get the chance. If you beat him he will become enthusiastic over your play, and if he beats you he will consider that as a stranger to the country he owes you some compensation. It’s ‘Heads I win—harp you lose.’”

“Weekes is not a bad hand at giving advice,” observed the solicitor, a smile creasing his broad face. “I am afraid he knows more of the little weaknesses of his fellow-citizens than is good for him—or for them.”

“And now, I think,” said the managing clerk, address-

ing himself to Frank, "you had better take these two little plans. I prepared them, expecting we should be employing a London detective who would want to get a knowledge of the ground. One is a plan of his lordship's estate hereabouts. His property in this county is not very considerable, and it ranges in a straggling sort of way from Dunmore to Tramore. The other paper is a sketch of Rhi-na-Shark and its immediate neighbourhood. It includes a sketch of a place called the Back Strand, and of a cluster of sandhills known as the Rabbit Burrow, also of the little river—Rhi-na-Shark—and for heaven's sake don't pronounce the first syllabic as if its 'i' was short. The ferry, you will see, is marked here with a dotted line. I suggest that you should, if possible, go to Dunmore first and take lodgings there. It will suit you better than Tramore as a base of operations, and will render you less liable to suspicion if you worked with Tramore as your base in the start. If there is a guilty person now cowering at Rhi-na-Shark he will be on the lookout for the approach of the enemy by way of Tramore. These names are, no doubt, hieroglyphics to you at present, but you will soon come to talk of them as pat as myself."

"Weekes never forgets nor loses sight of anything, Mr. Venables," said Mr. Mason proudly

"Gross flattery, sir!" said the managing clerk. "I frequently forget myself and lose sight of my own opportunities. But I can see that Mr. Venables is anxious to be off."

Frank was not sorry to get away. Mr. Weekes's manner caused him considerable irritation, and he did not like the risk of displaying anger. He said good-bye to

Mr. Mason, who rose and politely held the door open for him.

Mr. Weekes followed Frank downstairs. As they reached the hall a little man of mean and doleful aspect, who was standing in the passageway, touched his cap respectfully.

“I want you, Andy,” said Weekes to the little man, who looked, it struck Frank, as if he was an actor dressed for the part of the informer in a Boucicaultian drama. He had a wizened shaven face, not over clean, surrounded by a fringe of black whiskers, which wound its way under his chin. He had two little ferrety eyes and a turned-up nose.

“Perhaps you will give us a call before you start tomorrow,” said Weekes, addressing Frank. “Some piece of news may reach us from some quarter or other at any moment.”





## CHAPTER VIII

### DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

ON the outskirts of the city of Waterford, on the road which led to Rhi-na-Shark, there was a dwelling-house of considerable dimensions. The house stood in grounds of some four or five acres, surrounded on all sides by a high stone wall. Ballytruckle Lodge had been built by a family who had, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, established a linen weaving factory in the neighbourhood. The factory had at one period been very successful, but eventually had gone the way of most linen factories in the south of Ireland.

The failure of the business had impoverished the owners of Ballytruckle Lodge, but they had clung to the old place. The last of the once wealthy family was a bachelor who had only one passion—his garden. He lived entirely inside his own high walls, and had earned for himself a reputation for eccentricity. In the end he died under very tragic circumstances which we need not pause to go into here. Ballytruckle Lodge was mortgaged for all it was worth. The mortgagees offered it for sale after the old bachelor's death, but could not find a

purchaser. Then they tried to let it, but no one would live in the uncanny house, and for a dozen years it was untenanted. Then Mr. Charles M'Carthy offered to take a lease of it at a low rental, and, as he agreed to put the premises into repair, his offer was greedily accepted.

M'Carthy found the place almost a ruin, and the once beautiful garden a wilderness. He set to work to renovate the house, and to coax the garden back into its pristine splendour. This work of renovation occupied several years, and involved a larger expenditure of money than M'Carthy had originally contemplated; but it was his only hobby, and he was prospering and could afford to ride a hobby.

Mr. Weekes lived in a modest dwelling in the neighbourhood of Ballytruckle Lodge. The managing clerk, who stood in awe of no man and of only one woman—his wife—had not been shy of forcing himself on his prosperous neighbour. M'Carthy tolerated Weekes's familiarities and aggressiveness partly because they amused him—he enjoyed sharpening his own wit against Weekes's (though he generally found more of the flint than the bone in the man of law)—and partly because the managing clerk was a good judge of the value (commercial as well as literally) of books, and an admirable authority on rose culture and fruit culture. He gave orders with the airs of a termagant to the head-gardener at Ballytruckle Lodge, and was not incapable of losing his temper, and informing the gardener that he was “an ignorant bosthoon” if the man neglected to carry out Mr. Weekes's orders or ventured upon opinions antagonistic to those of Mr. Weekes.

On the evening of the day that Frank Aylward ar-

rived in Waterford Mr. Weekes (who had practically taken possession of M'Carthy's garden during its owner's absence) was investigating some early roses at Bally-truckle Lodge. After he had satisfied himself that the bushes had not been tampered with by unskilful hands and that the soil had been manured exactly as he had ordered it to be manured, he joined the master of the house, who was syringing some plants in one of his conservatories.

"By the way, Weekes," said M'Carthy, "I want to speak to you about a matter of business."

"I never talk shop after office hours," said the solicitor's clerk. "The Lord knows I get my fill of it during the day."

"But this is a matter which may interest you, and after all, I'd rather have your opinion on the point that's troubling me than the opinion of any lawyer in the town. Pray don't think I'm seeking for cheap advice because you happen to be under my roof. I want to treat it as a matter of business with you—strictly private, of course."

"Charles M'Carthy," said the man of law, "if you speak like that to me I'll break your head first, and then I'll allow your boss gardener, Dempsey, to use his patent soot mixture—warranted to kill at a hundred yards—on those tender young hybrids, which I have just been inspecting. Come, what's troubling you? Perhaps it's a question of marriage settlements?" he added, grinning silently from ear to ear.

M'Carthy frowned but kept his temper admirably. "No," he said, laying down his syringe, "it's a matter of the value of a letter of agreement. But come inside to the library."

In addition to restoring the grounds to their former pitch of excellence, Charles M'Carthy had furnished the house in most lavish style. For a man in trade, brought up in a wild part of the country, he displayed considerable taste in the arrangement of his house. He was rather too fond of garish things—gilding and mirrors and gaudy pictures and gaudily-bound books had an attraction for him. But he certainly had spared no expense. Visitors to Ballytruckle Lodge went away wondering when or how M'Carthy had got the money which he had put into the old mansion—thousands of pounds worth of furniture, some judges declared. The library was a library—that is to say, it was chiefly devoted to the storage of books. It was perhaps the only room in the house which would not irritate by its glitter an eye accustomed to quiet things.

Offering his guest an easy chair and a cigar, Charles M'Carthy seated himself at his private escritoire.

“No, Weekes,” he said, “I want you to be as serious as you would if you were occupying a seat on the bench, and to be as secret as if you were sitting in a concession box. May I understand that I can rely upon you?”

Weekes blew a cloud of smoke out of the corners of his flexible mouth and nodded.

“You know,” said M'Carthy—“there's no need to go beating about the bush—that my family has for a long time desired to get back the lands of Drumglass, in the County Cork, now in the possession of Mr. Mason's client, Lord Clashmore?”

“The desire,” said Weekes, “originated with Teague of the Black Hair—your somewhat remarkable grand-uncle, who died worth, to the best of my memory, some-

thing under five hundred pounds sterling.”

Charles M'Carthy frowned. “Yes,” said he, stroking his red beard, “it may seem that the idea was a preposterous one for so poor a man; all he could do was to sow the seed. The thing never assumed a practical shape until my father took it up. But will you be kind enough to prevent your very wonderful memory from straying into the past and listen to me? It so happens that we found ourselves able not so very long ago to approach the matter from a commercial point of view—that is, we saw our way to buy the property for its market value.”

“Phew!” whistled Weekes.

“I had the estate surveyed and valued a short time ago, and the figures I got roughly were fifty odd thousand pounds. Anyhow, instead of doing the regular thing, and putting the matter into the hands of my solicitors, I opened the ball myself, and waited upon Lord Clashmore.”

“And what did his lordship say?”

“He was very agreeable, I must allow; but I think he fancied I had gone a little off my head. However, I soon convinced him I wasn't such a fool as I look. I showed him my valuer's report, and I am afraid angered him by doing so; but I thought it was best to go straight to the point, to put my cards on the table, in fact.”

“I like to hear a man who is making a bargain talk of putting his cards on the table,” said Mr. Weekes. “It clears the air at once. You know that the man is determined at all hazards to do you in the eye.”

“It is not easy, Mr. Weekes, to put up with your infernally insulting remarks.”

“No offence meant, M'Carthy. But I can just fancy

how his lordship's lips curled. I hope he didn't propose to submerge you *in gurgite vasto*—in Rhi-na-Shark, I mean. But look here, M'Carthy. This is a matter in which I can use my ears no longer. Lord C. is our client, and it would be utterly unprofessional for me to discuss his affairs with you. Highly as I value you and your books and your roses and your raspberries, my worthy friend, I could not love you and them so much, loved I not honour more. I am not the owner of any large tract of land, nor do I covet anyone's lands. I have, however, a small mental estate, and there is a boundary line on the verge of my little enclosure. Inside my fence is a garden teeming with forbidden fruit, and there you may behold 'Notice to Trespassers' written in letters of fire, with cautions, also in glittering characters, to keep off the grass. *Thiggin-thu?*"

"I quite appreciate your—what shall I call it?"

"Say *esprit-de-corps*, if you're not afraid of foreign languages—or that divinity which hedges the divine majesty of the attorney's head cook and bottle washer."

"I was about to term it Bosh—but no matter. I have thought of objections which might arise to you, and I assure you there is no likelihood of my trespassing on your professional preserves. Anyway, before you shut your ears, open your eyes and read this, and then you'll see what I'm driving at."

M'Carthy handed a letter to Weekes, who read it aloud:

"SIR,—With reference to your proposal to purchase the lands of Drumglass, I have given the matter my very careful consideration, and I am willing to accept the offer

you make, namely, fifty thousand pounds. I shall take the earliest opportunity of instructing my solicitor, Mr. Mason, to go into the matter with you further. There is, I find on referring to my papers, some discrepancy (in the matter of acreage) between your figures and those in my possession, but I don't think the difference is of material consequence.—Yours truly, CLASHMORE.

“To Mr. C. M'CARTHY, Ballytruckle Lodge, Waterford.”

“Dash my buttons, M'Carthy, my boy, but this is overwhelming! The idea of two men making a bargain like this without the intervention of a solicitor bangs Banagher, and Banagher banged the——”

“Yes, I know—a friend, or patron, of the legal profession. Now, Weekes, what I want to ask you is, what is the value of this letter of agreement?”

“I see you have had it stamped at Somerset House. You prime boy!”

“Yes, I thought I'd get it stamped when I was over in London.”

“Raising the wind—seeking the dollars—fastening round your neck a mill-stone which will sink you in the bottomless pit eventually. A mortgage.”

“I'm afraid I can't give you my opinion, private or otherwise. Why not go to your own man? This might, or might not, be a document adverse to Lord C.'s interests, or to those of his successors.”

“You see, Weekes, here is my difficulty. If I consult my own man of law he will be going into all sorts of frivolous questions about the Viscount's disappearance; moreover to tell you the plain truth, I don't want anyone—even

my lawyer—to know about the affair until it is settled one way or the other. All I ask you now is to tell me if that agreement is good as against the Clashmore family; in other words, can the heir repudiate it if he chooses?”

“Remember my notice to trespass!”

“Confound your professional etiquette!” raid M’Carthy angrily. “All right—let me have the letter back. I suppose any solicitor can tell me for six-and-eightpence what I just asked you in a friendly way.”

“You’re not fair to me,” said Weekes. “I’d give you an answer with a heart and a half if I could honourably. But even if I could stretch my conscience to discussing the affairs of a client with you, I might be giving you an opinion not worth a *keenogue*. This is a big business and involves considerations which can’t be dealt with in a six-and eightpenny style. Here’s your letter. I observe it is dated April twenty-third—a week before his lordship disappeared.”

“Well, as you are not to be drawn on one point, might I introduce another little subject? Who is the heir to Clashmore, in the event of his lordship’s decease?”

“Ask me another,” said Weekes.

“Those fashionable Bibles, the Peerages, state it is his lordship’s only son,” persisted M’Carthy. “Do you, or do you not, know who this personage is? That, surely, is not a matter that could be regarded as a trespass on your meadows or fruit gardens.”

“I don’t know so much about that, and I object to your sneering at the flower or fruit of the mind. But that’s neither here nor there, friend Charles. To answer your question, I may say, without any loss of personal dignity or of professional self-respect, that I’m bothered



if I do know who the son of Lord C. is."

"Have you any suspicion?"

"The divil a one! I suppose you know, M'Carthy," he continued abruptly, "that it is supposed in certain circles that you know more about the missing Viscount than is good for you." Mr. Weekes laughed heartily—that is to say, he opened his mouth widely several times, and shut it with several snaps at this sally.

A strange look came into McCarthy's light blue eyes as his companion spoke. He pursed his lips, pressed the tips of his fingers together, and moved his eyebrows nervously up and down.

"Um!" said he. "The affair came rather awkwardly after the notice of eviction off my father. And, by the way, Weekes, I was somewhat surprised at a man who professes to know the law giving a summary notice to determine a tenancy existing from year to year. The law says that six months' notice is required."

"My worthy friend, without reference to any particular case in which you or I or anyone we know is concerned, and, speaking generally and without malice, prepense or aforethought, I would suggest that you didn't make an ass of yourself by posing as an authority on the law of landlord and tenant. No notice to quit is necessary where a party tacitly becomes a tenant from year to year upon the terms of an agreement for a lease, the tenancy expiring at the expiration of the term agreed to be granted. Put that in your pipe and smoke it; or, if you don't like to fumigate yourself with your own ignorance, go forth and consult a respectable solicitor. There was once a gentleman of our acquaintance who wrote that a little learning was a dangerous thing. He

was, believe me, thinking of men, who, with no special training, consider themselves qualified to give opinions about matters of law or medicine—*par nobile frathrum*,” he commented, thickening the last word.

“What a marvellous genius poor Hugh Mason keeps chained down in that dungeon of his in Quay street!” said M’Carthy, sarcastically. “I often told you that it is the bar or the bench or the Parliament house you should be adorning.”

“Do you think I don’t know that as well as yourself? Friend Charles, when I might have carved out a career for myself I was a conceited fool, and laughed as I left my opportunities slip away. Now, when I have lost my large ambitions, and all desire to wander from my native fold, I try to laugh at other people’s follies, or blunders or idiosyncrasies. Bah! what asses we all are!”

“I wish you would really bray aloud instead of pretending to laugh,” said M’Carthy. “It requires lot of imagination to fancy that you ever do laugh.”

“My friend, my smiles are the neatest things out. Look at the pull my silence gives me! I can laugh in a man’s face and not be accused of doing so. I tell you it took me years to train myself into laughing without making noise. I think it was in reading about Louis the Eleventh or some other frog-eating aristocrat, that I got the tip. Anyhow, many a time my knack has saved me from imprisonment for contempt. When I see in court a big, blustering, swollen-headed Q. C. floundering about and exhibiting his ignorance of some elementary principle of law, I burst into silent fits of laughter to think that I, Hugh Mason’s clerk, could teach the donkey his business. And no judge in Ireland can call me to order. Mine

is a great gift, mind you. But, Charles of the Red Beard, son of Simon the Patriarch, as I was saying a short time ago, rumour, *vox populi*, has it that your family—now, don't get rusty with a well-intentioned friend—could a tale unfold concerning one Henry, Viscount Clashmore, lately resident at Rhi-na-Shark House. Eh?"

"I suppose you think we should go out on the rooftops and shout out that we didn't do that because a man in the neighbourhood mysteriously disappears. Anyway a wonderful London detective has just arrived in Waterford—a patent amateur." M'Carthy smiled grimly. "He'll clear up everything for you."

"A detective! Is that so?" said Weekes.

"I admire your easy assumption of ignorance, of course but I can't say I admire your choice in the matter of detectives. I'd like to know what good you expect to do by sending a sawney like that poking his nose into the affairs of decent people. I travelled over from London with the youngster, and he was trying to pump me in the train coming down to Milford. I must confess I pitied him. He seemed to be a decent lad. and I felt so much for him that I tried to do a good turn by telling him he'd better take his box of colours—for he is posing as a landscape painter—to some more picturesque neighbourhood than Tramore. If you wanted to do the thing properly, couldn't you have employed a Scotland Yard man—some shrewd fellow that would pepper Tramore Strand with his dropped h's?" M'Carthy seemed to enjoy his joke, for he laughed a little boisterously.

"I haven't the least idea of whom or what you are referring to. my worthy humorist," said Weekes boldly. "All I know is that the police are very busy."

“And have no doubt a barrackful of dues. Lord C.’s disappearing is causing me a lot of worry. My father can’t be expected to live for ever—he’s ninety-one years of grace—and just when he was within reach of the grand prize, the hope of which, I firmly believe, has been keeping him alive for a quarter of a century, it is snatched away, for the moment at any rate.”

“So the old man is still bent upon being lord of Drumglass—monarch of all he surveys—or rather what other people have just been surveying with chain and theodolite.”

“Ay. He wants before he dies to look out upon the land which his forefathers owned, and to say to himself as he looks at it: ‘This is ours again, after all these years, and to no man on earth do we owe penny piece or an ounce of thanks!’”

“Then there is no mortgage in the air?” said Weekes quickly. “And how the mischief have you raised fifty thousand pounds? Is there a gold-mine or a mint at Castle M’Carthy or in Ballytruckle Lodge, friend Charles?”

“Neither gold-mine nor mint. Nothing but good luck and honest industry.”

And yet, though M’Carthy spoke boldly, his guest fancied he could detect a false ring in his voice.

## CHAPTER IX

### BROTHER AND SISTER

IT had been the custom of Charles M'Carthy for some years to give a garden party in June when his roses looked their best. He issued his invitations to the better class of traders in the city, to professional men, and to several county people. The latter usually ignored the invitation of the *parvenu* (as they regarded him), but M'Carthy was impervious to snubs, and his persistence had broken down many class prejudices. The fame of his garden and his hot houses had spread, and for a few years past a sprinkling of local aristocracy had patronized his annual party. Most of these came prepared to scoff at the heterogeneous gathering, but when they had beheld McCarthy's grounds they had remained to admire them, and to envy the owner. In sending out his invitations, Charles M'Carthy exhibited only one species of exclusion; he asked Catholics only. An elderly lady, a maiden aunt of M'Carthy, lived with him, and kept house for him, and it was she who did the honours at the annual gathering.

The latest garden party at Ballytruckle Lodge had

been the most successful one from every point of view. The chief incident concerned with it, in the eyes of the master of Ballytruckle Lodge, was the bringing out of his niece Geraldine, who had recently returned home after a two years' residence in a French convent. Geraldine's uncle had an eye for beauty other than that of horticulture, and it afforded him a tremendous sense of gratification and pride to know that his niece was by far the handsomest girl who graced his trim lawn. The young men raved about her. The good looking girls were jealous of her, though their jealousy did not prevent them from admiring her, as well as from wondering how such an uncle could possess such a niece. Plain-visaged maidens declared that "the M'Carthy girl" was ridiculously "stuck-up" for the niece of a butter merchant. Parents of marriageable daughters considered that things had come to a pretty pass when farmers sent their children to foreign convents. There was in Geraldine's manner a certain aloofness born of timidity, and superficial observers usually mistook this for vanity, pride, or superciliousness.

Amongst those who had been struck by the young girl's beauty were Robert Usher and his sister Kate. The former was about thirty years of age, tall, brawny and loosely built, with dark brown hair and dark brown eyes. He was not a handsome man, but he had a pleasant face, and he could assume a very pleasant manner when he was desirous of being agreeable. He came of a family resident in the county for a couple of centuries.

Usher was not a rich man, but few people knew how hard was his struggle to keep up appearances. He had inherited a small estate known as Bell Lake, and taking

its name from a lake situated about half-a-dozen miles from the city of Waterford. His ancestors had gradually sliced this estate away, and all that remained to Usher at his father's death were some three hundred and odd acres of land, and about two hundred acres of water and swamp—Bell Lake and its sedgy margin. Even the substantial acres were not his absolutely, for the father had left the weight of a killing mortgage upon them. Usher's land was good; he farmed it himself, and he was no mean agriculturist; but the net result barely sufficed to keep his very modest establishment going. His friends often wondered that he did not adopt Mickey Free's plan for making life easy—namely, “marry a wife with a fortune”; but Usher had never met any woman into whose hands he would care to resign his liberty. He was deeply attached to his only sister, who was ten years younger than her only brother—and Kate was deeply attached to Bob; and if it had not been for occasional financial troubles, the pair might have been said to live an ideally happy life at Lake Cottage.

The acquaintance which Kate Usher had made with Geraldine had quickly blossomed into friendship, and Charles M'Carthy's niece had paid several visits to Bell Lake during the year. Geraldine lived with her grandfather, Simon M'Carthy, at Prospect House, a lonely dwelling situated on the eastern arm of Tramore Bay. Once only had the Ushers visited Prospect House, and then Usher found that he could not tolerate the old farmer. Bob's sympathies were all English, or at least Anglo-Irish. He was himself of Cromwellian stock, and race prejudice, the feeling of the superiority of the conqueror over the vanquished, was inbred, though it rarely

displayed itself aggressively. He considered himself Irish to the backbone. He was proud, he would tell you—and he sincerely believed it—of being an Irishman. But an Irishman of old M'Carthy's type was abhorrent to him—such a man was merely “a native.” Usher considered the Irish language a barbarous jargon, and he did not attempt to conceal his contempt for it when the master of Prospect House harangued him in praise of the Gaelic tongue. The two young M'Carthy's—Simon's grandsons—irritated Usher, too, by conversing in his presence in Irish. He was not aware that this act of impoliteness, or boorishness, as Usher considered it, was a deliberate act. They were sharp young fellows, who had received an excellent education at an Irish Catholic college, but they could not tolerate an anti-Irish Irishman, as they deemed Usher, and they were quite in hopes of succeeding in picking a quarrel with him—an untoward event which might have arisen only for the restraining influence of their grandfather.

The morning of the day of Frank Aylward's arrival in Waterford, Bob Usher and his sister were seated in the breakfast room of their pretty house. Kate saw that her brother was unusually disturbed. She asked him no questions concerning the cause of his anxiety, knowing he would tell her in his own good time.

After breakfast he drew his chair to the window, which looked out upon the lake, and for a long time he sat gloomily gazing at the placid waters.

“Kate,” said he at length, “come and sit here I want to talk to you.”

His sister seated herself at the opposite side of the window, and seizing her brother's hand, she said, “I



know there's something wrong, Bob. I'm glad you're going to share the trouble with me, whatever it is."

"It's the old trouble," he exclaimed; "the accursed mortgage. I didn't tell you that about six months ago I received a notice of foreclosure. I didn't think it was anything but a formal matter, and Mason thought so too. He knew the solicitor in Dublin who had noticed me—a fellow named MacAuley—and he said he was a very decent lawyer. Mason wrote to him, and got a reply that he had no doubt his Client only intended formal notice; so I let the matter slide."

"This is what brought you to Dublin a few weeks ago, I suppose" said Kate.

"Yes," said he. "I called on the mortgagee's solicitor, and MacAuley pulled a long face, and told me I'd have to pay up, as he had received fresh instructions from his client. Now, from what I can see of the value of land, the place here would fetch very little more, if any more, than the mortgage money; and what to do I don't know. The present holder of the mortgage is abroad—where, I didn't ask—and he has left positive instructions with the Dublin fellows to foreclose in the event of the money not being paid. I tried in a few places if I could get the thing taken over, but in the present condition of land values here everyone I asked shook his head when I named the amount. I don't know where to go, or whom to turn to. In one of my wild moments a few months ago, I thought of going to Lord Clashmore—I heard of a few generous things he had done, and I thought he might help an old family out of a mess; but I let it rest too long. I asked Father Hackett to be my ambassador about a fortnight ago, and the good old man promised to

sound Lord Clashmore. He went to Rhi-na-Shark last Saturday, only to find that his lordship had slipped out of visible existence. The only thing I can think of is to go to Dublin again and beg for time."

"Poor, Bob," said Kate, pressing his hand. "I suppose we were too happy here, and not thankful enough for our happiness."

"I can't bear the idea of leaving the old place," said Usher, his voice shaking with emotion. Then pulling himself together quickly, he continued: "I, wish to goodness I could think of something, or of somebody I might appeal to, without wholly losing my self-respect. I asked old Mason, of course, but he could only view it from the business point, and from that point it would simply be a bad spec, for anyone to take over a mortgage. The margin is gone."

"What would you think if I asked Geraldine M'Carthy to speak to her uncle about it, Bob?" Kate enquired after a short pause.

"I'm afraid I couldn't stand that. The fellow has plenty of money, they all say; but he's a business man, and wouldn't see any business in this; and I couldn't stomach asking him for a favour, which, no doubt, he would decline. Why shouldn't he? He scarcely knows us, or we him."

"He seems very anxious to be friendly with you," urged Kate.

"I know. But I couldn't stand that class of man. He's almost worse than that old Turk, his father. He's no better than a shop-keeper."

"Very good people keep shops, Bob."

"No doubt. But they're not my sort. I expect you're

picking up some fine radical views from Miss M'Carthy," said Usher, a smile passing over his face.

"Radical indeed! Why, Geraldine is almost as great a Tory as her grandfather."

"I suppose the old fellow might be called a Tory, though hardly with the acceptation put upon the word nowadays. No doubt those marvellous ancestors of his, of whom he boasts in such an offensive way, did make raids in the brave days of old. I think it was Macaulay—I don't mean that accursed attorney in Dublin—who speaks of the Irish bogs being peopled with Popish outlaws, who were called Tories."

"And very charming Tories they must have been, if Geraldine had any ancestors like herself."

"I won't say you nay, Kate, though I don't think the women folk, with some brilliant exceptions, were much given to raiding or living in swamps. Anyhow, to dismiss old Simon, and go back to my own affairs, I mean to make another run to Dublin, and, in order to allow no grass to grow under my feet, I'll start at once. If I can't soften this metropolitan attorney, perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to ask him on a visit here. We could get up a water party on the lake, light it up with floating lamps and with blue and red fire. Then when the revelry would be at its height, we could tie a fifty-six pound weight to each of the lawyer's heels and cast him in the lake. And, having disposed of the troublesome fellow, we could fire up some rockets, and watch the sticks coming down, and meditate on the vanity of all human things."

"Now you're nasty, Bob."

"I feel that way, Kate," said he, raising and putting his arm round her shoulder; "but I'll struggle against my

ugly emotions, even if it was only to please a young sister of mine. And, by-the-by, didn't I ask Larry Fitzgerald to spend a day here this week?"

"Yes, but he is over in Wales. No doubt he has forgotten our existence for the moment."

"Hardly. But you had best pack that bag of mine, Kate. There isn't much time to lose if I mean to catch the midday mail."

"Might I ask Geraldine to spend a day with me? I'll be lonely while you're away."

"You're not in the habit of waiting for my permission, young woman, in matters of this kind. Ask her by all means if it pleases you."

"What a cold-blooded fellow you are, to be sure!"

"Cold-blooded? I suppose I am. But why remind me of the fact now "

"You're a goose, Bob. Don't stare at me so stupidly. And do try and keep up your spirits," she added, in a more serious tone. "I am sure you will find a way out of this difficulty. It has lived with us so long, and you have so often managed to pull through, that I am determined not to give in."

But for all her show of bravery, Kate Usher felt very heavy at heart as she left the room to pack her brother's bag.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ROYAL MAIL-COACH

FRANK walked away from the solicitor's office in a very disturbed condition of mind, he was almost inclined to abandon his self-imposed task, and to instruct Mr. Mason to get a detective over from London. In endeavouring to discover his uncle, or to ascertain what had happened to him, he would be only seeking for a needle in a bundle of hay. Then his pride asserted itself, and he decided that at all events he would visit the place with the outlandish name, Rhi-na-Shark. The very name of it began to interest and attract him.

Mr. Hugh Mason was evidently a good-natured fool, ruled by his vulgar and crafty managing clerk. He could expect little help from Mason, and it irritated him to think that he should have to deal with Weekes.

Another matter which disturbed the young Englishman was the discovery that he was distantly related to an Irish butter-merchant. He had no idea that class prejudice was so deeply rooted in him. He had been in the habit of scoffing at the supposed superiority of birth and breeding, and now that he was face to face with the

detestable fact of his relationship to a buttermilk he had not the courage to trample his feeling under foot. "What on earth," he asked himself, "would my mother think of such, a connection." Anyhow he would avoid the local trader carefully.

Since he landed in Waterford Frank had been so wrapt up in his own thoughts concerning his own affairs that he had paid little attention to his surroundings. He had vaguely seen houses and ships and people, and had listlessly heard a Babel of voices. Now, as he walked away from Mason's office, he determined to abandon his brown studies and to give some attention to the place and people round about him.

As he stood on the quay, about midway from either end of it, he saw a long line of ships and steamboats and a broad river from which, at the side opposite the city, steep hill rose. Glancing down the irregular line of the quay, he observed that the river swept round a corner at the end of it; and, glancing up the river, he beheld in the far distance the faint outline of a lofty mountain.

The faces and figures and dress of the inhabitants of the strange country did not strike Frank as being very different from those he might expect to encounter in an English town, but the voices puzzled him. He heard English spoken correctly; spoken with a thickening which changed the whole character of it; he heard it treated in such a manner that only here and there could he catch a word; and now and again a language which was quite foreign to him caught his ear—evidently the Irish tongue. The utterers of this language were chiefly sad-looking, tall men, wearing black slouched hats and clothes of good material but of quaint workmanship, or women

enveloped in long, hooded cloaks, made of black or dark blue cloth. Frank concluded that these foreign-speaking people were agriculturists visiting the city.

As he walked slowly down the quay, he suddenly remembered that he had left a small package containing brushes and colours in his berth in the steamboat. As he quickened his pace, intending to revisit the steamboat, he heard his name called. Turning round, he saw just behind him the figure of Mr. Fitzgerald.

"Taking a stroll, Mr. Venables?" said Fitzgerald, as he got into line.

"Yes," said Frank; "I am on my way to the steamboat now. I left a packet of brushes and colours there."

"McCarthy told me you were an artist. Are you thinking of doing some sketching in the neighbourhood?"

"I have an idea of trying my hand at some coast landscape," Frank replied. "I intend to make Dunmore my headquarters for some days."

"I'm just on my way to book a seat in the Dunmore Royal Mail-coach," said Fitzgerald. "Why not join me?"

"Are you going to Dunmore also?"

"No, only about half-way. I hope to have a day's fishing tomorrow. I haven't been in Dunmore for some time, but I shall very likely pay it a visit shortly. Come! shall I book a seat for you on the car?" asked Fitzgerald. "I'll have the pleasure of your company for my part of the journey, and perhaps you'd find the time would pass more rapidly than if you were to travel all alone by yourself."

"I did not mean to start until tomorrow."

"One day is as good as another to you, I suppose. Come along with me; and, if you're fond of angling, I

can find a bed for you tonight, and give you a good day's sport tomorrow."

"I am not much of a fisherman," said Frank. "Thank you very much. But I don't see why I should not avail myself of your kind offer of companionship. When does the coach start for Dunmore?"

"Four-thirty."

"I suppose I shall have time to get to the steamer and back to my hotel, and have something to eat?"

"You have a couple of hours," said Fitzgerald. "And don't bring any luggage with you. Take just what you want for the night, and tell the hotel people to send your baggage on after you. Perhaps you'd better have a car." He lifted his stick as he spoke, and in a few moments a neatly-appointed jaunting-car, with a well-groomed horse between the shafts, had pulled up at the curbstone in front of the two men.

"Come along, Bill," said Fitzgerald, addressing the jarvey—a burly, bearded man, wearing a soft slouch hat (Frank recognized him as being the man who had driven him from the steamboat to the hotel.) "Drive this gentleman down to the Milford boat and back to Mullin's hotel. Mr. M'Carthy told me you were stopping there," he explained, addressing Frank, who was a little bewildered at being taken in charge in this wholesale and unceremonious fashion. "I'll be off and get off and get those seats engaged in the Dunmore shandradan."

"Won't you let me drive you to the looking-office?" said Frank.

"No. I prefer to walk. Only that I feel a bit shaken after my sea voyage I'd never think of coaching it. In fact, I rarely sit behind a horse, as Bill Roche there can



tell you. I am regarded as a champion pedestrian."

"Oh, begor, sir," said the jarvey, "if every gentleman was as handy on the pins as yourself the divil a much thrade a poor car-driver would do....That man wouldn't mind walkin' his thirty mile in the day, and the dickens a hair would turn on him, sir" said Roche, turning to Frank, who could not quite understand or appreciate the familiarity of the jarvey.

"Ta, ta!" cried Fitzgerald, gliding along the flagway and shaking his stick in the air, as "the outside" rattled down the quay towards the Milford steamer—Frank seated on one side of the car and the driver on the other.

"You're a sthranger here, sir, I expect," said Roche, leaning across the well of the car.

"Yes," said Frank, curtly.

"An' are you goin' to stop in Dunmore, sir?"

"Yes."

"Faith, you'll find that a dull place this time of the year—unless maybe you're fond of say-fishin'. An' are you going to drive on the public car to Dunmore, sir? Sure that's no place for a gentleman to be seen. I wondered how Mr. Fitz would do the like with you!"

"I suppose Mr. Fitzgerald is a gentleman and knows 'what a gentleman might do."

"Ay, as far as himself is consarned, of course; but sure he goes anywhere an' no wan minds him. I wondher he didn't ax you to hire this little car of mine."

They had now reached the Milford boat, and Frank was glad to be relieved from the importunity of the pushing jarvey. He found his packet in the booking-office of the steam-boat, and he was soon on his way back to his hotel, his coachman preserving a strange silence on

the journey. When he had received his modest fare Bill Roche said:

"If ever you want a good horse an' car, sir, you might remember William Roche. My stand is on the quay."

"I'll remember you," said Frank; "but I don't think I shall have much use for your services."

"Ah, you'd never know!" said the jarvey.

When, about half-past four, the young man, carrying in his hand a light portmanteau, saw the Dunmore car—the vehicle which Fitzgerald had humorously termed the "Royal Mail-coach"—he felt very angry with himself for having accepted without enquiry Fitzgerald's invitation. The Royal Mail-coach was an ordinary "outside car," wearing a most shabby and dilapidated appearance, and the single horse between the shafts, was a tall, raw-boned animal, unmistakably a broken-down nag, stricken in years and spavined. Fitzgerald was standing near the car, and he signalled to Frank with a wave of his stick.

"I have secured the box-seat for you, my friend," said he smilingly, as the young man approached.

"I am not very much taken with the conveyance, I must confess, Mr. Fitzgerald. Why not have engaged a decent private car?"

"Hang it man, I couldn't afford such luxuries!"

"But I could, and would have much preferred it."

"My dear sir, I asked you to join me; and how on earth could I have allowed you to pay the piper? Come, he satisfied! You'll enjoy this kind of drive better than the solitary grandeur of a car of your own. There's more fun in it. You had better take your seat, for I see some passengers heading this way. Put your portmanteau

inside the well of the car. Let me do it for you.”

After disposing of the luggage, the good-humoured Fitzgerald assisted the young man to a seat next the driver's perch on the near side of the car, and then mounted, seating himself alongside Frank. The car accommodated three passengers on each side, and Frank was already wondering how on earth the miserable horse would manage to drag seven people over twelve miles of road. His next sensation was one of uncomfortableness at the character of his fellow-passengers. An elderly man, apparently a sea-farer, seated himself alongside Fitzgerald, and the elderly man did not seem to be completely sober. The other side of the car was now occupied. Three females sat upon the seat, one of them, a big, gaunt woman, wearing a coarse grey shawl. She was a talkative lady, and she spoke in a piercingly loud voice. She was unmistakably connected with the fishing industry.

“How the divil is yourself, Mr. Fi'gerald?” said the lady, leaning across the well of the car.

“Conduct yourself, Mag!” said Fitzgerald.

“Oh, begor, I can always do that without bein' told.”

The driver had now mounter to his perch. He turned round as he got into his seat, and addressing the talkative female, he cried:

“Shut yer thrap now, Mag Corcoran, an' don't be disturbin' dacent gentleman on her Majesty's mail-car.”

“An' who's more dacent than meself?” she asked. “Begor, I like that, Bobbie, from you. Is it castin' reflection on me you are, with your broken-down jingle an' yet spavined horse. Sure it's cruelty to animals to be sated on it—the Lord forgive me for disthressin' the

misfortunate animal!"

Frank was positively blushing with shame. He was wondering what his dear mother or his friends would say if they could see him in his present situation, He was disturbed from his unpleasant reverie by Fitzgerald's cheerful voice:

"I can see you don't relish this adventure," said he, "but, 'pon my soul, I thought it would amuse you as a stranger to the country to make a voyage in the Dunmore Royal Mail-coach. But perhaps I took too much upon myself."

He spoke so sincerely and good-humouredly that Frank dismissed his angry feelings and his gloom and said: "Oh, it's all right, thank you; but I haven't grown accustomed to Ireland yet. Everything is strange and peculiar to me—much stranger than I had ever fancied it could be."

"You'll get used to us rapidly, believe me," said Fitzgerald.

After a short run on the flat, the car had to mount a steep hill. The horse laboured heavily, taking a corkscrew course to ease his climb. At the top of the hill the driver was signalled by a little squat man on the footpath.

"Full up!" shouted the driver, in response to a signal from the man on the footpath.

"Couldn't you make room for me?" asked the little man piteously.

"Do you think it's a telescope I have harnessed to the horse " said the driver.

"The car won't stretch another inch, Andy."

"Sure you could give me a seat on the well," pleaded

the little man. "I find I can't do the journey on my pins."

The driver pulled up his horse in order to decline the extra passenger in more polite fashion, and Frank saw that the man was the wizened little fellow he had observed in the hall of Mr. Mason's office. He wore a shabby round hat, and his small frame was encased in a long coat of blue pilot cloth.

"Oh, begor, Andy, the horse couldn't stand another passenger," said the driver. "The poor craythur is put to the pin off his collar to haul the present load along."

"But I'm no weight," pleaded Andy. "I must get to Dunmore tonight somehow, and the divil a bit of me can walk, for I have twisted my ankle."

"Oh, is that Andy Kelly?" cried the voice of the raw-boned fisherwoman seated at the off side of the car. "'Tis sorry I am to hear that it isn't your neck is twisted, Andy; but I suppose Ould Nick looks after his own children."

"I wouldn't doubt you for a bad word, Mag Corcoran," said the little man on the footpath. "Let me have a sate, for the love of God!" he continued, addressing the driver.

"Arrah, drive drive on your coach, Bobbie!" cried Mag, "an' laive the little varmin to foot it to Dunmore!"

"What'll I do," Mr. Fitzgerald asked the driver.

"Oh, let him have a lift, Bobbie," said Fitzgerald, "though it's infernally hard on the poor nag."

"I wouldn't doubt you for a good word, yer honour," said Andy, hobbling towards the car, and managing to climb up behind into the well.

"I hope the last straw won't break the horse's back," growled the driver, whipping up his nag.

"Well, I've travelled in bad company before," exclaimed Mag, as the car drove on; "but never in worse than this."

Oh, glory! I hope none of my own people will see me rubbin' skirts with a process-server."

"Have sense, woman!!" said the little man.

"Don't dare to address me, you haythen," said Mag, hotly.

"I hope you haven't any processes to serve in Dunmore, Andy?" said the driver "They're a divil of a heavy weight, I'm tould."

"No, Bobbie, 'tis on other business I'm goin' there, avic."

"Begor, I hope," interrupted Mag, "that before you return you'll get your head broken as well as your leg!"

"Whist, woman!" said Andy. "Sure I do be only doin' me business. Why don't ye find fault with me mather, instead of with me "

"Oh, bad luck to Mистер Hugh Mason, as well as yourself," said Mag, "and all the dirty breed that lives by defraudin' and robbin' poor people! But if there was no wan like such scum as you to do the dirty work, men like your employer would have to dhraw in their horns. But I won't be soilin' me mouth talkin' to the likes of you."

And Mag then turned again to her companions on the car, who, judging by their silence, did not seem to enjoy her society any more than the young Englishman did.

"Isn't it very hard on me, Mистер Fitzgerald, to be spoke to like that?" said Andy, turning to his patron. The little man was seated on the well, his head and shoulders supported by the driver's perch.

"There is no mistake yours is a dirty trade, Andy," said Fitzgerald, "but I have no grudge against you, my

poor man.”

“Isn’t that a sthrange business, yer honour, about your friend, Lord Clashmore?” said Andy. “I’ve often heard tell of mystayrious disappearances, but this bates all I ever heard. But I’ll tell you a sthrange thing, Mither Fitz. Yestherday I was in Thramore on a bit of business, an’ I happened to sit down on the sate outside M’Grath’s baths, and Mither M’Grath spoke to me, and we got into chat about the lord, an’ be tould me he seen a boat sailin’ off Rhi-na-Shark—a yawl—and workin’ her way round Brownstown Head the evenin’ the lord disappeared.”

“And what about that?” asked Fitzgerald.

“Well, don’t you see, Mr. Fitz, it was between six and seven when Mither M’Grath seen the boat sailin’ out of Rhi-r.a-Shark, an’ sure there’s seldom a sailin’ boat in there except Corbett’s yawl.”

“And putting this and that together, Andy, what are you driving at?”

“Only, sir, that it looks to me as if the lord sailed out of the bay in that yawl with Sam Backas for some raison of his own, an’ aither got dhrownded at say or sailed away to some sthrange part of the coast.”

“Have you told this to Mr. Mason—about the strange yawl?”

“I spoke to Mr. Weekes about it today, an’ he tould me to mind me own business. Begor, he’s a terrible man, that same Mither Weekes. When he looks crooked at me, I feel I’d like to be a pay under a thimble. But I can’t get the lord out of me head at all. The idaya of a great man like that—the greatest man in these parts—disappearin’ as if he was only a common puff of smoke!

It bates all! There hasn't been the like of it since Mither Crotty was swallowed up in the quicksand on the Back Strand, an' that's nigh on to thirty years ago now, to the best of my memory."



## CHAPTER XI

### A BREAK-DOWN

IT is almost needless to say that Frank was considerably interested in the communication made by the little process-server. He had been cursing his stars for having introduced to the Dunmore Royal Mail coach; now he was inclined to thank his stars. It was evident to him that the mystery of his uncle's disappearance was a matter of interest or furnished gossip to high and low in the neighbourhood. The reference for the second time to the quicksand at the place called the Back Strand was a thing to be carefully noted. He was, of course, desirous not to display any interest in his uncle's disappearance; but he could easily see that Fitzgerald was not the kind of man to harbour suspicion of strangers. Turning to him, he said:

"I have heard several people speak of this Lord Clashmore since I arrived in Ireland. What do you make of his disappearance, Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"It's the talk of the town now" said Fitzgerald. "I confess it puzzles me. I might say that I was one of the few people who was on anything like intimate terms

with his lordship. Pray don't think I am boasting, my dear sir. I know it must look like it, for I am only a poor man, and an uncertainty even as to my immediate ancestry, while Lord Clashmore is a Viscount with more than twenty thousand a year, and a pedigree going back to the sixteenth century in this country, and God knows how much further back at the other side of St. George's Channel."

"Why should I think you are boasting? It is nothing so very wonderful for one gentleman to be on intimate terms with another. Everything isn't fixed by the money standard, thank heaven! nor by the title standard either—though I admit the latter expects a good many tokens of consideration."

"Perhaps you have broader views in England about these things," said Fitzgerald; "but here a title—especially a peerage—counts for a very great deal, and the possessor of it is a sort of demi-god. Clashmore is a proud man at heart; but it is only fair to say that he displays as little pride or vanity as if he were one of his own tenants. It seems a pity he should waste himself on the desert air of Rhi-na-Shark; but I expect he has a skeleton in the cupboard which he thinks is more secure from the prying eyes of the world in that lonely spot than if he were to remove the cupboard into a fashionable neighbourhood."

"I take it," said Frank, "that your speaking of him in the present tense is an indication that you do not believe he has met with foul play?"

"Faith, I hardly know what to think. I never heard of anyone that had a grudge against him—it least, anyone in this part of the world—and civilized people seldom

commit wanton deeds of violence—even in Ireland,” he added with a smile.

“He has had no trouble with his tenants, then?”

“Scarcely any. I heard he was about to evict one of them, but I can’t believe it. The tenant I speak of was the father of that M’Carthy who introduced me to you on board the steamship. There were things between the M’Carthys and Clashmore that would make it absolutely incredible than an eviction was intended.”

“Oh, begor, you’re wrong there, Mr. Fitz,” said Andy Kelly, “for I served the notice on old Simon with me own hand. Personal sarvice, sir.”

“I had forgotten your existence, Andy. And is this really a fact? How did old Simon take it?”

“Oh, he pitched me and Mither Mason and his lordship himself—God between us and all harm!—to the divil, and tould me he defied us with all our works and pomps. Faith, I was glad to be able to escape from ould Simon with a whole skin, an’ after sarvin’ him I ran away so fast that I got a tumble comin’ down the hill there near his gate, an’ begor me feet has been persecutin’ me ever since.”

“I can’t understand this at all,” said Fitzgerald, half to himself and half to Frank. “I must give old Simon a call and see what he has got to say. It would be a shame to disturb the old boy. He must be ninety, if he’s a day.”

“I heard this man behind us speak of a quicksand,” said Frank. “Is the quicksand in the neighbourhood of this Rhi-na-Shark? I don’t want to fall into it, you know,” he added, “if I should happen to visit the neighbourhood.”

“There’s no doubt about the quicksand,” said Fitzger-

ald, "at least none to my mind; but many people regard the tale of its existence as a *pishogue*—which may be translated as 'a tough yarn.' It is situated in a place called the Back Strand. The river of Rhi-na-Shark, like the Nile, overflows its banks—though it is only fair to say that our Rhi-na-Shark is more regular than the Nile—and at certain periods this quicksand is revealed. It is not always in the same spot; and that's probably the reason why some people don't believe that it exists at all. Lord Clashmore, for instance, would never believe in it, but it's there. It is said that if anything falls into it at a certain time of tide, at a later date, a sister quicksand, at another end of the Back Strand, throws the same thing up."

"That's true enough, sir. Begor, I wouldn't cross that Back Strand in the dark at any time of tide for all the goold in the mint," interjected Andy Kelly. "Do you remember about Crotty's disappearance, sir?"

"I can't say I have any very clear memory of it, Andy. I have heard of it, of course."

"He was missed, sir, and no tidings of him could be had, high or low, until one mornin' in visitin' the Back Sthrand, Misther M'Grath, of the baths in Thramore—at least I think it was he—came across the body there; and there was no manner of doubt that it was swallowed up in one quicksand Crotty was, an' thrown out of the other aftherwards. But Misther M'Grath could tell you the story better than I could, sir."

"M'Grath must be an old man, too, Andy," said Fitzgerald, his mind partly occupied with Simon M'Carthy.

"Eighty, if he's a minute. But faix, he don't look within twenty years of it. There's great health in Thramore,

sir, an' why wouldn't there be, with the Atlantic rowlin' into it all day long?"

"By the way" said Fitzgerald, turning to his companion, "I forgot to ask you where you mean to put up in Dunmore?"

"There's a hotel there, I understand," said Frank. "You see, you brought me off in such a hurry that I had no time to make any arrangements, but I suppose it will be all right."

"Oh, quite sure," said Fitzgerald; "but you might do me a favour—and it will be doing yourself a favour, you'll find, too—by putting up with an old lady, an acquaintance of mine in Dunmore. Her name is O'Dwyer. She owns two little cottages standing together like Siamese twins. She lives in one and lets the other. She will be quite deserted now, as visitors rarely go to Dunmore as early as this in the year, and she will make you as comfortable as if you were at home. How long do you mean to stop in these parts?"

"I hardly know. A week or two, perhaps."

"Candidly, you'd feel very lonely, I fear, in a hotel in Dunmore at this time of the year. Take my advice about Miss O'Dwyer's cottage."

"I am very much obliged," said Frank. "Perhaps you would care to come on to Dunmore, and be a guest of mine for a few days?"

"I'm engaged, as I told you, for tomorrow. I am going to do a day's fishing with an old friend of mine, one Usher. I mean to stop at his place tonight—about half way on the road to Dunmore. You might as well join me there? My friend Usher will be delighted to entertain any friends of mine."

“Do you mind me tellin’ you, Mr. Fitz.” said Andy Kelly, “that you won’t find Misther Usher at home this evenin’. He left for Dublin today by the mail thrain.”

“Just like my stupidity!” said Fitzgerald. “I never thought of letting him know I was coming today. I told him I would pay him a visit the moment I returned from Wales, and I returned some days before I had originally intended,” he explained to his companion.

“Then, there’s nothing for it,” said Frank, amused at the looseness of the way in which this happy-go-lucky man made appointments, “but to come on to Dunmore with me.”

“I will, with pleasure,” said Frank, “if you won’t think it an intrusion.”

“I can only say I’ll be delighted,” said Frank, with more expansiveness and heartiness than was his wont to employ when offering invitations to his friends. “I feel a bit desolate I must admit: so really you will be placing me under an obligation.” The young man had by this time almost forgotten that he was intending to make use of Fitzgerald as an unconscious guide in his proposed search after the missing Viscount.

An hour’s travelling brought the mail car to a forked road. Fitzgerald, as they approached this fork, explained that both roads which it disclosed led to Dunmore—the shorter one was very hilly, and was used chiefly by pedestrians, and the longer one was the one on which the mail-car was intended to travel. He pointed out the house of his friend, Usher, a picturesque cottage situated on the border of an extensive lake. “I’ll tell you a tale about this lake another time,” he observed, “which may amuse you. Bobbie,” addressing the driver, “what’s

the matter with your cattle?"

"Begor, I'm afraid, sir, he's in a state of decline."

"He's more like as if he was skating than trotting," said Fitzgerald.

"I don't like the way of him at all, sir. I think ye'd better get down of the car, ladies and gentlemen," he continued. "I'm goin' to ax ye to walk a bit. The horse seems to be givin' out. I was afraid of the last sthraw," he added under his breath.

With a motion to his companion, Fitzgerald jumped off the car, Frank following his example. The old sea-dog was still indulging fitfully in an alcoholic slumber, and the ladies were displaying some unwillingness to adopt the driver's suggestion.

No sooner had Frank reached the ground in safety than the horse fell down, snapping as he fell the shafts of the Royal Mail coach. The driver managed to save himself by a wild jump, but the ladies were thrown to the ground. The process server, clutching at the slumbering sea-farer, got an easy fall.

Frank and Fitzgerald rushed at once to the assistance of the females. Mag, the fishwife, was on her feet in a moment, her eyes blazing with rage, so there was no occasion to render assistance to her. She uttered some very forcible language, and then rushed violently upon Andy Kelly. She belaboured the unfortunate man with her brawny fists, and then with a demoniacal shout she tore his long coat open.

"Ah, you blackguard!" she cried. "It was the weight of your processes that dhragged the car down. I'll make mince-mate of 'em," pulling some documents from the inner pockets of the little man's coat, tearing them into

shreds, and casting them to the winds. Andy, the picture of terror, looked on this sacrilegious act, scarcely able to move. "And now," cried the virago, "the devil sweep me if I don't heave you, body and bones, into the lake! You'll make a tenderer mouthful for wan of Mither Fitzgerald's young sharks."

With a piercing scream Andy ran along the road at the top of his speed, hotly pursued by the fishwife. Suddenly she stopped, and, turning round, she bounded over a low hedge and disappeared.

By this time Frank had discovered that the two female passengers were unhurt, and had almost recovered from their fright.

"I see what alarmed Mistress Margaret," said Fitzgerald, "and what probably has saved poor Andy from a ducking. Here's the parish priest's trap in view, boys and girls. This is providential, Mr. Venables," he said, turning to his bewildered companion.



## CHAPTER XII

### IN THE PRIEST'S HOUSE

IN a few minutes an old-fashioned looking horse and trap pulled up close to the scene of the accident. The steed attached to the Royal Mail-coach had probably only dropped asleep. He seemed as much surprised as any of the passengers at his sudden fall; and as he slowly got to his feet, he stared round about him with a glance of sheepish amazement. Bobbie, the driver, was busy unharnessing him when the priest's trap pulled up the roadway.

"Hallo, Father John!" cried Fitzgerald, shaking his stick in the air. "We are after having a break-down, you see."

"I wouldn't doubt you, Larry," cried Father Hackett. "There's neither luck nor grace where you are. Anyone hurt?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Fitzgerald, walking up to the priest's trap, and shaking hands with its occupant. "Old Sullivan"—the seafaring man—"is a bit dazed, but I think it's chiefly liquor. Andy Kelly, the process-server, fell on top of him, but I don't think any bones are broken."

“Was that little Andy I saw running along the road?” asked the priest, “with Mag Corcoran hot-footed after him?”

“Faith, you have sharp eyes, Father John.”

“I’d want them. What were they up to, and where have they disappeared?”

“Mag threatened to duck Andy in the lake. Here he comes this way. The virago tore up a lot of papers he had concealed in his coat—she’s a desperate character—and then, no doubt, seeing yourself coming this way, she scampered over the hedge, and I expect she has struck the old road through the fields by this.”

“A stroke of a horsewhip wouldn’t be lost on her, I should think,” said Father Hackett, “though it’s not a medicine I’m fond of administering. What’s the damage, Bobbie?” he called out, addressing the driver.

“The two shafts broke, sir—that’s all.”

“Faith, it’s quite enough,” said the priest. “And might I ask where you are off to this fine evening, Master Larry?”

“I was going to spend the night with Bob Usher, but I am told the scoundrel isn’t at home; so I accepted an invitation from a young friend of mine here—to go to Dunmore with him. I say, Mr. Venables, come here a minute.”

Frank, who was standing not far off from Fitzgerald, walked up to the priest’s trap, and was introduced to his reverence—a white-haired benevolent-looking old man of about seventy years of age. “Mr. Venables is a young artist,” explained Fitzgerald, “a stranger to the country. Only arrived in it this morning.”

“I am sorry for this mishap, sir,” said the priest.

“Dunmore is five or six miles distant. I’ll tell you what you’d better do. Jump into this trap of mine, and I’ll take charge of Mr. Fitzgerald and yourself for the night. I am going home to dinner. You’ll have to take pot luck, as they say in these parts. As a matter of fact, I haven’t the slightest idea what’s for dinner, or whether there will be enough to go round, but we’ll do our best.”

“I couldn’t think of trespassing on you,” said Frank. “It is very kind of you, indeed. The prospect of a long walk doesn’t alarm me, I assure you.”

“Please yourself,” said the priest.

“It’s unlucky to deny yourself to a priest,” said Fitzgerald, “especially to a parish priest. Take my advice, Mr. Venables, and accept Father Hackett’s invitation. Of course, if you don’t, you will put me to the necessity of walking the remainder of the journey with you.”

“That would be a hard penance on you, Larry,” said the priest. “Get up, the pair of ye, and don’t be keeping me late for my dinner. Come along, Mr. Venables. If you wish to push on to Dunmore after dinner, my little trap, or somebody else’s will be at your service.”

Frank felt it would be churlish to refuse the priest’s invitation, and he saw that Fitzgerald was anxious to accept it, so he climbed into the trap, taking he seat which the priest offered him alongside himself.

“How are you going to mend the shafts, Bobbie?” asked Father Hackett.

“I have some bits of rope in the well, yer reverence,” said the driver of the Royal Mail coach; “and, by the same token, the English gentleman has forgotten his thravellin’ bag.”

“Thank you very much for reminding me of it,” said

Frank.

At this moment little Andy Kelly approached the priest's trap.

"God save your reverence" said he, touching his hat and making a bow.

"God save you kindly, Andy!" said the priest. "So Mag Corcoran was thinking of converting you into food for fish?"

"Oh, isn't it terrible, sir!" cried Andy. "Mr. Fitzgerald sir, didn't you see her tear up me papers? Won't you be a witness, sir, that it was no fault of mine?"

"I will, indeed, Andy."

"Misther Weekes will destroy me. There was wan letter he tould me he'd break me neck if I didn't deliver it to-night with me own hand—personal sarvice—to an English gentleman named Venables in Dunmore."

"Why, you *omadhaun*, you have been travelling all this time with the same Mr. Venables. That's he sitting alongside Father John. Faith, Mr. Venables," said Fitzgerald, chuckling, "if it was a writ Andy was carrying, Mag Corcoran should be able to claim a place in your memory."

"Oh, it wasn't a writ, your honour, but a private letter from Misther Weekes. Mr. Venables is a client of ours. I seen this gentleman in our office this mornin', but I didn't know his name, of course."

"A wonder they didn't introduce him to you, Andy," said Fitzgerald, with a cackle.

I' rank felt exceedingly uncomfortable now. This stupid little process-server had exposed him, and tendered him liable to grave suspicion. What had Weekes written?—no doubt some fresh instructions or some

fresh item of news; perhaps the story of the strange yawl. Anyhow, lie had seen the letter—if it was one of the documents snatched from little Andy by the fish-wife—torn into shreds.

“You’d best go back to town, Andy, and tell your master what has happened,” urged Father Hackett.

“But sure, Mither Weekes would murdher me, yer reverence, for gettin’ into such a scrape. He have no pity at all, and he purtends not to believe the day-light out of me mouth.”

“I’ll scribble a few lines to him for Andy,” sad the priest, passing the reins to Frank, and taking a small note-book from the pocket of his long coat.

“I wouldn’t doubt yer reverence,” said Andy, making another bow. “The heavens be your bed!”

“Faith, Andy, I never saw a man with a bad ankle run so fast as you did when Mag was chasing you,” said Fitzgerald, while the priest was writing the note.

“Oh, begor, sir, the fright she gave me dhrove all the stiffness out of my foot. It’s as soople now as a young ashplant.”

“Trot along now, Andy,” said the priest, handing him the note. “If the letter for this young gentleman here is of grave importance, you can fetch the true copy of it with you to-morrow morning to my house.”

“If it’s a latitat, Andy, or anything of that nature,” said Fitzgerald, “you’d better mind what you’re about. The lake is very handy, you know; and I’m told those young sharks are ravenous for flesh-meat.”

Frank had not succeeded in dismissing his unpleasant sensations. He felt inclined to make a clean breast of everything to Fitzgerald; but as he pondered over this it

seemed to him that he had no right to reveal himself. He had himself desired secrecy, and had enjoined it upon others. And it would be acting improperly if he were to take anyone into his confidence before consulting Mr. Mason.

“Good-bye, Bobbie,” said the priest, taking charge of the reins again, “and if you will take my advice you’ll not allow any of your passengers to resume their seats until your car is properly mended. Couldn’t you borrow some sort of conveyance for your few remaining passengers hereabouts? Tell Bill Brien, the blacksmith, that I asked him to lend you a cart.”

“Thank your reverence,” said Bobbie, “I will, sir.” And the priest, acknowledging the curtseys of the two female passengers, who had been sitting on the low hedge which bordered the road, drove off.

Frank was beginning to recover his equanimity. It was plain to him that Fitzgerald harboured no suspicions of him, and he could not help being amused as he reflected upon the adventures of the day.

“So you’re a stranger to Ireland, Mr. Venables?” said the priest.

“Quite a stranger,” answered Frank. “I arrived in Waterford about ten o’clock this morning.”

“And where did you pick up my friend behind?”

“I met Mr. Fitzgerald on board the steamboat.”

“He travelled from London in the same compartment as Charlie M’Carthy, and Mac introduced me to him,” explained Fitzgerald.

“Do you mean Simon’s son?” asked the priest.

“The same, sir.”

“That’s a queer business about the old man’s eviction,

Larry. Did you hear of it?"

"I did, sir; but I didn't believe it until Andy Kelly told me a while ago that he had served the notice on him."

"I suppose it must be only some legal matter of form. The moment I heard of it I drove over to Rhi-na-Shark house myself—excuse me, will you, Mr. Venables, for talking about a foreign subject like this—in order to see his lordship, and then I heard the news of his disappearance. One of our local potentates has been spirited away," said the priest, addressing Frank, "and none of us can make head or tail of the case."

"I have heard of the disappearance," said Frank, somewhat shamefacedly. He too felt that he could not go anywhere in the neighbourhood, or enter into conversation with anybody without hearing his uncle's disappearance discussed. He began to ask himself, if he felt so uncomfortable in the presence of people who did not suspect him of having any connection with the Viscount, how he would conduct himself in the presence of someone who might suspect him? "That fellow Weekes was right," he told himself. "It is a case for a professional detective, not for a callow amateur."

A quarter of an hour's drive brought them to the priest's house, a snug one-story building, standing in about an acre of ground, surrounded by a low stone wall. In front of the house was a tastefully laid-out flower-garden, and at its side a small coach-house. The priest delivered horse and trap into the hands of a "servant-boy," and then ushered his guests into a comfortably furnished room in which there was a table laid for dinner. A cheerful fire—it was still cold at nights—burned in the grate.

"I must look after a couple of knives and forks, Mr. Venables," said Father Hackett. "I'll leave my friend Larry to keep you company for a few minutes."

"You seem to have abundance of friends Mr. Fitzgerald," said Frank, as the priest left the room. "In this part of the country, I have," said Fitzgerald. "I'm sure I don't know what they see in me, except that I can play a good honest game of cards, and do bit of fishing or shooting or steeple-chasing—mostly at some friend's expense. If you don't mind my saying it, Mr. Venables, I have taken quite a fancy to you."

A bush mantled the young man's checks at this abrupt declaration, but he remembered Mr. Weekes' obiter dictum, that Fitzgerald's latest friend was always his best friend. He stammered his thanks at the very broad compliment, and his companion continued:

"Yes; it often strikes myself how odd it is that I find a welcome everywhere, in mud cabin or slate house. I suppose it really is that I am always able to be cheerful. And I'm a lonely man, mind you, Mr. Venables. The deuce a relative I have so far as I know. I have no memory of even a father or mother."

"I lost my father some years ago," said Frank, "but I am happy to say my mother lives. Indeed, I don't know how I should get on without her."

"I have often hankered after a brother or a sister, even if it was only to give them trouble. Just to feel that you had someone who took a permanent interest in you whether he or she liked it or no."

"Is it grumbling you are, Larry?" said the priest, entering the room. "Well, Mr. Venables, I have been interviewing my housekeeper, and she is in a rare state of



indignation at my bringing in a stranger—Mr. Fitzgerald doesn't count, you know—without giving her the opportunity of showing you what a good cook she is. A bit of boiled salmon and that vulgar dish known as Irish stew are the best I can do for you."

"You must have been expecting me," said Fitzgerald, "for you have named my pet weaknesses in the matter of grub."

Frank enjoyed his dinner heartily. His host, in addition to the salmon and Irish stew, supplied him with some very excellent claret, and with a plentiful supply of agreeable small talk. After dinner the priest's house-keeper—a stern-visaged old dame, wearing a stiff white frilled cap—cleared the table, and rehabilitated the fire in the grate. Then Father Hackett produced cigars and tobacco, explaining that he did not smoke himself, but liked to sit where others were smoking. "My only weakness in that direction," said he, "is snuff. Larry will have punch with his pipe, I know, and I'll stick to the claret. What will you have, Mr. Venables?"

"I'll keep you company, sir," said the young man.

"Excuse me, Father John, but I left my pipe in my overcoat in the hall," said Fitzgerald, rising.

When the priest and Frank were alone, Father Hackett, dropping his voice, said:

"Mr. Venables, I am a great judge of faces and family likenesses. It's one of my weaknesses. You have an Irish face. And more than that, I think I could tell who you are."

Frank was startled and felt horribly confused.

"Don't be alarmed," said the priest, "I am accustomed to keeping secrets and what I have just said is only for

your own ears, and I may be quite wrong in my surmise—it came on me like a flash at dinner. I thought I'd say what was in my mind the moment I got an opportunity. And here's Mr. Larry back. Now that you have your dirty pipe you might as well attend to your punch—the kettle is boiling—and tell us something that will amuse this young gentleman here. He mustn't go away with the bad impression of the dullness of an Irish priest's house. And by the same token, Mr. Venables. I suppose it is understood that you'll stop the night here. It won't be a morsel of inconvenience to me. There are always a couple of spare bedrooms in readiness, for I never know when my curates may quarter themselves upon me—to say nothing of my acquaintances in the lay world."

## CHAPTER XIII

### A SHARK AND SOME MINOR MATTERS

FRANK could not dismiss his alarm easily. Had this old priest really recognized him, and how? Could it be that he took him for a member of the plebeian M'Carthy family? At all events, he would at the first opportunity make full confession to Father Hackett. The mere acknowledgment of his assumed name was becoming irksome to the young Englishman.

He accepted his host's invitation with graciousness, and then he felt a little more at his ease. The priest was evidently doing his best to induce ease, but at the same time Frank could see that he was desirous of forcing the conversation in the direction of the disappearance of Lord Clashmore. He was now disinclined to discuss the matter, fearing he might make some slip which would disclose his identity, for he could hardly believe that Father Hackett had guessed rightly who he was.

"I have heard you speak of Rhi-na-Shark," said he, as the name of the creek was dragged into conversation by his host. "I understand it means the River of the Shark, and I heard two or three references to sharks in

the lake near which our coach broke down—is there any connection between the two waters?”

“There is a connection,” answered the I priest, “but the nature of it is sometimes disputed. I myself believe that the lake—which is called Bell Lake—finds its way into the river overland. There are others who will tell you that there is a subterranean connection between the lake and the river; but my friend Larry there is, I am afraid, solely responsible for the sharks in Bell Lake. He will tell you how they got there.”

Frank turned to Fitzgerald, who was busy with his pipe and his punch, and asked for an explanation.

“I don’t mind telling on myself,” said Fitzgerald, smiling, “even if it will make you think you have fallen into the company of a practical joker. There has always been, as Father John tells you, a dispute about the connection between the lake and the river. My friend, Bob Usher, who lives at Lake Cottage, always used to insist that there was a subterraneous channel somewhere which had a mysterious connection with the quicksand at Rhina-Shark, and I usually held that the only connection that existed was that when Bell Lake was too full its surplus water found its way over the land into the creek. Many a word Rob and I have had on that point. Anyhow I was stopping at Lake Cottage one night, and Bob floored me with his arguments in favour of the underground passage, and faith, I dreamt of tunnels and quicksands and monsters of the deep all night. I got up the next morning before the house was astir, determined to bring in some fish before breakfast, and to tackle Bob with fresh arguments in favour of the overland route, for I felt I could never rest easy in my bed with the underground

channel floating through my dreams.

"Usher has a boat on the lake, and it was out of the boat we usually fished. I hadn't any luck in the start, and I pulled the boat across towards the roadway where our car broke down this evening, knowing there was a fine jack-pike in a hole not very far from the road. I hooked the beggar right enough, as it happened, but he tore my top splice away with him, and left me without a hook—I had forgotten my hooks.

"While I was cursing the pike I saw a fisherman's cart coming along the road from Dunmore, and I thought one of the lads with the cart would be likely to have some hooks."

"You're early, boys," said I, getting out of the boat and approaching the two fishermen. "Have you any small fish hooks about you?"

"The deuce a wan, Mr. Fitzgerald," said the fellow, who was leading the horse—one Mick Clancy, of Dunmore.

"What fish are you bringing to town?" said I, seeing they had their cargo carefully covered with tarpaulin.

"Well, I don't mind telling you, sir," said he, "that it's a shark!"

"A what?" said I, thinking he was humbugging me.

"A shark!" said Mick, "and a dangerous fellow, too. He nearly snapped the hand off me when we were loadin' him into the cart. He desthroyed all my nets last night when we were out thrawlin'."

"And what on earth are you going to do with him?" I asked.

"Well," said Mick Clancy. "Mr. Slater in Waterford, the fishmonger, told me if ever I came across a shark

again—I caught a small fellow about two year ago, an' I was tellin' him of it—that he'd give me a couple of pound for the carcase, just to hang it up in his place, in ordher to dhraw the people to look at his shop.'

“Who knows you caught the shark, Mick?’ said I.

“Only me own crowd, sir.’ said he. ‘We towed him in afther us airly this mornin’.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do with you,’ said I. ‘Dump the fellow into the lake here, and I’ll give you two pounds for him, and that’ll save you a journey into Waterford.’

“Faith, at first he didn’t believe I was in earnest, but the sight of two new one-pound notes, which I pulled out of my pocket, convinced him I was—a heavy price to pay for my joke, mind you, Mr. Venables. Anyhow, to make a long story short, the tarpaulin was taken off the cart, and my brave shark was disclosed coiled up. The fellow was not quite dead, for when we touched him he opened the whole of his side apparently, and I remember it looked to me as if you were opening a harmonium furnished with several sets of teeth. Such a lot of ivory I never saw before or since in one place.

“There was a grappling iron in my boat with a coil of rope attacked to it, and we managed to fix the grapples well into the shark’s jaws, and between the three of us we succeeded in heaving the monster into the lake. He was about twelve feet long and he must have weighed nearly a couple of hundred weight.

“It’s understood now, Mick,’ said I to the fisherman, ‘that not a word of this is to be told to a living soul!’ Faith, Mick and his man laughed heartily as they gave me their promise to be silent and assisted me to fasten the end of the grappling iron to the stump of a tree.

“When the fishermen were well out of sight on their way home. I pulled the boat back to Lake Cottage, and gave a shout that brought Bob Usher out. wondering what had gone wrong.

“‘Begor, Bob,’ said I, as he got near the boat, ‘you’re right about the underground passage from the lake to the river.’

“‘Of course, I know I am.’ said Bob; ‘but what has convinced you?’

“‘Step into the boat and you’ll see,’ said I, ‘and you’d better bring a couple of men with you.’

“So we got two servant boys out of the house, and the four of us rowed towards the place where I had fixed my shark.

“‘What is it?’ asked Bob, as we rowed across the lake.

“‘Wait until you see,’ said I. ‘The mischief such a morning’s sport I ever had. The fellow snapped the top of my rod away, and it’s the mercy of goodness he didn’t haul me out of the boat, and not thinking of the danger I was in I baited the grappling irons for him with a pike I had just landed, and faith it was only a miracle I managed to kill him.’

“‘What on earth ails you?’ said Bob. ‘What it is you have caught?’

“I kept him on tenter-hooks until we got to where I had secured my fish. We got out of the boat, the four of us, and hauled on the rope; and, faith, if you ever saw three men dazed with astonishment, it was Bob and his two servant boys. There was the shark anyhow, still showing signs of life as we hauled him ashore. The best of it was that Usher, who’s a bit of an antiquarian, or whatever you call it, wrote a long account of my extraor-

dinary capture to a Waterford paper, and crowds came out to Bell Lake to see the monster—even after the shark was too high to be exhibited. Bob was as proud as a peacock of his being right about the connection between his lake and the Atlantic ocean—*viâ* Rhi-na-Shark and the mysterious underground river; but one unlucky night, when I had an extra tumbler of punch in me, Bob upset me by bragging about his underground channel, and giving me dissertations on shark spawn, so I told him how the shark got into the lake. Usher wouldn't speak to me for months afterwards. But the true story didn't get generally about, and there's many a person in the neighbourhood that still believes I caught a shark in Bell Lake. Andy Kelly, the process server, is evidently one. You might have noticed how he screamed and took to his heels when Mag Corcoran spoke of introducing him to the young sharks."

"There isn't one of the neighbours for miles round," said the priest, "would bathe in Bell Lake ever since Master Larry had the great catch there. I'm afraid you must think us a rather ridiculous people, Mr. Venables?"

"You seem to me to enjoy life," said Frank, "and there's nothing ridiculous in that."

"We have our sad hours, too, as well as the best and most cultured of ye; but we don't like letting a stranger see the uncomfortable side of us any more than is necessary. What would you say to a game of cards, or a game of chess, in order to enliven the evening? Master Larry there is dropping asleep, I see."

"I'll confess I am just beginning to feel drowsy," said Fitzgerald; "but so would yourself if you had been up nearly all night tossing and tumbling in a steamboat."



"It's a hard life of it you have," said Father Hackett, "a very hard life, indeed, my poor man! Do you play chess, Mr. Venables?"

"A little," said Frank; "but if you and I play, sir, we shall be leaving my friend here out in the cold."

"Don't mind me," said Fitzgerald. "If you care to play chess I'll be glad to look on at you. I'm fond of the game, but I'm no match for Father John. And as to cards—faith I'd get broke if I was to play to-night. I'm not up to card form—bad cess to that Milford boat!"

"He's the best hand in the country at spoiled five," said the priest. "But let us have our game of chess, Mr. Venables. I rarely meet a decent player."

"I am nothing to brag of," said Frank, who was very fond of chess, and prided himself not a little on his skill at the game.

He found a little later that he had no mean antagonist in Father Hackett, and he was chagrined when the old man, after a hard-fought campaign, mated him. "You'll have your revenge next time, I make little doubt," said the priest. "It is a pleasure to play with one who is your match. Master Larry would be asking a queen from me."

Fitzgerald was nodding in his easy-chair, his wooden pipe held perilously between finger and thumb. Frank was on his mettle now, and after about half-an-hour's play at the second game he felt he had cornered his antagonist. A knock was heard at the door, and in response to Father Hackett's "Come in, Statia!" the housekeeper entered the room to tell her master he was wanted in the hall. Excusing himself to his guests for—Fitzgerald was now wide-awake, the knock at the door disturbing

his light slumber—the priest left the room.

“A sick call, I fear,” said Fitzgerald to Frank.

“What does that mean?” asked the young man.

“Only that poor Father John will have to go tramping across country this chilly night. At least, so I expect. I hope it is a call near at hand.”

The host re-entered the room. “I’m sorry I have to leave ye,” said he, “but go I must. Mrs. Mulcahy, of Killea, is taken suddenly ill,” he explained, addressing himself to Fitzgerald. “I’ll give you charge of the premises, Larry. Go to bed when you like, but try to be good boys. I’ll stop at Killea tonight. I might as well, for I have got to say Mass there in the morning—Father O’Connell is ill. Please God, I’ll join ye at breakfast about nine o’clock.”

“Are you going to ride or drive, sir?” asked Fitzgerald.

“I’ll ride, Larry. That trap of mine is getting too crazy for hill-climbing, especially at night over a badly-kept road. Besides,” he continued, fearing it might be supposed that he was indulging himself with a grumble, “it will be warmer riding than driving, and I’m fond of taking care of myself. . . . Well. God be with ye, boys!” shaking hands with his two guests. “I’m sorry not to have been able to give you your revenge, Mr. Venables. I think you had me fairly cornered. Don’t be uneasy,” he added in a whisper, “I’ll have it out with you after breakfast to-morrow.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### SOME DISCOVERIES

At the comparatively early hour of eleven Frank was fast asleep, and he did not awake until it was nearly eight o'clock next morning. When he came downstairs he found that Fitzgerald was out—he had left the house about half-past six, declaring he meant to try his luck with a rod, and endeavour to earn an appetite for his breakfast. At nine o'clock Fitzgerald returned with a few trout, which he handed to the priest's housekeeper. Shortly after his arrival Father Hackett rode up, looking as fresh as a daisy.

When breakfast was over, the priest instructed Fitzgerald to go out and borrow a handy nag somewhere. "My poor beast," he exclaimed, "must have a rest today, and you two gentlemen, I presume, are anxious to push on to Dunmore."

When Fitzgerald left the house, Father Hackett turned to Frank and said:

"I fear I disturbed you a good deal last evening, but I'm an impulsive old person."

"You certainly surprised me," said Frank, "but I have

made up my mind to make open confession to you, for I feel my present position more irksome than I fancied it would have become. At the same time, I can hardly believe that you know who I am.”

“Remember,” said the priest, “it is only a shot I am making at it; but I take you to be Mr. Francis Aylward, nephew to my Lord Clashmore.”

“You have made a capital shot.” said the young man. “And now will you inform me how you identified me?”

“By a very old and simple process—that of putting two and two together.”

“They sometimes make five in clumsy hands—or less than nothing. What were the twos and twos?”

“In the first place, I have been expecting to find some stranger here searching quietly for his lordship. The police knew of no such person up to yesterday morning, when I was talking to the County Inspector at Dunmore, but the County Inspector fancied Mr. Mason had employed an English detective. Then I meet a stranger—an Englishman—who shows unmistakable signs of concern when the little process-server mentions that he has an important letter from Mr. Hugh Mason—Lord Clashmore’s solicitor—addressed to one Mr. Venables, an English gentleman.”

“I didn’t think you noticed my confusion sir.”

“I have as my friend Larry said last evening, very sharp eyes for an old man. But to resume: your name, Venables, struck me as being a name I had heard before; and, turning this over in my mind, I remembered that when I was building a new church a few years ago, I was seeking in all directions for subscriptions. Your worthy uncle, though he doesn’t belong to my Faith, gave me

a hundred pounds on the understanding his name was not be disclosed. I then hunted up all his lordship's connections, and wrote to the few I could discover, saying I was building a church on the Clashmore estate and was badly off for funds. The Honourable Mrs. Aylward rent me a five-pound note, and a sister of hers, Lady Venables, to whom I took the liberty of writing, sent me very best wishes and—"

"A postal order for one-and-sixpence," raid Frank, completing the sentence.

"Exactly," said Father Hackett. "How did you know the amount?"

"It is Lady Venables' stereotyped donation to charities about which she knows nothing and cares less—and an Irish Roman Catholic church would certainly come under this head."

"Well now, do you see," said the priest, "how far my twos and twos carried me, so far as yourself was concerned?"

"Yes," said Frank, "but I confess I should never have made four of them."

"Nor, perhaps, should I. But at dinner you happened to cover the lower part of your face with your handkerchief, leaving only the eyes and brows visible. In a moment the flash came to me. 'That's a descendant of the first Viscountess Clashmore,' said I to myself, 'or I'm a Dutchman!' There is a portrait of her ladyship in Rhi-na-Shark House which I have often gazed at. And knowing that his lordship had only one near relative of your sex and age, I don't think it required any great effort of genius to add up the tot and to figure it out who you are."

“Your having made such a good guess so early makes me feel that I had better go home again. I would not wish it to be known that I was in the neighbourhood wearing an assumed name—not for any consideration.”

“As to your being discovered. I don’t think you need trouble yourself about the risk. Recollect, I am possessed of some kind of instinct about faces and family likenesses which few people hereabouts possess, and not a soul, barring your uncle and myself, perhaps, ever heard of your aunt, Lady Venables. Your full face gives no impression of the M’Carthy physiognomy, and even if it did, that would attract no attention to you. The only person with whom possibly you will have to be careful is an old man of ninety—Simon M’Carthy. Old as he is, his eyes are as sharp as a hawk’s, and if you happen to cover up the lower part of your face, it’s on the cards that he’ll recollect the eyes and the brow of your great-grandmother. But, even if he did, that might give no clue to yourself, for all likelihood he has never heard of you.”

“I have heard of a good deal of this nonagenarian,” said Frank, “since I arrived in Ireland, and it seems to me that I shall have to make his acquaintance if I am to get any clue as to what happened to my uncle. I suppose you have some theory, sir, about the mystery of this disappearance.”

“Oh, you mustn’t ask me too much. I have no doubt you will, in order to satisfy your own mind, be obliged to meet the old man. He is not in my parish, but he is an old friend of mine.”

“But come, sir, you might, I think, give me some assistance. All I want is to discover what has happened

to my uncle. It is not a matter of one affectionate relative seeking after another with ambition or vengeance spurring him on; for I own to you that I have no feelings good, bad, or indifferent concerning the Viscount personally. It is with me a matter of clearing up a mystery—concerned with my family—a duty which I think devolves upon me whether I attack this subject in my own person or otherwise; for so far as I know, there is no other male relative of my uncle's living except the heir."

"Except the heir!" said the priest. "Who is his heir?"

"His only son."

"I didn't know he had a son living."

"Then you presumed I was the heir to the Viscounty, Father?" observed Frank, smiling.

"Certainly. I looked forward to saying one of these days to some snobbish visitor of mine: 'That's the bed the present or the future—as the case might be—Viscount Clashmore slept in the first night he spent in Ireland! That's the knife and fork he ate his first dinner in Ireland with! That's the identical glass he drank out of!' Now, surely, Mr. Venables—to call you by your *nom de guerre*, you are not going to disappoint me eventually in this respect!"

"I am afraid I am," said Frank, with a good-humoured laugh. "Indeed it would horrify me to think I was privy to founding such a museum. There was a son born to Lord Clashmore, and until a few days ago I was under the impression that his son lived with him at Rhi-na-Shark House."

"What altered that impression, might I ask?"

"My mother informed me that there was some mystery about the heir—that he was a dark horse."

Frank then told Father Hackett his mother's version of the Viscount's matrimonial affairs.

"Of course, I knew there had been a marriage," said Father Hackett, a puzzled look in his face, "but I concluded that the heir was your good self. What does Debrett say? I have an old copy here—not for the purpose of hunting up pedigrees, but for the more laudable object of seeking for likely people in aristocratic circles who might be cajoled into contributing to my building fund and other charities."

"I am no very close student of Peerages," said Frank, as the priest produced a well-thumbed copy of Debrett.

"Observe," said Father Hackett, "it opens easily at C. 'Clashmore, Viscount (Aylward) Henry Francis Aylward, third viscount in the peerage of Ireland. Born October 1829; succeeded his father in 1864; was educated at Harrow and at Christ Church, Oxford. Married (1851) Martha, only daughter of George Drake, Esquire, and has issue living, George Henry, born in 1851.'"

"That is all the information about him here," said Father Hackett, "except about the Creations, and the Arms, and the Seats, which I suppose you know as well as your A B C, or as what I have just read to refresh your memory."

"Yes," said the young man. "The entry you have just read stands exactly the same year after year."

"Oddly enough," said the priest, "it never occurred to me that the word 'living' was after 'issue.' I took it as being merely a chronicle of the birth of an heir who died in infancy. There is certainly no son at Rhi-na-Shark House, nor have I heard any mention of a son since his lordship settled down amongst us."



"You will also observe," said Frank, "that there is nothing further said about Lady Clashmore, so it is to be presumed she is also alive."

"Yes. That's very strange," observed the priest. "Here have I been bragging to you of my acuteness, and the deuce a bit of me ever noticed those two very important facts, I suppose just because they were under my nose."

"Those Peerages are by no means infallible," said Frank. "I once met a conductor of a Peerage, and his only idea was how to get advertisements. Those fellows usually rely on information supplied by the aristocrats, and if an aristocrat doesn't for any reason correct their little slips, the errors become what pressmen call 'standing matter.' Peerages are not flawless, sir, though no doubt the bulk of them are fairly correct."

"I have always regarded Debrett as being inspired," said Father Hackett.

"It does its best." said Frank. "I can answer for its editorial persistence, at any rate."

"You mustn't be disillusionising me. And now, my young friend, might I ask what your programme is?"

"It is a very loose document indeed. My idea is to go over the ground, and to endeavour to pick up any facts which possibly may escape the eye of a policeman, simply because he is a policeman. Besides, I understand that the Irish people are not fond of helping the police, and would be more likely to say things to a stranger who was not connected with the authorities."

"There's something in that," said Father Hackett. "But, tell me, does your solicitor approve of this, or rather does Mr. Weekes?—for poor Hugh Mason has little or no mind of his own."

“I cannot say that Mr. Weekes did approve of me,” said Frank, a little sarcastically, “but he consented, and promised, naturally, to give me any help in his power.”

“Did you enquire about the heir—I mean at Mason’s office?”

“No. I did not think of it.”

“You see, that may be a very important point, for a motive is what you have got to seek after.”

“Won’t you tell me what your own theory is, Father?”

“When you ask me the question, you ask me too much. I haven’t any theory. Some gossips talk of the young M’Carthys taking revenge for being noticed to quit, but I’m pretty nearly certain they are incapable of any deed of violence. Until the eviction was decided upon there was not bad blood between these young fellows and his lordship. But I may tell you I have heard that the M’Carthys had a very crafty and dangerous enemy in his lordship’s man—Backas.”

“Might it be that in attacking the man Backas they had no choice left but to attack my uncle?”

“I have told you I do not believe those M’Carthys capable, any more than you or I, of committing murder—if that’s what’s in your mind. His lordship may have vanished of his own free will. This matter of his having a direct heir living aggravates the difficulty of getting at the heart of the mystery. All I can promise you is I will keep my eyes and ears open, and if I should hear anything that will help you I’ll let you know. You’re in good hands in poor Larry’s, if you are desirous of careering round the country. He has his little weaknesses—I suppose every man must have some shortcomings or he’d be too perfect for mixing with his neighbours—but

he's an honest fellow. Don't let him walk you off your feet. Here he comes again, anyhow, with the nag which will draw you to Dunmore."



## CHAPTER XV

### ON THE ROAD TO DUNMORE

THERE was an amused look on Father Hackett's face as the borrowed steed was led in through the gate by the priest's boy.

"I suppose you recognize your old friend, Father Mathew," said Fitzgerald, pointing to the horse. "He's the best I could do for you, and, faith, Slattery, from whom I borrowed him, laughed when I told him it was for his reverence I was acting. He says he has quite cured him of his old trick, sir."

"Master Larry is referring to a very nasty habit that same horse had when I owned him, as I did once," explained the priest to Frank. "Maybe on the road to Dunmore he'll tell you about it, and what trouble it got me into on one memorable occasion. The story will serve to shorten the journey to Dunmore, and I don't mind running the risk of getting a bad character at Larry's hands."

"I'll tell on you, never fear, sir," said Fitzgerald, "if Mr. Venables will stand another yarn from me so soon again."

“By the way, I never thought of asking you where you’re stopping in Dunmore, Larry?” said Father Hackett.

“I am going to put our friend up at Miss O’Dwyer’s, sir.”

“You couldn’t do better. My boy will go with you and take the trap back. I’m not afraid of your pawning it, but I have to go on to Killea in the afternoon. So the sooner you’re off the better. Speed the parting guest, you know, Mr. Venables, is a good motto; and I am sure,” he added in an undertone, “you’re anxious to be at work. Here’s the trap now, and that prime boy of a horse harnessed to it. I expect he recognized the old shafts. Good-bye now, boys,” said the old man, “and my blessing be upon you!”

Frank expressed his warm gratitude to the priest for his kindness and hospitality, and Father Hackett, with a twinkle in his eye, said: “Ah! but you found out my motive for giving you a welcome. That museum, as you called it, was in my mind’s eye all the time.”

“Not *all* the time,” said Frank, grasping the priest’s hand.

“Now, Larry, are you ready, my boy? I suppose you will tool the chariot across the country!” exclaimed Father Hackett. “I sincerely hope the horse has been cured of that old trick of his.”

When after about ten minutes of a sharp trot, the trap was once more passing the margin of Bell Lake, Fitzgerald said: “This lake reminds me of a shark, and my shark reminds me of the story of this little gentleman who is pulling us along—that is, if you don’t think I’ll bore you. I’m an awful gabbler—once my tongue begins

to wag it goes on like the pendulum of a clock.”

“I’ll tell you when I’d like you to stop.”

“Faith, I’m afraid that would be trusting you too far. You’d let me go on until I ran down.”

“You need not think I am so extremely polite. Also don’t think, please, that it is as hard to amuse me as it may seem. I can enjoy a joke or a good story internally—and feel grateful for it, too.”

“Very well, then, here goes. Father John bought him from a man a—Protestant—named Maguire, who kept a general shop in Dunmore. Maguire was moving into the city of Waterford to better his fortunes, and he was selling off his stock. A prime boy he was, too. Anyhow, he offered the horse to Father John for eighteen pounds, warranting him to be sound, and quiet under saddle or harness and that he is, and a smart little trotter, too, when he’s left to himself. Father John asked, of course, what vices he had, if any? ‘Nothing to speak of,’ said Maguire, who thought it might be no bad thing to play a joke upon a priest; ‘only a trick of obstinacy at times. He’ll come to a dead stop now and again; but once you know him you’ll be able to handle him as easy as if lie was a spaniel. He only just wants a little bit of humouring.’

“Father John tried him for a few days, and found the horse tractable and quiet. So he bought him. Shortly afterwards there was a new Protestant Bishop appointed to the diocese. He was a haughty man, and a terrible temperance advocate. One day he visited Dunmore, in order to address his little flock there at the earliest moment on the temperance question, and a hot time he gave them, I am told. Anyhow, when he was

ready to drive back to Waterford, he was informed that one of the wheels of his carriage had been knocked into smithereens—his own coachman had got too much liquor inside his skin while his lordship was lecturing, and had scraped the wheel off against a telegraph pole. Of course, the Bishop didn't say much, but, I expect, like the sailor's parrot, he thought a good deal.

“Father Hackett happened to be in Dunmore the same day, and, hearing of the disaster, he offered to drive the distinguished visitor into town in his little trap. And as there was nothing else for it, the Bishop accepted the priest's offer, and off they started for Waterford city.

“All went first-rate until they got about half a mile beyond Bell Lake—nearer to town—and there, right outside a public house, the horse stopped dead. Poor Father John did everything he could to move the beast, but not a step could be got out of him. . . The owner of the public house came out, and, dropping a curtsey—for he knew who the two travellers were, and he recognized the horse—he said if their reverences would step inside his place for a moment he'd deal with the contrary beast. ‘I know he used to belong to Martin' Maguire, of Dunmore, said he. ‘and he has a trick of standing still, but I can cure him in a jiffy of his bad manners.’

“Seeing nothing else for it, and there being nobody looking on, the Bishop and the priest went into the pub, and in about two minutes the landlord told them it was all right; and, sure enough so, so it was. The horse trotted off in capital style. His lordship, of course, was boiling over with rage—that is, if a Bishop does give way to rage I'm sure I don't know; but Father John says he gave him a withering glance, and never opened his



mouth for another mile of the road. Here my brave horse stopped again in front of another public house, and, as if it was a regular game, out came the landlord with the same story of his being able to humour the obstinate beast if the travellers would step inside for a couple of minutes. Looking daggers at poor bewildered Father John, the Bishop dismounted again, and, just as at the first stage, the landlord came in in a few minutes and told them that Maguire's little nag was all right again—that he only wanted coaxing. As they trotted off, says the Bishop to Father John, 'This is monstrous, sir! monstrous!' Poor Father John assured his companion that he had never seen the horse play this trick, though he had driven him many a mile round Dunmore, and that he could not possibly offer any explanation of it.

"There was a long stretch after this without a public house, and Father Hackett, remembering that there was one just about two miles at this side of the city, determined to get his nag into a fast trot as they got near this last pub, and to keep plying the whip well. But it was no good. Just as they reached the house of entertainment for man and beast the horse stopped dead short. This time the Bishop was purple in the face, and he declared emphatically that he would not enter another public house. He had a strong suspicion that the priest was taking a rise out of him. Moreover he was suffering at the same time from a touch of gout in the foot—only for this he'd have walked home the two miles.

"Now the fellow who kept this public house was a queer character, and it annoyed him to see a Protestant dignitary riding in the priest's trap. But his annoyance

soon gave way to amusement as he gazed at the angry face of the Bishop. Father John got out of the trap and spoke to the landlord (who was standing in his own doorway), and asked if he had a horse and trap or even a saddle horse that he could give his lordship the Bishop. The landlord had neither, so Father John asked him if he knew how to cure the little nag in front of us of his obstinacy! 'I do,' said the man, 'for I see the misfortunate animal belongs to Maguire, of Dunmore; but the devil a cure—savin' your reverence's presence—I can give for him. Out of that be won't stir until the Protestant clergyman that's with you come in here and takes out a pint measure of ale and drinks it standing in front of the horse. He makes three halts of this kind between Bell Lake and the city of Waterford. That's the trick Maguire taught him.'

"Faith, our reverend friend felt he could sink into the earth with shame. He tried to cajole the landlord, but the fellow had more drink on board than was good for him, and not even for Father John would be try his hand at humouring the horse. He was determined to get all the fun he could out of the teetotal Bishop.

"As fortune would have it, it began to rain just then, and poor Father Hackett, trembling like a leaf, went to the Bishop and told him how matters stood. His lordship got into such a state that the gout in his foot broke out in him like a hayrick bursting into flames; and between the rain and the blackguardism of the tipsy landlord he saw nothing for it, as he wanted to get home as quickly as possible, but to dismount. He hobbled into the public house on Father John's arm, and thundered at the landlord to get somebody to drink the pint of ale in

front of the horse; but the landlord only laughed at him, and asked his lordship if he wanted to demoralize the neighbourhood by trying to get people to drink against their wills. In the end, poor Father John had to take out an empty pewter measure from the pub and drain it off in front of the horse, the drunken landlord angered at being done out of the joke, and the Bishop fairly mad between rage and gout.

“Of course, the story got abroad somehow, and Father John had to sell the horse—the prime boys christened the poor beast ‘Father Mathew’—and from that day to this nothing will induce the Bishop to travel out by the Dunmore road. Faith, it nearly cost Father John his parish—his own Bishop hearing of the adventure—innocent as the poor man was. . . . And now, Mr. Venables, if you stand up—weyho. Father Mathew!—you’ll get a glimpse of Tramore, the town of the Big Strand.”

When Fitzgerald pulled up the horse, Frank saw that for some time they had been mounting a gradual incline. He stood up in the trap alongside of Fitzgerald, who pointed with his whip to a cluster of houses, some six or seven miles distant, crowned by a building with a tall spire.

“That’s Tramore town,” said he. “To the left of it you can see the Metalman—at least, you can see those three white pillars on the headland of the far side of the bay. That’s the big strand with the surf rolling in over it, and those hills of sand are the Rabbit Burrow. You can’t see Brownstown Head very well from this. Down in the dip in front of you—you can’t see the house from this point—is Lord Clashmore’s place. He owns most of the land about here. The mountains behind Tramore

there are farther off than you might think. They are the Comeraghs. And right out to your left is the Atlantic, great, glorious and free!"

A curious sensation crept over young Aylward as he gazed at the stretch of country which had belonged to his family for generations. The artist's eye seemed to fail him; he was looking at something which interested him from a point of view which was new to him, and tantalizing. The prospect of the foam-covered strand, of the sunlit ocean, and of the lofty mountains in the distance, afforded him less pleasure than the prospect of the land which lay between him and Tramore strand, barren and cheerless as the dipping stretch of country seemed. It was almost treeless, and it was sparsely cultivated; but his ancestors had been lords of this land for centuries, his uncle owned it, and—who could say?—he might one day possess it himself. He had no previous experience of earth hunger; was he, he asked himself, foolishly setting his heart upon a Barmecidal feast?

As the journey was resumed, Frank began to grow moody and irritable. His companion poured out a flood of information concerning the neighbourhood through which they were driving, but the younger man paid little heed to Fitzgerald's chatter. Nor was he aroused from his moodiness until turning the corner of the road, near the peaceful village of Dunmore, a prospect of the Atlantic came full upon him and thrilled him.

Two minutes later the trap halted outside a pair of whitewashed, thatch-roofed cottages, and the travellers dismounted.

An elderly lady, who had been sitting on a wooden bench placed outside the window of one of the cottages,

threw down her knitting as the trap pulled up; and coming to a tiny gate which opened upon a small garden in front of the cottage, she answered Fitzgerald's salutation with an old-fashioned curtsy. She was a grey-haired old lady; a small white cap bordered her good-humoured face.

"And what pleasant breeze wafts you to Dunmore, Mr. Fitzgerald?" she asked.

"My friend—allow me to introduce you. Mr. Venables, to Miss O'Dwyer—is looking for apartments, and naturally enough I directed him to you. Can you put him up comfortably for a week or so?"

"I shall have great pleasure in trying to do so," said Miss O'Dwyer, who spoke with precision, and it seemed to Frank with considerable floweriness. "Rose Cottage," pointing towards one of the little thatched houses, "is empty. But come inside the gate. I observe," said she, with a prim smile, "that your horse is the far-famed Father Mathew. I trust his behaviour has not shocked this young gentleman."

"We didn't travel over that part of the road which is so full of temptations for man and beast," said Fitzgerald. "We came from Father Hackett's only."

"And how is dear Father John this morning?" asked the old lady. "I heard he was up all night at Killea."

"Faith, he looked as fresh as yourself this morning at breakfast," replied Fitzgerald, who was now handing some money over the gate to the priest's boy. "Put my bag and Mr. Venables' into Rose Cottage there," said he to the boy, "and then give your nag a feed and trot home as quick as you can."

"And I suppose," said Miss O'Dwyer, "you mean to

walk back to Waterford later?"

"Faith. I don't," answered Fitzgerald. "I'm going to quarter myself also on you for a few days."

"An added pleasure," observed Miss O'Dwyer, ushering the men in through the open door of her own cottage.

Frank found himself in a little room which looked to him something like a room in a doll's house. The only large piece of furniture in it was an old-fashioned piano.

"This is an extraordinary affair about my landlord," said the old lady, addressing Fitzgerald. "I feel quite in a fluster about it and have been longing to meet with someone who could tell me something trustworthy about it. What do you make of it at all?"

"It's a puzzler," said Fitzgerald. "I heard the news only yesterday—I was over in Wales for a short trip. There are all sorts of opinions in town about it; and coming out on the Dunmore car yesterday we were told that there was a strange yawl seen sailing out of Rhina-Shark about the time his lordship disappeared. The man that told me this fancies that Lord Clashmore may have voyaged out to sea."

"You will excuse us, I hope," said Miss O'Dwyer, turning to Frank, "for speaking of local affairs. We are referring to the mysterious disappearance of Lord Clashmore, whose tenant I have the felicity to be."

Frank was amused at the apology, and wondered what the prim old lady would think if she knew he was her landlord's nephew.

Then turning to Fitzgerald, she continued, "That's a strange thing, now. I heard only today from the captain of the coast-guard that they noticed a smack beating in for Brownstown the day before his lordship disappeared.

They couldn't make out what she was or what she was trying to do. It seemed to the coast guards as if the strange craft were beating about the head waiting for somebody, or trying to land something. She didn't look like an ordinary fishing smack, they say."

"A smuggler, perhaps?" ventured Frank.

"No, sir," said Miss O'Dwyer. "At least, the coastguards didn't think so. There is no such thing as smuggling about this part of the coast."

"You see what a virtuous, law-abiding people we are, Mr. Venables," said Fitzgerald. "Faith, there's no knowing but that the little process server, who told me of the strange yawl which sailed out of Rhi-na-Shark, has hit the right nail on the head; Lord Clashmore may have embarked on the very craft which the coastguards noticed off the Head of Brownstown."

"Oh, isn't it puzzling?" said the old lady. "But why should his lordship do so mad a thing?"

"There's a mystery about him, whatever it is," said Fitzgerald, "and he might do very mad things for no reason poor people like us could think of. But we'll take a stroll down to the pier, and let us have something to eat in about an hour, Miss O'Dwyer. Will that suit you, Mr. Venables?"

"Capitally," answered Frank, who was growing more and more perplexed about his uncle's disappearance.





## CHAPTER XVI

### IN DUNMORE

As the two men got outside the gate, Frank halted. At the opposite side of the road there were no houses, no trees, no shrubs—nothing to interrupt the view of the ocean, whose rounded back quivered and sparkled. The day was fine, the atmosphere clear and cool; a light northerly breeze was chasing out to sea patches of woolly clouds.

The entrance to the harbour was clearly defined. A little to the right, where the village dipped amongst the rocks, a stone pier stretched itself from the bluff of a headland, and at the extremity of the pier was a lighthouse. Across a wide stretch of palpitating waters, the great white light-tower—known as the Hook Tower—at the opposite side of the river's mouth, stood out boldly, restless tufts of foam caressing its rugged pedestal. Almost the only sound in the sleepy little village was the swish of the sea as it swirled amongst rocks and rolled backwards and forwards over pebbly beaches.

A sense of peace and contentment filled the mind of the young man as he stared at the glittering ocean; and

he began to wonder if his eccentric uncle was, after all, so very eccentric in selecting this lonely neighbourhood to dwell in. Who, with a spark of poetic sentiments in him, would not feel the better and purer amidst such surroundings? No vulgarizing thoughts were with him now—the prospect of the ocean was too stupendous and soul-lifting to admit the baser sensations which had visited him when he gazed for the first time upon his uncle's territory.

He was aroused from a brief reverie by the voice of his companion. "That's the coast-guard station," said Fitzgerald, pointing with his stick to a small building situated to the right on the top of a cliff. "Next house to it in that direction is about four thousand miles off. If you don't mind, I'll drag you up there; I'd like to have a few words with the coastguard captain."

As the two men were about to move forward, they heard the rumble of a vehicle approaching at a fast trot.

"Evidently," said Fitzgerald, "we are not the only visitors to the deserted village today; it never rains but it pours."

Frank took no interest in the approaching horse and cart, but his companion, who seemed to know everybody and to take an interest in everybody's movements, was determined to wait until he had ascertained who the visitor might be. When the car came within sight, a cry, partly of surprise, partly of amusement, broke from him, startling Frank not a little. "By the pipers of Moll Kelly!" said Fitzgerald, "it's little Andy, the process server, seated on Bill Roche's jingle. I expect," he added quickly, a humorous twinkle in his eyes, "he's chasing you, Mr. Venables."

“Most likely,” said Frank.

When the car pulled up, Andy Kelly jumped off it, and, bowing abjectly, he addressed Frank:

“You’re Misther Venables, of London, sir, of course?”

“Yes,” answered Frank.

“This is from Misther Weekes, sir,” taking a long envelope from his pocket. “He tould me to deliver it into your own hand.”

“Personal service, I suppose, Andy?” said Fitzgerald, smiling.

“Whisht now, sir!” said the little man, “an’ don’t be distractin’ me.” Then turning to Frank, and handing him the envelope, he continued: “He tould me, sir, to wait about here in case you had any answer to send back. We dhrove to Father Hackett’s first, and findin’ ye had left, we follyed ye up here, sir.”

“Times are looking up, Bill,” observed Fitzgerald, “when they can afford to hire your gilt-edged car for a process server.”

“Oh, bad luck to the spalpeen!” cried Bill Roche. “Sure I feel the disgrace of dhrivin’ him more than words can tell you, Misther Fitz; but I couldn’t disoblige Mr. Weekes, sir.”

“Disgrace, indeed!” pouted Andy. “The divil thank you when you’re paid for it; ant I could lawfully compel you to drive me wherever I wished, me fine fellow, under the act for the better regulation of vayhicles plyin’ for hire.”

“Well, bad luck to me.” exclaimed Bill, “if you talk like that to me, you little sperit, I’ll heave you over the rocks there—that’s where the Act will dhrive you, if you give me any of yer sauce.”

“I expect I shall have to reply to this letter,” said Frank to Fitzgerald.

“You’ll find pen and ink in your cottage. I’ll go over to the coastguard station, and join you in about an hour. Be off, now, Andy, and come back in an hour for Mr. Venables’ answer.”

Andy touched his cap, and was about to remount the car, when Bill Roche cried: “Get out of that, ye little scamp! I was engaged by your masher to dhrove you to Dunmore and back, but I wasn’t engaged to dhrove you about the village. I’ll be back in an hour for ye. Go an’ hide yourself somewhere in the meantime.”

And the indignant jarvey rattled off with his car.

Fitzgerald walked forward toward the coastguard station, and Frank retraced his steps to the cottage. Miss O’Dwyer met him at the door.

“I heard Mr. Fitzgerald say you might be in need of writing materials, sir,” she said. “You will find them next door in your own house. I’ll show you in. I suppose,” she added in a whisper, “you would have no objection to my offering some refreshment to little Andy Kelly? He’s not a popular idol, and he’ll not find much hospitality elsewhere, I’m afraid.”

“It’s very kind of you to think of it,” said Frank. “Of course, I’ll be very much obliged if you’ll be good enough to give him something to eat and drink. It is very remiss of me to have forgotten the unfortunate man.” Here he signalled to Andy, who was standing outside the gate, looking the picture of misery, to approach. Andy came into the fore-court with the gait and manner of a dog who had been recently kicked out-of-doors, and Frank slipped half-a-crown into his hand, and told him that

Miss O'Dwyer would look after his inner man.

Andy prayed that a multitude and a variety of blessings might fall on the head of the daycent gentleman and of Miss O'Dwyer, and then the prim old lady introduced her visitor to the interior of Rose Cottage, and ushering him into the little parlour, pointed to a writing case and an inkstand on a table.

Frank read Weekes' long and verbose letter first. It was written by Mr. Hugh Mason's managing clerk, was signed boldly by him, and contained nothing (even in the shape of an allusion) about Mr. Mason. Its chief purport was to tell the tale of the strange yawl which had been seen in Tramore Bay on the evening of Lord Clashmore's disappearance. Mr. Weekes considered this piece of information of considerable importance, and he suggested that Frank should take an early opportunity of interviewing Mr. M'Grath, of the Baths, in Tramore.

"Win him to your side," wrote Weekes, "by bravely and fearlessly ordering a cold salt-water shower. He's a capital gossip, and he revels in spinning personal yarns to Spartan customers. If he were to be approached by a shivering solicitor (*in puris naturalibus* or otherwise), or by the police, he would, out of sheer cussedness, shut his capacious mouth, after the manner of a rat-trap. In fact, if this Old Man of the Baths had the slightest suspicion that anyone was trying to pump him he would dry up, and most likely he would flatly deny that he had ever seen that yawl. In direct examination, if I may so put it, at the hands of a skilful Triton, the man M'Grath makes a capital witness; but cross examine him and you might as well be playing hide-and-go-seek with a Bengal tiger, for all the fun or value you'd get out of the

game. *Verb. sap. sat.*”

Mr. Weekes had no further news. He was surprised to find that Mr. Venables had left the town so hurriedly, but he was glad to learn that he had picked up Fitzgerald. The letter which the fishwife destroyed was merely to the same effect as the present communication. There was not a scrap of fresh intelligence as to Lord Clashmore.

Frank could hardly tell whether he was angered or amused by the jaunty style adopted by Mr. Mason's factotum.

A postscript added: “The enclosed letter, address to our care, came by this morning's Milford steamer. Thinking it might be a document of importance, I decided to despatch it by special car.”

Frank saw at a glance that the enclosed letter was from his mother. The letter was addressed to “F. Venables, Esq.” He wondered how the writer felt as she penned the pseudonym.

“My dear boy,” she wrote, “I have just received a welcome telegram announcing your arrival in the Emerald Isle, and I am writing in the greatest haste in order to catch a post which I find will, bring a letter to you early in the morning. I suppose you have had no time yet to discover anything. I shall hope to hear from you tomorrow. If you have anything startling to communicate I suppose you'll telegraph. Need I say I hope you are quite well, and that you do not find the change and the climate disagreeing with you? Be sure to wrap yourself up well. The weather is still very chilly, and of course the climate of Ireland is notoriously damp. Write me when you have any spare moments, and be sure to report progress—not in the sense, though, in which this

phrase is used in the Lower House.

“P. S.—Lady V. called last evening. She had just heard about Lord C. I said as little as I possibly could. Your cousin Kitty sends her kindest remembrances. I think she is a bit huffed at your having run off without bidding her good-bye. I tremble when I think of your having adopted your aunt’s surname. Pray be cautious, and avoid getting mentioned in the local papers.”

Frank answered both letters, giving his mother a brief account of the impressions of the city and county of Waterford, and telling her he had no fresh intelligence to transmit. He sent his kindest regards to his cousin Kitty, and declared he would write to her and apologize for not having called to say good-bye. To Mr. Weekes he penned a short note, giving him his Dunmore address thanking him for the message he had forwarded, and stating that he would call at Mr. Mason’s office to report progress the moment he had made any.

By the time his letters were written, Bill Roche’s car was outside the gate, Andy Kelly gazing at it with respectful concern. Frank took up the letters, and, going out of the house, he beckoned the little process server.

The strains of music now reached his ears—his landlady was playing the piano next door. Frank wondered at the firm and skilful touch which the old lady displayed, and he was gratified to know that she was a disciple of his own favourite Mendelssohn. After handing the letters for Weekes to Andy (who instantly mounted the car, Bill Roche touching the leaf of his big hat respectfully as he drove off), Frank walked quietly to the bench outside Miss O’Dwyer’s cottage, and seated himself upon it.

The distant hum of the ocean, the ripple and pathos

of Mendelssohn's music, and the glowing prospect of sea and sky, transported the young man into Lotus-land.

He was disturbed after many minutes by hearing a "Tally-ho!" in the distance, and standing up, he beheld Fitzgerald coming towards the cottage waving his stick in salutation. Approaching the half-open window Frank said: "Thank you ever so much for this unexpected treat, Miss O'Dwyer. Here is Mr. Fitzgerald, and though it may seem ungracious to say so, I expect he will be returning with an appetite for something more substantial than music."

A rustle of skirts in the room and the sudden cessation of the music disconcerted Frank, and then he saw, not Miss O'Dwyer, but a young lady whose luxuriant fair hair was crowned with a coquettish little straw hat. Frank breathed his apologies, and retired, not a little abashed, from the window to greet his comrade at the gate. He told Fitzgerald that he had just blundered into mistaking a young lady with a profusion of sunny hair for Miss O'Dwyer.

"I guess who it is," said Fitzgerald, his eyes brightening as he walked to the half-open window of Woodbine Cottage.

"And what brings your highness to Dunmore today?" he asked through the window. "That's a nice way Bob served me—flying off to Dublin the moment he heard I was coming to visit him. May I come in and introduce a young friend of mine?"



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LADY OF THE LAKE

PILOTING Frank into Miss O'Dwyer's parlour, Fitzgerald introduced him to the young lady.

"Miss Usher, Mr. Venables—the Lady of the Lake, as I sometimes take the privilege of calling her."

"A title," said the young lady, acknowledging Frank's bow, "to which I have, as you know, a decided objection."

"I should fancy from what he has told me about himself," observed Frank, "that Mr. Fitzgerald is the Enchanter of the Lake—converting it into a kind of comic aquarium."

"Oh, you have heard about the shark, then?" said Miss Usher. "Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous?"

"Very amusing, I should be inclined to call it. I am afraid I didn't show sufficient appreciation of the tale when he told it to me."

"One never expects an Englishman to enjoy an Irish joke thoroughly—or, at all events, to show that he enjoys it as an Irishman would," observed Fitzgerald.

"I hardly know whether I should be flattered or of-

fended by Mr. Fitzgerald's comment upon our national lack of enthusiasm," said Frank.

"Don't be either the one or the other, Mr. Venables," said Miss Usher. "He is not serious enough to offer anyone either offence or flattery."

"I am afraid I scent a conspiracy against me," said Fitzgerald, screwing his face into an appearance of ruefulness.

"But you haven't told me, Miss Usher, what Bob meant by running away from me."

"He had some business in Dublin, and we understand you were fishing in Wales. Did you catch any sharks there?"

"The House of Usher will never forgive me for that little joke," said Fitzgerald, addressing Frank.

"What an irritating person you can be, Mr. Fitzgerald! You have already addressed me by a title which should be employed only for one of Scott's or Tennyson's delightful heroines, and now you repeat your old joke about that gloomy and terrible House of Edgar Allan Poe."

"I'm a horrid bungler, I admit," said Fitzgerald; "but you have already cut the ground from under your feet by declaring that you don't consider me serious enough to be offensive. I suppose if I referred to you as Undine you would order my body to be flung into the lake to feed the young sharks."

"You grow worse and worse. The idea of attempting to compare me with a flighty creature possessed of no soul, simply because I happen to live on the margin of a lake!"

"But the nymph," Frank interposed, "possessed qual-

ities which Mr. Fitzgerald might be forgiven for accrediting you with. Besides Undine acquired a soul eventually."

"But think of the cost of the acquisition Mr. Venables!" exclaimed Miss Usher, holding up both hands. "If I had been born a water nymph I think I should have preferred to remain unmarried and soulless."

"You see," said Fitzgerald, "like my proverbial fellow-countrymen, I can never open my mouth without putting my foot in it. And when I foolishly try to display any book-learning I go a step further and disclose a cloven hoof."

Frank was quite surprised at Fitzgerald's evident familiarity with literature. He had assumed that his queer companion had most likely never read a book in his life. He hardly knew what to think of Miss Usher. Her manner was impulsive and winning, and there was a pleasant ring in her voice. She was decidedly good-looking, and evidently good-humoured. Her brown eyes danced merrily as she spoke to the two men; her pouting lips disclosed white and even teeth; and her rounded chin displayed a fascinating little dimple when she smiled. Her complexion was clear and healthy. She was neither tall nor short, lean nor stout—preserving in these respects the golden mean. Frank guessed her to be about twenty years of age, and he had made an excellent guess. Had he met her in a crowded London drawing-room he would probably have said, "What a pretty girl!" and she would have faded from his mind long before the next sunrise. To meet her here in the sleepy little village put quite another complexion on the matter. A vision of his stately cousin Kitty, whom he

was, he well knew, destined by his mother to marry—if she would have him—arose before him, and he was obliged to admit to himself with reluctance—for in a way he was fond of his cousin—that Miss Usher was a more fascinating young lady than Kitty Venables. She possessed a vivacity denied to his handsome cousin, a vivacity which emphasized such excellencies of feature and figure as Miss Usher could lay claim to. She did not appeal directly to Frank's heart, but she appealed most strongly to his artistic sense. He had a shrewd suspicion that Fitzgerald was in love with this pretty girl, and the suspicion caused him a feeling half of pity, half of jealousy. There would be a sort of sacrilege in throwing away such a handsome and accomplished girl on such a man. And yet, as he mused over this for a few moments while his friend was speaking to Miss Usher about her brother, he was angry with himself for thinking that any girl would be thrown away on this good-natured, good-humoured fellow, harum-scarum and plain-looking though he might be. He had moved to the open window, and was gazing at the ocean when Miss Usher's pleasant treble aroused him.

“Mr. Fitzgerald has just whispered to me that you are an artist, Mr. Venables. I am so glad to meet you, for I have a passion for pictures, and I am afraid I am horribly envious of people who possess a gift which the gods have denied to me.”

“You would hardly be envious of my gift if you saw my daubs,” said Frank, blushing in spite of himself. “I am the veriest of amateurs. On the deck of the steamboat yesterday a passenger asked me if I lived by my brush, and he more than suggested that he would recommend

me to abandon art for the butter trade. I confess he angered me, for I had an unpleasant feeling that he had unconsciously uttered words of wisdom."

"What a nasty man!" exclaimed Miss Usher. "I hope you threw him overboard."

"We are not in the habit in my country across the water of committing those violent deeds, even upon such terrible provocation," said Frank, smiling.

"And we only talk of committing them in my country," said Miss Usher. "Have you made any sketches since you arrived in Ireland?"

"No; I haven't even unlocked my colour-box yet. When I look at the ocean out there I feel the pettiness of my art—I mean of my personal efforts. A man should be born by the ocean, and grow to full age in sight of it and within sound of it in all its moods if he desired to have the grandeur of Nature impressed upon him. I can see it only like a fleeting show, with the knowledge at the back of my mind that when I return to towns and cities I shall not be able to conjure up the glorious spectacle. I never felt my own littleness so much as I feel it this afternoon."

"I wonder if that is a good or a bad frame of mind for an artist?" said the young girl archly.

"I should say a bad one, for no man who is doubtful of himself can excel in anything."

"What! Not even in the butter trade?" said Fitzgerald.

"You were quite right a short time ago," said Miss Usher, addressing Fitzgerald. "You do succeed in showing that cloven hoof occasionally when you open your mouth."

“That’s a worse figure of speech than the proverbial one,” said Fitzgerald. “But I can see my young friend, Mr. Venables, is scowling at me, and, indeed, I can’t blame him. And here’s Miss O’Dwyer to summon us, no doubt, to the flesh-pots next door. have you lunched, Miss Usher?”

“Yes, thank you. And after luncheon I felt so melancholy—having no one to talk to and nothing to look at except our dreary lake—that I rode down here to enliven myself with a glance at the ocean with the sun dancing upon it.” Miss O’Dwyer now entered, making an old-fashioned curtsey in the doorway, and announcing that the meal was now ready in Rose Cottage, and apologizing for the delay about it.

“It’s my fault,” said Miss Usher. “I kept her chatting here a while ago, not knowing that she should have been preparing a meal for hungry travellers.”

“Miss O’Dwyer,” said Fitzgerald, “we have just been discussing the question of beauty natural and personal.”

“What a fib!” exclaimed Miss Usher.

“Oh, come,” protested Fitzgerald, “that’s hardly fair. Surely you were discussing with Mr. Venables the question of beauty as displayed by art or nature, and that covers everything. Now Miss O’Dwyer, I put it to you as a sensible person isn’t that Atlantic out there more or less a fraud? You see it in all its phases. It happens to have put on its best bib and tucker today, but I appeal to you, isn’t it sometimes a nasty, treacherous looking heap of water, green as jealousy, and as ugly—well, I can’t think of a good simile—say as little Andy Kelly, the process server?”

“Don’t answer his foolish question, Miss O’Dwyer,”

said the young girl.

"This conspiracy against me is widening," observed Fitzgerald. "I appeal to your sense of fair play. Miss O'Dwyer."

A comical expression of mock bewilderment was visible on the old lady's face. "I am not too fond of the Atlantic," said she. "It can wear a very forbidding look. You wouldn't care, perhaps, to see it as I see it for long months every year, frowning and roaring."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Fitzgerald. "It's a drawn battle. Two of us vote against the Atlantic. I haven't forgiven it for the way it treated me yesterday. Don't you think that there are more beautiful things than a nasty ocean, Miss O'Dwyer? On your honour now, which would you prefer—it, or a handsome face which even a frown can't spoil?"

"Or a roar," suggested Miss Usher. "What stupid things you do say, Mr. Fitzgerald!"

"I am waiting for Miss O'Dwyer to answer me."

"Well, to be candid," said the old lady, "I think there is nothing prettier in the world than a pretty young woman, and nothing handsomer than a handsome man."

"And who's the prettiest young woman you know?"

"My circle is very limited indeed," said the old lady.

Neither Frank nor Miss Usher relished this conversation. Each of them was anxious to get out of the room before Miss O'Dwyer blundered into some reply which would make them ridiculous. But Fitzgerald knew the old lady better than to fear she would make an awkward reply. His chief object in asking the question was to tantalize Miss Usher and to enjoy her confusion.

"But," continued Miss O'Dwyer after a pause, dur-

ing which she seemed to be reflecting, "I don't mind giving you an opinion. Present company, of course, excepted," she continued, emphasizing the words, "I should be inclined to say that the prettiest, or should I say the handsomest young lady I know is old Simon McCarthy's grand-daughter, Miss Geraldine."

"Well—present company excepted—I'm inclined to agree with you," said Fitzgerald, who was now half afraid he had angered Miss Usher. "Anyway, I'd rather gaze at her than at the Atlantic ocean, even with the St. George's channel thrown in. I needn't ask you about the handsomest man in these parts. No exception can be allowed in his case. He stands before you now," sticking his thumbs into the arm-pits of his waistcoat, "admitting that he is ravenously hungry, and that he is almost as wise and as courtier-like as he is good-looking. Shall we see you later, Miss Usher?" he asked.

"No; I am off presently. I left my trap further up in the village; and I have a call to make before I return, so I will say good-bye now."

She offered her hand to Frank and to Fitzgerald, and the two men walked out of Woodbine Cottage, both experiencing a sense of grave disappointment that they were so soon to be deprived of the light of Miss Usher's bright eyes.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A GOOD HATER

AFTER luncheon Fitzgerald proposed a walk to Frank, and the two men set out in the direction of the cliffs.

"I don't know if I am making a nuisance of myself by referring so often to Lord Clashmore," said Fitzgerald, "but I can't get him out of my head."

"I assure you," said Frank, "I am much interested in the matter. From what I have heard of it his disappearance seems to be a very puzzling affair."

"Anything of the kind is so rare here," said Fitzgerald, "that we can't help talking of it and wondering at it. I feel I have it on the brain. While you were writing your letters I went up to the coastguard house, and the captain repeated to me what he had told Miss O'Dwyer about the strange smack being observed hovering round here the day before Lord Clashmore disappeared. The weather has been fine ever since, but even in the finest weather the coast is so dangerous that ships don't hanker after it. There's no safe place for them between this and Dungarvan—which is about twenty miles farther round the coast. The coastguard captain thought at first

that she might be an English or Scotch fishing smack which had got out of her course, or that she had mistaken Tramore for Bonmahon—a bay some miles to the westward of Tramore—but they haven't seen the little craft since, nor has she turned up at either Dunmore or Bonmahon. The wind has been off the land for some days, so she would be quite safe in making for either place."

"But why connect her in any way with this nobleman's disappearance?"

"In my mind the connection was made by what the little process server told us about the yawl sailing out of Rhi-na-Shark the evening Lord Clashmore disappeared. That man M'Grath may have made a mistake in calling her a yawl; she may have been a fishing smack. But perhaps the connection could only arise in the noddle of a stupid fellow like myself. We might turn up here. There is a finer view of the ocean from the top of this hill than from anywhere hereabouts."

"I thought you were proof against the seduction of the Atlantic."

"Well," said Fitzgerald, smiling, "I'm afraid I am. To be quite candid, I have an object in view of another kind. There's a vacant farm up in this direction, and now don't laugh at me—I have a dim notion of turning farmer. This is only a small place, but it has a decent house on the land, and I thought I might induce Lord Clashmore to let me have it cheap. I sounded his man—the man who has disappeared—about it, but he gave what is called an evasive answer. However, I meant to speak directly to Lord Clashmore about the matter. I spend so little time in the city that it seems a waste of money

to be paying for lodgings which I make so little use of. Besides, I'm not as young as I was, and I am beginning to feel the want of some sort of regular occupation. I have nothing—or almost nothing—to live for, and I don't want to become a useless old vegetable or fossil too soon. I haven't mentioned this matter of the farm out here to anybody, fearing my friends would chaff me, for everyone looks upon me as a confirmed ne'er-do-well. Pray excuse me for boring you with confidences."

"I assure you I am not bored," said Frank. He would have felt touched by his companion's confession, but he still remembered Mr. Weekes' remark as to Fitzgerald's newest friend being his dearest friend. But perhaps the shrewd man of the law had not correctly gauged Fitzgerald's character.

The two men had now reached the top of low, steep hill which overlooked the village, and turning round, Frank beheld a wider expanse of the ocean than had been visible from the front of the cottage. There was also a view of some miles of rugged and jagged cliffs winding westward in the direction of Brownstown headland, and a pleasant prospect of the country inland. To his left a grove of fir-trees festooned the back of the village.

"Do you see that cottage over there," said Fitzgerald, pointing inland with his stick to a white house nestling in a clump of larches; "that's the place I am coveting. It used to be tenanted by a man named O'Neill—a solitary bachelor like myself who died about a year ago. It's only half a mile off. Let us tramp over there until I show the place to you—if you don't mind?"

As they continued their journey—now on the level upland Fitzgerald pointed out various landmarks to

Frank, giving him the names of many of the small farmers hereabouts, and occasionally telling him some brief anecdote concerning one or other of them. Frank, it must be confessed, took little interest in this, but he marvelled at his companion's intimate, or seemingly intimate acquaintance with everybody in the neighbourhood.

As they were getting close to the coveted farm-house, Fitzgerald exclaimed with some show of excitement:

"Hallo! take a peep at that old man who is coming towards us—he has just turned the bend of the road there!"

Frank had noticed the man almost at the same time that his companion's quick eye had espied him.

"That's Simon M'Carthy—your friend Charles' father," said Fitzgerald. "I wonder what brings him out this way?"

Frank experienced a distinct thrill.

"Do you know the old man well?" he asked.

"Oh, as well as most people outside his immediate family know him. He is a dark old gentleman. Just think of that man in his nineties walking over from Brownstown, four or five miles off! Would you mind my introducing you to him? I'd like to know what brought him over this way—perhaps like myself he is after O'Neill's farm. Do you mind?"

"Certainly not. I'll be very glad to meet him. You know I am already on good terms with the family; he is, as you have just reminded me, the father of the gentleman who suggested the butter trade to me as a glowing profession."

"Don't say a word about the son. The old man and

he don't get on too well. At least, so I'm told. And try to avoid calling him 'Mister' in speaking to him."

"And what do you desire me to call him?" asked Frank.

"M'Carthy simply. Sometimes he is very touchy about being 'Mistered'—it is an English title—he hates everything English like poison—and it is only out of courtesy to his English-speaking acquaintances that he talks in the language. At least so he will tell you, though he allows his grand-children to speak it, fearing, he explains, that it might interfere with their prospects if he insisted on their speaking Irish only. He's a strange old fellow."

"But if he is such a hater of everything English, perhaps he will want to break my Saxon head with the blackthorn stick of his."

"Of course, you needn't mind him if you'd rather not. He will pass on with a nod if I don't stop him. And," he added with a smile, "don't be afraid of him while you have such a valiant protector at your elbow," shortening his stick as he spoke. "Shall I stop him and cross swords or—shillelagh—with him?"

"Just as you please."

Frank was eager to meet the old man, and it seemed providential that M'Carthy should be thrown across his path so soon, but he was nervously anxious not to show the slightest anxiety to meet him.

M'Carthy was now very close. He was a thin man, but large-boned. His back was curved. If he had been erect he would probably have stood five feet ten, or perhaps six feet. He wore a rough-looking tall hat and a long blue cloth coat. Ribbed-wool stockings were visible below his coat, and the buckles of his shoes shone. He carried

his stick firmly, and his tread, though slow, was firm. His face was shaven, except for a fringe of snow-white whiskers which framed it. A stranger might easily have taken him for a hale man of sixty to sixty-five years of age.

“Hallo, M’Carthy!” cried Fitzgerald, waving his stick as the old farmer drew near.

“Good evenin’, Mither Fitzgerald,” said the nonagenarian, halting and lifting his head. Then he glanced at Frank, and a look of astonishment came over his face; it was only a momentary glance, but it puzzled and disturbed Frank. In the wonderful blue-grey eyes of the old man there had been almost a flash of recognition.

Frank was astonished at the absence of heavy furrows in the face of a man of ninety. Nor was McCarthy’s skin of that parchment hue which ordinarily denotes great age.

Fitzgerald put out his hand, and the old farmer gave him a cold shake-hands. “Will you allow me to introduce a young friend of mine here—Mr. Venables, a visitor from the accursed land of the Sassenach?”

“What name did you say?” asked the old man, putting one hand to his ear. “I’m beginnin’ to get hard of hearin’ at one side.”

“Mr. Venables,” repeated Fitzgerald in a louder tone. “Venables!” said the old man. And then he extended his hand to Frank. “You’re a sthranger, sir,” he said. “*Cead mile failte!*”

“Well, M’Carthy,” said Fitzgerald, “you’ll be flying a Union Jack next. Offering a hundred thousand welcomes to a Saxon!”

“Pardon me,” said the old man. “An Irishman may

surely offer a welcome to a visitor no matter what country he belongs to. 'Tisn't the visitors we hate, but the people who stop here and steal or destroy everything that was ours. More-over, the young gentleman is no Sassenach. His blood is as Irish as your own—maybe more so—or I'm no judge. Names don't tell everything."

"Wrong this time, Mac!" said Fitzgerald, "but I won't argue with you." Then turning to Frank he said in a low voice: "He's a wonderful genius about pedigrees and genealogies and all that kind of thing. I never knew him to blunder like this before."

"What's that you're sayin'?" asked the old man.

"That you're the most wonderful man in all Ireland—of your age," said Fitzgerald. "I suppose you have walked from Brownstown?"

"Ay!" replied the old man, in a voice which recalled to Frank the voice and manner of his red-bearded acquaintance in the Milford train.

"And are going to walk back there, I suppose?"

"Most likely."

"More power to you! How are all the young people?"

"Sthrong."

"Remember me to Miss Geraldine, won't you?"

"I will, if I remember it."

"This is strange news about your land-lord, M'Carthy."

"Sthrange indeed," said the old man, a curious gleam, Frank thought, in his eyes. "But wasn't he always a sthrange man?"

"Then you think he has disappeared of his own accord?"

"What's to hinder him?"

"Is it true, then, that he wants to turn you out of the

old place?"

"There's some chicanery goin' on which I don't understand. An enemy of mine, most like, got the ear of Clashmore."

Frank sustained something akin to a shock at hearing his uncle called "Clashmore" by the old farmer. He wondered how his mother would have felt if she had heard the words.

"Then you don't think his lordship has been murdered?" said Fitzgerald.

"I'm damn sure he's not!" exclaimed old McCarthy, with emphasis. "Who would dar' to spill his blood here while me an' mine are to the fore?"

"I'm glad to hear you say so. What brings you this way, might I ask. Was it looking at O'Neill's farm you were?"

"Ay!"

"Are you thinking of bidding for it?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Faith, to tell you the truth, I have an eye on it myself."

"You!" exclaimed the old man. Then his eyes twinkled. "Maybe you're thinkin' of gettin' married and settlin' down?"

"Who knows, Mac?"

"You might do worse. An' the girl—whoever she is—might do worse." Then turning again to Frank, he said. "This young gentleman is a sthranger, you say. Is this your first visit to Ireland, sir?" he asked in a mild and pleasant voice.

"Yes," answered Frank. "I arrived only yesterday."

"It's a grand counthry," said the old man. "God's own



country!” he added with fervour, lifting his eyes to the sky, “if they’d only laive it alone across the wather. An’ it’s no use to them, an’ never will be!” he exclaimed, with a touch of fierceness.

“You see,” said Fitzgerald, “my friend Simon is thinking of Erin’s ’days of old ere her faithless sons betrayed her.’ and at the same time he is looking forward to seeing himself crowned king of Munster when we have destroyed the Saxon, root and branch, and banished him as St. Patrick banished the snakes.”

“You may have your joke, Misther Fitzgerald—you’re welcome to it, if it amuses you, my poor fellow; an’ it doesn’t hurt anybody.”

Frank could hardly prevent himself from laughing. The magnificent condescension of the old farmer tickled him. Fitzgerald was a little nettled.

“You’re a very inconsistent man, Simon,” said he. “You address my friend and myself as ’Mister,’ and you’d fly into a temper if I was to ’Mister’ you.”

“Every wan to their taste, as the woman said when she kissed the cow. You wish to be called after the English manner, an’ I humour you. So does this young gentleman, I suppose, an’ I humour him. An’ why should I not be humoured if I don’t desire to be known by anything but my Irish name, or my Christian name without any British ornament in front of it? My pride is as good as your pride any day in the year.”

“And the idea of your talking English!” continued Fitzgerald.

“Well, if I didn’t I couldn’t be talkin’ to yerself now; an’ it’s your disgrace, not mine, that you don’t know your own language. Maybe you or your friend speak French

or Italian to amuse yourselves. If a red Indian was to get a grip on you, wouldn't you like to be able to palaver with him in his own tongue, while you were feeling for your knife to cut his throat? Eh!" A fierce light sparkled in his eyes as he spoke.

"Faith, you'll frighten my friend, M'Carthy."

"Divil a fear of that! 'Twould take more than words to frighten him. Are you stoppin' long in these parts, sir?" be asked, looking at Frank keenly, but with a softened glance.

"I am making only a short visit," replied the young man.

"If you're out Brownstown way an' would care to dhrop in at my little place—any wan about there will know me, or maybe your friend, Mither Fitzgerald, would show you the road—you'll be welcome, and you, too, Mither Fitz. Good-evenin' now, gentlemen."

Then, lifting his stick, and without waiting for a reply or making an offer of a hand-shake, the vigorous old man passed on.

"Well, this is a rare go!" said Fitzgerald. "The idea of Simon the Terrible inviting an Englishman to his castle! You're specially favoured, Mr. Venables, I can tell you, however you managed to put the 'comether' on the old fellow."

## CHAPTER XIX

### IN RHI-NA-SHARK HOUSE

WHILE Fitzgerald was examining the interior of the coveted farm house, Frank wandered moodily through the grounds of the farm.

M'Carthy's invitation troubled him. He had intended to pay a haphazard visit to the old man for the purpose of discovering some clue to the mystery of his uncle's disappearance. Now, he asked himself, how could he eat salt with him, and at the same time act the part of a spy?

As he pondered over this problem in ethics, he remembered old Simon's emphatic declaration that Lord Clashmore had not been murdered. Frank had listened carefully to all that the old man had said. His manner of replying to a question by asking another, or by offering a reply which to an Englishman seemed ambiguous, had not enabled him to form any definite opinion as to whether Simon M'Carthy had been fencing or merely making answers after his usual fashion; but Frank noted that his declaration of opinion that Lord Clashmore had not been murdered was direct as well

as emphatic. There was also the old man's boast of the invulnerability of the Viscount while a M'Carthy was in the land. The implied patronage in this boast had caused Frank considerable irritation.

He longed for some shrewd friend into whose ear he could pour the gathered facts concerning his uncle, and from whom he might expect wise counsel. Weekes was sharp enough, but he did not wish to reveal his identity to the managing clerk. Fitzgerald, no doubt, had at the bottom a considerable fund of common sense; but Frank was unable to summon up sufficient courage to unmask himself to a man with whom he had been sailing under false colours, and who might resent such a piece of deception. He could only think of Father Hackett; and it seemed to him that the kind-hearted priest, who did know who he was, would be by far the best person to confide in. He decided upon revisiting Father John as soon as he had travelled over the suspected ground. This decision eased his mind a good deal, and Fitzgerald, after his inspection of the house, found his newly-made friend in much more cheerful humour than on the journey to Dunmore.

As they returned to the village, they halted again on the summit of the hill, and Fitzgerald pointing out to sea, expressed an opinion that a rainstorm was brewing.

The northerly breeze had died away, and in the southwest the sky was dark and lowering.

"I expect we'll have a southerly burst before long," said Fitzgerald. "I'm sorry for your sake, and you'll find it very dreary here if it comes on to rain heavily. I'm the worst companion in the world inside the four walls of a house—not," he added, "that I'm suggesting that I am a

lively one out-of-doors.”

“That’s only your modesty,” said Frank, pleasantly. “I’m not in the habit of entering into sudden friendships, but I honestly feel after less than two days’ acquaintance as though I had known you for years.”

“If this wasn’t your first visit to Ireland, I’d say you had been after kissing the Blarney Stone. And now that I come to think of it, didn’t that terrible old Turk, M’Carthy, declare you had Irish blood in you? Perhaps he made a good shot.”

Frank was confused, but he boldly answered, “Not a bad one. My father was Irish; but this, as I have already told you, is my first visit to Ireland.”

“Well, ’pon my soul, old Mac is a genius. It would never have occurred to me there was an Irish drop in your veins, Mr. Venables. I can’t call to mind any Irish family of your name.”

“Possibly not,” said Frank, hardly knowing how he was to escape from his difficulty, and thankful his companion was not of a suspicious nature. “My family was originally English; and, as the old man M’Carthy told us, names don’t tell everything.”

“They tell lies sometimes,” observed Fitzgerald innocently. “But for goodness sake, Mr. Venables, don’t think I’m cross-examining you. I couldn’t tell you whether my own father was Irish or English—my name, for all I know to the contrary, may be covering a falsehood. I may be a Smith, or a Brown, or a Jones, or a Robinson.”

“I am rather afraid,” said Frank, uneasily, “that I haven’t been communicative, and that I haven’t acted fairly towards you in not saying more about myself.”

“Don’t be troubled for an instant on that score. I have

an instinct about certain things—one of them is that I can always know a gentleman. Moreover," he added, "you're one of old Mason's clients, and the old donkey is devilish particular about his clients. He's a regular snob, but by no means a bad-hearted fellow; nor is he quite so stupid as some people make him out to be."

"How does he tolerate the impudence of his clerk, Weekes?" asked Frank, delighted to have the opportunity of turning the conversation from himself.

"Simply because the good steamship Hugh Mason would get on the rocks if sailing master Weekes was not on board. Mason may be the propeller and the rudder and the saloon and other inanimate things—"

"The fog-horn," suggested Frank.

"Yes. even that; but the brain which directs the concern is Edward Henry Weekes. Why, even Lord Clashmore preferred the opinion of the man to the opinion of the master. This reminds me that I really ought to go over to Rhi-na-Shark to-morrow. I can kill two birds with one stone—make enquiries at the big house, and introduce you to M'Carthy Castle. Do you mind a stiff walk?"

"Not in the least."

"Then we shall go on a long reach to-morrow, with our heads to the west'ard. We must pray for fine weather—though, by the look of things out at sea, I am afraid our prayers will be only thrown away. But perhaps you'd rather not accept the old Saxon-hater's invitation."

"I certainly mean to accept it."

"I'm glad of that. He's a touchy old customer, and when he asks anyone to visit him which is a very rare event he expects to be treated as if he were the Lord

Lieutenant issuing a command. If you didn't turn up he'd have it in his nose for me, for he'd be sure to think I had set you against him. Old Simon and myself manage to get into fisty-grips whenever we meet, but our battles are bloodless, and I think we like each other at bottom. I expect he will amuse you. And it's only fair to say that, under his own roof he is tolerable; he knows what is due to a guest. Anyhow, he's not the kind of man you'd stumble across in a fashionable club, and I expect novelty has as much attraction for you as it has for most young men of the world."

Frank was amused at the picture his companion's words conjured up. He could fancy the wild delight which the advent of old Simon at his own club would produce in the breasts of the younger members, and the horror of the fogeys.

"But why do you speak as if you were an oldster? I suppose there are not more than a dozen years between us?" he asked.

"Probably not, but I feel already—as I think I told you before—that I am approaching very close to the fossil stage; and you know a man is as old as he feels."

"A medical man would tell you that you are as old as your arteries."

"The Lord forbid that I'd ever go poking at my arteries in order to discover how old I really was! Anyhow, I am old enough to be growing anxious about my way in life. Many who know me envy me my easy, happy-go-lucky career; and, faith, often I wish I was a quill-driver, or a shopman, or a toiler in the fields. But here I go on chattering about myself, instead of trying to think what would interest you. I'm sorry I can't talk art, my

knowledge of books is the merest surface knowledge; and of high politics I know about as much as I do about the differential calculus."

"I'm very glad. I assure you, that you can't talk art; and I'd prefer to hear you about your sharks, or your dipsomaniacal horses, if you'll believe me. than to hear the jargon of the Lords or the Commons poured into my ears."

"Your poking fun at poor, ignorant Paddy now."

"It's very shabby of you to say that; it would be very mean of me to do so."

"Don't be vexed with me—but that's like rain. We shall have to hurry on." As he turned to look at the sky, he added, "I am afraid we must abandon those prayers against rain. Let us make a compromise and pray that the storm may blow rapidly over, and leave us a fine day for our tramp to-morrow. Look out to sea there! Where's your blue and gold now? And look over there towards the Hook Tower! That's the advance guard of our Dunmore fleet scampering wildly home for shelter. I expect they have been trawling up the Wexford coast."

The two men had now reached the gate of their cottage. The mouth of the harbour grew quickly alive with home-flying sloops.

"I had no idea Dunmore owned so large a fleet." said Frank. "There must be fifty or sixty little crafts making for this place now."

"And how many of them do you think belong to Dunmore?" asked Fitzgerald.

"All we see, I suppose."

"I wish it were so," said Fitzgerald. "They are all Manxmen, Scotchmen, Welshmen or Englishmen, with



the exception of two.”

“I’m listening to you running us down,” said Miss O’Dwyer from the doorway of her cottage. “There are two Kinsale hookers and an Arklow one amongst them, Mr. Venables, in addition to our own two little fishing boats.”

“That’s a nice proportion for the Emerald Isle, isn’t it, Mr. Venables—a tithe?” said Fitzgerald dolefully.

“And what’s the matter with you?” asked Frank—“lack of enterprise?”

“Lack of everything—money, heart, encouragement or assistance from the right quarters. Apathy, sinking to hopelessness or despair. The feeling of being a conquered people is bred in our bones, and is drying up the sap in us. We are becoming marrowless. I blame you,” he continued, shaking his stick at the ocean, “for some of our troubles, my old Atlantic. Your mists and vapours and salt airs enervate us—your rains and storms distract us and bully us. Ugh, you wicked thing!”

“Come in out of the rain, Mr. Venables.” said the old lady. “Mr. Fitzgerald will bring bad luck to himself and his friends by saying evil things of God’s handiwork.”

Frank’s first evening in Dunmore was a dull one. The rain fell heavily, the sky frowned, the atmosphere was oppressive, and the sea sang hoarsely. The only refuge from the gloom was furnished by Fitzgerald, who suggested cards. Miss O’Dwyer invited the two men into her cottage after they had discussed a light meal, and Frank was indoctrinated into the mysteries of “spoiled fives,” and “forty-five,” and he instructed his companions in those of “écarté.” At ten o’clock their hostess politely dismissed her visitors, and Frank found himself in bed

half-an-hour later.

Much to his delight the next morning brought fine weather. The heavy rain had ceased, and a strong, salt-smelling, south-westerly wind blew in from the sea. After their breakfast the two men started out for Rhi-na-Shark.

Fitzgerald conducted his companion along the margin of the cliffs for some miles, then turned inland and sought a road which led to Rhi-na-Shark House.

It was after midday when the travellers reached the gate of Lord Clashmore's lonely demesne. The keeper of the lodge, a withered, bent old man, saluted Fitzgerald as he opened the gates, and declared in reply to Fitzgerald's enquiry, that there was no news about his lordship. The two men walked along a broad avenue, well sheltered by trees at each side, and after five minutes' walk a bend in the avenue disclosed the house to Frank's gaze.

It was a rectangular stone-built mansion crowned with embattled parapets, and fronted with a pillared portico. Though the building showed no signs of decay or neglect, it wore an aspect of loneliness and melancholy. The hall door stood wide open. No servant was visible, but a tug at the bell in the vestibule summoned a domestic—a stout, elderly, round-faced, clean-shaven man, dressed in rusty black. The elderly man his lordship's butler bowed as he ushered the visitors into the hall.

"This is strange news, Donnelly," said Fitzgerald abruptly.

"Very strange, indeed, sir," said Donnelly.

"What's the last intelligence?" asked Fitzgerald.

"There's not a scrap of news beyond the fact that my lord and Sam Backas didn't turn up on Friday morning."

“And what do you make of it, Donelly?”

“Begad, sir, I can make nothing of it. His lordship seemed a bit disthressed durin’ the week, but that’s neither here nor there, of course.”

“Did the quicksand on the Back Strand occur to you at all. Donelly?”

“Well, it did. sir. I remember the time poor Crotty was swallyed up in it, but I don’t see what would bring his lordship so far out of his way. It was a fine, clear evening, too.”

“He may have been trying to cross by the ford—that’s a good bit up from the ferry, you know, in the direction of the quicksand.”

“Thru enough, sir; but we’re all in hopes that his lordship is safe and sound somewhere—God grant it!”

“Amen!” said Fitzgerald. “And now, Donelly, what can you do for my friend and myself in the shape of a bit of luncheon? We have walked over from Dunmore this morning; and, speaking for myself at any rate, I can declare that I have brought a very good sauce with me—a first rate appetite.”

“I’ll have something for you in less than an hour, sir.” said the butler; “and maybe, while I’m looking after it, you’d like to show the house to the young gentleman.”

Frank was now gazing at a picture, one of the many that adorned the hall, and the only portrait there. It was a full-length, in Lawrence’s unmistakable manner, of a lady in a riding habit. Frank recognized the first Viscountess Clashmore, though the portrait in front of him did not give one exactly the same impression of the Viscountess as the portrait which hung in the dining-room at Park Lane. It represented a more vivacious and

more coquettish-looking lady than the Park Lane portrait, and the face lacked that quiet beauty, purity and kindness which Frank had always found so attractive in the portrait of his great-grandmother. He liked his own picture best, though possibly the portrait he was gazing at portrayed a more fascinating personage.

"How, in the name of all that's marvellous," he asked himself again, "could this woman have come from peasant stock?"

As the butler disappeared Fitzgerald turned to Frank. "I see you are gazing at the great viscountess," said he. "Isn't she a beautiful woman? And only think of it—she was a cousin of the old man who took such a fancy to you yesterday old M'Carthy. He raves about her whenever her name is mentioned."

This piece of information concerning the old farmer's admiration for a member of the Clashmore family aroused in Frank a feeling half of anger, half of humiliation. His radical propensities were but skin deep.

"I suppose," continued Fitzgerald, seeing that Frank had not replied to him, "you couldn't be expected to take any interest in the ramifications of the Clashmore pedigree; but as an artist, what do you think of the portrait?"

"It is by Sir Thomas Lawrence, I see," said Frank; "and it is an admirable specimen of his style; but I should fancy not a very close likeness of the lady. I imagine the artist was too anxious to make a showy portrait. Lawrence frequently was when he had a beautiful woman for a sitter. I could fancy that the Viscountess might have been more attractive to a quiet eye if she displayed a little less consciousness of her charms." He

was thinking of the portrait in his own home.

"Now, do you know, that's strange," said Fitzgerald, "for it is very like a criticism—only in different language—which Simon M'Carthy passed upon this very portrait."

"Indeed!" said Frank coldly.

"I met the old fellow here one day when he was paying his rent. 'Well, Mister Fitzgerald,' said he, 'I never see that picture of my kinswoman'—Frank winced—'without feeling angry. She looks as if she was saying to me: 'Amn't I a beauty of the first water; And that she was,' continued the old man, 'though she was as modest as a nun. You can't see the real goodness of her in that face—bad luck to the dauber who drew her with that smirk on her!'"

"Sir Thomas Lawrence would, I am sure, be highly flattered by the old peasant's criticism."

"Peasant! Mind what you're saying, Mr. Venables. Simon M'Carthy considers the Milesian blood in his veins bluer than any that ever coursed through an English or Anglo-English nobleman's. But come and have a look at the house."



## CHAPTER XX

### AT THE FERRY

A SENSE of keen pleasure filled Frank as he accompanied Fitzgerald through the house. The rooms on the ground floor were large and lofty; the furniture—most of it more than a century old—was picturesque; and though the apartments displayed some lack of feminine care, they were tastefully arranged. Gildings were tarnished; paint, carpets and curtains had lost their freshness; but it was evident to Frank that the master's eye had not been wanting. A gloom pervaded the rooms and corridors, and the silence of the house was oppressive, but the young man was in a humour which did not easily admit gloom.

The picture gallery naturally interested him most. Here he saw portraits of his ancestors, from Sir Hildebrand to his own father. Fitzgerald knew every face in the picture gallery and could discourse about the owner of each with as much glibness as if he were telling anecdotes of Lord Clashmore's tenantry. Frank was almost sorry when Donelly announced that the luncheon was ready, for the prattle of his queer companion was now

intensely interesting to him.

After luncheon Fitzgerald asked Frank if he would care to go down and explore the neighbourhood of Rhina Shark Ferry, and the latter readily assented. The two travellers found when they left the house that the wind, instead of lulling, as Fitzgerald had earlier in the day declared it would, had considerably increased. Leaving the lodge gate behind them, they entered a narrow by-road which led to the ferry, and in about ten minutes, on their turning a sharp corner, a view of Tramore Bay burst upon them with the three white towers of the western headland forming a background. The wind now beat fiercely in the faces of the two men, stinging them like the stroke of a whip, and as it was laden with particles of dry, fine white sand, which met his cheeks like needle points, Frank found it almost impossible to keep his face forward or his back straight. Fitzgerald seemed to enjoy the punishment.

"I call this fine," he cried. "Makes nerve and muscle tingle, doesn't it, Mr. Venables? If you keep turning your face from side to side you'll find your ears full of sand long before we get to the ferry. This will be no day, I am afraid, for exploring the Back Strand yonder." He pointed with his stick to the right, where whirling clouds of pale yellow sand were flying over an expanse of even strand.

Almost fighting every step of the way with the wind, they reached a flat, sandy beach; in the middle stood a small, squat, lonely looking house, which was, as Fitzgerald explained, a shelter for the ferry-boat and ferryman. On reaching the house Fitzgerald knocked at the door, and his summons was speedily answered by a



tall, brawny young man between twenty-five and thirty years of age, florid-cheeked and bearded. His hair was ruddy and curly, and his eyes blue and sparkling. He was a handsome looking fellow, Frank thought, and as fearless as a Viking.

"Hallo, Mister Fitz!" said he. "What brings yourself here this wild day? You'd best come inside or you'll be blown off your feet. Come in, sir," he added, addressing Frank.

The two travellers entered the shealing. The door opened directly on a room which was a kitchen and living-room in one. A deal table and a few chairs were its only furniture. A short ladder in one corner marked the means of ascent to the loft where the ferryman slept.

"Well, Jack," said Fitzgerald, when the men and Frank had seated themselves, "I suppose you guess what I've come about?"

"I partly do, sir," said the ferryman. "An' the dickens own sthrange job it is, sure enough!"

"You may speak quite openly to me before my friend, Mr. Venables. He knows all I know about the affair. It doesn't concern him in any way, but I thought as he was a stranger in Ireland I'd show him one of the loneliest spots in it, and I could be having a chat with yourself at the same time."

"You might have chosen a finer day, sir."

"It promised fair enough when we left Dunmore this morning. But, as I was asking, Jack, what do you make of this affair about his lordship?"

"What could a poor ignorant man like me make of it? I was thinking could the lord have turned back to Thramore afther he met Mr. M'Grath on the strand!"

“That’s hardly likely, Jack. Someone would have seen him in Tramore. You were out at sea at the time, of course?”

“Out of sight altogether,” said Corbett. “I suppose you heard what ill-luck I had, breakin’ the mast of my little yawl.”

“I did. Now, do you know, Jack, what I think, and you ought to have as good an opinion about this as any man in these parts?”

Corbett gazed frowningly, it seemed to Frank, at Fitzgerald, and shifted his place—he had been standing at the side of the hearth looking down at his visitor.

“An’ what’s that, sir?” he said, in a voice which had a trace of huskiness in it.

“Not finding you here when they arrived at the other side of the ferry, either his lordship or Backas thought they would try to ford the river further up, where the reef runs across it.”

“And were swept out to say thryin’ to cross the reef,” said Corbett quickly. “Faith, that’s the best idaya yet, sir.”

“But it isn’t my idea at all, Jack. For there would be no danger to Backas in crossing the reef—he knew it well—and it isn’t likely he’d have risked his lordship’s life unless he were certain of what he was doing. No; but what I think is that in trying to reach the place where the ford is they got caught up in the quicksand. Now, what do you think of that idea?”

An ashy pallor crossed Corbett’s cheeks, and it was some moments before he spoke.

“That could hardly be, sir,” he said hoarsely.

“Why not? Both men pooh-poohed the danger of the

quicksand—in fact, didn't believe in it, simply because it shifts its locality and is dangerous only at certain times of tides and at certain seasons, and neither of them had chanced to see it during one of its wicked periods. Wasn't Crotty lost in it some thirty years ago?"

"Lost where, sir?"

"Don't be stupid. Didn't Crotty—you surely have heard of it—chance to stumble into the quicksand on the Back Strand, after crossing the ford higher up the creek?"

"I believe that's so, sir," said Corbett.

"Well, do you mean to say you don't know living here as you do from year's end to year's end at what time of tide, and at what seasons the quicksand shows itself?"

"I hardly could tell for certain. As you say yourself, sir, it shifts, and begor, I thry to keep as far out of danger as I can."

"Don't pretend to be stupid, man," said Fitzgerald, a little angrily. "You haven't an ounce of foolish flesh on you. Don't be fencing with me, or I'll think you're concealing something that might put you into more danger than the quicksand out there."

"What would I be concealin'? Wasn't I cut of sight of the place when the lord ought to have reached here, by all account?"

"I'm not asking you anything now about your master, but about the quicksand. Do you know all about it, or do you not?"

"I suppose I know as much about it as any other man in the neighbourhood, an' that's little enough."

"Can't you speak plainly to me, and not be pretending to be so infernally dense? How was the tide about

six o'clock last Friday—the evening his lordship disappeared?"

"It was beginning to make. It was low wather about five."

"And it's only about an hour before and after low water the ford can be crossed?"

"That's so, sir."

"Well," said Fitzgerald, glancing at Frank, "it was dead low water—so Miss O'Dwyer told me last night—at five o'clock in the evening that the man Crotty stumbled into the quicksand. He had crossed from this side about six o'clock, and was intending to make, it is supposed, a short cut across the Back Strand, when he was swallowed up. Now, Jack, my man, what have you to say?"

Corbett was undoubtedly confused, but he made a bold struggle to keep his countenance.

"Faith, it's no knowing but there's something in your idaya, sir; though I don't believe it myself. It's more likely, as it struck me when you spoke of the crossing the reef, that it was dhrowned his lordship was, and Sam Backas along with him."

"If they were drowned in the creek their bodies would have been washed ashore by this. You know that well."

"Well, there's something in that, too, sir; but I can't think of everything all at a rush. Begor, 'tis a puzzlin' case altogether, Mither Fitz."

"And now there's another thing, Corbett. What time did you get back here that evening?"

"What time did I get back here! I didn't come back here at all. I was too much afraid of gettin' scolded by Sam Backas. I spent the night at my sither's."

"I don't mean when did you get back to this house of yours, but when did you get your yawl home?"

"As near as it might be to eight o'clock. I couldn't tell, for I haven't clock or watch, and there's no one about here to tell the time, but it was after nine when I got to my sither's, and it took me about an hour to moor the boat and walk across to her place—there or thereabouts."

"What time did you come round Brownstown head—the wind was off the land, wasn't it? Your boat was damaged, and it would take you some time to get from the Head to here?"

"My mast was broke, as I towld you, an' I suppose it was about seven o'clock when I was abreast of Brownstown Head. But who said I came round the Head?"

"Didn't you?"

"No, sir. I came round the Metalman Head, and made across the bay as best I could."

"And did you see a strange yawl coming out of Rhina-Shark when you were crossing the bay?"

Corbett again hesitated before he answered this question.

"The divil a yawl or any other boat I seen that evenin'. Reckless enough, I went out single-handed, intendin' to pick up some chap at the Cove at the Metalman side, but I changed my mind as I got across the bay. It took me all my time, I can tell you, to get home at all—for it was the height of foolishness for me to try to sail the boat single-handed. Anyhow I couldn't afford to use my eyes for other people's business."

"There was a yawl sailed out of the creek here and round Brownstown Head, Jack, between six and seven

o'clock. Find out for me who or what she was."

"How could I do that, sir?"

"I'll leave it to yourself; and if you'll take a friend's advice, Jack, you'll do what I ask, and perhaps save yourself some trouble."

"That's a quare way to be talkin' to a poor man like me. How the mischief could I find out about other people's boats?" he exclaimed gruffly.

"Don't be so surly! I'll look you up again in a few days, and do your best in the meantime. And now, Mr. Venables, we ought to be going. You know we have a visit to pay in the neighbourhood. Good-day, Jack; keep your eyes open, and think over the good advice I have given you."

"Good-day, sir," said Corbett, going to the door and opening it as his two visitors rose. "You're not crossing the ferry, then?"

"No; we're striking back Dunmore way—this is no day to face the Back Strand."

Fitzgerald led the way across the sandy beach, Frank following at his heels. The elder man walked with great rapidity, and Frank found some difficulty in keeping pace with him. When the travellers had regained the road by which they had come from Rhi-na-Shark House, Fitzgerald slackened his steps and said:

"I am afraid you will think me a most inconsiderate companion. Here have I been hauling you over the country this wild day, secretly bent on errands of my own. Pray forgive me—will you?"

"There's nothing to forgive. I am enjoying myself thoroughly. I'd tell you if I wasn't."

"That's a good fellow. The fact is this affair of Lord

Clashmore is filling up all the corners of my little brain. He was most kind to me on many occasions, and I have a sort of hope I shall get at the heart of this thing. I wish to goodness I could feel I wasn't boring the life out of you. Old M'Carthy put fresh hope into me by what he said yesterday his lordship not having been done away with."

"What is your theory now?" asked Frank, angry with himself for not having the courage to reveal his identity to his companion. "I am quite sincere in saying that the matter interests me vastly."

"Well, you saw, I expect, the way that fellow Corbett wriggled when I was questioning him."

"There's no doubt he was very uncomfortable and not a little confused. I shouldn't care to anger a man like that, I must confess."

"That's the only way to take one of his stamp. Show him a bold front, and he'll believe you're as fearless as himself. He knows something—I'm convinced he does," exclaimed Fitzgerald, with unusual warmth. "But whether he knows all or only a little, of whether what he does know is only a matter of suspicion, I can't make up my mind. He certainly is concealing something. Didn't you think he was fencing with me?"

"I should be inclined to say so; but, honestly, I find myself utterly unable to understand that class of Irishman. Mr. Corbett is a Sphinx, and ought to be in Sahara hewn in stone, and not in this lesser sandy desert in flesh and blood. But what have you at the back of your own mind, Mr. Fitzgerald, about Lord Clashmore?"

"Nothing that I could say now there are so many other things to be cleared up first. And I don't want to

be found guilty of discovering a mouse's nest in a cat's ear. Let us talk of something else. It is about two miles from here to M'Carthy's house. I suppose you haven't changed your mind about paying my friend Simon a visit?"

"Not at all. I shall be very glad to see the old man in his own castle. He interests me a good deal. In fact, most things hereabouts interest me out of all proportion."

"You're not tired, I hope?"

"No, thanks. With the wind behind us it stems more like flying than walking, and the sand doesn't catch us now."

"Don't think I mean to ask you to trot back to Dunmore. I'll get one of old Simon's people to drive us back to our head-quarters."



## CHAPTER XXI

### AN ATLANTIC WILD-FLOWER

SKIRTING Rhi-na-Shark House, the travellers walked a little to the left, leaving Brownstown Head to the right of them. The two white pillars gradually lifted themselves into prominence as the two men ascended the sloping ground at the back of Lord Clashmore's demesne. Fitzgerald explained that they were now facing almost due south, and that an hour's easy walking would bring them to Mr. M'Carthy's house.

Fitzgerald walked across country regardless of hedges and ditches. Occasionally he picked his way alongside growing crops, and sometimes he followed narrow and rutty roads. Frank was not accustomed to this kind of steeplechasing, and he was growing more tired than he cared to confess, while his companion seemed as fresh and as light of tread as when he had started out from Dunmore in the morning. Fitzgerald was evidently turning things over in his mind, for he spoke but little.

At length, after what seemed to Frank to be a very long Irish hour—he had already some experience of the length of the Irish mile, and he was ready to believe

that an Irish hour numbered considerably more than sixty English minutes when distances were measured by it—his companion halted and pointed (as usual, with his stick) to a clump of trees in the distance to the left, "That's old Simon's place," said he. "You can't see the house just yet; it is well sheltered. I observe that you are not carrying such a springy step as you were a few hours ago. We shall soon have an opportunity of resting ourselves."

"I'm all right, thank you," said Frank, "even though I am not such a sprinter as yourself. I wonder how trees can flourish in such a place. How far is it from the house to the Atlantic?"

"About a quarter of a mile. The trees are a bit stunted and lean landwards considerably, as you can see, but they've got acclimatised to storms and salt water now. Do you see that small building standing out in a line with M'Carthy's dwelling? That's the old fellow's dairy."

"It must be almost on the verge of the cliffs. What a place for a dairy—or, indeed, for any building!"

"Oh, it's safe enough. It's one of the old fellow's whims. He got it built himself, and he has made quite a decent bit of a road to it."

"I should fancy the cows and the dairy-maids must bless him."

"I suppose it's like being hanged; you get used to it. His cattle thrive, anyway, and he has quite a reputation for butter. Now you can see the house."

Frank caught a glimpse of a white building through an opening in the clump of trees.

"I wonder," said he, "who had the pluck or the temerity to build a dwelling-house in such a wild neighbour-

hood?"

"I believe the rash builder was the father of the first Viscountess Clashmore—the lady whose picture you saw in the hall at Rhi-na-Shark House. He rented a tract of land here from the Aylward family, and in the course of time he converted a barren waste into a very tidy farm. He was a morose customer, it is said, and had little left but his pride when he wandered up here from some part of the county Cork, bringing with him his only child—a daughter—and his nephew—the very old gentleman who now rules this place. Simon was the orphan son of a younger brother. He was some years—I don't know exactly how many—the junior of his cousin Mary. Strange isn't it, the ups and downs in the world? Here is an old farmer still living in these wilds, who dwelt under the same roof nearly a century ago with a first cousin who married a peer, and whose grand-son is also a peer, and the lord of the soil hereabout—that is, if he is still in the land of the living."

Frank was growing almost sick with vexation as he listened to Fitzgerald's gossip. The closeness of his connection with an Irish peasant—for as such he insisted on regarding old M'Carthy—had not come fully home to him, until he actually saw the house in which his great-grandmother had dwelt before her marriage with his great grandfather.

If it had not been for his anxiety to discover what had happened to his uncle he would have retraced his steps from the domain of the M'Carthy's. He hardly knew how he could endure to enter the house with the knowledge that old Simon was distantly related to him. The two men were now walking along a fairly well-kept country

road.

"This, then, I suppose," said Frank incautiously, "is Prospect House?"

"That's it, sir," answered Fitzgerald, not heeding the import of his companion's incautious inquiry, or wondering how the stranger came to know the name of the dwelling.

"It is well named, anyhow," said Frank, with a swelling sensation in his throat. "The prospect is certainly a grand one."

"I prefer something more cultivated and cheerful," said Fitzgerald, "and a more populous neighbourhood. I think I should go melancholy mad if I were compelled to spend a winter on Brownstown Head. Here we are now at the gate of Castle M'Carthy."

A low and irregularly built stone wall surrounded Prospect House and its grounds. As Fitzgerald opened the latch of the iron gate, Frank saw the house was a straggling, one-story building with a thatched roof, over which were flung heavy weights attached to chains. The walls of the house were plastered and whitewashed, and the windows were protected outside by heavy wooden shutters, now held back on their hinges against the wails. The house faced the west, and from it there was a clear view of the three white pillars on the western headland of Tramore Bay.

As the visitors passed through the gate an old man, who was kneeling over a flower bed, stood up and offered a token of recognition to Fitzgerald by touching his forelock.

"Good morrow, Tim," said Fitzgerald. "Is the governor in?"

"He is, sir," answered Tim, the gardener. "And I think he's expectin' you sir, for he towld me there might be visitors here one day this week. He's in the parlour there, all alone. Won't ye go in, gintlemen? I had to close the half door today, the win' blew so sthrong from the westhard."

"I'll soon wake the house," said Fitzgerald, going up to the hall and knocking at it.

In a few moments the door was opened by an elderly woman who addressed some words in Irish to Fitzgerald, the latter replying to her in the same language, and then winding up with, "I'm afraid, Anty, that's all the Irish I have, so you and I must do the rest in dumb-show. . . . Come along, Mr. Venables, I am trying to thank the handmaiden here for her very flowery Irish welcome, and I'm afraid I can't continue the conversation any longer; she doesn't know a syllable of the English language."

Frank followed Fitzgerald into the hall, and the old woman, preceding them, opened a door to the left. As the visitors entered the room the occupant, Simon M'Carthy, stood up from his chair near the window, laid down a book and his spectacles, and greeted the visitors with a "welcome, gentlemen!" offering his hand to Frank first and then to Fitzgerald.

"So you've kept your promise, Mr. Venables," said he. "I hardly expected you so soon, especially on such a wild day as this. You must be tired and hungry, both of ye."

Fitzgerald explained how they had spent the day, and he protested that he had no desire for food at present, but he would not object to a drink. Frank made a similar statement, and the old man declared he was quite

willing to allow his visitors to postpone the meal, if it only meant postponement. "I am my own housekeeper for the moment," said he, "for I hardly thought you'd venture this way in the face of such a wind, and I allowed my granddaughter to pay a visit to the dairy. But she'll be back presently. And now, what can I offer ye to drink? There isn't much choice in this out-of-the-way spot, but whatever is here ye're welcome to—whiskey or claret?"

Fitzgerald declared for whiskey, and Frank, who disliked the seductive spirit, was very glad to have the offer of claret, a beverage he had hardly expected to find in the old farmer's house. M'Carthy pulled the bell rope at one side of the fireplace, and gave his orders to Aunty in Irish. "Sit down, gentlemen, and dhraw yer chairs near the fireplace," said he. "A taste of a fire is not to be despised this blustery day."

"Might I enquire, M'Carthy, what you were blinding yourself with before we came in?" Fitzgerald asked.

"If you want to know then, it was my prayerbook but it would be no use to you, for it's an Irish one."

"I suppose you couldn't say your prayers in English?"

"You're right. But here's Anty with something that will occupy your restless mouth."

The elderly woman placed on the table a tray containing a stout decanter, a bottle and some glasses, and a biscuit-box. Old M'Carthy uncorked the wine dexterously. "I don't dhrink anything now but a little taste of spirits," he said, turning to Frank. "Wine is too cold for my ould blood, but I am glad to see you refusin' whiskey, Mr. Venables. I don't like to see young men touchin' it."

"And is it an old man you're calling me?" asked

Fitzgerald.

“Begad, you’re nearly as crabbed as me-self,” said M’Carthy. “I was going to say as settled; but you’re afther astonishin’ me by what you towld me yesterday about your bein’ thinkin’ of puttin’ yerself undher the yoke of a farm an’ a wife.”

“Don’t go blowing the gaff all over the countryside on me now,” pleaded Fitzgerald. “As to the wife, I’ve got to wait until she accepts me.”

“Have you asked her yet?”

“Don’t be so curious now. Youngsters like you shouldn’t be told tales of this kind at all.”

“She might do worse,” said the old man oracularly. “But I’m afraid you have no courage.”

Frank was astonished at the change in the manner of his host. He was no longer Simon the Terrible. He was Simon the Amiable, and to listen to him one might be pardoned for refusing to believe that more than sixty winters had passed over his head. Another matter that caused the young man some surprise was the furniture of the room. It was old and solid, but there was a glimpse here and there of something that indicated the deft hand of a woman of taste.

Oddly enough, Frank, notwithstanding Miss O’Dwyer’s laudation of Geraldine M’Carthy, had never given a serious thought to that young lady. He had a nebulous notion that she was a country wench of the ordinary pattern—a pattern abhorred by him. But now, as he glanced round the room, it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps the lady of the house was not of the ordinary country-girl stamp. He could hardly believe that the elderly servitor could have had any hand in the ar-

rangement of the parlour in which he was now seated.

“Here’s Ger!” said the old man, who had returned to his nook in the window when he had seen his visitors’ wants attended to. There was a look in his face as if he had beheld some pleasant vision. “I’m glad she’s back, for I’m like a child when any cares of the house are laid on my shoulders.”

The door of the parlour was opened and a young girl stepped in. She was about to retire before Frank had seen her face, when M’Carthy cried out, “Come in, my dear! It’s only Mr. Fitzgerald and his young friend that I was tellin’ you I met last evenin’ near Dunmore.”

Old Simon’s granddaughter entered, a slight look of confusion on her face. She extended her hand to Fitzgerald, and then in turn to Frank as her grandfather introduced her.

The young man, accustomed as he was to meeting all sorts and conditions of people and being at his ease with them, was more confused than Geraldine M’Carthy as he gazed shyly at her. She was tall and willowy, and, much to Frank’s surprise, bore no traces of roughness or uncouthness. She wore a blue serge costume which fitted her lithe figure perfectly, and a dark straw hat was perched in an ample nest of flossy black hair. The wind out-of-doors had swept a feathery tress across her smooth, white forehead and had heightened the dainty colour of her fresh young cheeks. Frank quickly remembered that this young girl was of the blood of the first Viscountess. He could recognize the curve of the mouth and chin, but beyond this there was no facial resemblance. Geraldine’s dark blue eyes fascinated the young man most. Such liquid depths and colour and softness



he had never seen in the eyes of any other woman. His great-grandmother could not boast of those wonderful eyes, with their long black lashes.

“My great-grandmother was a beauty,” he mused; “this young girl is peerless.” Then he remembered the words he had lightly spoken to his mother a few days before: “They must raise some remarkable peasants in Ireland.” Geraldine was not remarkable—the word would ill describe her; she was, in the eyes of the young man, marvellous. And she seemed to be utterly unconscious of her beauty. Perhaps this very unconsciousness was her chief charm. “Could men,” Frank asked himself, “with ordinary eyes have ever seen this young girl and refrained from shouting laudations of her from the house-tops?” He found himself wondering if she were one of those vapid women who have nothing but their physical charms to recommend them. She might be stupid or vulgar-minded. But could she be—it was hardly possible to harbour such a thought.

Franks brain was in a whirl. He had inherited from his father a chivalrous and tender feeling about women—his mother had termed it Quixotic—and this feeling had restrained him, and had kept his brain cool as far as the softer sex was concerned.

He was unnerved in the presence of this country girl. He almost regretted he had ever seen her; the memory of her face, he told himself, would remain aimlessly with him.



## CHAPTER XXII

### AN OLD MAN'S TALE

GERALDINE was seated near her grandfather while Frank had been swiftly and tumultuously criticizing her. Having taken off her hat, she put out one hand towards the old man, who grasped it and held it greedily. Her presence seemed to silence and engross him, for apparently he forgot his guests for many minutes.

From the moment of his entry into the parlour of Prospect house, Frank had lost sight of the real object of his visit, and now that it recurred to him, as he sat shyly glancing at the young girl, he felt that it would be a sacrilege to come prying into this sanctuary. He hated his role of amateur detective; and Weekes' warning of his unfitness for his self-imposed task flashed across him, adding to his discomfort. He also remembered two of Weekes' expressions, which had angered Frank, chiefly because he considered them to be untrue: "You have a capacity for enthusiasm," and "You are liable to be led astray by sentiment or temper." He now discovered that he did possess this capacity for enthusiasm. If the man Weekes was right in one of his judgments, might he not

also be right in the other, and was he, Frank Aylward, already being led astray by sentiment? He must fight with his feelings or he should be undone.

Was there not something very odd in his being invited to the house of a man who was suspected of being concerned in the disappearance of his uncle? Did an old Irish peasant think of pitting himself against a *fin-de-siècle* young Englishman and of outwitting him?

And then, as he glanced at Geraldine and at the old man who held her shapely white hand, he grew angry again—angry at himself for harbouring suspicions of the two.

Fitzgerald broke a silence which had been an awkward one for the three younger people, by addressing the host; and Frank felt that his friend's words were almost more awkward than the silence itself.

"I say, M'Carthy, this young gentleman here was viewing a portrait of an old favourite of yours to-day, and he quite agrees with a remark you once made about it to myself in the hall of the big house."

"Are you speaking of my kinswoman who married Lord Clashmore?" asked the old man, lifting his head, his old eyes sparkling.

"Of course. What else or who else could I be referring to?"

"And what had Mr. Venables to say about her?"

"Let him tell you himself."

"Oh, merely," said Frank, battling bravely with his confusion, "that I thought the portrait too showy."

"That's the word!" exclaimed the old man. "Perhaps Mr. Fitzgerald told you that she was a cousin of mine that we mere brought up together?"

"Yes," said Frank. "It is very wonderful."

"Ay," said the old man musingly. "It is wonderful, surely, that here I am alive at this day, and a great-grandson of Mary M'Carthy may, it is like enough, be in the world."

"The lady lived here, I understand?" said Frank.

"Ay, in this very house; and 'twas a dark day and a dark house when she went out of it. Maybe, you'd like to hear the story of her, sir, as you brought her memory up to me?"

"I'd be very glad to hear about the Vis-countess," said Frank. "The portrait I have recently seen has given me quite an interest in her."

Old Simon paused, and it was some moments before he found his voice again.

"It was in the last year of the ould century that my uncle—Teague of the Black Hair, as he was called—settled down in this wild place. He had been on his keepin' for some time afther the great Rebellion; that's his pike hangin' up on the wall facin' me. He was a fine man was Teague, with love an' pride an' hathred burnin' in his veins an' lightin' up his face. An' though when he was excited or angry his eyes would flash with fire, yet at ordinary times they wor as soft as a woman's. Often I think Geraldine's eyes have a look of her great-granduncle's, though I never saw the angry flash in 'em that used to make me thremble when I saw it in the eyes of Teague. There was no middle way with him in anything. He loved his counthry an' his faith as he loved his own people, but if he turned against anyone belonging to him for any raison of his own that he thought good, he could hate 'em almost as sthrong

as he hated the oppressors of his counthry an' his faith. But that's neither here nor there for the moment, except to tell you the kind of man he was.

“When he came here his only child, Mary, was in her fifteenth year her mother had died the year before, while Teague was fightin' in Wexford. My uncle loved the ground his child walked on, an' she was fond and proud of him, as well she might be. I was only a youngsther, just beginnin' to walk, when I was sent here—just think of that!” he said with a smile, “an' look at me now in my second childhood. Anyhow. Mary was my nurse, an' I need hardly say I doted on her as I grew up. An' a happy life we had of it here until something went wrong, which I was too young to know anything about at the time—some three years after my uncle came here. I knew all about it afterwards, for my Uncle Teague towld me what had happened.

“Lord Clashmore—his title was brand-new then—came on a visit to Rhi-na-Shark House, an' he saw my cousin Mary, an' fell in love with her, an' she with him. He was a handsome gentleman, I'm towld, for though I may have seen him. I can't remember him at all. Anyhow, he came up here one day to my uncle, an' asked if he'd give his consent to a match between Mary and himself. Teague had never suspected anything was goin' on, and he was thremblin' with anger to think that his only child was desayvin' him. He gave a flat refusal to Clashmore anyhow, an' the lord, who thought it would be jumpin' for joy Teague would be, couldn't believe my uncle was in airnest.

“Are you mad?” says he, ‘or do you know who you're refusin'?”

“I’m not mad,’ says Teague. ‘an’ I’m refusin’ the head of a house which two centuries ago stole from my people the land which had belonged to them for more centuries than I care to count. Moreover,’ says Teague ‘you’re a Protestant, an’ if these things weren’t enough for me, you’re a Sassenach, an’ that’s worse than all else.’ Lord Clashmore couldn’t undherstand Teague at all—”

“Faith, I’m not surprised, M’Carthy,” interrupted Fitzgerald.

“Aisy, my good man,” said old Simon, with a trace of anger in his voice. “I’m tellin’ you my story, an’ if you don’t like it I’ll not throuble you further with it.”

“Oh, don’t be so touchy!” said Fitzgerald; “I am only just picturing the scene to myself. Continue by all means, and I won’t be naughty again. Speak to him, Miss Geraldine.”

“Geraldine knows the story by heart,” said the old man.

“But I’m not tired of it, grandfather.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, my dear,” declared the old man, recovering his good-humour; “my friend Fitzgerald can pretend not to be listenin’, an’ you can go an’ look afther things in the kitchen for a bit—for these gentlemen must be gettin’ hungry, an’ they may have proud stomachs. Then I can tell the story to Mr. Venables, an’ you can come back to us when you have set Anty straight.”

“Whatever pleases you best, grandfather,” said the young girl, rising.

“The boys will come in hungry, too, Ger,” he said. “What time do you expect ’em?”

“In about an hour, sir.”

Frank held the door open for Geraldine, and then he returned to his seat. The story of his ancestors was full of interest for him, though he did not by any means like the point of view.

“As I was sayin’, Mither Venables,” continued the old man, “Lord Clashmore couldn’t quite undherstand my uncle. He had his own pride, of course, and no doubt to be refused by a tenant of his hurt his pride; but what seemed to anger him most was Teague’s sayin’ that the Aylwards”—the mention of his name disturbed Frank strangely—“had stolen the land of the M’Carthys.”

“I am aware,’ said the lord, ‘that I hold land in the County Cork which once belonged to some family of the name; an ancestor of mine was granted the land by the sovereign of the realm. Anyhow,’ said he, ‘there are so many M’Carthys in the counthry that I might be excused for doubtin’ that you arc in the direct line of the Drumglass branch of the family.’

“That was what my uncle wanted. Goin’ to the cabinet in the corner there, he opened it, an’ took out some rolls of parchment an’ laid ’em on the table.

“What are these musty things?” asked the lord, with a sneer.

“The title-deeds of the lands of Drumglass about half of which lands your progenitors stole. Musty deeds they are, for some of ’em go back to a time when the Aylwards wor as poor an’ as shabby as I am this day.’

“To give him his due, Clashmore was a daycent fellow, and he was plaised at Teague’s pride; an’ as like as not, he was glad to know that he was proposin’ for a girl whose blood was better than his own. Anyhow, himself an’ my uncle talked the matther over again, but the



religion was a stumblin'-block Teague couldn't get over at all. The upshot of it was that as—always happens when young people fall in love with each other—my cousin Mary found the scales weighin' down the lover against the father, an' she ran off with Clashmore.

“My uncle was torn with rage. He couldn't undherstand at all how his only child the—idol of his heart—could throw him, that used to be the idol of his heart, over for a sthranger—a Protestant, too, and a Sassenach, only about half-a-dozen generations back. I was too young, of course, to know what was happenin', but, young as I was, I felt the loss of my cousin; an' my uncle was so changed—so dark an' gloomy an' solitary—that I was left mostly to myself.

“A few lonely years went by. an' I heard that Lady Clashmore was visitin' Rhi-na-Shark. I was towld by some of the farm servants all sorts of tales of her grandeur in Dublin an' over in England, an' faith, they used to anger me, them same tales. I suppose 'twas jealous I was. I heard that the lady of the big house had sent a message to her father askin' to see him, an' that my uncle sent word to her not to dare to darken his door.

“I was curious to see my good lookin' cousin again, an' I heard that she used to drive into Watherford occasionally in a little pony carriage of her own. Whatever divil possessed me I won't know, but one mornin' I started out for the road by which she'd be thravellin' if she was goin' to town. I meant to shame her—God forgive me!—before her lackeys. Just the sort of thing only a young imp would think of doin'. But I suppose I had a touch of anger in me against her for havin' deserted us, an' for havin' turned my stout-hearted uncle into a sour

an' silent man. Anyhow, as luck should have it, she did thravel into Watherford the very day I went out in search for her. As soon as I saw her little carriage climhin' the hill, I placed myself in the ditch by the side of the road near the top of the hill. I knew she'd have to walk the ponies up the hill, for it's a stiff pinch. I tore my clothes and covered 'em with mud, an' I rubbed some mud on my wicked young face, an' I waited until the carriage was just abreast of me. Then I rushed out cryin', 'I suppose you're too proud now, Cousin Mary, to recognize one of your own people?'

"The words were no sooner out of my mouth than I could have bit my tongue off. Instead of givin' me a cut with her whip, as I expected she would, an' have dhriven on to be laughed at by the lackey who was sittin' behind her, she reined in her ponies an' cried out, 'Oh, Cousin Simon, you wicked young monkey, is that you? Come here to me!'

"Then I looked up at her, an' may God pardon me for sayin' it! but she was as beautiful as an angel in heaven, an' she looked as easy an' as grand as if she was born an' reared in laces and diamonds, an' there was a smile on her face that haunts me whenever I think of her. I went over to her, sheepish enough, I needn't say, an' stoopin' forward she kissed me, dirty an' ragged as I was. Then she scolded me for the state I was in, little thinkin' I had dirtied myself to humble her. She asked after my uncle—how he was, an' when he was most likely to be found at home, an' things I couldn't quite undherstand then, an' which my memory doesn't hould, an' then she dhrove off.

"You may be sure I washed myself an' put on my best

clothes the next time I went out, an' every mornin' for weeks I stood at the brow of the same hill as clane as a new pin; but never a sight more did I see of Mary M'Carthy."

The old man almost broke down as he came to this part of his tale, and he was obliged to wipe his cheeks and eyes with his handkerchief before he turned his face again towards Frank.

Fitzgerald was the first to break the silence.

"Was the Viscountess ever reconciled to her father?" he asked.

"That's the saddest part of it." said old Simon. "An' if I'm not wearyin' you I'll tell you in a few words about that. Some weeks aftherwards I was out on the cliffs an' didn't come home until afther the sun went down. When I got back I found my uncle walkin' up an' down this room cryin' like a child. I had never seen a tear on his eyelids before, an' the sight of him weepin' made meself cry with misery. He sent me out of the room, pattin' me, as I well remember, kindly on the head.

"I learned aftherwards what had happened. He was standin' lookin' out of this very window here when what did he see but his daughter openin' the gate out there! He went out at wance into the hall an' shut the door, which always stood open when the wind would let it, in her face. For days afther that he never left his room, an' often I heard him moanin', an' often I heard him cursin' his hard, proud heart; an' one day he went down to the big house, only to be towld that the family had left Ireland forever. They went abroad—to Italy. Poor Mary didn't make old bones. Some say her heart was broke by her father's hardness; but if it was, so was his.

“You see, Misther Venables,” continued the old man, after a brief pause, “if we nourish pride or anger we must pay for them; an’ they’re the dearest articles known.”

“Faith, you must have spent a lot of money in your time, then, M’Carthy,” said Fitzgerald.

“Eh?” said Simon, with a touch of asperity.

“The end of your story is very sad indeed,” said Frank. “But perhaps Lady Clashmore found comfort in the love of her husband and the care of her children. There’s compensation for everything in life.”

“Perhaps,” said the old man. “I don’t know what compensation my poor uncle had. All the courage seemed to die out of him; an’ that hall door was never opened during his life again—he shut it forever on himself when he shut it on his child. . . . I think I hear the boys outside. That’s Charlie’s voice, if my old ears don’t deceive me.”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

USHER'S mission to Dublin was wholly unsuccessful. On the morning after his return to Lake Cottage he was standing in front the house staring at Bell Lake, endeavouring, fruitlessly, to think of some way out of his difficulties, when he was startled by hearing the sound of wheels. Looking down the shady avenue which led to the house he saw a tax-cart approaching, and in a few moments he recognized the occupant of the vehicle.

"To think of the toil," he mused, "is apparently as good as to talk of him. Charles M'Carthy! What brings him here, I wonder?"

"Good morning, Mr. Usher," said the red-bearded man, as he approached.

"Good morrow and welcome," said Usher, with a show of cordiality.

M'Carthy stepped down from his trap, passing the reins to a boy seated behind, and going up to Usher he offered his hand. "I am glad to find you alone," he said. "Can I have a few words in private with you?"

"That you can," replied Usher. "What private more

spot could you find than the margin of this desolate lake?"

"Then do you mind walking round with me?"

"Not a bit of it. But first of all, won't you have something to warm you after you drive?"

"No, thanks; I am pretty nearly a water drinker."

"There are a few million gallons of your favourite fluid in front of you there," said Usher, "and though I am not a great spree-boy, I could wish just now—much as I love the old late—that a magician's wand could convert its waters into ten-year-old whiskey."

"The country-side would be somewhat demoralized if you had your wish."

"Not at all. I could afford then to build a stone wall round the lake, and roof it over, and drain it Into puncheons."

"Believe me, it Is nicer as it is. I envy your possession of a peaceful spot like this, Mr. Usher. I expect a man living here can hardly help being as peaceful as his surroundings."

"The quietness of it gets on my nerves sometimes, and makes me wish to hear a rattling gale, and to see the ocean boiling."

"You might get tired of that, as I did at Brownstown. When you feel the house shaking under you like a frightened horse, and know that the roof is prevented from flying into the next parish only because it is weighted down, and when you can fill your mouth with salt spray as you try to stand upright at your hall door—then you might begin to think that a quiet spot down in a valley was not to be sneered at. But to my business—which is hardly business."

They were now walking along a winding path which skirted the lake for a short distance, and then plunged into a walk bordered with shrubs and trees. Usher was wondering what business his visitor could have with him. He could hardly be aware of his embarrassments. M'Carthy, he saw, was evidently at a loss to know how to open the negotiations—whatever they might be.

"I needn't tell you who or what I am, Mr. Usher," said he; "but I think it is no harm to say that I am well off as to worldly things, that my age is forty-eight, and that there isn't, so far as I know, a taint in my blood."

"What on earth are you driving at?" said Usher, smiling at this abrupt declaration. "Do you think I am an insurance agent seeking for your life?"

"You are the head of an old and honourable house," said M'Carthy, "and that is why I come to you now."

"You're puzzling me, I assure you," said Usher, still smiling, and still quite at a loss to know what the red-bearded man was keeping at the back of his mind. "I know you don't want to borrow money from me, and if you did I couldn't lend it. But if you want to lend me money you'd be astonished to find how quickly I'd jump at it." He tried to laugh, but his attempt was a failure.

"If I thought you were in earnest you might find me very willing to advance you money," said M'Carthy. "Don't forget to give me a chance when you're looking for a local capitalist," he added, with a swift, uneasy glance at Usher. "But that's not what brought me here. No, Mr. Usher. What I want to ask you is for permission to pay my addresses to your sister."

An angry frown distorted Usher's face, and for some moments he did not attempt to speak. M'Carthy, too,

was silent, and visibly ill at ease.

“It is a very extraordinary proposal and comes upon me with something like a shock,” said Usher at last. He had to damp down some angry fires before he could suffer himself to continue the conversation.

“What is extraordinary about it?” asked M’Carthy, his eyes fixed on the ground.

“Many things. Difference in years. Absence of the ordinary intercourse which leads to such matters. And, to be candid with you, and meaning no offence, the difference in our respective stations.”

“You come of good old Catholic stock. So do I,” said M’Carthy boldly, lifting his head in the air as he spoke.

“All the same there is a difference. Your manner of bringing up and my sister’s are not of a piece.”

“Possibly not. Yet I don’t think I am a bore. I am aware your sister is an accomplished young lady. She will not find me deficient in matters of education or enlightenment. Her faith is my faith. Her country is my country. Believe me, Mr. Usher, I have not approached you lightly or without full consideration of the objections you might urge, and have urged. All I ask is for your consent to pay my addresses to Miss Usher. If she declines to consider my proposals—well she will make an unhappy man of me but I shall endeavour to bear my disappointment like a man.”

“Hang it all, M’Carthy, you’re a fine fellow! But I can’t see my way to this. There are other reasons which I can hardly discuss with you.”

“Has Miss Usher any attachment which would stand in my way?”

“I cannot answer that question.”



"If she has, of course, it puts a different complexion on the matter."

"To be candid with you, I suspect there is something of the kind, but it is very nebulous indeed. I hardly ought to say this, but you have been so candid yourself that I don't like to withhold an answer. If you won't be offended at my saying it—and I assure you I don't say it with any intention of offending you—I'd be very sorry to hear that my sister would consider a proposal from you favourably. Indeed, for the matter of that, I might truthfully say I'd be very sorry to lose her to anybody, except perhaps to some very dear and intimate friend. We have grown up together, M'Carthy, more like father and child in some respects than brother and sister. I verily believe it would knock me over altogether to be separated from Kate; and to see her marry into the house of a stranger would almost break my heart. I am perhaps not in very high spirits just now, and I could not—honestly, I couldn't—approve of her accepting you—even if she were willing to listen to such a proposal."

"You will be getting married one day yourself. Mr. Usher"—Bob shrugged his shoulders—"and perhaps you it be glad to know then that your sister is comfortable and happy. It is the way of the world to break up such attachments as yours and hers."

"Perhaps so—worse luck!" said Usher gloomily. "Well, look here, Mr. M'Carthy, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll speak to my sister at the first favourable opportunity, and I'll see you again, or write to you."

"Thank you. That's all I can ask. That's all I came here to ask. And now I'll be pushing on to Brownstown."

"Oh, indeed you won't," said Usher. "Not just yet, at

any rate. I'd like to have your opinion about some of my roses. If you envy me the possession of the lake, I envy you the possession of that garden at Ballytruckle. You'll have a bit of luncheon with us presently."

"Very well. Thanks."

"But understand, not a word of this to anybody until you hear from me."

"That is understood," said M'Carthy, a look of pleasure on his broad, bearded face.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### UNREST

ON Saturday morning Frank was distrait. Fitzgerald noticed his abstractedness at breakfast, and it occurred to the good natured man that it might be no bad thing to relieve the young Englishman of his company for a short time. So he declared that he had some business in the neighbourhood which would occupy him for the greater part of the day, and perhaps Mr. Venables might have some correspondence to attend to, or might care to go sketching.

The younger man thanked his companion for his suggestions, and said he was very glad to be reminded of letter writing, and that he would probably open his neglected colour box when he had finished his letters.

When he was left alone, Frank unlocked his writing case and sat down to report progress to his mother. He felt that he had made some progress, though he would hardly have cared to have been cross-examined about it by Mr. Weekes. He wrote a cheerful letter telling his mother, among other things, that he had visited his uncle's house; also that he had become acquainted with

a kinsman, who was much concerned about pedigree as herself—only this kinsman's point of view was one which would flutter fashionable dovecots in England. He gave what he considered to be an amusing description of the master of Prospect House, but he said nothing about the daughter of the house, though her image was haunting him. He informed his mother that he now believed his uncle was alive, though what had become of him was absolutely unknown. However, he playfully declared, he held severable valuable clues and he hoped they would lead him out of the maze eventually. He then gave a brief description of Fitzgerald, speaking most warmly of his strange companion.

After he had sealed this letter he determined he would write to his cousin Kitty, but this he found to be an impossible task. He tore up several sheets of note paper on which he had written sentences, and, almost unconsciously, he began to write Geraldine's name on the blotting pad. Then he tried to make a sketch of her, and wasted in the attempt more paper than he had devoted in his abortive attempts to complete a letter to his cousin.

"I might as well be trying to paint the Atlantic," he exclaimed, rising from his chair and leaning out of the half-open window of the cottage. "I felt my littleness yesterday as a sketcher of sea and sky when the mystery of the ocean perplexed me. Now I feel my littleness as a sketcher of faces when the mystery of this girl's face tantalizes me. Have I fallen in love?" he asked himself. "Have I, Frank Aylward, possible heir to a viscounty, surrendered myself to the first country girl I meet in this seductive island? What would my mother think of

me if she could read my thoughts now? She implored me not to come back with an Irish brogue. What on earth would she say if I told her I wanted to return some day with an Irish wife—an Irish farmer's daughter? But do I? Perhaps when one falls in love so easily one falls out of it with a greater ease. Am I in love, or am I merely the victim of some brain-sick fancy?"

Then he tried to dismiss Geraldine from his mind, and to focus his thoughts on the mission which brought him to Ireland. He returned to his desk determined to write down the heads of various things which had come to his knowledge since his arrival, but he could not concentrate his thoughts upon the subject; and after destroying some more paper he went into the hall, put on his hat, and strode out of the house.

He walked along the road which led to Waterford, and after he had accomplished a short distance he saw Andrew Kelly, the uncouth little man recognized Frank at once, and, bowing profoundly, he approached and handed him a letter, saying:

"From Misther Weekes, sir, an' if there's any answer I'll call for it laither, at your lodgin', sir."

"Very well," said Frank, bestowing on the little man a half-crown. "Go and get something for yourself in the village, and call at Rose Cottage in an hour. I suppose you have walked out from town?"

"I have, sir, an' many thanks to you for your goodness to me. Sure it's aisy to know a gentleman."

"I suppose you mean that a gentleman is one who has loose silver in his pocket?"

"Indeed I don't, sir. It isn't the money; it's the way it's given. I'm more accustomed, worse luck! to kicks than

to ha-pence or half-crowns; an' I'd rather have a kick from yourself, sir, than half-crown from some caubogue of a fellow that 'ud toss it at me as if he was throwin' a cracker to a dog."

"I'm afraid, Andy, you're all too fond of blarney in this country—but get along now, for you must be tired after your long walk."

As Andy Kelly shuffled off, Flank opened Weekes' letter. It was so legibly written that he found no difficulty in reading it as he continued to walk.

"DEAR SIR," wrote the managing clerk. "I am sorry to inform you that it is known to a member of the M'Carthy family—to wit, Charles of this city—that your business in this country is concerned with Lord C.'s appearance. The noble Red Man let it slip to me in a moment of anger that he had spotted you. This discovery will render it very difficult for you—if not impossible—to pursue your researches in the neighbourhood of Rhi-na-Shark in secrecy. How much or how little our mutual friend knows about you I cannot tell, but I am now convinced that he knows (or, at any rate, if he desired, could know), a good deal an to what has become of Lord C. He has no doubt informed the M'Carthy family, who live at Brownstown, that he spies a stranger; and if there is mischief afoot you may possibly be spirited away in the fearless old fashion. I would respectfully suggest that you do not travel alone in the neighbourhood of Rhi-na-Shark. You will most likely be safe so long as you are in the company of Mr, Fitzgerald; but without him I should not, if I were an insurance office, be inclined to accept you as a first-class risk.

“I have again been in consultation with the county inspector of Police, and I regret to say he has not discovered the faintest clue. If you wish to have a constable *en déshabillé* (or otherwise) told off especially for year protection, the article can be supplied free of cost. Of course, this would in some ways add to your difficulties, but it might be well for your personal safety, which is naturally, I presume, a matter to you (as it would be to the undersigned) of the foremost importance. Perhaps you will come into town early next week and talk the matter over with me. Mr. Mason sends his kindest regards and hopes (as I do) that you are enjoying the freshness of the scenery.—Your obedient servant,

“EDWARD HENRY WEEKES.”

“P.S.—Don’t forget Father Neptune—M’Grath—when you get to Tramore.”

“What an irritating fellow this is,” said Frank, as he placed Weekes’ letter in its envelope and put it into his pocket. “And so the butter merchant ‘spotted’ me. Well, if he did, I spotted him, and I was not far wrong when I thought he showed signs of alarm in the railway carriage at the mention of my uncle’s name. That ought to be a feather in my cap. And if he knows anything surely the authorities can be appealed to; or is it a fact that English law does not rule here?”

Frank fell to considering again if old Simon M’Carthy had deliberately sought him out and invited him to his house for some occult purpose. And could it be that this beautiful girl, his grand-daughter, had been privy to any knavery that might be on foot?

He hated himself the next moment for his suspicions,

and Geraldine's eyes haunted him once more with their purity and pathos.

One thing he decided on doing in defiance of the advice of that fellow Weekes; he would explore the neighbourhood of Rhi-na-Shark without the protection of a body-guard, Fitzgerald or policeman. Weekes' assumption that his own safety was of prime importance to him unduly angered Frank. He had never known fear—at all events not the fear which Weekes had in his clerkly mind. Then he remembered Corbett, the boatman, and his own admission to Fitzgerald that he should not like to get into collision with such a man; but this only fixed in him the desire to prove that his courage had not failed.

Retracing his steps to the cottage, he summoned Miss O'Dwyer and asked her to prepare a light meal for him. He meant, he told her, to take a solitary walk to Tramore. He ascertained from the old lady that there was a shorter way to Rhi-na-Shark than the way Fitzgerald had brought him. He might, Miss O'Dwyer informed him either travel all the way to Tramore by a road which wound its way further inland than the Back Strand embankment and walk along the embankment, when he struck it; or he might cross the ferry at Rhi-na-Shark, and continue his way to Tramore along the big strand. It was almost due west from Dunmore to Rhi-na-Shark, and if he kept that fact in view he could hardly go much out of the direct course.

Frank experienced some difficulty in deciding what he ought to say to Fitzgerald to explanation of his erratic conduct. After some pondering he made up his mind to leave note saying that he felt out of sorts, and had taken it into his head that a solitary walk would chase



the blues away. He would return late in the evening. He had, he told Fitzgerald, ascertained from Miss O'Dwyer that in case his wanderings took him to Tramore he could hire a car there and drive back.

Frank had now to answer Mr. Weekes' note. He thanked the writer for his zeal and his advice. He would pay a visit to Mr. Mason's office early in the following week. He considered that if he was not making headway he was at least losing no ground. He concluded his brief letter with a post-script: "Thanks, I do not require police protection."

"I have an idea," mused the young man, "that this class of letter, curt and yet displaying no trace of temper, but keeping the fellow at arm's length, must irritate him. Very likely if I respond in his own style he would address me as 'Venables, old boy!' and pat me on the back."



## CHAPTER XXV

### A MEETING AND A PROPHECY

WHEN Frank was about an hour on the to Rhi-na-Shark he found he had travelled considerably out of his westerly course. It was about one o'clock, and he could plainly see that for some time he had been unconsciously walking southward instead of westward.

As he stood and looked at the shimmering blue sky, his watch in his hand, he had no difficulty in finding the south, and it was that direction his eyes had been turned for some time. He smiled as he reflected that he had been moving toward Prospect House. "The desire of the moth for the star, of the day for the morrow," he murmured, quoting his beloved Shelley. He held out his right arm laterally, and gazing to the direction to which his extended hand pointed, he picked out some landmarks; and then, scrambling over a hedge, he pursued his way in a westwardly direction.

Remembering Fitzgerald's method of crossing country, he thought he could not do better than follow the example of his newly-made friend. He had not walked westward for five minutes when a wild desire to turn to

the left and proceed southward possessed him. Again he halted. What excuse could he offer for visiting Prospect House so soon again? The warnings of Weekes hardly occurred to him, or if they did, they occurred only to be dismissed instantly and contemptuously. Was he becoming crazy? No. The world seemed to him the same as it seemed yesterday—the same, except that now he could conjure up mental pictures of Geraldine's eyes, of Geraldine herself.

But falling in love was one thing and marrying quite another. It astonished him to discover that he, who had never before seriously contemplated matrimony, was now discussing with himself the pros and cons of a marriage with one whom he had never seen until the previous day—a young girl belonging to a country and to a faith as foreign to him as the circle in which she moved.

He told himself this must be a sort of madness; his mother would most certainly regard it as sheer insanity. Yet his great-grandfather had done this thing which he was now contemplating vaguely, and no one accused him of madness. And when the young man had turned those things over in his mind, he asked himself—for the first time—how he was to know that he could induce Geraldine M'Carthy to listen to him? What a bumptious, conceited fellow he was! What an egotist! She might have—no doubt she had—a sweetheart of her own. It would have been very odd if there was not a numerous hand of worshippers at such a shrine. Already her hand might be pledged. This reflection stung him mentally, as the sand and the wind had stung him the previous day, and he moved forward—towards the west—like a man

battling with a storm.

He walked onward for more than half-an-hour, careless as to what direction he was moving in, and possessed of a sub-consciousness that he was being watched or dogged. He had lost all interest in his mission. His tumultuous thoughts concerning this young girl who had bewitched him dominated all other things.

Suddenly he found himself on the summit of an elevated ridge, and beheld, in the valley beneath, his uncle's mansion. He knew now that he had wandered out of the proper track, but that his wanderings had not led him very far astray. From where he stood there was a pleasant view of Rhi-na-Shark House, embowered to foliage. The prospect of the mansion recalled young Aylward to a more ordinary mental condition. He found himself regretting that he had no sketching materials with him. The landscape would have inspired him to make a sketch that would at least please himself and interest his mother; he was anxious, moreover, to give Fitzgerald some evidence of his skill. The ocean and its mighty barriers had overwhelmed him; but there was something within his *métier* which appealed to him.

As he stood gazing downward at Lord Clashmore's house, he observed with surprise an easel set up in a distant nook to left. Who on earth, he wondered, in this uncultured region, could be sketching? Perhaps it was the mythical painter whom he had invented for the benefit of the man M'Carthy on the train. The artist was hidden from view behind a low rock which jutted out from the slope of the hill. There was a freemasonry amongst artists, and this stranger, whoever he was, would probably be pleased to meet a brother of the brush.

Frank walked obliquely downwards to the neighbourhood of the easel. As he turned the corner of the jutting rock which was sheltering the sketcher his heart leaped. It was Geraldine! She wore the same dress that she had worn when he had first seen her; the only change in her attire was that here black straw hat was replaced by a white one.

“Miss M’Carthy!” he exclaimed, hardly able to control his voice. “What a pleasant surprise! I was expecting to find some gruff, bearded Bohemian.”

Geraldine rose from her camp-stool, and shyly offered him her hand. “I must admit you startled me,” she said. “It is very rarely one meets a stranger in this out-of-the-way place.”

“May I look at your sketch?” asked Frank.

“If you please. I don’t think it will stand any severe criticism.”

It was a sketch, nearly finished, of Rhi-na-Shark House from almost the same point of view which had a short time before appealed to the young man. The drawing was no mean performance, although it lacked the divine touch of genius; it was firm, free, and correct, and the colour was true. Frank would have been delighted with himself if he had made so good a sketch, though possibly if he had not seen it with the eyes of a lover he might have criticized it more severely.

“This is really excellent, Miss M’Carthy,” said he. “Your foliage is alive.”

“It is very kind of you to say so. I think you told me you painted a little yourself.”

“But this makes me ashamed of myself,” said Frank. Then the young man turned and glanced at Geraldine.

For a moment her wonderful eyes looked at him gratefully, and thrilled every nerve in his body.

Then she dropped their lids, and Frank felt as though the sun on a brilliant day had hid itself behind a cloud. Half-an-hour ago he would have given all he possessed for the privilege of this interview, and now he found himself unable to make any use of the golden opportunity. He would have liked to have held her white hand and told her that she was the most beautiful woman in the world; that the sight of her eyes ravished his senses; but he found that he could utter nothing but the veriest commonplace.

Though Geraldine was embarrassed, she showed no signs of embarrassment. She put her drawing carefully into her portfolio, declaring that she was already late, and must hurry home. Frank asked her to permit him to accompany her, but she declined his request with a pleasant smile. "My brother, Charlie, generally comes to meet me," she said, "when I go on an excursion like this. I expect to find him near the top of the hill."

Frank asked leave to carry the small easel to the top of the hill, and Geraldine graciously granted the permission. The young man, though he had offered to see Geraldine home, was not by any means anxious to see her brother Charlie. That young bucolic had, he considered, been deliberately rude to him the previous evening. When conversing in Frank's presence the young M'Carthy had occasionally spoken in Irish. They generally adopted this plan of campaign when they found themselves in the company of anyone whom they regarded as an anti-Irish Irishman; and an Englishman, in their eyes, was as much to be despised as a bad

Irishman was to be hated. Fortunately, they found few opportunities of displaying their antagonism to Briton or West Briton.

Frank explained to Geraldine that he was on his way to Rhi-na-Shark ferry. At the top of the hill she indicated to him the direction he should take, and then she put out her hand and said, "Good-bye." There was a quiet note of dismissal in her voice.

The young man walked away floundering in the Slough of Despond, and he could see no shining Wicket-gate.

He now knew he was irrevocably in love with Geraldine M'Carthy, and he felt that she was as far from him as the stars. He had rarely been arrogant, and as rarely did he harbour self-conceit. Pride he had known and vanity, though he had struggled to keep these qualities in subjection. But the humility which now possessed him was an absolutely novel and perplexing sensation.

As he blundered along over-hedges and ditches he again became possessed of the feeling that somebody was following him. The ground over which he was travelling was poorly cultivated, and only rarely did he encounter a toiler. But the feeling that he was being watched clung to him.

It was about three o'clock when he arrived at Rhi-na-Shark ferry. He had been on the march for nearly three hours, and he was weary in mind and body, and in poor condition for prosecuting investigations of any kind. He was unpleasantly sensible of this, and it caused him some additional heart-burning that he, who had prided himself on his level-headedness and stout-heartedness, should have been so quickly vanquished by the bright eyes of a strange woman who regarded him with indif-



ference.

He found the neighbourhood of the ferry us deserted as he had found it the previous day. He approached the house of the ferry-man and knocked at the door. Corbett appeared and did not give any sign that he recognized Frank. He gruffly asked if it was the ferry he was wanting to cross, and being told it was. he demanded five shillings for his fee. Frank tendered the money, and incautiously observed that five shillings seemed a high price for ferryage.

“You needn’t pay it,” said Corbett. “Put your money back in your pocket, an’ you can swim across the creek as aisy as you like. There’s no man to hinder you.”

“You needn’t be so ill-tempered, my good fellow,” said Frank, “because I made a careless remark.”

“Don’t ’good fellow’ me!” said Corbett. “I don’t want yer dirty money—I wouldn’t touch it now at any price. The ferry-boat here is not a public conveyance. It belongs to his honour, Lord Clashmore, an’ he’s the only man alive that I’m bound to ferry across whether I like it or no. But come on. You’re a sthranger, an’ I wouldn’t like to have it said that I disobliged a thraveller.”

Frank fancied that Corbett had some object in displaying this surliness, and in making this last speech. He had, consciously or unconsciously, laid emphasis on the words, “the only man alive.”

When they got to the ferry-boat—a shallow rectangular-nosed craft, usually termed a pram—Frank stepped on board, and Corbett silently followed him.

“I am going on to Tramore,” said Frank, as Corbett shipped his oars. “I suppose there is no difficulty in finding the way there?”

“Not a morsel,” said Corbett. “When I land you, all you have to do is to sthrike round by the butt of the Rabbit Burrow—them hills of sand across there—an’ you’re on Tramore Sthrand, with a clear run before you.”

“What about travelling round by the other side of the hills, to the right?”

“You can’t do it,” said Corbett. “The sand is too soft; it’s more like mud than sand in parts, an’ the tide sweeps in there, an’ might overtake you.”

“This is a desolate place.” said Frank, gazing round about him.

“It is then,” assented the ferryman. “An’ here you are now on the other side of Rhi-na-Shark!” and with a swift pull he sent the small boat flying into a miniature dock out of the side of the river bank.

Frank stepped ashore, bidding good-day to the ferryman, who answered him with a nod of his head.

The traveller knew he was being watched by Corbett as he walked slowly across the sands, making for that part of the strand which lay between the Rabbit Burrow and the ocean. Occasionally he halted to gaze around him, and every time he looked towards the creek he saw the ferryman sitting motionless in his boat. “He evidently doesn’t desire to conceal his anxiety to watch my movements,” reflected Frank. “I wonder if this is carelessness, stupidity; or is it suspicion, with fear at the bottom?”

It took Frank a full quarter of an hour to get round the corner of the first great sand-hill. The strand upon which he was walking was very soft—his boots were covered at each step, and progress was slow and tiring. When he got round the base of the first of the sand-

hills a view of the town of Tramore, perched on the top of the arm of the bay which stretched itself out to the Metalman Head, was disclosed. As he wandered slowly down the strand the waters of the bay at his left, and the sand-hills rising to the right of him, he was impressed considerably by the loneliness of the place. Look in what direction he might, he could see no sign of human life nearer than Tramore, which was full three miles distant from Rhi-na-Shark. He now realized how easily a man might be snatched out of sight here, and no clue as to manner of his disappearance be found, it would be useless, he considered, for a stranger to make researches hereabouts. Nothing but a knowledge of what had actually happened would be of any use, and the only way to arrive at such knowledge was to seek for the motive which had caused the disappearance of his uncle.

A desire to explore the heart of the sand hills now seized him, and he walked up a shingly slope which protected the base of the hills for a considerable distance. As he got to the top of the slope he was startled to see a human figure that of an old woman. She was seated at the base of one of the sand hills—a basket alongside her. The young man walked towards the old woman, and as he approached she stared him out of time-worn grey eyes. She muttered some words in a language which Frank thought he recognized as Irish.

“Good day,” said he, baiting close to them old woman.

“Good day, yer honour,” she answered, still gazing curiously at him.

“What have you got in the basket?”

“Shells, yer honour, that I gather in the Burrow.”

Frank saw that these were curiously-formed and curiously-marked shells, all belonging to one species of sea-snail. "And what do you do with these?" he asked, picking a few out of the basket.

"I make necklaces of 'em, yer honour, for the childher that comes to the sayside in the summer."

"They're vary pretty shells," he said. "That doesn't seem a very lively way of earning a living." There was a cheerful ring in this old woman's voice which touched the young man.

"Oh, I get cockles on the Back Strand, too, sir. An' sometimes I pick up a thrifle from young ladies and young gentlemen that like to have their fortunes towld."

"A teller of fortunes, too!" exclaimed Frank. "Could you tell mine?"

"I'd try, if yer honour likes," said the old woman, rising to her feet, her grey eyes glowing

"I suppose I must cross your palm," said Frank good-humouredly.

The fortune teller made no reply. She seemed to be lost in thought.

Frank, urged by a generous impulse, slipped a coin into the hand of the old woman, and as she gazed at it a look of intense surprise came into her face.

"Gold!" she cried, her eyes glaring at a half-sovereign which the young man had placed in her shrivelled hand. She caught Frank's left hand, and gazed at it a while, bending back his fingers and looking askew at the palm. Then, having shut her eyes for a few moments, she reopened them, and said in a strange, half-dreamy voice:

"Look at the sky in the north. What colour is it?"

"Deeply blue," replied Frank, amused at the manner

of the fortune-teller.

“Does that remind you or the colour of her eyes?” said the sibyl. And without waiting for a reply, she continued, “What do you see in the sky out at the south, there?”

“A white cloud.”

“Is it whiter than her hand?”

“You’re an Irish fortune-teller, without any doubt. You ask questions instead of prophecies.”

“Doesn’t your heart give you the right answer? It will tell you better than I can. I’m sorry for you, young gentleman,” continued the old woman, “for there is throuble before you. There are great prizes for you, but in securin’ one you may lose the others. Nothing can guide your choice rightly but the prayers from a pure heart.”

“My good old Sphinx,” interrupted Freak. “I’m afraid you will have to explain yourself.”

The old woman shook her head. “I can only say it as I hear it said to me,” she murmured. “You’re seekin’ something now. Something that has danger in it. Don’t be hasty. Come closer.” Here she lowered her voice. “In there, behind those hills of sand, there is a sandy plain, and in the western corner of it a wooden post stands up. Go there at seven o’clock on the evenin’ of the first of the new moon, an’ stand by that post—but, as you value your life, don’t go a step to the east of it, or the north, or the south. An’ maybe you’ll see what you’re searchin’ for. An’ come prepared an’ be watchful, for others may come, an’ disasther may befall you. And may God bless an’ protect you, an’ may the heart of her with the blue eyes turn to you!”

She uttered the last half-dozen sentences in a peculiar sing-song voice, as though she were repeating

something learnt by heart. Then she dropped Frank's hand, and speaking in the cheery tone she had adopted when first addressing him, she said "I hope yer honour is pleased with yer fortune?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to explain some of it to me." said Frank.

"Begor, that I can't sir, for I don't remember what I towld you. I gave it to you as it was given to me, an' it's passed away from me as if I never had a voice in it at all. God bless yer honour. It's aisy to see you have a kind nature. An' the prayers of ould Peggy, maybe, will bring blessin's on yer head—though 'tis herself that says it."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE

THE visits of Charles M'Carthy to Prospect House were rare and irregular. The statement he had made to Frank Aylward on board the steamboat that his father had quarrelled with him for embarking in trade was not untrue, but it was not the only curious cause of quarrel—or rather of coolness—between old Simon and his son.

Charles was the youngest of four children. Simon's eldest son, John, had, at an early age, shown a strong inclination for study, and he had been destined for the Church, but after a course of training for the priesthood he had some scruples about his fitness for Holy Orders and had retired to Brownstown. The second child of Simon was a daughter, Mary; the third, a son called after his grandfather of the black hair. This Teague was—with the expectation of the eldest son becoming a priest—looked upon as the future ruler of the house, and it was a source of considerable disappointment to him that his brother John had returned to the parental roof. When John had been about a twelvemonth at home he married, and his marriage involved a change in the

domestic arrangements of Prospect House. Mary, who always sided with her brother Teague in everything, fled with that hot-headed young man to Australia, about the time that gold was first found in that continent. Charles, youngest son, was "an odd child." He was in appearance and disposition utterly unlike either of his brothers or sister. They were black-haired, and had deep, dark-blue eyes; they were tall, handsome, and lightly built: Charles was dumpy, plain-featured, red-haired, and his eyes were a pale blue. Old Simon had a theory that the red hair and the light-blue eyes denoted a cropping-up of an old and abominated Danish strain. Simon had possibly heard of the word atavism, but he always stuck to his theory that Charles was a Dane, and he could never warm to the boy.

The eldest son of the house—the apple of his father's eye—died shortly after the birth of his youngest child, Geraldine, and John's wife followed her husband to the grave a years later. Simon M'Carthy refused to recognize his son Charles as being the heir presumptive to the house, though. Teague in Australia had emphatically declared his intention of remaining at the Antipodes, and had offered to resign to his youngest brother any claims which he (Teague) might have to the succession. There were rumours in the neighbourhood of Brownstown that the wild Teague in Australia was sending home piles of money to his father. Mary had married a rich squatter, and to her also was credit given for contributing largely to the fund which was to purchase eventually the confiscated estates of the M'Carthys.

When Charles M'Carthy (after his interview with Usher at Lake Cottage) arrived at Prospect House it



was about four o'clock. He learned from Anty that his father was dozing in his armchair in the parlour. It was a mild and languorous afternoon; the high wind which had blown across the bay on the previous day had now become the gentlest of zephyrs. Charles also learned on his arrival that his niece was in the dairy; so after putting up his horse and trap he sallied out across the fields towards the solitary building on the brow of the cliffs.

As he approached the dairy he saw Geraldine coming towards him. She was surprised to see her uncle, as no intimation of his visit had preceded him.

After some enquiries after the health of her brothers, and some references (apparently jocosely, for Charles M'Carthy smiled as he gave utterance to them) to the quality of the butter, he turned to his niece, and said in a more serious tone:

"I suppose we had better go back to the house. I didn't like to disturb the governor. I came out here to give him a special warning about something."

"About what, uncle?" asked Geraldine anxiously.

"Oh, something concerning the mess these wild brothers of yours have got us into, of course. There is a private detective in the neighbourhood searching for Lord Clashmore, or for clues to him; and in making his enquiries he might stumble across something else here."

"A detective!" said the young girl. "That is a police agent, a man in plain clothes?"

"Yes. Of course, he needn't be a police agent to be a detective. In fact, the fellow that's here is no doubt from one of the London private enquiry offices. Anyhow, everyone here must be on their guard about him, for,

even if he is the most stupid ass in creation, it won't do for him to have a free run over this part of the country; we must all have our eyes upon him."

"Will you describe him then, uncle?"

"He's a tall, well built young fellow, with brown curly hair and brown eyes—rather a good-looking, gentlemanly chap. But there can hardly be any mistake about him. He is intending to appear in the disguise of an artist in search of something to paint, and I am told he has adopted Larry Fitzgerald for his guide—I was unlucky enough to be the means of introducing him to Master Larry. What's the matter, Ger?"

"Is the young man's name Venables?" asked Geraldine.

"Yes—that's the name. How did you know? You don't mean to say," he went on quickly, a look of anger or disappointment, or fear—it was not easy to tell which—in his eyes, "that this spy has been here already?"

"I do, uncle," said Geraldine, speaking with agitation. "At least a young man answering to your description, who was introduced as Mr. Venables, spent yesterday afternoon and evening in the house. He came with Mr. Fitzgerald."

"May the mother of Moses melt that meddling looney, Fitzgerald! He means no mischief, I know, but he blunders into it—confound him!"

"I don't think—I really don't think, uncle, that this young man can be a detective."

"Why not? Because he is a good-looking fellow, is it?"

"No," replied Geraldine, blushing; "but because he is a gentleman."

"Gentlemen go into all sorts things now in England.

You'll find sons of dukes in tea houses, and marquises retailing coals, and earls whose wives keep bonnet shops. Indeed, to come nearer home," he added, with a short laugh, "royalty isn't ashamed—more power to it!—to shed the light of its countenance on butter merchants. But do you mean to say that the governor allowed a stranger to prowl about the place for half a day—an Englishman!"

"It was grandfather who asked him to the house. He met him over in Dunmore the evening before last."

"The governor must be going daft. Does he show any other symptoms of brain-softening?"

"Oh, uncle—indeed he doesn't! Why should you speak like this?"

"I can only say I never heard of such folly. Did the young Englishman meet your brothers?"

"He did, uncle."

"And didn't they suspect anything?"

"How could they? Haven't I told you that grandfather asked the stranger to the house?"

M'Carthy was silent for some moments. He walked alongside his niece, puffing his cheeks and tugging at his fiery beard.

"Look, here. Ger." said he, "if anything is discovered I'll wash my hands publicly of the whole affair—I mean the last affair of course, of course. I can't afford to have myself mixed up with suspicious or dangerous transactions now—no, not for the mines at Golconda. John and Charlie will have to take all the burden of their own acts on their own shoulders. They've made a nice mess of things, just as matters were shaping themselves comfortably."

"I'm perfectly sure, uncle, that the gentleman who came with Mr. Fitzgerald was not prying into our affairs in any way." Geraldine was about trembling to add something concerning a more recent meeting with the young Englishman, but her uncle interrupted her harshly.

"Rubbish, my dear child! Of course, that is his artfulness—to leave that impression. I didn't give him credit for so much cleverness, I must confess."

"Where did you meet him, uncle?"

"He travelled with me from Paddington to Milford. Watched me on the platform, and followed me into my compartment. I didn't think he'd get out here for a few days at any rate, and naturally I didn't expect that the governor would invite him to the house. I never heard of such a thing. But I blame that meddlesome ne'er-do-well Fitzgerald. What happened yesterday? Just tell me."

"They arrived about four o'clock, and remained talking to grandfather until the boys came in for their supper—or dinner, as we chose to call it yesterday for grandeur. And then, about eight o'clock, Charlie drove them back to Dunmore."

"And did they never stir out of the house the whole time?"

"Never once, until they left with Charlie."

"And what on earth was the detective doing—listening to the governor's raumaish?"

"Grandfather was speaking most of the time, certainly."

"I suppose he related the family annals to the detective. Trotted out Uncle Teague and Cousin Mary. How

the fellow must have laughed in his sleeve!"

"I told you he was a gentleman, uncle. You must have seen that for yourself."

"See what it is for a young fellow to be blessed with a handsome face! And so my handsome niece was touched by the air and manner of a private enquiry man. 'Pon my song, Geraldine, I gave you credit for more penetration. Is it blushing you are? No wonder."

Uncle and niece were now nearing Prospect House.

"Who is this young party coming towards us? I don't think I remember her," said M'Carthy.

"She is a girl I got for the dairy last week. They wanted some extra help there."

"Is she all right?"

"Quite, uncle."

"She looks a simple young creature, but it isn't easy to form correct opinions about the female sex, young or old."

The girl, who was about fifteen years of age, curtsied as she approached M'Carthy and his niece. The latter said:

"Well, Molly, where are you off to now, child?"

"I was going back to the dairy, Miss."

"It's locked up, Molly, now, for the evening. Go and do some sewing in the kitchen. Anty will give it to you."

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said the young girl, "but I thought I'd tell you a quare thing about the dairy yesterday."

Charles M'Carthy started, and ran his hand over his bearded face.

"What was that, Molly?" asked Geraldine.

"About the fire, Miss. I let it go out, Miss, by acci-

dent.”

“Oh, Molly, after all I said to you!”

“I’ll never do the like again, Miss. But what I was going to tell you, Miss, that when I went outside for some sticks to kindle the fire again the smoke was comin’ out of the chimley the same as if the fire was lightin’.”

“And why wouldn’t it, Molly, until the chimney grew cold? What a goose you are! Don’t let people hear my new dairy maid making a goose of herself. Run in now to Anty, child.”

When the young girl had passed on, Charles M’Carthy turned to his niece, a strange look in his eyes.

“Ger, my dear,” said he, “the fates which have been on our side for such a long time are beginning to work against us. But I must add that you turned the thing admirably. Those French nuns who are responsible for you must be clever and cool-headed ladies. I wish your wild brothers had some of your levelness, my dear.”

“They are causing me more anxiety, uncle, than anything in the world is worth.”

“I don’t doubt that, my dear Ger. But what’s to be done just now, I’m dashed if I know. Oh, I was forgetting that I had a letter in my pocket for you.”

“A letter for me!” exclaimed Geraldine.

“Ay, from your friend, Miss Usher. Here it is.”

“I dropped in at Lake Cottage on my way out here. I had a few words to say to Mr. Usher. He’s a fine fellow, Ger, isn’t he?” M’Carthy gazed at his niece out of the corners of his eyes as he spoke.

“He is, indeed,” said the young girl. “But come inside, uncle. You’ll find a cup of tea welcome, I expect; and grandfather is sure to be awake now.”

“She’s too smart for me,” mused Charles M’Carthy, as he followed Geraldine through the gate of Prospect House. “I couldn’t notice a tremor in her face when I mentioned Usher’s name. I wonder what she’d say if I told her what my object was in visiting Bell Lake? Well, if I can’t manage to arrange a match between the families she ought to be able to do it.”





## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE OLD MAN OF THE BATHS

As he continued his walk down the strand, Frank was puzzling himself over the words of the fortune teller. How could she have guessed what it was that was filling every corner of his mind? Her words surely pointed to Geraldine, if there was any meaning in words. And then this curious direction, about visiting the Back Strand at the first of the new moon, pointed to some sort of supernatural knowledge. Or could the old woman know certain things, and have deliberately lain in wait for him? Again did Weekes warning occur to him, and again did he dismiss them; if there was mischief afoot it could only mean that it would emanate from Prospect House, and he neither could nor would believe that Geraldine, or indeed her grandfather, had evil in their hearts.

“Oh, what a puzzle it all is!” he exclaimed. “I might cry out with Hamlet, 'O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right!'”

His thoughts soon took look another turn, or rather ran again in their former groove. Why had he not been able to summon up courage to say something to GERAL-

dine, which would indicate that he, at least, desired to be better acquainted with her? Did she suspect, he wondered, that he was a spy? He could not think she did, for he was certain Geraldine was a proud girl with a will of her own; and that she would never have offered him her hand if she supposed he was one who had come to pry into the affairs of her house. No, she had not heard the dangerous report yet. But if Weekes was right, if Geraldine's uncle did suspect him, then he might bid good-bye to any hope of approaching the lady of the blue eyes again, until he had thrown off the mask of disguise, even though it was only that of a name, which was becoming not only irksome, but detestable.

He made no effort now to conceal from himself that he was in love with old M'Carthy's granddaughter; all desire to debate the question had ceased. Again came the longing to pour out his troubles and perplexities into some friendly ear, and once more he made up his mind to consult Father Hackett. No doubt, the good old priest would be in the neighbourhood of Dunmore next day.

About four o'clock Frank reached the outskirts of the town of Tramore. Almost the first building he encountered was M'Grath Baths—a long straggling structure situated at the edge of the cliffs which overhung the western end of Tramore strand. He had no desire for food, but it occurred to him that a shower-bath would freshen and revive him, and perhaps the proprietor might chance to be in a communicative mood concerning the mysterious yawl, to whose presence in the bay Weekes and Fitzgerald attached much importance.

Outside the baths a corpulent old man was seated

on a low wooden bench. He was much stooped, but otherwise he did not wear the look of great age. Andy Kelly, Frank remembered, had stated that M'Grath was eighty years old. This man could not be within twenty years of that period of life, unless, indeed, he was a phenomenon like old Simon McCarthy. Moreover, the man did not look like a proprietor. He wore no coat or hat, and his woollen shirt was tucked up at the wrists, displaying most of his brawny fore-arms. His shaven face was large, round, and full. The sea and the sun had tanned it richly with his finger as Frank walked up to him, he enquired:

“Do you want a bath, sir?”

“Yes” said Frank. And then he remembered Weekes' suggestion, and he added: “A cold salt-water shower bath.”

“A first rate thing, sir,” said the old man. “Step inside, and I'll have it ready for you by the time you're undressed.”

The dressing room into which he was introduced was draughty and chilly, and Frank almost shuddered at the notion of stepping into cold water, for his walk had heated him a good deal. He was partially undressed when the old man returned, carrying a wooden pail of warm water. This he placed in the shower bath hole (which adjoined the dressing room)—it could scarcely be called a room—explaining that it was for the gentleman's feet. Frank was grateful for this unexpected luxury, and expressed his thanks with cordiality.

The shower-bath refreshed him wonderfully. All his tiredness and languor had vanished by the time he stood in front of the building again asking how much he owed.

“Sixpence, sir,” said the old man.

The price seemed ridiculous to Frank, and pulling out some loose silver he selected a half-crown, which he tendered, saying, “I’ll be glad if you’ll keep the change for yourself.”

“For meself,” said the old fellow, with a queer smile. “Begor, I’m meself an’ no wan else—William M’Grath that owns this little place. Here’s your change, sir.” passing two shillings to Frank.

“But sixpence is an absurdity, Mr. M’Grath,” persisted Frank.

“That may be,” said M’Grath, “but it’s the price. Divil a ha’penny more or less to the Lord Lieutenant himself if he took a bath here. You’re a sthranger, sir, I can see,” said he; “an Englishman, belike.”

“Yes,” said Frank “I am an Englishman, and this is my first sight from this point of view of your wonderful bay.”

“Don’t be speakin’ as if you wor thankin’ me for it,” said the old man with a chuckle. “It wasn’t I made it. It was here before I came, an’ ’twill be here afther me”

“If you don’t drain it all away, and make presents of it for sixpences.”

This seemed to tickle the old man.

“Begor, I’m here a long time now, sir—seventy-seven year, an’ the divil a much change in the matther of wather I see in Thramore Bay, hard as I’ve been workin’ for about half a century to cart it up here.”

“Seventy-seven years!” said Frank. “You don’t look within a dozen years of that.”

“The air is fine here, an’ there’s little to worry you. It isn’t age, I’m towld, that kills people in big towns, but

poor air and plenty of sthrain on their nerves. I feel my years light enough."

"It's a good record," said Frank; "more than the allotted span."

"Ay. I was a slip of a boy when the *Say-Hourse* was wrecked—but maybe you never heard of her?"

"I must confess I didn't,"

"She's a sort of landmark for dates here in Thramore, sir. She was a thtransport with a battalion of the Fifty-ninth on board, an' in the noonday she was dhriven into the bay in the heighth of a terrible gale. 'Twas in the month of January, Eighteen Hundred and Sixteen. As well as soldiers and sailors there was a lot of women and children on board. Everything that men could do was done to thry an' save 'em; but it wasn't God's will; only about thirty wor rescued. Two hundred and ninety-two men an' seventy-wan women an' childher perished out there in front of you. The sthrand was alive wid corpses for days. Most of 'em were buried in the Rabbit Burrow. My own father broke his leg and nearly lost his life rescuin' some of the poor craythurs."

"That must have been a horrible tragedy, certainly. Looking at the bay now, one could hardly fancy it could be so wicked."

"It's the divil's own bay some times. But won't you sit on the sate here?"

"I suppose you could tell many a tale about it," said Frank, seating himself. Mr. M'Grath following suit, and folding his arms as he gazed out at the Atlantic.

"I could then," said the old man. "Many a tale. There used to be yarns about threasure that was found on the sthrand belongin' to that same *Say-Hourse*. She had a

lot of goold on board, but the divil a copper of it I ever came across. Maybe I'd amuse you if I towld ye what happened to me wance about a wreck—though, God between us an' all harm! it isn't a very proper thing to be thryin' to rise a laugh out of a disasther. But as it occurs to me I'll tell you the story. There was a foreign ship—a Greek—dhriven in here in a gale wan winther's day, an' it was aisy to see that she was booked. Anyway the lifeboat was launched, an' I went out in her, an' afther a tough fight we got under the lee side of the ship, just as she struck on the rocks out of Brownstown Head there. The say was roarin' like the divil as it went flyin' over her masts, an' the screech of the win' was enough to dhrive terror into your heart. We shouted to the crew to throw us a rope, but the misfortunate dagoes couldn't hear us, or didn't undherstand, an' wor so distracted that they didn't seem able to help themselves; an' man alive! before you could say Jack Robinson, the moment was gone by. Wan lump of a say, like a mountain let loose, sthruck her a box, an' sent her into halves, just the same as if you wor snappin' a stick across your knee, or crunchin' a nut with your tooth. Our boat was capsized, an' our oars broke into matches. We clung to the boat, an' some way or other we managed to right her; but the divil a sailor out of that ship did we ever see alive afther."

"That must have been a terrible business." said Frank, as the old man paused.

"It was then. My wrist was twisted out of its socket; an' how the divil I kept hangin' on to the lifeboat I don't know. But that's only the first part of the story, sir. A couple of evenin's aftherwards, up near the Rabbit

Burrow, a man by the name of Connolly was comin' from Rhi-na-Shark. It was pitch-dark at the time, an' begor, what did he do but stumble over somethin' on the sthrand. He put his hand out, and it touched the cowl'd cheek of a corpse; an' bein' a cowardly lump of a fellow, he ran along the sthrand like the divil, an' never cried halt until he got to my door. Faith, I thought it was best to go up to the Burrow at wanst, fearin' Connolly was mistook an' that it mightn't be a corpse at all, but some poor craychure only half dhrowned. I took a lanthorn wud me, an' some brandy an' I throtted up the sthrand. But a corpse it was, lookin' as fresh in the cheeks, I give you my word, as if 'twas only asleep the craychure was. Begob, I cried over it as if he was wan of me own blood, an' carryin' him up to a dhry sheltered place at the back of the sthrand. Connolly and meself left him, coverin' him over wud my greatcoat. We reported the matther to the police, an' there was an inquest. Without doubt he was a foreign sailor—was of the crew of that same Greek ship. The coroner offered Connolly thirty shillings to bury him dacent, an' the cowardly fellow almost declined the job. But his poverty was sthronger than his cowardliness, an' he took the money and buried him. Two days afther the same, Connolly found another dead sailor on the sthrand, an' he got the buryin' of this poor daygo too, an' seemin'ly his courage was improvin'. Next day he found another of the crew an' begob many a poor fellow was beginnin' to get jealous of Connolly's good fortune. But the fourth time he was nailed, for they discovered then that it was the same sailor that the blackguard was thryin' to make a living' out of—buryin' him at night and diggin' him up again in the

mornin'. But he had no luck for he broke his leg—the divil's a cure to him!—by fallin' into a hole in the Burrow wan night, an' that cost him nearly as much as he made out of the poor daygo. Now what do you think of that, sir?" asked Mr. M'Grath, a grim smile on his great round face.

"I think you are an extraordinary people," said Frank, a little angrily—the old man's frequent introduction of the word "divil" somehow annoyed him. "Your courage and your recklessness, and your piety and good nature, and your damnableness are sufficient to puzzle any poor unfortunate Englishman. You cram an unholy oath and a pious ejaculation into the same sentence. And you put a tale that would melt the heart of a stone—as you say yourselves—cheek-by-jowl with some ghastly joke."

"Don't be too hard on us, sir. We have a great love of a joke in any shape—God spare us our laughter!—ye tuk everything else from us, ye Britons; an' it isn't clear to me that ye're not robbin' us of our fun now—what little is left of it. I'm towld ye're very sayrious in England, sir."

"Not always," said Frank. "But what puzzles me about any Irish people I have met is the extraordinary contrasts in their characters."

"That's only what our national poet, Tom Moore, says, sir:

"Erin, the tear and the smile in thine eye  
Blend like the rainbow that hangs in the sky."

You must have an Irish sthrain in you to be noticin' these things at all."

Frank felt that the conversation might easily put



him into a tight corner, so he decided to alter the trend of it abruptly.

"I heard of a remarkable quick-sand in a place called the Back Sthrand," said Frank. "Is there really such a thing there?"

"There is, then. It comes an' goes, like the rain, or the tides, or the storms."

"Was anyone ever lost in it?"

"A man named Crotty was, seven-an'-twenty years ago. His body was recovered by that very same fellow, Connolly; an' it gave him such a fright that he lost his reason, an' never could give any account of where or how he found it. He came here wan night roarin' like a bull, an' jabberin', an' I managed to make out that it was a dead man he found—he seemed to have a knack of findin' 'em. I hauled him back with me, an' on the Back Sthrand I found Crotty's body; but Connolly wouldn't come near it; an' we always supposed that it was thryin' to take his watch or somethin' he was when the corpse gave a kick—as they sometimes do when the muscles are relaxin'—an' that the seven senses wor frightened out of him. People will tell you sir, that 'twas I that found Crotty, but that's not the truth. I used to employ Connolly here dhrawin' up wather from the say, but the divil a much good he was for anything afther the night he found Crotty's body."

Frank was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable at M'Grath's gruesome recollections, and he determined—seeing an opportunity—to shift the current of the conversation once more.

"That's Brownstown Head opposite isn't it?" he asked, pointing to the eastern arm of Tramore Bay, which

stretched its clubbed fist into the face of the ocean.

“It is, sir.”

“How far is it from here to the far end of the strand?”

“About three mile—maybe a bit more, if you take in the part at the other side of Rhi-na-Shark. Why do you ask, sir?”

“I was just testing my eyesight. I suppose your estimate of the distance is fairly accurate. It took me about an hour to walk it. What size would you say that boat is that’s sailing out of Rhi-na-Shark now?”

“You have good sight to see her, sir. God spare you your eyesight. She’s a small yawl. I expect she’s the fishin’ boat that belongs to Jack Corbett, the ferryman. May the divil burn me,” he exclaimed, “if she isn’t the same yawl that I saw sailin’ out of the bay yestherday week. It was gettin’ too dark then to be sure of her—I beg your pardon, sir, but I was talkin’ to meself just then. There was a great gentleman, wan Lord Clashmore, sperited away last week off that sthrand. It seems I was the last that seen him alive. I passed him on the sthrand, an when I got back here I was sittin’ on this bench, an’ I saw a boat sailin’ out of Rhi-na-Shark. The ferryman says he out beyant the headlands in disthress at the time, an’ maybe he was; but that’s the same boat I saw yestherday week. The divil melt me if it isn’t!”

“Here was something fresh!” reflected Frank; something that might mean a good deal.

“You came by Rhi-na-Shark, did you sir?” asked M’Grath. “From Dunmore, no doubt?”

“Yes,” said Frank.

“Faith, then, you had a long walk, an’ you must be hungry as well as tired; an’ here I am keepin’ you dis-

coorsin' about meself."

"I'm much obliged for your stories, Mr. M'Grath. Tell me, do you know anything of an old fortune-teller calling herself Peggy?"

"Ould Peg of the Burrow! Well! I know her. An' did she tell you yer fortune, sir?"

"Yes; I met her as I was passing the sand hills."

"Faith, do you know, sir, that, some people say she isn't right. She tells fortunes that come throe—most surprisin' some of 'em. But the sstrangest thing of all about old Peg is that she can put herself into a thing they call a thrance, an' then, accordin' to herself, what she tells you isn't said by herself at all, an' she doesn't remember what she is tellin' you. They say she can see what's thravellin' through yer mind as she houlds you by the hand."

"And do you believe this?"

"Well, spaykin' for meself, I don't, sir. I expect there's too much salt pork and cabbage in my blood to have anybody readin' my thoughts in a thrance. But I've known good people that swear by ould Peggy and her thrances. What do think of the fortune she towld you?"

"She has puzzled me," said Frank, "She guessed some of my most private thoughts, certainly."

"Well, now, isn't that sstrange?" said Mr. M'Grath.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A REBUFF

THE hotel which Mr. M'Grath had recommended to the young Englishman commanded a fine view of Tramore Bay. From the porch he could see most of the configuration of the bay, and right opposite to him, in the east, stood Brownstown. As he strained his eyes he fancied he could distinguish the clump of trees in whose bosom Prospect House was hidden. How delightful, he reflected, it would be to go to rest with his eyes turned towards Geraldine, and to wake to see the sun rise over the spot where she dwelt!

He found he could have a room in the front of the hotel, so he engaged it; and, having ordered dinner, he sallied out in search of the telegraph office. He sent a message to Fitzgerald stating that he meant to stop in Tramore for the night.

As he was coming out of the telegraph office, a white-haired, black-coated old gentleman entered it, and Frank was surprised and delighted to recognise Father Hackett.

“Well, now,” said the priest, as he shook Frank’s hand.

"Isn't this almost providential? I was just going to send a message to you, saying I would call at your place in Dunmore tomorrow. That's sixpence saved anyhow—perhaps more, for I couldn't think how I was to squeeze my message into twelve words."

"I'm very glad, indeed, sir, to meet you. I was intending to pay a visit to you. Are you stopping in Tramore?"

"No, and yes, I have just arrived; but I shall not be setting home to-night. I came over this evening in order to be handy to-morrow. I promised to preach for the pariah priest here at last Mass."

"Perhaps you will dine with me? I am at that hotel just round the corner."

"I can't, my dear sir, for the P.P. here expects me to dinner; but I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll look you up in a couple of hours and we can have a walk together. I have a few words to say to you."

"And I'm very anxious to speak to you, sir."

"Very well. I'll call for you as soon as I can get away. How did you leave Master Larry?"

"He deserted me this morning. I believe he did it purposely, in order to give me a loose leg. I took advantage of his absence by going for a solitary prowl which eventually landed me in this little town. I have just been telegraphing to him that I shall sleep here to-night."

"I suppose you are Mr. Venables to him still?"

"I am ashamed to say I am; that is one of the points on which I wished to consult you."

"Well, we can leave everything until after dinner. I expect you're hungry after your long walk, and I'm due at the presbytery. My way is to the right, yours to the left."

“I hope I shan’t hear you say that on the Last Day, sir.”

“Go on now, and fill your inner man, and don’t be trying your profane jokes on a poor old Irish priest, who never did you harm.”

After Frank parted from Father Hackett he did a little shopping, and then returned to his hotel, where, he found a very excellent dinner awaiting him.

About eight o’clock, as it was growing dark, Father Hackett came, and conducted Frank along a road which led to a public walk overhanging the Bay.

“Now, Mr. Aylward,” said the priest,—“for Aylward I must call you, knowing it to be your name—which of us is to begin?”

“I will leave that to your judgment sir.”

“I think I’ll ask you to open the ball.”

The young man then poured into the ear of the priest a narrative of the principal events—so far as they had any bearing on Lord Clashmore’s disappearance—which had occurred since he had set out from Father Hackett’s house the previous Wednesday.

“And what opinion have you arrived at now?” asked the priest who had patiently and attentively listened to Frank’s narrative.

“My opinion—based on nothing substantial, I admit—is that my uncle is alive, and has been spirited away for some reason of which I have no inkling. I have an idea that Mr. Charles M’Carthy knows something, and ought to be compelled to disclose what he does know.”

“And how can you compel him?”

“There is a law in the land.”

“Granted! But what has the law got to do with the matter, so far as Charles M’Carthy is concerned? What sort of a deposition would you yourself care to make before a magistrate? Suppose M’Carthy knows nothing, and that you made wrongful and unwarranted accusations against him, you would be very sorry—apart from the possibility of getting yourself into trouble. You may take my word for it that anything of that kind had better be left to the judgment of your solicitors. I had already heard of your visit to Prospect House, and I was wondering what you would think of old Simon. Are you easy in your mind that he didn’t recognize you in any way—either as a member of your uncle’s family—or of his own?” he slyly added.

“You are referring to my supposed likeness to the first Viscountess. No, I don’t think so. He looked at me when first we met with a curious stare of recognition, but it faded at once, and I saw no recurrence of it.”

“I expect he did see the likeness to your great-grandmother; he saw it only through a glass darkly perhaps, but it softened him instantly towards you. That’s my reading of it. Did he speak of the famous Lady Clashmore?”

“Yes, sir. He told me a story of his recollection of her that quite touched me.”

“Ah, yes! You struck some chord, you see. You sent the old man’s memory travelling backwards some four score years. I suppose you have no desire to injure the tenants of Prospect House?”

“Good gracious, no! Why should you ask?”

“Don’t you see, if you go tilting against his son Charles you will be upsetting the old man as well, and his grand-



children, too. The family at Prospect House are under notice to quit; and, as I understand the matter, active proceedings to turn them out-of-doors are stayed until something is known definitely about your uncle, or until something arises which may make Mr. Mason, in whose hands the matter is, proceed to extremities. Old Simon is well enough off to be careless of any proceedings which would merely touch his pocket; but to expel him from his home would be equivalent to tearing his heart out. Mr. Weekes believes that the object which your uncle had in view in instructing him to come to Rhi-na-Shark House this day week was to withdraw the unfortunate proceedings against old M'Carthy."

"Did Mr. Weekes tell you this?"

"He did. I saw him yesterday—I was consulting him on some other business, and I mentioned the matter to him. I am greatly interested in old Simon and in his grand-children—though the boys are much too wild for my taste—and I'd do or say a good deal to save them from trouble."

"If you assure me that anything I might do of contemplate doing would injure old M'Carthy's granddaughter," said Frank impulsively, "I would prefer to cut my right hand off than to do that thing."

"What does this mean?" asked Father Hackett stopping in his walk, and seizing his companion by the arm.

"It means, sir, that I have fallen in love—don't smile at such a reckless admission. It is one of the subjects, and by no means the least important one, on which I mean to ask your advice and your help. I would give all I possess, or hope for, to know that Miss M'Carthy would look favourably upon me."

“My dear Mr. Aylward, this is terrible nonsense,” said the old priest, with a troubled look. “You young men of the world are in the habit of falling in love with every pretty face that takes your hot fancy; you work yourself into frenzies, and think the world oughtn’t to go round until your passion is cooled; and then, if you are a decent sort of fellow, you are ashamed of yourself. A week at home, the sight of a London drawing room, or of a London ball room, and you’d blush at the mere thought of what you have just said to me.”

“You mistake me utterly,” protested Frank. “I spoke to you because I felt I must speak to somebody, and I thought of you as one into whose ears confessions of all kinds are poured daily, and counsel sought.”

“Not this sort of confession, my dear young friend. What would you think of making the confession to Mrs. Aylward?”

“I mean to do so,” said Frank, “if I can think there is any hope for me with Miss M’Carthy.”

“Hope for you! What a modest young man it is, to be sure! My dear Mr. Aylward, this won’t do at all. I am very fond of Geraldine—she is as good a girl as ever breathed—and I’m not going to have her young life spoiled by a stranger—however honest-minded he may be—who will forget her in a month, and who has no business to think of her at all, except as the dutiful grandchild of a lonely old man.”

“What right have you to say this, sir? I tell you, I love Miss M’Carthy. If I didn’t love her honestly, do you think I’d dare to tell you of it?”

“No—I’m sure you wouldn’t, my dear child; but you’re young and fiery, and I’m a cold-blooded old priest. These

whirlwinds and lightnings pass over, and destroy as they pass; and it is part of my business to look after my flock and to see that every effort is made to save them from destruction. Don't you see yourself the impossibility of this?" continued Father Hackett fervently—"nothing but heart-breakings and mischief could arise out of it. It is very decent of you, I freely admit, to speak to me on the subject, and I haven't the slightest doubt you mean well, and that you are for the moment in earnest; but your earnestness will pass away, and though you may be vexed with me now, you will thank me one day when you recollect that I saved you from yourself."

"You ask me if I don't see the impossibility," said Frank. "What is the impossibility? I see none, except the one—that she may not listen to me."

"Now, are you serious? Isn't everything about it impossible? There is nothing in common between you except that God has blessed you both with a reasonable amount of good looks, or good health, and, I think I may say it, of good nature. Against these things you have differences of faith, of nationality, of social rank, and lack of knowledge of each other. Will you do one thing?—will you promise me not to speak to this young girl until you have told your mother what you have told me?"

Frank paused for some moments. "I cannot promise you that," he said; "but I will promise you that I will talk to my mother at the first opportunity."

"Then, so far as Miss M'Carthy is concerned, you will have to reckon me as one with his hand against you. I am sorry to say this to you, for I admit, without any beating about the bush, that I'd like to have your friendship. Don't be selfish now, Mr. Aylward, and don't be angry

with me.” said the priest, pressing Frank’s arm with his lean white fingers. “And now, to hop to another matter, and to explain why I wished to see you. I am told—don’t ask me where or how I came to my knowledge—I often am the repository of secrets which are as sacred almost as it they had the seal of the confessional on them—that you run some risk in wandering in the neighbourhood of Rhi-na-Shark.”

“I have heard so,” said Frank. “It doesn’t disturb me very much. Indeed,” he added, smiling, “I should have mentioned that I had my fortune told this afternoon, and that I was warned of dangers by the sibyl. Also I got definite instructions how I was to proceed. At the first of the new moon—”

“I couldn’t, if you will pardon me,” interrupted Father Hackett, “listen to any raumaish about fortune telling. I suppose you came across the sibyl known as Peg of the Burrow?”

“Exactly.”

“Well, whatever she told you don’t believe in it; and whatever she advised you to do, don’t do it. That’s wholesome advice, and you needn’t cross my palm in payment for it. Listen to me. It seems the presence here of anyone, such as you, suspected to be on the lookout for information concerning Lord Clashmore, stands in the way of something else particularly which is not concerned directly with Lord Clashmore, except in so far that it keeps the mystery of his disappearance a mystery. The police don’t count; like the poor, they are always with us, and the devil we know isn’t as formidable as the devil we don’t know; but a detective—from London—don’t be vexed with me—is regarded in a different light.”

“Then,” said Frank, with a trace of temper, “you know that my uncle is alive, and is possibly hidden somewhere hereabouts. What strange people you are!”

“I never said so. I’ve told you what I know. And my advice to you is to return to London, and to leave matters in the hands of your uncle’s solicitors. It is quite possible that everything will be cleared up within a month. My anxiety is about yourself. I don’t want you to be spirited away, or to get into any sort of trouble.”

Father Hackett did not add that his anxiety to induce Lord Clashmore’s nephew to leave Ireland was increased tenfold by the confession the young man had just made of his love for Geraldine M’Carthy.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### LOVE IN A MIST

ON Saturday night Frank went to bed in a very gloomy state of mind. Father Hackett's objection to him as a suitor for Geraldine, in addition to the chagrin it produced, caused him to reflect upon the objections his mother would raise. He pictured her horror at the idea of what she would consider to be a shocking *mésalliance*. He remembered, too, how earnestly he had recently assured her, that no village maiden born could possibly interest him. Neither his mother nor himself had then seen the daughter of the M'Carthys. But would a glimpse of Geraldine effect any change in his mother's opinions? He feared not. It would help him very little to argue that his great-grandfather had sought a wife from out of Prospect House. And when he began to think over the story of the marriage of the first Viscount Clashmore he could not hide from himself that the union had resulted in the ostracizing of his ancestors, and in the tragedy of the broken life of Teague M'Carthy.

Another source of irritation, of a different kind, which disturbed the love-sick young man, was the reflection

that he had made little or no real headway in the search for his uncle. Every day seemed to deepen the mystery surrounding Lord Clashmore's disappearance. What one adviser suggested another condemned. And yet he felt that there were several people who, if they spoke freely or if they were compelled to disclose what they knew, could probably clear up the mystery. Father Hackett knew something. The M'Carthys, probably—certainly Charles M'Carthy—had some knowledge of what had happened. The ferry-man, Corbett, was another who should be compelled to speak. The ghoulish and good-humoured old man, M'Grath, had certain suspicions. And it was not at all unlikely that the fortune-teller in the Rabbit Burrow either knew or suspected something of importance.

Why, he asked himself again, as he had already asked Father Hackett, should not one or other of these people be made to speak out? He decided that he would consult Weekes again, and endeavour to discover what was really at the back of that astute gentleman's mind, and why he stayed his hand.

Frank had intended to ask Father Hackett if he would advise him to drop his disguised name altogether, but the priest's rebuff in the matter of Geraldine had put everything else for the moment out of the young man's thoughts.

Sunday morning broke gloomily. Frank had intended to awake about four o'clock in order to see the sun rising over Brownstown, but, when he awoke, it was, he discovered, past six. As he stood flt the window of his bedroom he could see little save a thick mist which blotted out the prospect of the eastern arm of Tramore Bay. In his



highly strung condition the young man regarded this as an ill omen. The previous day he had held Geraldine's hand in his; he had looked into her wonderful eyes; he had seen from the window of his room the trees which sheltered her abode. Now a dark and depressing cloud had arisen between him and her.

Superstitious thoughts had rarely visited him, and had hardly ever been entertained by him; but since his arrival in Ireland some curious change had come over young Aylward. Yesterday found him actually giving heed—if not credence—to the words of a fortune-teller. If he had encountered one a week ago in his own country he would have passed on heedless of her; or, if he had thought of her at all, it would have been only to wonder why the police had not taken her into custody.

He stood for some moments at his window, the boom of the melancholy ocean in his ears, endeavouring vainly to pierce the thick curtain of mist; and then he returned to bed, pondering over the words of the old woman, and angry with himself that he should be influenced by such folly. One thing was evident, that by some means or other the old witch had guessed he was in love with Geraldine. It might be that Peg was the hidden watcher who had, he felt certain, been dogging his steps across the country from Dunmore to Rhi-na-Shark. She might have seen him speaking to Geraldine. No doubt that was the explanation of the "fortune" she had told. But this did not explain her specific instructions to visit a certain part of the Back Strand, at a certain time, when he was to find what he was seeking. This might be an ingenious plot to entrap him; Father Hackett had warned him against the old woman; and yet he was

more than half determined to do her bidding. He was not going to be daunted by the possibility of danger, nor would he allow the fear of the unknown to deter him. If nothing was brought to light during the mysterious visit to the Back Strand, no one, save an old hag, would be aware of his folly. If he should discover anything, it would cause him some gratification beyond that which mere discovery could produce.

Nor would he allow himself to be vanquished by Father Hackett's warnings, that he had better abandon the pursuit of Geraldine. No. He would follow his own instincts, turning a deaf ear to the sober advice of reason. And when a young man abandons himself to the superstition or to the promptings of instinct—and love is one of the oldest as well as one of the freshest of instincts—he generally abandons himself blindly, deriving added pleasure from the feeling that he is risking something and defying somebody.

The weather did not improve as the day grew, and Frank was a prey to loneliness. He was almost sorry he had not returned to Dunmore, as he had originally intended on the previous night. Borrowing a mackintosh and defying the heaviness of the mist, he sallied out shortly after breakfast and wandered about the cliffs. He returned to the hotel after one o'clock, more anxious than ever for comradeship of some sort. This unrest and his craving for companionship were novel, but by no means agreeable sensations. He tried to read, and he tried to write, but his attempts were utter failures. As he sat at the window of his room. It seemed to him that if only the sea-mist would vanish, if only he could behold that neck of land upon which Geraldine dwelt, a

weight would be lifted from him.

About three o'clock he was aroused by a knock at his door; and the intelligence that a gentleman wished to see him afforded him a quickening sense of pleasure. He had no doubt the visitor was Father Hackett.

As he appeared at the head of the staircase, which was visible from the hall, he was greeted with:

"You're a nice fellow, hauling me all over the country. I am as wet as if you were dragging me through the Atlantic."

"I am very glad to see you," replied Frank cordially, "but I hardly think I am responsible for the weather."

"We'll talk about that later. My wetting won't hurt. But what made you run off in this fashion?" asked Larry Fitzgerald, placing one hand on Frank's shoulder.

"I hardly know," answered Frank.

"And I see you have been out getting a soaking, too. This won't do. You'll be catching a cold and cursing the unfortunate climate instead of laying the blame at your own door."

This interest which Fitzgerald displayed in him and his familiarity would have been resented by Frank if he had been in his normal mood; now the display gratified him.

"I shall not blame the weather or the country," he said; "but if I do get a chill I shall debit it to your sworn foe—the Atlantic."

"I told you what a beast it was, but you wouldn't take my word for it. It has a broad back, and will easily bear the weight of any curses-rigged bark we may set afloat on it. But I have a couple of letters for you and I want to consult you about a third. The coffee room is empty

just now; let us step in there.”

Frank saw that one of the letters was from his mother. This he would keep unopened for the present. The other was obviously from Mr. Weekes. The managing clerk wrote that he had business on Monday in the neighbourhood of Dunmore, and would take the liberty of calling at Rose Cottage in the afternoon.

“It is very kind of you,” said Frank, “to bring me those letters. How did you cross country?”

“On Shank’s mare.”

“On such a day as this;”

“Horses or carriages are not everyday luxuries with me. Besides, it was by no means a bad morning when I left Dunmore. The mist seemed to belong chiefly to Tramore Bay. I didn’t run into it until I was half way here. And then I ran into something else—the arms of a friend of yours—Charlie M’Carthy.”

“Old Simon’s grandson?”

“No—the old man’s son. He enquired most tenderly for you. Wondered you weren’t with me. I told him I was journeying toward you, performing the office of travelling postman. He came a good bit of the way with me, and we wandered off the direct road to the ferry at Rhi-na-Shark; and instead crossing that notable river in Corbett’s pram I came round by the Back Strand embankment for a change. There is nothing like variety.”

“It seems an odd sort of day for prolonging a country ramble. Perhaps your friend, Mr. M’Carthy, contrived to draw you out of your way.”

Frank was again on the point of confessing who he was and what had brought him to Ireland, but once more his resolution to set himself straight with Fitzgerald

failed him.

“What on earth object could he have in doing so? He was simply trying to keep a neighbour company—to shorten a long road for him.”

“That must be as Irish fashion of shortening a journey—to lengthen it considerably. I suppose I shall gradually become familiar with Irish manners and customs.”

“May you never grow familiar with anything worse, my dear sir! And now about the other letter of mine,” taking a note from his pocket. “It is an apology from my friend Bob Usher for being out of the way when I travelled out to Bell Lake last Wednesday. He insists that you and I shall spend a day with him—the earliest day we can name. I’d like to introduce Usher to you; of course, you know his sister already! What do you say to Tuesday next?”

“I am much obliged to your friend for his invitation,” for said Frank, “and I am quite at your service, provided Mr. Weekes does not haul me into Waterford. Mr. Mason has some business of mine in his hands and his clerk is intending to visit me at Dunmore to-morrow about it. Such is the contents of one of the letters you were good enough to convey to me.”

“In matters of this kind, Mr. Venables, your motto should be—pleasure first, business after. Never refuse an invitation; it is an unlucky as refusing a bid for a horse.”

Frank declared that he did not expect Mr. Weekes’ business with him could be of sufficient importance to stand in the way the visit to of Bell Lake, and then he informed Frank that Father Hackett was in Tramore. The volatile Larry immediately suggested that Frank

and he should start out for the house of the parish priest, a suggestion which Frank declined to adopt. He had letters to write, he said, and seeing that his companion was anxious to be moving again, he asked him why shouldn't he call upon his friends alone, and come back to the hotel to dinner.

Fitzgerald thought Frank's was an excellent idea, and, after fortifying himself with a little brandy to keep the damp from penetrating, he started.

After Fitzgerald's departure Frank went back to his room in a much more cheerful mood. Looking out of his window he saw that the mist was slowly stealing away. Already he could distinguish the dim outline of Brownstown.

He opened his mother's letter. There was nothing of special interest in it. Towards the close Mrs. Aylward upbraided her son for his neglect of his cousin Kitty. "I hope, my dear boy," she wrote, "that you're not having written to her does not mean that you have seen in the Emerald Isle brighter eyes which for the moment have fascinated you. All Irish girls, I understand, have dark blue eyes and a remarkable kind of blue-black hair—like somebody's fluid; and these are supposed to possess some mysterious attraction for susceptible young Englishmen. Thank goodness you are not a susceptible being! Speaking for myself, I must say I consider black hair on a woman's head an abomination, but no doubt the dark-blue eyes with it may possess a sort of attraction, simply because of the strangeness of the combination. But everything Irish is so absurd!"

These observations caused Frank some angry thrills; but the anger, or irritation, was quickly replaced by a

sense of amusement.

“Poor mother!” said he, a smile upon his face. “What on earth would she say if I were to tell her that I have lost my heart—that those Irish eyes she scoffs at are dearer to me now than any other eyes in the world!”

He looked across the waters of the bay. The mist had almost faded, and a great slanting beam of light transfigured the dusky arm of Brownstown.

Frank threw up the sash of his window and kissing the finger-tips, he waved his right hand towards Prospect House, exclaiming in fervent voice:

“Geraldine—my beloved!”





## CHAPTER XXX

### THE BURNING OF THE BOATS

FITZGERALD was easily persuaded to remain in Tramore for the night; and on Monday morning Frank and his friend travelled by car to Dunmore. Miss O'Dwyer was greatly pleased to see them. The old lady had been considerably disturbed by Fitzgerald's non-appearance on Sunday night. She was, she declared, half in dread that the mysterious hand which had matched Lord Clashmore out of sight had grasped her humble guest.

Mr. Weekes duly arrived at Rose Cottage, and Fitzgerald announced his intention of going for a stroll while business was being discussed. Weekes, after he had descended with agility from Bill Roche's car, informed Frank that he had lunched in the neighbourhood, and that he was wholly at his service for an hour or so.

"I hadn't really anything very fresh to communicate," said the man of the law, "when I started from home this morning. Nor did I leave the ancient city of Waterford behind me solely on your account. As a matter of fact, I thought I would kill several birds in this region with one stone today. I had a troublesome will to put into

shape near Rhi-na-Shark. Then I found my way to Lord Clashmore's residence to see if anything new had turned up there; and then I drove over here to give you a scrap of information and to ascertain what progress you had to report"

Mr. Weekes indulged in one of his ineffable smiles; and then in his raspiest voice he said: "In the spring the young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love!"

For a moment Frank had to repress an almost overmastering inclination to fly at Mr. Weekes' throat, but the managing clerk, unaware of the nearness of the explosion, continued, "And a mere feeling that things are ripening is about as useful as falling in love or as spreading nets for larks who will rumble into them when the firmament, like Sir Isaac's apple, seeks the crust of Mother Earth. I'd charge you six and eightpence, if you'd stand it, for that figure of speech, Mr. Francis Venables; but I can see by your face you'd consider it dear at the money."

"Very," said Frank drily.

"Then the item shall not appear, visibly, in our bill of costs. But to business. You have seen old M'Carthy, of Prospect House. Do you connect him in your mind with our little affair?"

"I cannot say that I do. He is too honest—at least that is my reading of him to be mixed up with crime. And yet—"

"Ah, there's the rub!" interrupted Weekes. "I felt that 'And yet' was coming."

"I was only about to add," said Frank, still finding some difficulty in controlling his temper, "that though I can hardly believe this very old man to be concerned in

what you are pleased to call our little affair, I feel that some members of his family might be within the area of, suspicion."

"His grand-daughter, maybe?" suggested Weekes, smiling after his peculiar fashion.

"I wish, sir," said the young man sharply "that you would not adopt this hatefully flippant and over-familiar manner when you are talking to me."

"No offence meant," said Weekes. "It is only my way, young gentleman."

"Your way gives offence, and I do not intend to tolerate it. We are not comrades. We are comparative strangers, discussing a serious question—a question possibly of very serious crime."

"You see, Mr. Venables," said Weekes. "I have during my semi-professional life got into the habit of taking, or rather pretending to take, nothing seriously when conversing about it. When I am satisfied that action must occupy the place of words you will discover that I can be as serious as a tax collector. However, as you wish me to converse with you in a graver manner than is my wont, your wish shall be unto me as a crowner's quest law. I take it you have discovered nothing?"

"Well," said Frank with some hesitancy, "that is so—unfortunately."

"I did not expect discoveries could be picked off the bushes like blackberries in September, but I should not be surprised if you are, as the children says, 'warm.' Shall I go over the matter my own way, and give you my views up to date? I may say that those views have suffered considerable change since last I had the pleasure of discussing them orally with you."

"If you please," said Frank coldly.

"Well, we have a case in hand where a person of distinction disappears, leaving no trace behind. With him disappears a nobody his attendant, one Backas. Our first impressions naturally centred themselves in the person of distinction, and practically we lose sight of Mr. Nobody. But it now seems that we cannot be certain that it was not this man Backas who was the person primarily aimed at. It may be that opportunity to snatch Mr. Nobody out of sight—even, if you like it, to do away with him—occurred at a time when a great lord was with him, and that in order to submerge the man the master had to be swamped in the same boat."

"That idea occurred to myself," said Frank, calling to mind his conversation with Father Hackett. "Do you think there is anything in it?"

"Only this—that Backas was kicked out—metaphorically—of Prospect House, and being kicked out, what was more natural for him than to vow vengeance upon that house?"

"Is this a surmise of yours, or do you know that it is so?"

"I know that it is so. His Lordship's butler—one Donelly—you and he have met, the old fellow tells me—is my informant. What the nature of the quarrel between Backas and the M'Carthys was Donelly does not know, but he is certain it was a bitter one."

"When and how did you ascertain this?"

"Only today, and only by a process of pumping for which I have a knack—my little way, if you can understand that, Mr. Venables."

"Then do you think any member of the M'Carthy

family is concerned with the affair?"

"I do."

"Which of them?"

"The grandchildren." Frank's heart throbbed and his hands trembled. "And furthermore I have a strong suspicion that Uncle Charles—the Hidalgo with the red beard—is privy to the whole business. I say this in the teeth of the fact that he and I are, I may say, intimate friends, and I hold a very high opinion of this same Don Carlos."

"And does this class of man calmly and unblushingly mix himself up with a great crime? and do you hold a high opinion of such a man? One statement is almost as incredible as the other."

"There may be no crime—that is, if the crime of murder is on your mind. It may be only a case of abduction—a pastime which used to be very common in this country in the brave days of old. There is, in my humble opinion, another gentleman mixed up in this business, one Corbett, the ferryman. This County Waterford Charon is a foster-brother of one of the M'Carthys—which of them I don't know—and the ancient custom of fostering has a tendency to knot foster relatives together more strongly than any modern class of bond, especially where a thing known as *lex talionis* is concerned. But I'll come to Corbett a little later. Charles M'Carthy is evidently greatly disturbed. Whatever has happened has upset him considerably, and he finds himself between Scylla and Charybdis—or to put it in a more homely fashion, between two stools. If he speaks of what he knows he may ruin his relatives; if he doesn't speak, the action of his relatives may upset plans upon which his whole

heart is set. That is my reading of the riddle; but pray remember I do not claim to be infallible."

"Why not compel Mr. Charles M'Carthy to speak?"

"That might be a case of bringing the horse to the pond; we might not be able to make him drink. And in leading the horse to water we might stumble into a mare's nest."

"What then do you advise?" said Frank, hardly able to conceal his amusement at Weekes' display of jangled metaphors.

"A little patience. Already there is consternation in the camp of the enemy. Today I made a discovery—which you would most likely have made tomorrow, or whenever you revisit the glimpses of the Stygian shores—I mean Rhi-na-Shark. Mr. Corbett has burned his boats."

"Your tropes—as I heard you call them—are somewhat confusing. Do you mean that Corbett is carrying the war into the enemy's country? And how? Or what do you mean?"

"I mean that he has actually burned his boats. No figure of speech. No allusion to the immortal Julius. On Saturday night Corbett made a bonfire of his flotilla—the fishing yawl and the pram. And he has vanquished into that limitless region known vaguely as space."

"And what do you make of this?"

"That he felt he was suspected—that his boats, or one of them, concealed important evidence—that you were a police officer, and that his arrest was imminent. Therefore he has gone into retirement somewhere."

"And I suppose he can be found?"

"Not a bit of it—unless he wishes it."

"What sort of a country is this?"

“An excellent country, Mr. Venables, when you know how to accommodate yourself to it—a thing no Englishman can learn, and a thing which most Irishmen find it difficult to do, because of the foreign laws, *scriptæ et non scriptæ*, which do not seek to accommodate themselves to the mere native. And now, my dear sir, I think I may by word of mouth a warning I tendered to you in writing the other day. You had better keep dark for the present. Stick to Dunmore, fill yourself with its ozone, and carefully avoid the neighbourhood of Rhi-na-Shark.”

“What if I decline to do anything of the sort?”

“Then your blood will be upon your own hand! I don’t want to see you snatched off in the flower of youth and beauty—I beg pardon, had quite forgotten my promise not to indulge in frivolity,” said Mr. Weekes, observing a very angry frown on Frank’s brow. “We must be cautious. There is something in the case that makes me fear that want of caution may be want of sense, and that a false step will land us in as ugly a quicksand as that on the Back Strand. If you were an ordinary detective I’d be only too glad to know that you were accepting all risks unhesitatingly; but Mr. Mason has impressed upon me that you are not to be allowed at any cost to run yourself into danger.”

“It is very kind of Mr. Mason to be so very thoughtful, but I am nearly old enough now to act for myself, and I am not likely to run into danger merely for the sake of it.”

“But that is not sufficient. You will thank me later for what I have said, much as you may despise my warnings now. I have advised you to keep clear of Rhi-na-Shark for the present, and I will add: Don’t tempted to pay

another visit to Prospect House until matters get a little forwarded. I know that proffered advice doesn't smell very sweetly—it is something like those coins about which a gentleman hailing from ancient Rome sought olfactory opinions—but you must recollect that it is a lawyer's business to proffer advice, and to charge for it, too. I hear the sound of the jingle which is to convey me to the place from whence I came, so I'll be saying good-day to you, with the pleasant knowledge that you are fonder of my absence than of my company. Ta, ta!"



## CHAPTER XXXI

### A VISIT TO BELL LAKE

WHEN Weekes had driven off, Frank vexed with himself for having treated his visitor rather badly. He had plainly shown that he disliked him, and he had indicated that he would ignore his advice, well-meant as the young man felt it was. He had an uneasy suspicion, too, that Weekes either knew or guessed who he was. It was quite possible that his mother had written to Mr. Mason asking him to keep a special eye upon her son's movements, and that the solicitor had confided in his clerk. "But after all," the young man asked himself, "what does it matter? I shall be revealing myself to Fitzgerald presently. It now seems to me that I gain nothing by adopting a false name. Everyone who wants or cares to pierce the disguise is apparently able to do so. Father Hackett knows who I am. Charles M'Carthy, having so easily discovered that I am not merely an artist travelling for amusement, will probably have pushed his suspicions a step farther, and have guessed that I am Lord Clashmore's nephew. Doubtless he will inform his family. I wonder what will Geraldine think of it? or

will it concern her in any way?"

The mere thought of Geraldine dragged Frank's thoughts out of the rutty road over which they had been travelling. There was one portion of Mr. Weekes' counsel which he would unquestionably ignore. He would visit Prospect House again at the first opportunity. During his interview with Weekes he had more than once been disturbed by the horrid thought that Geraldine might possibly have some knowledge of a great crime. Even if it were merely a knowledge, and that she was simply screening some members of her family, this would be enough to tarnish his idol. Now, as he reflected upon the whole affair, he hit a sense of relief that Weekes had changed his mind, and was no longer of opinion that Clashmore had been murdered. Had not old Simon M'Carthy, too, declared with emphasis that the Viscount's blood had not been shed? But what had become of his uncle? What was at the bottom of this strange affair?

When Fitzgerald returned to Rose Cottage he found his young friend in a lazy mood. Fitzgerald proposed a walk, and Frank suggested a chat or a smoke or a game of cards or anything that would not involve locomotion. The day was warm, and the air induced supineness of mind and body. Fitzgerald would not listen to any suggestions for remaining indoors, and after writing a note to his mother, Frank went for a stroll along the cliffs with his newly-found friend. Several times he was on the point of revealing himself, but something stopped him every time he endeavoured to approach the subject—he could not nerve himself to any mental exertion, however slight. Finally he made up his mind languidly that he would face the task of declaring himself a harmless im-

postor immediately after his return from Bell Lake. If he spoke before he visited the Ushers, Fitzgerald would have to go over the ground with Mr. Usher. It could make no earthly difference to the owner of Bell Lake whether he entertained Frank Venables or Frank Aylward, and it would cause Fitzgerald some trouble, and possibly some annoyance to have to explain the change of name. And, moreover, the young man was still desirous of concealing his identity from all except those persons with whom he had intimate friendly or business relations. He would certainly confess to Fitzgerald not later than Wednesday, and he was inclined to face all possible risks, and to jeopardize his chance of discovering what had become of his uncle by revealing himself to Geraldine at the first favourable opportunity. The idea of meeting her again under the cloak of a false name was hateful to him.

And yet he had placed upon his shoulders a burden which he could not lightly throw to the ground; perhaps if he told Geraldine all about it himself he might be irretrievably injuring his uncle. The words of old Peg of the Burrow occurred to him: "There are great prizes before you. In seeking one you may lose the others." In seeking to further his own cause with Geraldine, in endeavouring to obtain a prize which he valued more highly than anything else on earth, he might be doing the very thing which would defeat his own purpose. And he might, at the same time, be causing grave mischief to others.

Tuesday morning proving fine, Fitzgerald declared that the best way of performing the journey to Bell Lake would be by walking there.

Frank demurred, asserting that the weather was too warm and too oppressive for pedestrianism, but the elder man had his way in the end, and shortly after breakfast the pair set out for Usher's residence.

When they were trudging up the avenue leading to Lake House, Fitzgerald said, "We're not the only visitors here today. I suppose my friend Bob is giving a house-warming. He leaves home so rarely that no doubt he regards his Dublin visit as a noteworthy event."

"How do you know there are visitors?" Frank asked.

"Look through the trees there. Don't you see a spruce, bright-looking tax-cart standing outside the door of the house?"

"It may belong to Lake Cottage. I do see something of the kind gleaming."

"My dear sir, my friend Usher's machine is as old as the hills, and if you were to suggest a new one to him he would regard you in much the same light as he would regard one who preferred a new bottle of wine to an old one. Bob is passionately attached to everything about this place, and the more ancient the article the fonder he is of it, Dash my wig! I'll tell you whose trap that is," continued Fitzgerald. "It belongs to an old friend of yours, Mr. Venables."

"An old friend of mine," murmured Frank, puckering his brows.

"Yes; no other than Charles M'Carthy, from the city of Waterford. I wonder what brings him here. I don't ever remember to have seen him at Bell Lake before. I suppose he has some business with Usher." The smile had died out of Fitzgerald's face now, and was replaced by an anxious look. He uttered the last few sentences

rather as though he were talking to himself. Then turning to his companion, he said. "I expect your old and valued friend is paying only a flying visit. Probably Usher will be relieved by our arrival, for M'Carthy can only be calling on business, and if there's one thing Usher hates more than another, that thing is business."

In a few minutes Fitzgerald and Frank were standing in the porch of Lake Cottage, and they could see through the windows of the breakfast parlour the figures of two men in earnest conversation. The tall man whom Frank had not seen hitherto was standing with his back to the window. A loud "Tally-ho there!" from Fitzgerald startled him, and in a few minutes the tall man was standing at the open hall door.

"Larry, you villain!" said he, "you nearly frightened the life out of a visitor of mine!"

"This is my friend Mr. Venables, Bob," said Fitzgerald. "Mr. Venables, Mr. Usher, the sole proprietor of this house of entertainment."

"Come in my dear sir," said Usher, offering his hand to Frank. "You are only half a stranger, as you are already known to the other and the better half of the house. Come this way," leading his visitors through the hall. "I have a friend here, but he is no stranger to Master Larry."

"Nor to Mr. Venables either," Fitzgerald, who took a malicious pleasure in reminding Frank of his acquaintanceship with M'Carthy.

"Is that so, indeed?" said Usher.

"Fact, sir. They are bosom friends. Could hardly be torn from each other last Wednesday morning when the Milford boat arrived at her berth."

"Mr. Fitzgerald is having a little fun at my expense," said Frank. "I chanced to meet Mr. M'Carthy crossing."

"Well, that saves me the trouble of introducing you," said Usher, opening the door of the breakfast room. "Mr. M'Carthy, here are two friends of yours."

"I'm always glad to meet my friends," said M'Carthy, emphasizing the last word. "How do you do, Mr. Fitzgerald? I thought I recognized you from the window," shaking hands with Fitzgerald. "How do you do, sir," said he coldly, nodding to Frank.

"Don't you recognize Mr. Venables?" asked Fitzgerald.

"Oh, yes," answered M'Carthy, "I remember the gentleman."

Frank could have struck the red-bearded man. His tone implied superiority mixed with contempt.

"I think I'll be off now, Mr. Usher," said M'Carthy. "I should have been in the city before this. I'd like to say just one word to my niece if you will find her for me."

Frank forgot Charles M'Carthy's insolence as he listened to these words. Geraldine was in the house. He should see her presently. What a glorious piece of news.

"She is in the garden with my sister. Come along with me. I'll show you where they are. Will you look after Mr. Venables, Larry? I'll be back in ten minutes. Come along Mr. M'Carthy."

"I never saw M'Carthy so surly," said Fitzgerald, when the two men had left the room. "I'd like to have thrashed him for his insolent manner to you. I suppose he thinks because he is rich that he can afford to play fast and loose with people."

"I could not afford to take notice of his boorishness,"

said Frank. "I am very glad he didn't do the hail-fellow-well-met with me. I don't find it very easy to tolerate over-familiarity or insolence in any man. I have enough to do in that line in the matter of Mr. Weekes."

"M'Carthy puzzles me," said Fitzgerald. "He used to be all things to all men. I expect the process of piling up the dollars makes a fellow a bit lop-sided, unless he has a very level head. But we may as well get out-of-doors and have a look at the lake, and give Mr. Charles an opportunity of escaping."

Fitzgerald led his friend along the path which Usher had taken on the previous Saturday with M'Carthy. Each was quietly killing time, waiting until the man with the red beard had vanished, and each was busy with his own thoughts, and in both cases these thoughts were centred in the eternal woman.

After about a quarter of an hour they began to retrace their steps to the house, and as they drew near it Fitzgerald caught sight in a by-path of the figure of a young lady.

"Pray excuse me, Mr. Venables," said he. "I have a few words to say to Miss Usher, of whom I have just caught a glimpse down this path to the left. I'll pick you up before you reach the house."

Frank walked slowly on and presently he met with a path leading to the right, which disclosed a view of the lake. He turned down this path, and at the end of it he found there was a small arbour. As he stood at the entrance of the arbour his heart leaped with joy. Geraldine was seated inside. She rose instantly, as Frank lifted his hat, and bowed coldly.

"This is a wholly unexpected pleasure, Miss M'Carthy,"

said the young man. "It was only within the last half-hour I learned you were here."

Geraldine was unmistakably agitated; indeed there was in her face a look of distress which caused Frank grave uneasiness. After a pause, she said in a low and tremulous voice:

"Mr. Venables, I wish to be candid with you. You have placed me in a most awkward position, and I hardly know what to do or to say."

"I have placed you in an awkward position! How, may I ask?"

"I did not expect to meet you here, and my uncle has just desired me not to hold any further intercourse with you."

"Why?" asked Frank, in a hard, dry voice.

"He says—oh, why should you give me the pain of saying it or you yourself the pain of listening to me?" Here Geraldine's voice failed her.

"I am sorry to distress you. Miss M'Carthy. I think I can understand. I am using a name which is not my own." Geraldine looked at him shyly and nodded.

"Does he inform you what he supposes my real name to be?"

Geraldine shook her head.

"Then might I ask what he said about me? You tell me you wish to be candid with me."

"He has pointed out to me that you visited my grandfather under an assumed name, and that you are—" Geraldine faltered and trembled.

"A detective—a spy," said Frank, completing the sentence.

Geraldine nodded again. She could not trust her



voice.

Frank did not speak for some moments. It angered him beyond measure that Geraldine should believe him to be a spy. And yet, how could she, under the circumstances, regard him in any other light? An impulse to reveal himself and to pour out a flood of wild words seized him, and it required a gallant effort to quell the impulse. His wounded pride then took possession of him.

“Yes,” he said, speaking slowly, “I confess to you, Miss M’Carthy, that I am a spy—an indifferent amateur; but I did not come under your roof in that capacity, I assure you, on my honour. I have placed myself in a very awkward position, I now see, and in a very humiliating one.”

“I am sure,” murmured Geraldine, not daring to lift her eyes, “that a word from you would blow my uncle’s suspicions to the winds.”

“And that word I cannot speak. Not now, at any rate. I must think over it. There are only two people in Ireland,” continued the young man, after a brief pause, and speaking in a quieter tone, “with whom I should care to set myself straight—Mr. Fitzgerald and yourself. Perhaps I may soon be able to do so. I will not make your visit to your friends here awkward, Miss M’Carthy. I shall leave the place at once, and write my apologies to our host. I could not face him now; nor, indeed, would I care to meet Mr. Fitzgerald in my present mood. Good-bye, Miss M’Carthy. I assure you I am very much distressed—all the more because I have distressed you.”

And, glancing for a moment at the young girl, who

stood before him with bowed head, Frank walked blindly away.

Had he seen Geraldine's face with the hot tears upon it his *amour propre* might have broken down.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### A FAIRY GODMOTHER

IT was some time before Geraldine could regain her ordinary composure. The troubled face of the young stranger haunted her and pained her.

Geraldine held a spy almost in as much abhorrence as she would hold a thief or an assassin. Her uncle had assured her that the Englishman was a detective, using a false name, and the young man had practically admitted the charge. But there was something still concealed from her. She could not bring herself to believe that the stranger was a detective, amateur or professional. His brown eyes wore too frank and honest a look to belong to a spy.

A keen pang of remorse assailed her as she recalled the face of the young Englishman. And yet how could she have avoided giving him pain? The remedy was in his own hands, if he was wrongfully suspected. Had she disobeyed her uncle, had she followed her own instinct and declined to act upon her uncle's advice, she might have provoked some disaster which would involve those she held dearest.

In Geraldine's heart love of her own kin was inbred and intense—intense to a fault. All the traditions of her house were familiar to her from childhood. Mingled with stories of brave and noble and valorous deeds were tales of cruelty and oppression (born of pride), and tales of vengeance; but there was no meanness in the sinister traditions which had often chilled her blood as she listened to her grandfather. No member of her house had ever broken faith with one of his own kin not even in those terrible times, in the days of Elizabeth and of Cromwell, when every art was employed and every vicious nerve strained to set parent against child, brother against brother. Abject poverty, contumely, pains and penalties, many of her ancestors had experienced; loss of everything that made life tolerable; betrayal at the hands of strangers they had trusted; but never, so far as she knew had an act of treachery sullied the record of the M'Carthys of Drumglass.

The young girl's ideas had in many respects been fixed before she went to the convent in France, and nothing apparently could alter her views. She had made few intimate friendships at school. Though she was frank and gentle and good-natured, there was behind her frankness some impassable barrier. Her home and those it contained formed her world, and however narrow the sphere was she had no desire to enlarge it. The nuns (who probably understood Geraldine better than she understood herself) had often rated her playfully for her reserve and coldness. She was told that selfishness and foolish pride were at the root of it all, and sometimes the young girl feared that this was the truth. Yet when she endeavoured to summon up courage to fight

her egotism and her empty pride she found the task well-nigh impossible. Now and again she had made a violent effort to form an acquaintance with one or other of her school companions, but she soon found herself sinking hopelessly back into her normal condition. With her wild brothers Geraldine could be as light of heart and as unreserved as the veriest hoyden. She could enter into all their games; she could pull an oar or sail a boat, or she could ride across country on the most unruly of nags. Alone or in the society of her brothers her spirit was bold and free; the presence of a stranger seemed to subdue her instantly. She puzzled her shrewd old grandfather. Sometimes as he pondered lovingly over her the old man would say to himself, "She has the eyes of her great-granduncle. God forbid they should ever have to flash like his with anger or to melt with sorrow!"

With Kate Usher she had formed the first true girl friendship of her life. It had begun with a considerable display of reserve on Geraldine's part, but Kate had soon broken through the reserve, and in a very short time the two young girls ceased to have any secrets—except a few very sacred ones—from each other.

Geraldine was aware that Kate was in some measure fond of Mr. Fitzgerald. She could hardly be in love with him; she displayed none of the ordinary symptoms of love, and Fitzgerald was many years older than Kate; but if she was not in love with him neither was she in love with anybody else.

Kate was aware that Geraldine was not in love with any man, and this knowledge was a source of disappointment to her, for there was one man the sadly wished to see Geraldine fall in love with—her brother Bob. She

did not dare to urge her brother's cause openly, fearing she might alarm her shy friend; but she urged it in a roundabout way, and it caused her considerable regret to observe that she had made no impression upon Geraldine, and that Bob was incapable, or was not desirous, of making headway for himself. She had confided her scheme to Father Hackett, and though the good old priest was easily enlisted in favour of the cause—both Bob and Geraldine were favourites of his—he counselled patience and prudence. Geraldine, he declared, was a strange girl. "You may bit her easy enough," said he, "but you won't get her to jump a five-barred gate unless she likes it; but if she does fancy it, she'll take that gate flying, whether you like it or not."

As Geraldine walked along the path leading from the arbour she saw Kate Usher approaching her.

"I fancied you would have strayed down here," said Miss Usher. "I have been having such an exciting morning of it. Let us go back to the arbour, for I must sit down to collect my thoughts. What is the matter with you, Geraldine, dear? You look as if something was troubling you. No secrets from me. What is it?" she asked, catching Geraldine's hand and pulling it through her arm. "Dear me! how I envy you those two or three inches of stature. You can pull yourself up proudly or disdainfully without an effort, whereas I feel I look positively ridiculous when I try to stand upon my dignity. But come, what's the matter?"

"I'll tell you later. I have been disturbed. I hardly know what to think; but don't mind me or my little troubles now. What about yourself?"

"Geraldine, some change has come over you since

I saw you last. I don't know what it is. There was an anxious look in your face this morning. What business have you to be anxious about anything? But here we are at my favourite little nook. Come in and sit down with me, and I will tell you a secret which will make your hair stand on end. I hardly know, though, whether I ought to tell tales out of school, but I can't contain myself. Geraldine, my pensive one, what would you think if I told you that I had a proposal of marriage this morning?"

"From Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"No, stupid! But from your uncle."

"My uncle Charles?"

"None other. Bob knew it was coming, but the rascal kept it secret from me."

"And what have you done?"

"I am afraid I have been very cold blooded. I have declined the honour. Now don't look angrily at me. I am not jesting. Your uncle proposed to me in the most courtly fashion, and I could have felt for him, only I could see with half an eye that his heart wasn't in the proposal."

"Why should he make it. if he wasn't in earnest?"

"Of course he was in earnest; but it wasn't his heart that spoke. He told me his desire was to ally himself with a member of an old and honourable Catholic family."

"And is there anything very ridiculous in that?"

"Dear me, no. Who said ridiculous? But just think of a man wanting to acquire me as he would a chattel or a portrait, or as a member of a Catholic family!"

"I suppose you would consider an alliance with my

uncle a *mésalliance*?"

"Oh, Sensitive Plant! No such idea ever came into my wicked brain. But honestly Geraldine, if you were in my position would you think of accepting the proposal?"

"Not if I didn't care for him. But do you think it fair to tell me or anyone else ; about a matter of this kind?"

"I think it fair to tell my own Geraldine, from whom I have no secrets worth talking of. She need not be afraid I shall tell anything else."

"You are vexed with me now, Kate."

"I am, Blue Eyes—just a little."

"But you must not be."

"Very well—I won't be," said Kate, drawing Geraldine's head towards her and kissing her on the cheek.

"Did your uncle seem much disturbed at your refusal of him?"

"Not an atom. He said he hoped it would in no way interfere with the friendship between this house and his, and I promised him it wouldn't, and we parted the best of friends. Indeed, I think he seemed relieved that the ordeal was over, and that he was free either to continue his bachelor life or to pursue some more tractable and more eligible young person. But, Geraldine, dearest, my refusal of your uncle was a very selfish act on my part. I fancy it will distress poor Bob."

"How?"

"I will tell you, though I shouldn't, I well know, trouble you with my troubles."

"Have you troubles, dear Kate?"

"I have, dearest. Or rather poor Bob has."

"What kind of troubles?"

"Those that you—or I can't cure. Horrid money trou-



bles. When I think of them I am heart-broken. There is a mortgage on the place—perhaps you don't know what that means—but what it does mean is that, unless we can pay a very large sum of money immediately, Bob and I may be turned out of this dear old spot. I don't mind it so much for myself, but it will break poor Bob down. It's none of his fault. He has no extravagances. His troubles, like the place itself, is an inheritance. But why should I distress you?"

"I am so glad you have told me, Kate."

"Yes. It is a relief to me to speak to someone about it—a selfish relief, I suppose."

"I had no idea that there were any money difficulties disturbing you. And your troubles can be so easily cured."

"It might be, perhaps, if I had accepted your uncle. I feel inclined when I think over everything to go to him and tell him that I'll marry him, if he helps Bob out of his difficulty. Everyone says he is rich."

"You needn't do anything so dreadful. How much money is required, Kate, dearest?"

"A large sum. About four thousand pounds—or somewhere about that. But it is odious to be talking of it to you, Geraldine."

"I can get you four thousand pounds, I haven't the slightest doubt."

"You! You don't mean to say that you have got a diamond mine at Brownstown, or a pearl fishery? Or have you discovered the philosopher's stone in one of those wild caves?"

"No," said Geraldine, a quiver in her voice, "none of these things. But grandfather has plenty of money. And

he would refuse me nothing in his power, I believe. And this is within his power, Kate."

"Are you jesting, Geraldine?"

"Why should you ask such a question?"

"And you are really serious?"

"Quite."

"You are an angel. It is so like a fairy tale that I was going to say you were a fairy god-mother. But it is absurd, Geraldine. I couldn't—I should say Bob couldn't—accept money from you. Now don't be vexed. We surely may be allowed to have our pride just as you have yours."

"Surely a friend may help a friend without either of them hurting one another's pride. Besides, you and I need have nothing to do with the matter. Your brother can arrange it with my grandfather. All I can promise is that I will take care that Mr. Usher will not be refused if he asks."

"Geraldine, I feel I am dancing on air. You have made me so happy."

"And won't you allow me to be happy, too?"

"But in this case, you see, your happiness can be only a reflection. But, good gracious, here have I been all this time forgetting that there are guests here! It must be quite half-an-hour since I told Mr. Fitzgerald I would follow him almost immediately with the young English artist I met in Dunmore last week."

"If you are referring to Mr. Venables—"

"So you know his name already!" interrupted Miss Usher. "How comes this?"

"Very simply," replied Geraldine, blushing vividly. "Your friend, Mr. Fitzgerald brought him to Prospect

House one day last week.”

“And you never told me this.”

“I had no opportunity. But, as I was about to say, you will not find him at Lake Cottage. Something happened just before I met you, and I had to tell him that he and I could not remain under the same roof.”

“And could it be that this horrid man was rude to my Geraldine?” asked Miss Usher, her eyes flashing.

“Oh, dear, no. Quite the contrary. But—the fact is, Kate, my uncle Charles has a particular objection to this stranger. Before he left here today he told me that Mr. Venables was not Mr. Venables, but a detective using a false name.”

“What rubbish!” exclaimed Miss Usher. She had not heard that the family at Prospect House was in any way connected in the public mind with Lord Clashmore’s disappearance. Her brother had heard the rumour, but had given little or no heed to it. “And if this Mr. Venables is a detective—in my opinion it is an absurd surmise—one of those strange ideas, no doubt, your uncle in his Saxon-hating condition loves to cherish—what on earth does he want wasting his time with innocent people like you and me and Mr. Fitzgerald—eh, Young Woman of the Blue Eyes—to address you in quasi-Celtic fashion?”



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE WOODEN POST

WHEN he left Lake Cottage it was young Aylward's intention to return to Dunmore, but as he walked along the road he changed his mind, and decided that he would pay a visit to Rhi-na-Shark Ferry and to the Back Strand. This he felt would be doing something, whereas if he was to seek Rose Cottage he would be removing himself from the scene of action, and would doubtless give himself over to melancholy or angry thoughts. He endeavoured to dismiss from his mind all consideration of what Fitzgerald would think when he came to hear that his companion was a detective. He did not dare to dwell upon Geraldine's attitude towards him. He would make a strong effort to concentrate his faculties on the matter that had brought him to Ireland.

Fumbling in the breast pocket of his coat amongst his small stock of letters he found the plans which Mr. Weekes had handed to him in Mr. Mason's room. As he glanced at them he saw that they would be of little use in directing him to the road to Dunmore, and that at a certain part of it, which he remembered, the Tramore

strand was visible in the distance.

He had travelled for more than half an hour on a level highway, which skirted the margin of the lake for a considerable distance, without meeting a pedestrian of any class. The solitude did not surprise or depress him; he was already growing accustomed to it.

At that part of the roadway which begins to ascend he came upon a small cottage, and here he made enquiries respecting the shortest cut to Rhi-na-Shark. The woman who answered him at the doorway gave him directions so volubly that Frank was hardly able to follow her words, but her final instructions to "ask as you go along" seemed to him fairly sound advice.

When he came to the turning to the right, which he had been told to take, he wandered for a long time over a hilly and badly kept road. This road had several turnings off at, leading apparently to nowhere. Frequently he had to retrace his steps, and often he had to invoke assistance to guide him to the right track.

His mind was in so disturbed a condition as the thoughts of his interview with Geraldine at Bell Lake forced themselves upon him, and he was so frequently discovering that he had lost his way, that he had no eyes for the landscape which unfolded itself as he descended in the direction of the Bay of Tramore, and no consideration of the passing of time disturbed him. He had never once consulted his watch from the time he left Bell Lake until he found himself standing upon the Back Strand embankment, at the extreme eastern end of it, that is to say at the end nearest to Rhi-na-Shark. He now looked at his watch, and found, much to his surprise, that it was near five o'clock. He also realized that he was tired,

and that to continue his journey to the ferry and then to walk back to Tramore would probably be beyond his powers. He was hungry, too, he had eaten nothing since breakfast, and had been sustained during the afternoon with an occasional mug of milk which he had obtained at one or other of the cottages on the road from Bell Lake—gratuitous refreshment, too, for in every case his offer of payment had been positively but politely declined.

He again examined Mr. Weekes's plans, and then he remembered the old fortune-teller's words. This was the very evening on which she had advised him to seek the post at the western end of the Back Strand!

He had consulted an almanac at the hotel and found that the first of the new moon coincided with the period when the spring tide was at its highest water. In about two hours the time indicated by old Peggy would have arrived.

As he stood on the embankment, the sand-hills at the other side of the Back Strand between him and the ocean, he smiled as he pondered on his half-credulous views of old Peggy's words. Anyhow, he told himself, he would soon have an opportunity of testing their value. Though he had decided after his interview with Father Hackett, to pay the mysterious visit to the Back Strand, the matter had slipped out of his mind when Fitzgerald had asked him to name Tuesday for the visit to Lake Cottage, and probably he would not have remembered the hour fixed by the old woman only that he found himself in the neighbourhood. His chief desire to keep the appointment—if it might be so termed—did not arise so much from a belief that there was anything in the fortune-teller's prognostication as from a wish

to prove to himself that there was no leaven of fear in his composition. Now, he found himself inquiring: was there, after all, some occult impulse sending him to the spot? He had not, when he had left Lake Cottage, intended to visit the Back Strand, but fate had driven him towards it.

The pangs of hunger—a sensation quite new to him—now began to attack the young man, and he felt there would be considerable difficulty in holding out for a few hours longer against the craving for food. Looking around him he espied, about a quarter of a mile inland, a small cottage, and, replacing Weeke's plans in his pocket, he started for the lonely dwelling.

The ground he now walked over was broken and swampy. There was apparently no road or path leading to the little cottage—at all events, none in the direction he was travelling. To add to his discomfort the day, which had been fine, though cloudy and sultry, now showed signs of cyclonic disturbance. Rain began to fall slowly from a leaden sky in thick, heavy drops, and an occasional gusty growl told that a storm was brewing.

Frank halted now and again to turn round and look out towards the ocean, but its expanse was hidden by the great ramparts of sand. He did not like the angry look of the sky; but whether it presaged thunder or a storm of wind and rain he could not tell. The atmosphere was oppressive enough for thunder.

When he reached the lone cottage—a miserable-looking building, probably some fisherman's shealing—he found some difficulty in gaining a hearing. He was not even the bark of a dog to reply to his knocks at the closed door. More than ten minutes went by, and Frank feared that



he had lighted upon a deserted house. At last he heard a voice say: "Who's there?" The young man answered boldly, "A traveller, looking for something to eat and drink, and quite willing to pay."

After a few more quiet minutes the door was opened, and a miserably-clad woman stood in the doorway.

"I'm sorry for you, young man," she said, "but we're poor people here, and there's little or nothing to offer you."

"Anything in the shape of food will be welcome," said Frank. "I am too hungry to be particular."

"All there is, sir," said she, "is some griddle cake and some cold potayties an' milk. You're welcome to them if you come inside."

Frank entered a dark, damp, wretched-looking room, almost devoid of furniture. A table, a chair, and a kitchen dresser was all the plenishing he could see. Seating himself at the table, he was soon busy with the frugal meal, and as he devoured it, almost greedily, he was wondering what his mother would think if she saw him dining upon cold potatoes.

In common with all the other poor people whose hospitality he had enjoyed during the day, he found that the woman of the cottage would not accept any money. It was quite possible, he told himself, that he had been eating the poor creature's supper, and he determined to make a strong effort to compel her to take something from him. He picked a half-sovereign out of his purse, and catching her skinny hand as he stood in the doorway he laid the piece of gold on her palm. The woman stared at it, and started back as if she was horror-stricken, her eyes glaring at the coin in a manner that reminded

Frank of old Peggy's eyes when they lighted upon his gold.

"As you won't accept money from a stranger for food," said he, holding out his hand, "tell me my fortune. I know by your eyes you could, if you wished," he added lightly.

"I can tell yer honour one thing," said she, "though I'm no fortune-teller. There's a storm comin' on, an' take my advice and go to Thramore—it's the nearest shelter for a gentleman like you—as quick as ever your legs can carry you. The bank by the Back Strand is the nearest road you'll get—worse luck!" Then, lowering her voice and speaking with an impressiveness which startled Frank, she said "An' don't tarry on your road far anything on God's earth. An' may Himself an' His Holy Mother guard you an' bless you!"

Frank walked away considerably puzzled by the result of his second small attempt at generosity.

The rain was not falling heavily, the sky had grown darker, and the gusts of wind were more fierce and more frequent. As he retraced his steps the roar of the sea fell boisterously on his ears.

When he reached the embankment he pulled out his watch, and saw that it was a quarter past six o'clock. The salt tide was now pouring in over the Back Strand, covering the drab sands with green and yeasty waters.

The young man walked hurriedly along the broad dyke, a prey to anxious thoughts. The woman in the lonely house he had just left had meant to warn him of something by her parting words, something beyond the storm which was threatening him. No doubt she knew old Peggy, the fortune-teller, and what one was

advising him to seek the other was advising him to avoid. And now, as he began to think over old Peggy's words, he remembered that she had told him he was not to approach the wooden post at the western side of the Back Strand from any point but the west. This doubtless meant that he was to approach it from Tramore and not from Rhi-na-Shark. It was quite possible that there was some plot afoot in which the sullen fellow, Corbett, was a prime mover. Perhaps he had better be discreet, even at the risk of having to tax himself with cowardice, and adopt the advice which had been tendered to him by Father Hackett as well as by the woman to whom he had last spoken.

The same feeling which had haunted him during his journey on the Saturday from Dunmore to Rhi-na-Shark—the feeling that he was being followed or watched by some one in hiding now came over him afresh. He turned suddenly, looking inland, and more than once, on repeating the action, he could have sworn that he saw the figure of a crouching man in the swampy track. Twice he called out, "Hallo, there!" but received no answer to his challenge.

This feeling of being dogged irritated him considerably. It did not produce any alarm; on the contrary, it braced him up, and eventually it caused him to decide that he would see the matter out, whatever it might cost. He would seek the post indicated by Peg of the Burrow, and he would defy the weather and trample down any sense of fear.

The storm was now indicating its nature more definitely. From the black sky out to sea flashes of lightning darted, and the thunder of the clouds now and again

silenced the thunder of the ocean. The wind howled intermittently, oppressive lulls emphasising its turbulent voice.

Cold, wet, and miserable, a prey to misgivings which took no definite shape, Frank moved onwards, his journey seeming almost interminable as he plunged through the rain. The slightest influence exerted in either direction would now have swayed him to push vigorously forward to Tramore, or to see the post mentioned by the fortune-teller, and to stand by it until the tide receded.

As he approached the western end of the Back Strand, it was almost as dark as if the sun had been sunk an hour's journey below the horizon. Taking out Weekes's plan, Frank endeavoured to discover where the post might be, but there was no indication of it upon the plan, at least none which the lurid sky would permit him to distinguish. He was about to walk onwards again when a great flash of lightning burst from the zenith, disclosing to him, a few hundred yards to his left, a round wooden post, standing upon the Back Strand. A mound of sand sheltered it at the eastern side, and partly hid it from one approaching from the eastward. The flash which revealed the post seemed to the young man, in his highly-strung condition, an indication that it was his destiny to stand on the mystic spot at the psychological moment. As he decided that he would follow out the impulse which now seemed to be controlling him, Frank Aylward almost laughed aloud at the notion that he could be swayed by the supernatural.

Climbing down the side of the embankment he proceeded to walk towards the post. As he advanced, the ground, he discovered, was soft, slimy, and yielding; his

foot sank more deeply at every step.

He had not gone very far before a sense of alarm filled him as he suddenly slipped, one leg burying itself in the ooze almost to the knee. He drew up his leg quickly and crawled backwards. He now thought he saw the reason of old Peggy's admonition not to approach the post from any direction but the west.

Judging that the town of Tramore lay to the westward, he had little difficulty in following the instructions of the old woman. Turning his back on the town, now concealed from view by the darkness and the heavy rain, he found that there was a solid ridge leading to the wooden post.

On arriving at the post he saw that it was notched at regular intervals—the notches, he presumed, indicating either the rise or fall of the tide or the height of the post above high or low water. It was imbedded in stones and clay. In the south, facing the ocean, and within a few yards of the solid ground on which the post stood, was a wide circular patch, now only dimly discernible. This patch looked to Frank like a great round vat or cauldron of boiling liquid. It bubbled and seethed, and its frothy scum was every moment agitated by a heaving motion.

The young man had lost all sense of fatigue and of the cold and wet, and was heedless of the gusts of wind which blew in his face with staggering effect. He took out his watch, and, peering at it, made out that the hands pointed to seven o'clock.

"Now," said he, with a brave attempt to smile, "is the mystic hour! We shall see what we shall see!"

But although he tried to convince himself that nothing of any moment would really happen, he was filled

with an undefinable sense of terror as he gazed at the quivering patch in front of him.

Suddenly he noticed something round and dark bobbing up and down in the bubbling mass. He strained his eyes, but could not make out what the something was. It seemed to have arisen out of the centre, and to be gradually moving round in a widening circle. He got as near as he could with safety to the edge of the cauldron, and as the round, dark thing was coming close to him another great flash of lightning lit up the welkin, and Frank beheld an object which was no longer dark—something round, and white, and gleaming.

A man's face!

Horror stiffened him and glued his feet to the ground. The thunder reverberated overhead, and made the earth tremble. Frank could only stare at what he knew to be a human head—no doubt the head of Lord Clashmore.

Wild thoughts whirled through his fevered brain. He tried to remember clearly the tales he had heard of the quicksands on the Back Strand. This, then, was one of them yielding up the dead which its sister quicksand had engulfed eleven days ago.

He made a mighty effort to control himself, and to summon back the power of action which had deserted him. Although for a few moments he felt that he would prefer to face death, in any shape, rather than that this ghastly thing should touch him, he tried to screw up his courage to grasp the floating head when it should come within his reach.

As he was nerving himself for the hideous task, the seething mass in front of him rose up in a dome in the centre, a great gurgling, terrifying sound accompanying

the agitation. The next moment the body of a man—not a head only, Frank thanked heaven—was vomiting out of the quicksand and lay at his feet.

As he sprang back from the body he was suddenly seized from behind in a powerful grasp, and before he could turn to defend himself, or to ascertain who was his assailant a violent blow struck him senseless at the foot of the wooden post.





## CHAPTER XXXIV

### CONVALESCENCE

WHEN Frank Aylward returned to consciousness he found himself lying in a bed in a darkened room. His first experience was a dull sensation in his head, not exactly pain, but something akin to it. He looked around the room, but he could not recognize it, and the effort cost him something for he relapsed into unconsciousness, a sickening sensation that he was falling into a quicksand terrifying him. When next he opened his eyes his brain was clearer, and the dull memory of hideous visions had lost much of its terror. A sense of lassitude, not wholly unpleasant, weighted him. He was conscious of voices in the room and presently he distinguished the figures of two men seated at the window. He now recognized the room. It was the bedroom in Father Hackett's house which he had occupied the first night he had spent in Ireland. He could hear the voices of the two men, and he knew one was the old priest and the other Larry Fitzgerald. He was in good hands; but what had brought him to this pass? Oh, yes. He remembered. And as he closed his eyes a vision of the floating head and the bubbling

sands swam before him.

Presently he shook the vision from him, and again he listened to the low voices of the two men. He was unable or unwilling he—hardly knew which—to speak or to move, but he could overhear the conversation easily, and at it was not concerned with anything of a personal or private character he did not feel he was an eavesdropper.

“My dear Larry,” he heard Father Hackett say, “I wish you’d try to have some sense, and to put those crazy notions of yours about the Atlantic ocean out of your head.”

The words amused Frank, recalling as they did his own sense of the absurdity of Fitzgerald’s objections to the mighty ocean.

“My notions aren’t half as crazy as you think, sir,” replied Fitzgerald. “Nor am I the only one that has a bad word to say of this Gulf stream.”

“You might as well be speaking disrespectful of the equator, Larry. It’s best to make the best of everything God sends us. What I, in my old-fashioned way, think is that this is just what we are neglecting to do—that we’re not making the best uses of our opportunities, I mean.”

“I suppose not, sir. Perhaps though if we saw our villages converted into towns, and our towns into big cities, and the whole country dotted with factory chimneys, we might regret the change.”

“Regret it! I should think so. That’s not what I want to see at all. I hate big towns—especially manufacturing towns—with their smoke and their dirt and their smells. It seems to me that, when you begin to shut people in and deprive them of the wholesome air in narrow streets,

you poison their souls as well as their bodies. That's not what I want to see in Ireland—God forbid! There are plenty of ways of being prosperous in Ireland—I don't mean ways of making great fortunes, but ways of being comfortable—if we only could shake Great Britain and her imperialism off our backs, and, like good Christians, forget our quarrels. Look at the Channel Islands. They support in comparative comfort, with no aid from factory chimneys, a population which in proportion to their area would mean—with all due allowance for waste land—six or seven times our present numbers in Ireland.”

“I expect you have been dipping into 'Cornelius O'Dowd,' recently, sir.”

“I have not, Larry. Do you mean to say that the scoundrel Lever has forestalled me about this Channel Island scheme of mine?”

“Not exactly forestalled you, but I thought he might have given you a hint. I remember he says somewhere in 'O'Dowd' that he is tired of hearing Ireland abused, and he suggests that when England has nothing better to do, she might take a turn at the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands—that, no doubt, some fault could be found in England against the Island of Sark and its inhabitants, if she could be only got to divert her attention from the Emerald Isle. But that's just what Great Britain won't do, sir. Anyhow, she will never consent to be shaken off. Small as we are and poor as we are she is either unable to do without us, or she is afraid of us.”

“Her fears are unfounded, or would be if she could only clear her mind of old prejudices. When she first decided to squelch us—to quote that genial old Scot, Tom Carlyle—as if we were a rat in her path, we were,

perhaps, in competition with her, but that's all past and gone, and in my humble opinion the game didn't pay for the candle. It would take us some centuries now to get level with her again in matters of commerce or population, and I don't think we'd ever trouble to enter into the competition. Anyhow, if we were to become a sort of Channel Island I expect we could offer the best security in the world for peace and industry, the possession of say half a million landed proprietors. Those who want to grow rich in a hurry could go to England or Scotland or America or Africa or Australia. I don't want to see anybody grow rich on factory smoke and sweated labour. No, Larry, my friend, to make a deliberate bull, what we want to do here is to get back in order to go forward."

"How far back—to paganism?"

"Not quite so far. Though, upon my conscience, I think I'd prefer paganism to some of the new-fangled religions which masquerade as forms of Christianity."

"I'm afraid, Father John, that your idea for remodelling poor Ireland isn't much more practical than my idea of diverting the course of the Gulf Stream."

"Maybe not—but it's much more sensible, Larry, my friend. But we mustn't get too polemic, or we shall be forgetting ourselves, and perhaps disturbing that poor boy over there."

"That poor boy is listening to you. Father Hackett," said Frank, startling the two men. "And he is very much interested in your scheme for the pacification of the distressful country."

"This is too bad. Mr. Aylward," said Father Hackett, approaching the bedside and seizing the hand which Frank extended "But when two thick-headed Irishmen

get together and think nobody is listening they can't help themselves from floundering into arguments about their native land. And how do you feel?" He placed his hand on Frank's brow as he asked the question.

"Very comfortable. I assure you, sir."

"No pain or giddiness at all?"

"None."

"That's splendid! Larry, I think I may safely introduce you now to my young friend. Mr. Frank Aylward, nephew of lord Clashmore."

"Do you think you can forgive me for the deception?" asked Frank, as Fitzgerald seized his hand.

"It's a principle of mine not to hit a man when he's down." said Fitzgerald. "How could you expect me to assault you while you lie in bed there? Faith, I'm very glad, old fellow, to hear your voice again."

"We've had too much talk already," said Father Hackett. "My old housekeeper who is nursing you, Mr. Aylward, will give us beans for disturbing you. You must take things easy a bit. This is Larry's first visit to your sick bed, and he was allowed to enter the room only on the conditions that he would do nothing that might be calculated to disturb you. He'll get a wiggling I warrant you. All you want is complete rest. Do your best to doze off now, at we'll come to you again as soon as the doctor says we may."

Frank could only express his thanks with his eyes. He found himself tired again and ready to sink into slumber.

For several days young Aylward had brief interviews with his two friends. All conversation concerning his accident, or events which led up to it, was strictly forbid-

den, Father Hackett promising him that would answer every question to the best of his ability as soon as the doctor allowed the invalid downstairs.

When Frank was permitted to move out of his room, he learned that he had been ten days in the priest's house. He had been taken from the Back Strand to the hotel in Tramore the evening of the assault upon him, and Father Hackett, hearing of this the next morning, had driven over for him, had been allowed to convey him to his house in a carriage. The chief recommendation of the doctor had been perfect quiet, and the priest knew this could be more safely assured under his own roof than anywhere else in the neighbourhood.

"I wish you wouldn't ask me any further questions just yet," said Father Hackett, "but as I promised to answer you I will do so. Perhaps it would only fret you to have questions tumbling about in your mind with no answers to fit them?"

"I am sure that is so," said Frank. "For some days I have grown quite irritable through curiosity. But before I enquire about myself, may I ask how you dealt with my mother—of course she heard of my mishap?"

"We managed to keep everything quiet for some days. Then Mr. Weekes wrote to Mrs. Aylward—in Mr. Mason's name, of course—informing her that you had met with an accident which would most likely prevent you from writing for a week or so. He assured her, of course, that there was no cause for alarm, and, coming from a solicitor, I suppose your mother more rapidly accepted the statement than she would if anyone else had written. She wanted to come over here, but Mr. Weekes managed to put her off. He sends a daily telegraphic bulletin

about you. Of course, if there had been any grave symptoms, we should instantly have summoned your mother, but thank goodness, we were never seriously uneasy about you.”

“You have been very thoughtful, it is evident. And now, sir, may I enquire who or what administered the coup-de-grace to me?”

“It was a who—Corbett the ferryman.”

“What was his object in attacking me?”

“No doubt, to prevent you from seeing what you saw; but he was a few minutes too late. You might have fared worse—though I don’t believe the scoundrel meant to do more than stun you—only for Andy Kelly, the process-server.”

“Was he upon the scene, then?”

“He was. He had been dogging your footsteps for some days. Mr. Weekes told him off for the purpose, and whatever way you did it, you endeared yourself to the poor little man. He was just a moment too late to prevent Corbett from springing upon you—Corbett, like yourself, was wholly unaware that Andy or anyone else was in the neighbourhood—and Andy got his foot twisted again as he was crawling after Corbett. But lamed as he was, and insignificant looking as he is, he faced Corbett boldly. The ferryman has many a knock of a stick on his head, and many a scar to bear witness to Andy’s courage and pertinacity. The worst of it is that the poor little fellow got a sad drubbing for his pains, and is not yet fit to leave his bed.”

“And how was I brought to Tramore?”

“Andy dragged or carried you there somehow. He delivered you up to Mr. M’Grath, of the Baths, and

then be collapsed. Old M'Grath got you conveyed to the hotel."

"It seems to me that, with the exception of my friend Mr. Corbett, you have ail been very kind to me. Where is that gentleman?"

"Corbett! In jail at present. Acting on Andy's information the police managed to obtain forcible possession of him. He was hiding in a little cottage near the Back Strand. You had some food there, it seems, shortly before the big thunderstorm came on."

"And now, sir, comes my most important question. Did the discovery of my uncle's body"—he shuddered as the memory of his adventure on the margin of the quicksand came to him—"clear up the mystery of his disappearance?"

"No. Matters are still very much in the dark. The body, which was so strangely revealed to you, was not, as you think, that of your uncle."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Frank. "The thing has been haunting me. Whose body was it, then?"

"The viscount's man, Backas. The mystery concerning your uncle's disappearance is no clearer. It may be that Corbett—who is as silent as a grave—will speak when he feels his own life is in danger. And now, my young friend, I refuse to talk further with you about those gloomy matters. We shall have dinner in about an hour, and our common friend, Larry, has promised to join us. I have told him as much as I felt he ought to know of you end of your mission to Ireland. By-the-by, here are some letters for you which, perhaps, will occupy you until dinner time. I have to pay a visit in the neighbourhood, and I will return as soon as I possibly



can.”



## CHAPTER XXXV

### A TALE OF A TAX-CART

THE letters which Father Hackett handed to Frank were chiefly from Park Lane. Two had been written before the attack had been made upon him, and were made up of lively gossip concerning his mother's circle. This gossip would have interested or amused the young man a couple of weeks ago; now he found it flat, indeed almost wearisome. It seemed to wear an archaic look, to chronicle events of little moment which must have occurred in some distant era. He could not realise that only about three weeks had elapsed since he had shaken the dust of London off his boots. His mother's more recent notes were brief, and were mainly requests that he would write to her the moment he was able to do so. She declared that she felt he was in good hands, but naturally she could not help being anxious. If he had the slightest desire to see her, she would instantly cross over to Ireland. She hoped he would no longer puzzle himself over his uncle's affairs, or run any further risks in order to pierce the mystery concerning him, but that he would, the moment he was well enough to travel, return to Park

Lane. Ireland was, as she had always believed it to be, an abominable and savage country. For her own part she would prefer to join an expedition to Central Africa rather than to cross St. George's Channel.

How much or how little she knew of the particulars of the attack upon him Frank was unable to gather from his mother's letters; but he felt a sinking of the heart as he read his mother's comment upon Ireland and the Irish, and as his thoughts flew to the lady of the blue eyes.

No doubt Geraldine knew who he was. What effect would the discovery have upon her? He found himself unable to arrive at any answer to this question, and in despair he turned to an unopened letter, the envelope of which bore Mr. Weekes' hand-writing upon it. This letter was dated the previous day.

"MY DEAR SIR," wrote the man of the law, "I hear with the sincerest pleasure that Richard is himself again, and I hope to have the pleasure at an early date of offering his majesty personally my congratulations on his restoration. As concealment (which for some time has been feeding on my cheek) is no longer necessary, I may say that almost from the beginning I had a shrewd suspicion that you were my Lord Clashmore's nephew. In justice to my master (as you termed Mr. Mason at our first interview) I may add that he kept the secret faithfully. I felicitate myself on having disobeyed your instructions *in re* keeping an eye upon you. Amongst my many suspicions I felt that our athletic and industrious friend, Corbett, might elect to go on the warpath after the burning of his boats; but it did not occur to me

that the thing which did happen might happen. I must admit that I scoffed at the quicksand theory; it wore too melodramatic an air to recommend if to a lawyer. The devil of it is, that your discovery of Backas' body affords no light to direct us to the path which will lead to the unearthing of your worthy uncle. The inquest may elicit some fact or facts of importance. At all events, it will, I feel, help to guide me in following certain many routes.

"No doubt Father Hackett has informed you that we are in daily communication with the Hon. Mrs. Aylward. Mr. Mason desires to be remembered most kindly to you, and to offer his congratulations on your recovery.—Yours, faithfully to command,

"E. H WEEKES."

"P. S.—Our injured factotum, Andy Kelly, is now pronounced out of danger, and in a few days he will be fit to tender his evidence (for what it is worth) at the adjourned inquest. In view of certain legal proceedings, we hardly had any choice left about your name; its disclosure cannot hurt.—E. H. W.

"P. S. 2.—It may possibly interest you to know that at long last I am a member of one of the learned professions. In short, as our friend Micawber would put it, I am a full-fledged solicitor. In addition to entering upon this new *rôle*—pray excuse the goak—I have been made a partner in the honourable house of Mason, and (in commercial phraseology) we shall in future adopt the style and title of Mason and Weekes. (Trusting we shall

be favoured with a continuance of your esteemed orders. Country families waited upon at their residences. Repairs executed with neatness and despatch). If, by the way, you should require any money, we shall be most happy to be your bankers for any reasonable amount. For Self and Partner, E H. W.”

“This man would drive me mad in a month,” said Frank. “But I must not forget that he has done me a good turn.” As he tossed Mr. Weekes’ letter aside he heard Fitzgerald’s voice in the hall, and in a few moments the two men were shaking hands. Fitzgerald looked particularly spruce, and his eyes beamed with pleasure. Frank hardly knew whether he ought or ought not to refer to the deception he had practised upon his companion, and, while he was swiftly deliberating, Fitzgerald settled the matter by saying:

“Well, Mr. Aylward, I am horribly deceived in you. I never would have taken you for a practical joker; and to play a joke of the kind on a fogley like me! It’s a mercy I didn’t say something hurtful about your Waterford connections.”

“You are letting me off very lightly. It is very good of you.”

“Not at all, my dear sir. Father John told me all, and, faith, I felt for you, knowing how hateful you must have found it to be going about with a name that didn’t belong to you. I must say that I was a bit hurt for a moment that you didn’t trust me, but when I came to think of it, and remembered that our acquaintanceship was a brand-new one, and made merely by chance, I realized what a donkey I was.”

“Coals of fire, Mr. Fitzgerald.”

“Now, don’t be nasty. The best way is for both of us to forget the name incident.”

“If you’re willing to forget it, it is almost needless to say that I am.”

“Faith, I’m more than willing. Bob Usher has chafed me unmercifully about it. And I got a deuce of a rating from Simon M’Carthy over you. The old man seemed as proud as a peacock with a wooden leg that he had in a measure suspected who you were the evening he met you first. It seems he had then only a vague feeling that you bore a strange resemblance to the first Viscountess Clashmore—a resemblance I confess, I am unable to trace; but, then, I am no good at that kind of thing. Old Simon puzzled his head over you the evening you were at Prospect House, but he couldn’t fix you—indeed, as he had never heard of your existence, it would have been hard even for him—Irish as he is—to discover who you were. He was angry as the deuce when he heard of your mishap. He said it was simple madness to have allowed you to go about running your head into danger. The old boy has evidently taken a great fancy to you. He sends here every day to inquire after you.”

Frank could hardly tell whether this piece of information pleased or displeased him. His pride was up in arms at the thought of his being regarded as *persona grata* by a mere Irish farmer. But was he not Geraldine’s guardian, and would not his friendship be work fostering, if it would help him approach Geraldine?

“Here’s our host,” said Fitzgerald, “and that sounds very like the dinner bell. And, faith, it’s a welcome sound, for I hadn’t a mouthful since twelve o’clock.”

Frank fancied during the dinner that Fitzgerald was unusually buoyant, and that Father Hackett was not a little distrait. It was evident that there was a mild conspiracy to keep the conversation clean away from anything concerned with Lord Clashmore or his disappearance, or with the discovery of Backas's body. Nor was the young man sorry for this. He had, for the moment, lost much of his interest in his uncle, and his thoughts, when they strayed inadvertently, strayed to Prospect House. He had made up his mind that we would pay a visit to Brownstown at the first opportunity.

After dinner Father Hackett suggested that, as the evening was mild and bright, Frank might like to take a stroll in the garden.

As the young man walked through the garden, it was evident to him that he was not yet fit for a long tramp. A certain lassitude still clung to him. No doubt he could borrow the priest's trap, and drive to Brownstown; but in a moment it occurred to him that this would hardly be fair, considering Father Hackett's objections to him as a suitor for Geraldine. Then he remembered the final postscript in Weekes's letter. Why should he not purchase a conveyance for himself? And he felt a secret joy at the idea, which suddenly occurred to him, of making a present of his new vehicle to his host when he would be returning to England.

Taking advantage of a lull in the conversation he said:

"How one enjoys the fresh air after having been locked up for a time!"

"You must be cautious, you know," said Father Hack-



ett. "Don't let Master Larry inveigle you into any pedestrian expeditions. You won't be fit for much walking for some days yet."

"I am aware of that, sir. My legs seem to have lost some of their swing for the moment. A ride or a drive would suit me better, I have no doubt."

"Isn't it the dickens to be poor?" said the priest. "My unfortunate shandradan broke down while you were ill—I believe it was nearly as old as the 'One Hoss Shay'—and my poor horse is not a fit mount for you; but no doubt our friend Larry can find something decent for you."

"I didn't mean that I was seeking to trespass on you further, sir, or on Mr. Fitzgerald. I have already been a sufficiently heavy charge on you. I want to buy a horse and trap."

"That would be a large extravagance, my dear young friend."

"But I can afford to be extravagant. My visit to Ireland has cost me so little in the shape of money, that I feel ashamed of myself, and I must launch out in some direction, even if it is a selfish direction. I suppose you could pick up something suitable for me in Waterford, Mr. Fitzgerald—something good, but not too flash."

"I know the very thing," said Fitzgerald, "if you don't mind going to seventy or eighty guineas for it. As neat a cart and as good a little hack as ever you laid your eyes on, and well worth the money—your old friend Maguire's, sir," turning to the priest.

"Maguire! I can't say I remember him or his vehicle, Larry."

"Faith, then, your memory must be very convenient

one, for he sold yourself a horse once that nearly caused a schism in the Church.”

“Oh, you mean that rascal from Dunmore that sold Father Mathew to me?”

“The same, sir.”

“And he has a trap for sale now?”

“Well, the sheriff has, sir. Maguire had no luck, and has bolted to America. I must tell you about him and his tax-cart. Perhaps you may remember, Mr. Aylward, that I informed you, in the course of one of my yarns, that this Maguire left Dunmore in order to enlarge himself in Waterford?”

“I remember your story well. I should be rather alarmed at purchasing cattle of his.”

“Oh, this is a beauty with no tricks. But I must tell you the tale of Maguire. It’s very short and it may amuse you. He started in Waterford as a grocer and provision dealer with a great flourish of trumpets. Being a Protestant, people didn’t enquire much about his stability—they took it for granted that he had money, though if he had been a Papist they’d have made every conceivable sort of enquiry about him. It’s a great thing to be a Protestant in Ireland, Mr. Aylward, especially if you want credit. Anyhow, Maguire launched out on a great scale and was seemingly doing very well, but whether it was that he was too extravagant privately, or that he was putting money secretly by, I can’t tell you, but anyhow he got himself, or put himself into a tight corner. Most of the people he owed money to lived in Waterford—about a dozen of them were on bills with him, or had cash owed to them to tunes varying from about one hundred to two hundred pounds, and Maguire managed his

affairs so artfully that no one creditor of his knew anything of any other creditor's dealings with him. Anyhow, when affairs were ripe my brave Maguire—who had a strong weakness always for a joke—bought this cart and the little mare for something about a hundred guineas—it's a really first rate turn-out, a kind of thing that even a Bishop wouldn't be ashamed to own. Then he went to each of his creditors and pulled a long face and spun a plausible yarn. A man in England with whom he had dealings, had induced him to sign an accommodation bill, and the British rascal had suddenly gone broke, and nothing but ruin and emigration stared poor Maguire in the face. 'I don't owe anything of consequence in Ireland but what I owe yourself—eighty-two, eleven, seven, or a hundred and five nought eight, or two hundred and twenty-seven four nine,' as the case might be. 'If you take proceedings against me, my few British creditors will be down on my tail, and I'll have to go bankrupt, and then there won't be a penny in the pound. But I'll tell you what I'll do with yourself—for a friend is one thing and a trade creditor another thing. You know that horse and trap of mine—it's worth a hundred and twenty any day. I keep it at Cantwell's stables, and I'll give you an order to Cantwell for it—but don't shame me by going for it until I'm out of the country.' The man who was owed a hundred or under apparently did not reflect very deeply on the morality of his secret bargain, and jumped at the offer, and made some pleasant remark about it being a good old custom to take the beast for the damage. The man who was owed a larger sum shook his head and didn't see his way to the deal. When a creditor was troublesome—that is to say, when Maguire couldn't

manage to frighten him about a penny in the pound—he offered him his furniture in addition to his trap, and managed to square it in this way. Each creditor was bound in his solemn word of honour to say nothing to anyone in town about Maguire’s financial ruin, and not to go for the trap or the furniture until poor Maguire had set out on his travels for America. Anyhow, the day after the prime boy telegraphed from Queenstown that he was afloat each creditor went down with his order to Cantwell’s stables. Of course, you see what’s coming. There was a procession of citizens each with an order for the same horse and trap. There was the deuce’s own fun then. Some heads were broken, and the language, I am told, was enough to bum the stable down. Cantwell swore he had bought and paid for the horse; but there was some flaw in his bargain and the sheriff stepped in and seized it for his costs and proposes to sell it tomorrow. Of course it was the same with the furniture—only worse—for the creditors started using chairs and tables and pots and pans for ammunition, and most of the furniture was converted into matchwood, after it had served its purpose as lethal weapons. In addition to being chaffed, many a respectable trader was obliged to wear sticking plaster on some part of his face for days, and a certain pompous bank manager had to attend to his clients with his head swathed in lint—he got an unmerciful welt on the temple from a saucepan with which a solicitor struck him, as he was trying to sneak away with an umbrella stand while the scrimmage was at its height in the kitchen.”

“Larry, you scoundrel,” said the priest, “you’re stretching it too far; you’re giving me a pain in my side.”

“There’s the horse and trap in the hands of the sheriff to witness if I lie. sir.”

“What will Mr. Aylward think of us at all?”

“He hardly knows what to think of you,” said Frank, “except that you can make him laugh at stories of rascality. Anyhow, I wouldn’t miss that tax-cart for more than seventy guineas, and if Mr. Fitzgerald will do me the favour of purchasing it he will make me more than ever his debtor.”

“I’ll become your debtor with pleasure. But I wish I could screw a real good laugh out of you. Look at poor Father John. He’s picturing the bank manager—he knows the one I mean—looting the hall. It does you good to see a man enjoying a joke, even if it’s only a small taste of a joke.”



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### CRABBED AGE AND YOUTH

THE next few days were spent very quietly at Father Hackett's house. Frank saw but little of his host during the day-time, and each evening when the priest returned to dinner he was accompanied by Larry Fitzgerald. It seemed to Frank that there was a deliberate, though unostentatious effort made to prevent any private conversation taking place between himself and his host. The young man was not sorry for this. He was now anxious to avoid anything which would lead up to a mention of Geraldine's name. A restless desire to revisit Prospect House possessed him, and he felt he could not pay a visit to Brownstown so long as he was Father Hackett's guest. He had a feeling, too, that he was a burden on the priest's establishment. Many little things which came under his notice convinced him that his generous host was none too well off.

On Saturday evening the new horse and trap—fresh from the hands of the sheriff's officer—arrived, and Frank seized the opportunity of announcing his early departure. He endeavoured to adopt an air of mock in-

gratitude. He stated that, though he was fully satisfied his strength was thoroughly restored, he would derive added strength from inhaling in Tramore the salt airs from the ocean. He would remain in Tramore, he declared, until the adjourned inquest on Backas's body had been held.

Frank was a little ashamed of himself for concealing his intentions of paying an early visit to Prospect House; but he was convinced that, if he opened his mind to Father Hackett, the worthy priest would again endeavour to dissuade him from the pursuit of Geraldine M'Carthy. When he was bidding good-bye to his host and to Larry Fitzgerald on Monday afternoon—fully instructed as to the most direct carriage route to Tramore, and fully determined to alter his course when he should be at a safe distance from the observation of his two friends—he could hardly conceal his confusion.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when he drove up to the gate of Prospect House. The gardener, whom he had met during his former visit, was again at work in the garden in front of the house. He recognized the young Englishman, and took charge of his trap, informing him that the master was at home and alone. Frank experienced a sense of disappointment at the word alone; he had hoped to see Geraldine, and yet he hardly knew whether it would be better that he should see her until he had spoken to her grandfather.

He found the old man sitting in the porch, gazing out in the direction of the ocean. He was evidently astonished to see young Aylward. He stood up as Frank approached, and putting out his hand welcomed him cordially.



"I'm proud to see you here again, Mister Aylward," said he, "to call you by the name that belongs to you, an' I'm more pleased than I can tell you to know you are none the worse for your ugly adventure. You might as well sit down an' enjoy the air with me," pointing to a chair alongside his own. "My granddaughter has just left me. She's gone off on some scamper with those brothers of hers. Wild young fellows, Master Aylward," he added, reseating himself as Frank took the chair indicated by the old man. "You're young yourself, an' I suppose you can have a kind of fellow-feelin' for boys who do things that sober old age shakes its head at. An' do you feel quite well again?"

"Quite, thank you." answered Frank. "But when I think of having entered your house under an assumed name I don't feel very happy."

"I'm more sorry for you in that matter than for myself. If I had known who you were I expect your throuble would have been saved—but, thank goodness, there is no harm done. I was mighty unaisy about you."

"It's very kind of you to take so much interest in a stranger."

"Sthranger inagh! Faith, sthranger as you were to me the first evenin' I met you, my heart warmed to you, if you don't mind me sayin' so. An Aylward is no sthranger here; doesn't most of the land you see round you here belong to ye?"

"To my uncle, no doubt; but that's very for from its belonging to me."

"And to whom will it fall after the present lord leaves it all behind him?"

"To his heir—his son."

"I never knew be had chick or child. Not, indeed, that I troubled about things which didn't concern me, but my son Charles tells me that it is your own self who will succeed the lord in due course. An' I don't mind tellin' you that that same son of mine, clever as he thinks himself, is in a deuce of a state of disthress at havin' foolishly mistaken you for a detective. He warned us all here about you, an' he warned those people, the Ushers, about you, I believe, the day you visited Bell Lake with that simple-minded gentleman, Larry Fitzgerald. An' by the same token, when I heard a thrap dhrive up towards this place a while ago, I thought it was Mистер Usher. He's comin' to pay us a visit this evenin'."

"I don't see how your son, or any one else who had discovered that I was using a wrong name, could have avoided suspecting me of being a detective, under the circumstances."

"Faith then, I held out for you and very nearly came to blows with my clever son. I'm too old to be deceived now, an' I bad a feelin' that you had good blood in you, an' a man with the right dhrop in his veins would never dirty his blood by makin' a spy of himself."

These words chafed Frank a little, but he was determined to keep himself—if he possibly could—in the good graces of Geraldine's grandfather. He now began to wonder if the expected visit of Usher could have anything to do with Geraldine. Was it possible that Usher was coming to Brownstown on a similar errand to his own? He was in a condition which saw a possible rival in every likely bachelor.

"As you use the word 'spy,' I still feel uncomfortable," said young Aylward, arresting his wandering thoughts.

“I want you to understand that when I visited you about three weeks ago I completely forgot, while I was under your roof, that I had come to Ireland for the purpose of discovering anything; but it is only fair to say that in my capacity as amateur detective, or whatever you wish to call it, I did intend paying you a visit. That intention of mine is now thrown to the winds. At the same time, as you know who I am and what brought me to Ireland, perhaps you could help me in clearing up the mystery which still surrounds my uncle.”

Frank fancied the old man was considerably disturbed by these words. An awkward pause ensued, and then Simon M’Carthy said, in a quiet and apparently an unconcerned manner:

“I’m sorry I can’t help you at present, Mither Aylward. I have no doubt things will turn out in the long run all right about your uncle; an’, if I might offer you any advice, it would be to have patience. Maybe it would be no bad thing if you were to go home for a bit, now that you’re all right again, an’ come back here in a month or so. I’d be as pleased, perhaps, as yourself to see Lord Clashmore back at Rhi -na-Shark House, for there’s something between us that’s got to be settled, an’ I’m growin’ very old. I’ll tell you what’s between us, though it may be no news to you—if you don’t mind listenin’ to me.”

“I have heard of nothin’ unpleasant.” said Frank, “except that my uncle had taken proceedings to dispossess you of this place.”

“Ay, that’s wan thing, sure enough. I can’t believe he acted of his own free will in that matter. I make do doubt he was poisoned against me an’ mine by that

unfortunate man whose body yerself discovered.”

“And what quarrel bad you with Backas, might I ask?”

“Well, I’ll tell you. He used to come here fawnin’ on me, an’ all the time I knew the fellow had somethin’ at the back of his mind. I never suspected what it was until one day he found me alone here, an’ what do you think Mr. Backas asked me?”

“I’m sure I can’t guess.”

“For the hand of my granddaughter,” exclaimed the old man, a sudden blaze of anger lighting up his eyes. “No less.”

Frank was horribly disconcerted, and he found it impossible to make any comment. Indignation, anger, shame, rendered him speechless.

“I listened to him.” the old man went on, “an’ when he was done I said to him quietly enough: ‘Have you spoken to Miss Geraldine on the point?’ ‘No,’ answered the fellow, ‘I have not.’ ‘I’m glad to hear it,’ says I, ‘for I think I’d have killed you if you had.’ Begor, he turned as white as a corpse, an’ the deuce a word he gave out of him. ‘Look here, Mr. Backas,’ said I, ‘go down to Lord Clashmore an’ tell him what you’re afther aski’ me. You might say to him: “My lord, old M’Carthy has turned me out of his his house because I, your lordship’s lackey, proposed to form a family connection with your house and his.” There is the door Mr. Backas,’ said I, ‘an’, old as I am, if you dar’ to cross my threshold again, or to look at my grandchild if you should happen to meet her, by the sky that’s above us, I’ll take the law into my own hands.”

Frank’s angry feelings were ousted by a sense of un-

easiness—indeed almost of horror—as he listened to the words of the old man. Could it be that the young M'Carthys had done what their grandfather had threatened to do?

“And what, I wonder, did actually happen to this man, Backas?” he asked timidly.

“No doubt the inquest will tell,” said the old man. “He was lost in that quicksand, of course. Who would know that better than yerself, Misther Aylward?”

Frank felt that Simon M'Carthy was fencing with him as to how Backas had met with his ghastly fate, and that it would be useless for him to attempt any cross-examination. The old man was evidently anxious to change the current of the conversation.

“I have been botherin' you,” said he, “about that man Backas—God rest his sowl!—and forgettin' that it wasn't about him I was meanin' to talk to you.”

“Oh, about some business between you and my uncle. I thought you were referring to this very matter in telling me of his ill-starred attendant.”

“No. What I was goin' to say was that there has always been in our family a great desire to get back to those very lands in Cork which I told you about, an' of which the musty an' useless old title-deeds are in my possession. Much of the land is scattered an' broke up an' gone out of thrace, but the portion your family owns has been in our eye for many a long year. My uncle Teague started the matter on a small footin', and chance, or Providence maybe, put something in our way which gave us the power of gettin' back what our hearts were set upon. An' afther all,” continued old M'Carthy, pausing for a moment and gazing through an opening

in the trees, which disclosed a peep of the ocean and of three white pillars on Metalman Head. "I have been lookin' out on this land an' sea an' sky for so long now that I fear I'd ddrop into my grave at wance if I was to be taken from this place. You can't thransplant an old three, Mr. Aylward, an' I'm a very old one, nearly fit to be cut down, anyhow."

"You look hale enough." said Frank. "I expect you will see many a younger man go before you."

"Ay! who'd think a month ago that poor Backas would have left me behind, an' that all his plots and' plans against me—for I make sure he did his best to poison your uncle against me—would have ended in such a terrible death? But that's neither here nor there, Mither Aylward—only I know well that people think hard things of me an' mine in the matter of your uncle. But as I towld you when I first met you, there's no man hereabouts would dar' to shed his blood while I'm to the fore. But maybe I'm saying too much. When an old man gets talkin' he often talks too much."

Endeavouring to make a brief mental narrative of M'Carthy's wandering talk, Frank puzzled himself. It seemed to him that the old man knew his uncle was alive, and, moreover, knew what had happened to him, and yet it might be that the astute master of Prospect House was deliberately endeavouring to confuse him or to set him on a wrong track. It would be best he decided not to discuss the subject further, but to wait patiently until the inquest on Backas had taken place. No doubt the enquiry would clear some of the mists away.

Frank was anxious to speak to M'Carthy concerning his granddaughter, yet he was fearful of making

a wrong opening. Though he had set out from Father Hackett's house with the hope of seeing Geraldine and with the intention of speaking to her directly, he was not convinced that it would be better if he disclosed his intention firstly to old M'Carthy. Geraldine was not to be wooed in the ordinary way. The traditions in which she had been brought up would be certain to influence her. The head of her house was her king. Shy she was, but fearless, and gentle as she was pride would sway her easily. She might be already engaged, and, if this were so, it would be better he should know it from the lips of old M'Carthy than from Geraldine. Indeed, it was this last point which gave him most concern. To learn that she was engaged would extinguish his brightest hopes. But if she was unpledged he now felt that he would, in defence of Father Hackett's warnings, have as good a chance of winning her affections as any young man who might be acquainted with her. He possessed a good man qualities and qualifications which could not help advancing him with any ordinary young girl in his own walk of life. What puzzled him was: would these qualities or qualifications advance or retard him with Geraldine? She was unlike any other woman he had ever met. His knowledge of her was scant, he readily admitted to himself, but he had some subtle instinct that if he could win her for his wife he would win the greatest prize that might be found in the lottery of his life. The diffidence which had formerly possessed him had now almost vanished. All he wanted was the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the young girl—the rest, he tried bravely to assure himself, would follow.

For some reason Frank and his host had preserved silence. The old man's thoughts had evidently wandered off into some channel unknown to the young man.

It was with some difficulty that young Aylward nerved himself to approach the delicate topic.

"I should have mentioned earlier, sir," he said, "that I came here to-day with two objects. One was to offer my apologies for having on a former occasion intruded upon you wearing a wrong name. I understand that is a forgiven."

"Certainly," said the old man. "I see the difficulty you were in. An', moreover, it was meself that asked you to come here. That needn't throuble you, Mistor Aylward. I hope your other business is a light."

"That is for you to say, Mr. M'Carthy. I was told I should not Mistor you; but it is hard to adopt any other fashion."

"Call me as you please, sir. My objection to bein' mistorered only extends to the shoneen class, or to them that thry to make fun of my counthry or of meself an' my prejudices."

"Well," said Frank, fidgeting in his chair, and hardly knowing how to put the matter without loss of dignity to himself, "what I wish to say is that I am anxious to know if Miss M'Carthy's hand is unpledged."

The old man turned round in his chair and stared curiously for a moment at his guest.

"So far as I know, it is. But isn't that an odd question for a sthranger to ask? Why should you seek to know, Mistor Aylward?"

"Because, sir, I am desirous of becoming better acquainted with Miss M'Carthy—indeed, I am desirous of



knowing if I may, with your consent, pay my addresses to her?"

"Ah, my dear young man!" said old Simon, with some show of excitement, "am I to hear at this time of my life the story over again of the great lord an' the little lady? Didn't I tell you the tale of my cousin and your own great grandfather?"

"Yes; and it hasn't deterred me, as you see, from trying to walk in the footsteps of my ancestor," said Frank proudly. "Besides, I am not a great lord, nor is Miss M'Carthy a little lady."

"But you will be a great lord one day, an' what would she be then in comparison but a little lady?"

"But me or possibilities concerning me out of the question," said the young man. "In speaking of my great-grandmother I remembered you said yourself that she could not be made a greater lady than God made her. Neither can your granddaughter."

"Mr. Aylward," said the old man, in a husky voice, "you do me an' mine a great honour. More than that, you do it in a grand way—as one of your blood should. But it isn't every objection that my uncle Teague urged against the first Lord Clashmore to be urged against yourself?"

"No," said Frank. "That marriage cancelled everything except the one thing—the difference in our religion. That, I admit, remains. I assure you I haven't an atom of religious bigotry in me. Indeed, in the matter of religion I believe if I were to live in Ireland I should become a Catholic. Certain religions suit certain countries and certain people just as the climate and the soil do. Brief as is my acquaintance with Ireland, it seems to me that

I have acquired some kind of instinct into her ways, and I must admit the ways—foreign as they are—appeal to me in a peculiar fashion.”

“Foreign, indeed!” exclaimed the old man. “It’s in your blood. The soil is native to you, though you never trod it before—it springs to you.”

“I almost believe it does. I feel inclined to say with Ruth: ‘Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.’”

“An’ why can’t you say it right out an’ act upon it—I mean as to the faith? though I’d rather you approached that same subject by a different channel, Mither Aylward.”

“Sudden conversions are dangerous things, sir.”

“So are sudden attachments of young men for young women. An’ to go back to where we broke off a short while ago, the religion is a stumblin’ block that can’t be got over, even if there were no other stumblin’ blocks in the way. An’,” he added briskly, “doesn’t it all seem rather sudden? How many times have you met my grandchild?”

“Three times.”

“What would your family say, Mither Aylward?”

“I have only my mother.”

“An’ your uncle?”

“I hardly know him, and he hardly knows me.”

“But you may be his successor, an’ you should not overlook that. Moreover, there is a feud now between him and mine, an’ I have no doubt he would set his face hard against any such alliance, even if I didn’t.”

“I must say I did not take my uncle into account. Nor even when you remind me of him does it alter my

intentions. As have already said, I have only my mother to consult."

"An' you will speak to her before you say a word to my grandchild."

"I don't see why I should promise this."

"Then you expect your mother to object. Naturally she would. A grand English lady could only think of us as mere Irish peasants, an' your marryin' wan of my people would, I make no doubt, look her mind the same as I would regard a match between my grandchild an' your uncle's lackey. Though I have my own way of lookin' at some things that doesn't blind me to other people's views."

"But am I not old enough to be guided myself?"

"Here in Ireland—I mean outside the towns—we don't think any boy or girl is ever old enough to be guided by their own feelin's in matthers of marriage. We may be wrong or we may be right, but we make fewer unhappy marriages than ye make, by all accounts, over in England. You're stoppin' with Father Hackett. Would you ask his reverence's opinion, Mither Alyward?"

"I have asked him."

"Oh, indeed! An' he towld you what I'm thryin' to tell you now, I make no doubt?"

"I can't say he didn't; but if Miss Geraldine's hand is unpledged, and if you will not help me, I suppose I should be justified in speaking to her myself."

"You would hardly be justified, Mither Aylward. But I suppose it is what you will do. But before you disregard me, won't you think hard of what I towld you of your great-grandmother an' of her father's broken life? You're very young, an' the world is wide, an' in a little time

when you go away from here you will forget all about my poor little child—I always regard her as my own child—or you'll think of her only as you might about some wild flower that took your fancy for a minute an' faded without costin' you a pang."

"With as much earnestness as any young man may assume and on my word of honour, I assure you, sir, that, however wide the world may be, or however long or short my time in it may be, I shall never forget nor ever think lightly of your granddaughter. And why should you punish me why seek to spoil my life;" continued Frank vehemently, "merely because someone else's heart was broken nearly a century ago? Remember, too, that it was his own pride or obstinacy or hard-heartedness—call it what you will—that brought its own penalty upon your uncle, and that the union was a happy one so far as the husband and wife were concerned."

"You argue so strong, Misther Aylward, that you shake an old man like me. . . . May God direct me an' you—an her!"

Silence fell upon the pair for some minutes. Then Simon M'Carthy lifted his head. "Don't I hear the sound of wheels on the road?" he asked.

"Yes," said Frank moodily.

"That must be Misther Usher. I think I told you he was coming to see me on a matther of business."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### WILD WORDS

BOB USHER was astonished to find young Aylward at Prospect House. He did his best to conceal his astonishment, and also he politely avoided any awkward reference to Frank's visit to Bell Lake. After a few words with old M'Carthy he congratulated Frank (addressing him as Mr. Aylward) on his recovery, and informed him that a daily bulletin had been brought to Lake Cottage by Fitzgerald. Suspecting that he was in the way Frank volunteered to take a solitary stroll round the cliffs while his host and Mr. Usher were busy with each other. M'Carthy demurred, but Frank had no doubt that he was in the way, and that old Simon's protest was due to politeness. He promised to return in about an hour.

As he got outside the gate he found it difficult to decide what direction his steps should take. He would have liked to have cut across country to the spot from which he had obtained his first view of Rhi-na-Shark House—a spot endeared to him by memories of a meeting there with Geraldine—but he would not have sufficient time to perform this journey. He was accustomed, as are most

men who dwell in big cities, to walking or riding with a definite object. Walking merely for walking's sake was novel to him, and had not the attraction it possesses for those who live in the country. For a short time he followed aimlessly and moodily a narrow roadway leading towards the cliffs. He was turning over in his mind the rebuffs he had encountered at the hands of the old priest and of Geraldine's grandfather, and it seemed to him the most serious obstacle in his path was the religious difficulty. Frank had not even troubled himself much about questions of faith. He attended church on Sundays almost as a matter of form, and religion itself had seemed to him little more than a matter of form. He had no sympathy with people who wrangled over it. When he had heard or read of men or women who suffered or died for their religious principles he could only wonder. Christianity offered a broad platform, and those who could not stand upon it and live peaceably upon it were merely fanatics who would quarrel about anything under the sun.

He was still in no way desirous of puzzling himself afresh over his uncle's disappearance—the subject was mingled with ghastly discovery, and whenever thoughts of this forced themselves upon him they distressed him horribly, bringing back not only memories of the quicksand, but of blurred dreams and visions which had visited him from time to time during the days he was recovering from the effects of Corbett's savage blow. Still, the conversation with old M'Carthy had driven his thoughts buck into the old channel, and dismissing his perplexities about faith and unfaith and half faith, he wondered again if any of the family at Prospect House were con-

cerned with the mystery. It seemed to him that the old man was cognisant of what had actually happened. That his uncle was alive Frank had now little doubt. He had been spirited away for some purpose, and it must have a purpose of considerable moment which could prompt such an outrage. The mouth of the man Backas was sealed for ever, but it was evident that the ferryman, Corbett, knew that the Viscount's attendant had perished in the quicksand. It was all very puzzling. Neither old Simon nor his granddaughter was, it would seem to any ordinary observer, made of such material as would permit either of them to be a party to a criminal act. Then he remembered his small outburst of indignation at old M'Grath's tale of the wreck and of the sailor's body found upon the strand. The people hereabouts were perplexing. They held opinion about love and hate, right and wrong, life and death which he could not fathom. Old M'Carthy might, for some reason which would be inexplicable to Frank, regard a violent outrage with equanimity, especially if vengeance for a wrong or a supposed wrong was at the bottom of it. And yet, had not the old man asseverated that no one would dare to spill the blood of Lord Clashmore while M'Carthy was in the land? If the whole matter of the disappearance of the two men was a mere accident—a view which more than once had occurred to him since his recovery—why were such pains evidently taken to conceal the nature of the accident?

With all of these disturbing thoughts in his head, Frank wandered on unconscious of the direction in which his steps were leading him. The sound of the sea was in his ears, though he was only dimly conscious of it. At

last, after nearly half-an-hour of leisurely walking, he lifted his head as he turned a sharp corner in the narrow roadway. and right in front of him, not a hundred yards off, he saw the building which Fitzgerald had informed him was M'Carthy's dairy. Frank stood still, gazing at the house, wondering once more what had possessed the odd farmer to erect a dairy in this out-of-the-way spot. Fitzgerald had informed him that it was built almost on the edge of the cliffs, and as he stood in the roadway he beheld, almost at his feet to the left, the desolate ocean. The roadway here was flanked with a high ditch formed of sods and stones and peering over the ditch to the left he saw that the brow of the cliff was not much farther distant from him in that direction than M'Carthy's dairy. He could hear the intermittent gurgle of the sea as it receded from some pebbly beach at the foot of the cliffs.

He had not seen anyone since he had set out from Prospect House. The dairy had no sign of life about it, except that smoke was issuing from one of its chimneys; the door was closed, the windows shuttered and barred on the outside.

The loneliness was almost oppressive. As he looked out upon the ocean he beheld nothing except the expanse of water. No ship sailed upon it. At some distance to the right of the dairy the two white beacon pillars stood up—two giant derelict ghosts.

Frank was about to retrace his footsteps when he saw the door of the dairy opening, and in a moment a woman appeared in the doorway. It was Geraldine.

The young girl stooped to lock the door; then she examined the shutter bars, and then she walked down the narrow roadway towards Frank. She had covered



more than half the ground between them before she recognized the figure of the stranger. She halted for a moment, and then resumed her walk. As she drew near to him, Frank saw that her face wore an anxious look.

"I hope I have not alarmed you. Miss M'Carthy," said he, stepping forward.

"You have not alarmed me," stammered Geraldine. "but you have surprised me."

"I had not the least expectation of meeting you, or indeed anyone else, in this lonely spot. I was paying a visit to your grandfather to apologize for a former visit, and I started out about an hour ago to take an aimless walk. Your grandfather had a visitor."

"Mr. Usher!" said Geraldine, her face glowing and all the appearance of anxiety leaving it.

"Yes," answered Frank, somewhat disconcerted by the manner in which Geraldine had welcomed the news of Mr. Usher's arrival. "I thought I might be in the way. May I walk hack with you, Miss M'Carthy?"

"Certainly," said Geraldine graciously.

"I have been compelled to tear off my mask, you see. I was stupid enough to persist in wearing it when you drove me away from Bell Lake that miserable Tuesday."

"Mr. Aylward," said Geraldine, a swift change in her voice which startled and thrilled the young man, "I have been most miserable since that unlucky day."

"Miserable. Why?"

"On your account. I charge myself with being responsible for your trouble—though goodness knows I did not dream of the possibility of such a disaster. When I heard you were injured I pat it all down to my own conduct—though even now I hardly know how I could have avoided

speaking to you as I did. But you are quite well again, I know. I have no need to ask you, for we heard about you daily. Will you forgive me?" She held out her hand as she spoke, and Frank eagerly pressed it.

"I have to forgive," he said, hardly able to find his voice, as he released her hand; "only much to be infinitely grateful for. I brought all my troubles upon myself. In my superior wisdom I chose to disregard the advice of those who were anxious to guide me. But it is all passed now, and, horrible as my experience was, I'd willingly go through it all again to know,"—he faltered here—hardly able to find a fitting completion for his sentence—"to know," he added lightly, with a smile upon his face, "that my troubles had made you miserable."

Geraldine made no comment upon Frank's words. She quickened her pace, and for some minutes the pair walked on in silence, the young man glanced shyly at his companion, throbbing with eagerness to speak wild words to her, and fearful of being precipitate. The objections raised up by Father Hackett and by old M'Carthy fled as chaff before the wind, but something told it would be dangerous to woo Geraldine in Petruchio, or even in Benedick fashion: His chivalry concerning women, too, held him in check, nor did he desire to take advantage of the young girl's impulsive words.

"Miss M'Carthy," said he at length, in a voice which bore no trace of the feverish agitation which possessed him, "I am almost a stranger to you. I could wish we were better acquainted, for there are things I should dearly like to say if we knew each other better."

"And there are things I should dearly like to say to you, Mr. Aylward, if we were better acquainted."

These words disturbed the young man for a moment. Then their import was plain to him. Geraldine had some confession to concerning his uncle—something which distressed her—something she was possibly afraid to communicate.

“Then,” said he, “the best thing we can do is to become better acquainted.”

“I fear that is hardly possible.”

“And why, pray?”

“There are many reasons, Mr. Aylward. But I can say no more at present. Besides, one of my sex should never be asked for a reason.”

“But suppose I do not desire to be lightly shaken off.”

“You told me a short time ago that you blamed yourself for disregarding the advice of those who sought to guide you.”

“You want to condemn me out of my own mouth. But do you mean that you wish to be my guide, Miss M’Carthy? If that is so you will find me very willing to accept your guidance.”

“I am too inexperienced to make such an attempt, but I will say that I would rather you kept away from the neighbourhood of our house. This may seem very rude and very inhospitable, but I do not mean it in that way. I assure you.”

Frank was chilled.

“You are colder than your grandfather,” he said.

“I am sorry to seem cold—or indeed rude, as I must appear to you—to a stranger.”

“And yet a few moments ago you said that if we knew each other better you would like to speak more freely to me.”

“That is so, Mr. Aylward. You must have a very poor opinion of me, I fear. I am very much distressed, and I hardly know what to say. Let us talk of something which will make me forget that you are Mr. Aylward and make you forget that I am Miss M’Carthy,” she continued, with a forced smile—“something impersonal—the sea, or the sky, books, music—painting, if you like.”

“I cannot,” said Frank impatiently. “I do not want to talk of anything which will make me forget who you are or what you are. Miss M’Carthy, I am going to do the rashest thing I ever did in my life.”

“You are beginning to alarm me now Mr. Aylward,” said Geraldine, turning her beautiful eyes appealing towards him.

“I cannot help myself. I want to tell you that I love you.”

“Hush, pray!” pleaded Geraldine, a frightened look in her face.

“I cannot. You will, no doubt, think my words wild, and you may think them foolish, but I repeat them from my heart—I love you. They are words I never said before to any other woman. Put me off—send me away—do what you please with me, but don’t tell me that there is no hope for me.”

“You forget yourself, Mr. Aylward—you forget who you are and who you may be,” said Geraldine, speaking almost as wildly as Frank had spoken. “You forget who I am and what I am—and what is due to me.”

“I forget none of these things. I know that you are the most beautiful gentle-woman in the world, and that you are the dearest in it to me. That’s all I know or care to know, except the one thing—that I may hope to

win you." He tried to seize her hand, but she moved it swiftly forward out of his reach.

They were now close to the gate of Prospect House. Geraldine opened the gate and passed through it, leaving Frank a prey to feverish hopes alternating with dull despair.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### IN COURT

WHEN he arrived at the hotel in Tramore on Monday night, Frank found a letter waiting him there. It was from Fitzgerald, and it contained an enclosure, a letter from Weekes which had arrived at Father Hackett's house shortly after Frank's departure. Weekes's letter was a brief and businesslike notification that the adjourned inquest on the body of Backas would be held on the following Thursday. Fitzgerald's note was also a brief document; it merely stated that he had some business in hand which would keep him away from Tramore for several days.

Young Aylward's love affairs had taken such hold of him, and his hopes and fears concerning Geraldine were so perplexing, that he could summon up but little interest in the affairs of other people. Much as he liked Fitzgerald, he was glad to know that his friend would not distract him for some days. He found it difficult to turn his thoughts upon the mystery of his uncle's disappearance. That affair had for the moment assumed a shape as shadowy as if it had been something he had

read long ago in a book.

He spent most of the Tuesday and Wednesday on the grassy slopes of the cliffs which form the western boundary of Tramore Bay. Not far off from the three pillars on Metalman Head, he discovered a nook from which a glimpse of Prospect House was visible. Here he lounged, his gaze wandering across the glittering bay, his thoughts revolving round the one centre—Geraldine M'Carthy. Now and again, when he saw anything which looked like a human figure in the neighbourhood of the distance house, he would stand up, and, straining his eyes, he would endeavour to discover if this were she.

The weather was gloriously fine. The sea swelled and sparkled, and sang love-songs for him. The sun irradiated the eastern arm of the bay, casting a splendour upon the many-hued fields and upon the swart and jagged cliffs. To the left, the sandhills shone, sometimes assuming for him the appearance of lustrous tents where giants slumbered.

The hours he spent upon the cliffs, with Prospect House in view, were full of ecstasy; but, as he wandered home each evening to his hotel, he could not shut out anxious and jealous thoughts, and often he found himself hating Usher with a fierceness which he found it difficult to smother.

On Thursday, at eleven o'clock, Frank set out for the little court-house at Tramore, where the adjourned inquest was to be held. When he reached the court he was instantly taken in charge by the bustling Weekes. The newly-made solicitor was resplendent in a frock coat which put every other coat in the court into shadow, and he wore a button-hole which was the envy of every man



who know what a flower was. Mr. Mason shook hands, somewhat theatrically, with young Aylward, and piloted him to a seat, congratulating him audibly (in his most magnificent bass) on his restoration to health.

The little court was crowded, the inquiry possessing widespread local interest, and most of the spectators—a goodly number of whom were females connected with the fishing bathing industries—wore expressions which (if the countenance is really the index of the mind) demoted high spirits and pleasurable anticipations. As the ordeal of viewing the body was over, the jury looked positively gleeful.

Frank was unpleasantly conscious of the fact that he was the observed of all observers. As soon as he was seated, Mr. Weekes, bending towards him, whispered:

“I say, Mr. Aylward, haven’t you got some second front name?”

“Yes,” said Frank, “but I never use it.”

“I suppose it’s Irish?” said Mr. Weekes, stretching his lips slightly.

“My second name is Desmond, my father’s name,” said Frank curtly. “I don’t see why you ask this question.”

“My dear sir, there is a sort of plebeian, or literary flavour about a single Christian name. The coroner is a regular tuft-hunter, and a Christian name standing alone wouldn’t appeal to his courtly imagination. When I hit him a slap of your double-barrelled name, watch how he’ll tumble to it. I’ll be able to play havoc with the witness should occasion require. It is suggested that I should represent you, Mr. Aylward, and that Mr. Mason should represent your uncle. I suppose that’s agreeable

to you?"

"Perfectly," said Frank, "if it is clearly understood that I am not to be made responsible for any verbal antics of yours."

"Still harping on my verbosity," said Weekes, stretching his mouth laterally.

When the coroner opened the Court, and had concluded an address to the jury reminding them of their obligations and duties, and touching upon the evidence previously tendered, Mr. Weekes rose and said:

"I wish to say, sir, that my partner, Mr. Mason, represents the Viscount Clashmore's interests here, and that I attend, sir, to represent those of my client, Francis Desmond Aylward, nephew to Lord Clashmore."

"Has any one turned up to represent the deceased?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir," answered a solicitor, who attended the inquiry on behalf of the police. "We have failed to obtain any tidings of any relatives of the late Samuel Backas."

"Call Francis Aylward!" said the coroner, examining his papers, and forgetting the Desmond with which Weekes had weighted his sentence.

"Allow me to congratulate you on your recovery, Mr. Aylward," said the coroner, Frank stood opposite to him to be sworn.

"Thank you, sir," said Frank, taking the Testament from the hand of a police constable.

As the oath was being administered a tall, slender, hook-nosed young man entered the court, and, when Frank had handed back the Testament, the tall young man addressed the coroner in a mincing voice.

"I must apologise for being late, sir," he said. "I am

here in the interests of John Corbett, of Rhi-na-Shark."

"It is all right, Mr. O'Connell," said the coroner. "Is your client in the court?"

"No, sir; but he is in safe-keeping. No doubt the police will produce him at the psychological moment."

Frank's direct evidence was a simple narrative of the manner in which he had found the dead body. Mr. O'Connell then rose and tackled him.

"Have you recently been passing under a false name, witness?" he asked sharply.

"I object, sir, most emphatically to this," exclaimed Mr. Weekes, rising.

"And I most emphatically object to Mr. Weekes' improper and undignified interruption," said Mr. O'Connell. "Does the witness decline to answer my question?"

"What is the object of the question?" asked the coroner. "I mean so far as the present inquiry is concerned?"

"It is, I submit, sir," said Mr. O'Connell, "important to elicit for the benefit of the jury the fact that a witness has been passing himself off as somebody else."

"I am quite willing to answer the question." said Frank.

"Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Aylward," said the coroner. "Proceed with your cross-examination, Mr. O'Connell."

"Puppy!" exclaimed Weekes audibly.

"Beggar on horseback!" retorted Mr. O'Connell in an undertone.

"Did you address me, Mr. O'Connell?" asked the coroner slyly.

"No, sir. I am afraid I gave utterance heedlessly to some of my inward thoughts. Well, Mr. Aylward, may I be permitted to ask you if it was very dark at the time

you discovered the body of the deceased?"

"Almost as dark as night."

"You have stated that you were violently assaulted just as the body came within reach of you?"

"Yes."

"Did you recognize your assailant?"

"No."

"The darkness prevented you from recognizing him, I suppose?"

"No. He attacked me from behind."

"We are not here, Mr. O'Connell," said the coroner, "to inquire into any assault on the present witness. Our business is to inquire into the manner in which Samuel Backas came by his death."

"I bow to your ruling, sir," said Mr. O'Connell simperingly.

No one else having any question to ask the witness, young Aylward retired to his seat. Mr. Weekes whispered: "I suppose you don't know who the gentleman is that has been cross-examining you?"

"No," said Frank. "Who is he?"

"The damndest ass and jackanapes in the County Waterford," whispered Weekes, in a tone that might imply that he had imparted some valuable piece of information.

The next witness called was Andrew Kelly.

Frank had not encountered Andy since the evening he had been assaulted. As he glanced at the process-server, he fell to wondering what could have possessed the little man to have risked his life in the service of a stranger.

The process-server, looking the picture of abject hu-

mility, told his story—how he had followed Mr. Aylward (or Mr. Venables, as he persisted in calling him), and how he had seen Corbett spring upon him from behind, and how in coming to the rescue he had encountered the dead body, which he had recognized as being that of Sam Backas.

“You say you saw Corbett attack Mr. Aylward,” said Mr. O’Connell, rising.

“Ay, sir.”

“Now, now, Mr. O’Connell!” interrupted the coroner.

“If you will pardon me, sir. I think my question will be found to have a bearing on the inquiry.”

“Very well. Proceed.”

“You are not on friendly terms with Corbett, I understand. Is that so?”

“Well, it is so, sir.”

“He threw you into Rhi-na-Shark once, when you were trying to cross the stream surreptitiously in his coat with processes in your pocket—didn’t he?”

“He did, sir, bad luck to him, an’ nearly dhrownded me.”

“You’ll never die that way, Andy. Anyhow, there was bad blood between Corbett and yourself. What were you dogging Mr. Aylward for?”

“Now, now, Mr. O’Connell!” said the coroner, “I must protest.”

“Very well, sir; but there’s more in this case than meets the eye.”

“You can reserve your forensic abilities for some other court. We are here, I may again observe, Mr. Fanning,” he continued, addressing himself to the solicitor who represented the police, “to inquire into the cause which

led to the death of Samuel Backas, and up to this the only evidence before me today is evidence as to the finding of the body. What further evidence is there concerning the manner in which the deceased came by his death? At our former inquiry the matter of identification was gone into, and we had before us medical evidence which went to prove that the cause of death was suffocation as from drowning. There were, as I may remind the jury again, no marks of violence upon the body. Am I to assume that there is no further evidence to produce?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Fanning. "We have other witnesses, but we wished first to get the medical evidence and that of identification and discovery out of our road."

"Now we're busy," whispered Weekes to Frank.

"Is Mr. Fanning the next best ass in the court?" asked Frank.

"No; he's a very decent hackney."

"Call Margaret Prendergast." said the coroner, after a short whispered discussion with Mr. Fanning.

There was some shuffling in the court, and much to Frank's surprise, he saw old Peg of the Burrow, flanked by two policemen, advancing toward the coroner's table. The old woman was duly sworn and examined as to her name and occupation. Then Mr. Fanning said:

"Do you remember the evening"—Frank had by this time grown accustomed to hear the word evening used for that portion of the day which he would term the afternoon—"of Friday, the thirtieth of April?"

"I do, sir."

"Will you tell the jury what you saw that evening between the hours of five and seven o'clock."

"Well, sir," said old Peggy, "about five o'clock I left

Prospect House.”

“That is the house of Mr. Simon M’Carthy?”

“Yes, sir. The family there, especially Miss Geraldine, is very good to me. She always gives me my tay and a bit of silver to carry away with me, God be good to her!”

“Yes, my dear woman,” said the coroner, “but that is not what the jury wants to hear.”

“I’m afraid you must let her tell her tale her own way, sir,” said Mr. Fanning. “Go on, Peggy.”

“It was about five o’clock as near as may be when I left Prospect House, for I heard Miss Geraldine say it had sthruck five, an’ that she wanted to look afther the ould gentleman’s tay. I thrudged on towards Rhi-na-Shark, an’ when I got within sight at a bend, of the road, of the ferry, I seen a man runnin’ along like mad towards the Back Sthrand follyed by another man. Suddenly the first man disappeared an’ I nearly died of the fright for it was pain to me that it was into the quicksand he tumbled. He threw up his arms wance an’ then I saw him no more. Oh, gentlemen, it put the heart across in me.”

“How far off were you at the time?”

“About half-a-mile from the creek, as near as might be.”

“And how much further than the creek was the place where you saw the man go down?”

“Maybe a quarter of a mile, sir.”

“And could you distinguish who the two men were at that distance?”

“I could sir. My sight is wondherful sthrong for distances, though it’s poor enough when I’m lookin’ at things close at hand.”

“Who were those two men? Now pray be careful.”

“The foremost man was Sam Backas an’ the man chasin’ him was Jack Corbett.”

“I told you we were busy,” whispered Weekes to Frank.)

“Well, what happened after the man disappeared?”

“I hardly know, yer honour, for I fell into a dead wakeness from fright. When I came to meself an’ continued my journey to Rbi-na-Shark there wasn’t a soul on the sthrand; but I saw a yawl sailin’ out to the creek.”

“Did you notice who were in the yawl?”

“I saw figures of men. sir, but they were too far off, even for my sight, to tell who or what they were, or how many of em there were.”

“That is all I have to ask the witness, sir,” said Mr. Fanning, resuming his seat.

Mr. O’Connell now rose.

“You say Corbett was chasing the man?”

“Yes, yer honour.”

“How could you tell this?”

“Well, I don’t suppose they wor runnin’ races for fun.”

“You’re a fortune-teller, aren’t you—a witch?”

“That’s what some ignoraymuses call me, sure enough, yer honour. I’m a poor lone woman, sir, livin’ by my industry.”

“And by your wits, too. I have no doubt. Did you tell this extraordinary tale to anyone before you told it to the police?”

“No, sir. I didn’t exactly—but—”

“But what? Come, my good woman!”

“It was on my mind a dale, an’ I knew that what went down on that quicksand near Rhi-na-Shark was



likely to come up at the other quicksand at the far end of the Back Sthrand eleven days later. I was afeared to go there meself, so I managed to put a young gentleman on the thrack of discoverin' the body by tellin' him in my own way what was throublin' me."

"And who was the young gentleman?"

"A fine, daycent, young gentleman that I saw spaykin' to Miss Geraldine, the lady in Prospect House, wan day near Rhi-na-Skark House; an' knowin' from Andy Kelly that he was searchin' for some news of the lost lord an' his man, I thought I'd put him on the thrack of Sam Backas's body in case it turned up."

"Would you recognize the young gentleman whom you saw speaking to Miss Geraldine M'Carthy, and to whom you gave the information about the second quicksand?"

"I would, sir."

"Look round you. Is he in the court?"

"He is, sir. He's sittin' there alongside of Mистер Weekes."

Frank felt he could sink into the ground as he found the eyes of the audience turned upon him. What he feared most was that the blundering solicitor would elicit from the garrulous old woman some further information concerning Geraldine and himself.

("Think of that doubledyed donkey trying to upset a story that goes a deuce of a long way to clear his client, just for the sake of seeing his name flourishing in the the local papers!" whispered Weekes, when young Aylward's ordeal of identification was over. "He ought to be pole-axed, *pro honoris causa*.")

"You say you recognized John Corbett and the de-

ceased—I mean Backas. Were there any other people visible in the neighbourhood of the ferry at Rhi-na-Shark at the time you suppose you recognized the two men who were running along the strand?”

“All my eyes wor for the two men who were runnin’, sir, an’ I didn’t notice anyone else.”

“But there might have been others?”

“There might be, sir.”

“And you could not recognize the people who were in the yawl which you saw sailing out of the creek?”

“No, sir.”

“Not with that extraordinary long sight of yours?”

“They were out of range, sir.”

“Your vision is most accommodating Mrs.—or should it be Miss—Prendergast. Almost as accommodating indeed as that of Mr. Samuel Weller on a certain critical occasion. I have nothing further to ask this witness, sir.” added Mr. O’Connell, addressing the coroner. “My client, John Corbett is now prepared to tender his evidence.”

At a nod from the coroner a policeman left the court, and Weekes whispered to Frank. “Pon my veracity, the man O’Connell has more in him than I gave him credit for—or very much less. He is either going to get his client out of the mess—so far as Backas is concerned—or else he is going to fasten a hempen noose round the man’s neck. Well, Mr. Aylward, we shall see what we shall see, which is, I believe a fairly good translation of *Nous verrons*—don’t mind my foreign accent. I did not acquire it in Stratford-atte-Bow anyhow.”

Corbett now entered the court in custody of a policeman. He looked, Frank thought, merely defiant. The

coroner duly warned him that the evidence he would offer the court might be used against him, and Corbett gruffly nodded as a token that he understood his position.

Mr. Fanning, representing the police, opened fire briskly upon the Rhi-na-Shark ferryman.

“Do you remember the evening of Friday, the thirtieth of April?”

“I do.”

“What fixes it in your mind?”

“Many things.”

“Where were you about five o’clock that evening?”

“Near the steps leading to my oat at the ferry.”

“At which side of Rhi-na-Shark creek?”

“At the Thramore side.”

“Did you see Samuel Backas that evening?”

“I did.”

“When?”

“About five o’clock, or thereabouts.”

“Was he alone?”

“No; the lord was with him.”

“You mean Lord Clashmore, I presume?”

“Ay.”

“Were you alone at the time?”

“There were others near.”

“What do you mean by near?”

“They were seated in my yawl.”

“Who were the others?”

“I decline to say.”

“But you must inform the court.”

“With all due respect to the court, I will do nothing of the kind.”

“Come, come, witness,” said the coroner, a little angrily. “Do you realise your position?”

“I do, yer honour. Sure all you can do is to commit me for contempt; and the deuce a morsel of contempt I have for you, sir; and I can’t be in more than one jail at a time.”

“You refuse, then, to say who your companions were?” resumed Mr. Fanning.

“I never said they were companions.”

“Friends, I suppose?”

“Amn’t I afther tellin’ you that I’m not goin’ to say any mor eabout who was there? I’m willin’ to tell you anythin’ you ask about meself. I’m not responsible for other people or their doin’s.”

“Oh, indeed you are, witness, if it should be that you were partners in any conspiracy with them. You may learn that the later, perhaps. Backas, you say, was accompanied by Lord Clashmore?”

“That’s so.”

“Well, what happened?”

“Well, there was a bit of a row—or a sthruggle.”

“With whom?”

“Between Backas and meself.”

“About what?”

“I decline to say.”

“And the presence of your master, Lord Clashmore, didn’t restrain you?”

“No—my blood was up.”

“Umph! Well, what next!”

“Backas thought I meant mischief—as least, so I suppose, an’ he took to his heels an’ I went hot-foot afther him up the shtrand. He headed for the Back Sstrand,

an' as I was a thrifle excited, I forgot altogether that it was a dangerous time for the quicksand. Indeed, it never occurred to me about it at all until I saw him rush into the soft spot; an' before I could raich him he was gone clane out of sight. That's the whole thruth now of how Sam Backas was lost, an' it gave me such a fright that I've never been the same man since."

"Where was Lord Clashmore all this time?"

"Mr. Coroner," said O'Connell, rising, "you called me to order before for indulging in extraneous inquiries. Has the question just put by Mr. Fanning any direct bearing on the present inquiry?"

"It may have," said the coroner.

"It has, sir," said Mr. Fanning.

The question was then repeated. Corbett was silent for more than a minute, his head lowered.

"I decline to answer," he said, lifting his head and staring defiantly at the solicitor for the police. "All I'll say is that I never laid hands on his lordship, nor would I for any consideration undher the sun."

"You made several statements about your own movements on that evening which do not tally with your present statement," continued Mr. Fanning.

"No doubt. I didn't want to have any suspicions raised against me of havin' a hand in Sam Backas's death, an' there's no doubt I told many a lie, but I'm tellin' the thruth now. An' I'd like to say, as I'm at it, that naturally enough knowing the ways of that desateful, murdherin' quicksand, I waited until the eleventh day in ordher to seize upon the body and bury it if it did appear, and seein' I was forestalled I was in such a holy terror, thinkin' of what I might be charged with,

that I gave way to my madness, an' sthruck the young man who was before me at the sisher quicksand a blow, which I now ax his pardon for. An' I can tell him that there isn't a man in Ireland sorrier than my own self for what I done to him that evenin'—in my despair at findin' that he had discovered the body. I hav a lighter heart this minute, at seein' him in the coort sthrong and handsome again, that I've carried since that black evenin'."

Frank experienced a swift desire to walk to where Corbett stood and to offer him his hand—a desire he quickly repressed. Weekes whispered:

"The rascal is telling the truth—but what the dickens has become of his lordship?"

The ferryman's statement made a visibly favourable impression on the jury.

Mr. O'Connell had intended to address the court, pointing out that what all the other witnesses had testified tallied in all salient points with Corbett's statement. He also meant to poke a little fun at Andy Kelly, at old Peggy, and at Mr. Weekes, and it was with the greatest reluctance that he decided to let his client's unexpected confession speak for itself.

The coroner, in charging the jury, assured them that the witness Corbett had incriminated himself by his voluntary admissions. He had been a party to a quarrel with the deceased man, Backas, and the quarrel had resulted in Backas' death.

But the fifteen good men and true, after a short deliberation, returned a verdict of death by misadventure, adding a recommendation that some effort should be made to enclose the neighbourhood of the quick-sand,

and prevent a recurrence of a similar fatal accident to that which befell Samuel Backas.

Mr. Weekes left the court looking gloomy, indeed crestfallen. The despised Mr. O'Connor had carried away all the legal honours of the day. Moreover, the alleged tuft-hunting coroner had shown no symptom of being impressed by the fact that Mr. Weekes' client was an aristocrat.





## CHAPTER XXXIX

### ON A JAUNTING CAR

WHEN Frank, flanked by Mr. Mason and Mr. Weekes, got outside the door of the coroner's court he was served by a policeman with a summons, instructing him to appear before the magistrates in Tramore on the Monday following, to give evidence in the matter of the assault committed by Corbett. Mr. Weekes took the summons from Frank, cast his eyes over it, and informed the policeman that all was in order.

It was now two o'clock, and it had been arranged, before the opening of the coroner's court, that the two solicitors should lunch with young Aylward at the hotel in Tramore. The senior partner was strangely reserved, and used his voice hardly at all. The Junior partner, too, had lost much of his vivacity, and Frank found the luncheon a dull and depressing meal.

It was soon manifest that Mr. Weekes was uncomfortable in Mr. Mason's presence, and that Mr. Mason was uncomfortable in Mr. Weekes's presence. Mr. Mason did not quite like the idea of having to endure intimate social relations with his newly-made partner, and Mr.

Weekes, knowing this, felt at a disadvantage.

Immediately after luncheon Mr. Mason expressed his intention of catching the next available train to Waterford and as he had, he explained, a call to make in Tramore, he begged Frank to excuse him for running away so quickly. "I am leaving you in good hands, Mr. Aylward," he said; "and perhaps you and Mr. Weekes may find that you have some words to say to each other concerning the day's proceedings. The mystery of your uncle's disappearance is as thick as ever, I fear."

"Thank goodness, he's gone!" exclaimed Mr. Weekes as soon as his partner was out of earshot. "There is at times an oppressiveness about my boss which hangs upon my shoulders like an upper millstone. Moreover, I want a smoke badly, and I'd be in mortal terror of offending Mr. M.'s nostrils with such vulgar fumes as those of Murray's Mellow Mixture. You won't mind my lighting up my pipe, I know? No, thank you," as his companion offered him his cigar case. "I prefer to burn the weed *more Hibernico*—that is to say, in a *dudheen*." He extracted a pipe case from a pocket of his coat, and, opening this, he produced a richly coloured clay pipe with a vulcanite stem. "Of course, to be truly stage-Irish," continued Mr. Weekes, "I should wear the pipe stuck in my hat, but I am no respecter of traditions. You can't beat a genuine Irish clay, Mr. Aylward. I believe they are mostly imported from Glasgow, but that's neither here nor there. It does not look aristocratic, I admit—indeed, it is highly unprofessional; it would be unbecoming in a managing clerk; but the full fledged attorney can afford to scoff at public opinion."

"Perhaps as this is a public room," said Frank, "the

hotel people might not care to have it filled with tobacco smoke."

"Bedad, maybe you're right," said Mr. Weekes. "And that same remark of yours furnishes me with an idea. I drove out from Waterford this morning on a jaunting car, and I mean to return thereon. What would you say to having a bit of a drive with me? The stuffiness of that coroner's court is still lurking in my bronchial tubes, and no doubt lurks in yours, too, Mr. Aylward. A ride through the country will be good for both of us. What say your?"

"I have no objection," said Frank, who was by no means anxious to spend an afternoon, and possibly an evening in close companionship with Mr. Weekes. "I suppose if I ride into Waterford with you I can return by train?"

"That you can, unless the seductions of the city prove too strong for you."

"I must get back here tonight, and I expect I shall have to remain in Tramore for some days. I did some damage to that new cart of mine yesterday on one of your cross country roads, and it is on the hands of a local doctor."

"An hour's drive on my vehicle will take us into town and apart from hygienic considerations, I can discuss with you in the open air certain matters which are perplexing me, and which cannot be wholly uninteresting to you. Shall we make a start? Procrastination is the thief of time, as the copy book headline tells us; so let us go in search of my jarvey. He is most likely waiting outside the hotel door for me."

As he reached the vestibule of the hotel Frank saw

close at hand a jingle which he thought he recognized. The driver was standing alongside it, in converse with a man who was apparently desirous of hiring the vehicle.

"Amn't I afther tellin' you," said the jarvey in a loud tone, "that you can't have the car. I'm engaged for the day by Attorney Weekes."

"Did you hear that?" said Mr. Weekes. "To the stranger it may seem a sort of put up job that the subtle flattery of the 'Attorney Weekes should fall upon your ears; but I can assure you Mr. Aylward, that my coachman is no flatterer. He is simply lifting himself in public estimation by heralding my promotion. And our overhearing him is a mere accident. Come along. . . . Is the mare able to carry an extra passenger to the city, Bill?"

"Oh, begor she is, sir," replied Bill Roche, turning round and recognizing Frank as he turned. "Glad to see you safe and sound again, sir," he said, touching his broad-brimmed hat respectfully.

"You see," said Mr. Weekes, grinning, "you are the cynosure of all eyes in these parts."

"I sincerely hope not," said Frank. "Your jarvey and I are not strangers."

"Begor, I'm the first man in Ireland that took you in charge, sir," said Bill Roche, backing his car to the steps of the hotel door, "an' I can't help feelin' an intherest in you, sir."

"That's very kind of you," said Frank, amused at Mr. Roche's expression of friendly concern.

"Bill is what is known as a Prime Boy," said Mr. Weekes, "but he generally keeps a good steed, and his car is usually furnished with springs and cushions and other rare delicacies."

"I wouldn't doubt you for a jibe, Misther Weekes," said Bill, "but your tongue is the worst part of you."

"Get up on your perch, you rascal, and don't speak again until you're spoken to," exclaimed the attorney. "Now, Mr. Aylward, you sit on the side near you, and I'll hoist myself on the off side, and as we travel citywards we can hold a consultation over the well. Now then, Bill, off you go, and take it gently."

When the car was in motion, Mr. Weekes stretched himself over toward Frank, and, speaking in a subdued voice, he said:

"I didn't show up very well today in court, I fear, but I was too sure that my learned brother O'Connell would fall at the first ditch. But, to come to our own affairs, what I want to say is that Corbett made one remark during the course of his examination which struck me as being worth noting. I think you will agree with me that the fellow—rascal as he has proved himself to be—was speaking the truth today."

"He certainly gave me that impression. But I find it so difficult to understand the mere Irish. I don't mind telling you that I felt inclined to get up and give the scoundrel my hand when he asked my pardon."

"That does credit to your heart, my young friend," said Mr. Weekes, with a benedictory smile. "Anyhow, I think that we may assume that though he did not tell the whole truth, he told nothing but the truth, so far as he went."

"It seemed so to me," assented Frank.

"Well, then, did you take note of his words when he was asked about your uncle? 'I never laid a hand on his lordship.'"

"I remember the statement, but I must admit that It made no particular impression on me."

"It did on me. It said as plain as words could speak. 'Though others laid hands on his lordship. I did not.'"

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see, that throws some new light on the situation. Others—he admitted others were in the neighbourhood of the ferry at Rhi-na-Shark the evening your uncle disappeared—did lay hands on him. Now the only others who could have laid hands on him must be some person or persons whom Corbett is trying to screen. He did not know when he spoke how the verdict would go—in fact he had a very strong belief, I understand, that he would be found guilty of something like manslaughter. Moreover, he has yet to go through the ordeal of the further magisterial inquiry, which has been awaiting your recovery, and he knows that he will, in all probability, be committed for trial at the next assizes. Therefore he must have had some strong reasons for shielding his accomplices."

"I don't see what this leads to."

"Don't you remember me telling you a short time ago that Corbett was a foster brother of one of the young M'Carthys?"

"You still hold the opinion." said Frank "that the M'Carthys had a hand in my uncle's disappearance?"

"I suggested that possibility before. Now it seems to me to be almost a certainty. Corbett wouldn't risk his neck or his liberty for anything short of a relative—either one in blood or by fosterage."

"And what do you now think has happened?"

"That the M'Carthys decided to spirit Lord Clash-

more away, and that it is not improbable that in the attempt your uncle somehow lost his life."

"I cannot believe it. With what object, or for what purpose would the M'Carthys engage themselves in such a wild and lawless undertaking?"

"To get his lordship out of their way until some project of theirs had been completed."

"What sort of a project is in your mind? What could possess respectable, and so far as I can judge, peaceful people to commit such an outrage?"

"Foolhardiness, fear, greed, urgency. These things working on the minds of the two young fellows of a naturally wild character, they might in a moment of desperation seize an opportunity of getting troublesome people out of their way—perhaps not meaning them serious bodily harm."

"The motive would want to be very strong."

"It would."

"And what could it have been?"

"Did you ever hear of the troopship *Sea Horse*?"

"The *Sea Horse*? Not that I can remember. Stop a bit. I think that old fellow who owns the Baths—M'Grath, isn't it?—told me it was the name of a troopship which was wrecked in Tramore Bay about a century ago. But what could he the connecting link between a shipwreck occurring generations before you or I were born and the carrying off of my uncle the other day?"

"Bill," said Mr. Weekes, lifting his voice, "when was it that the *Sea Horse* was wrecked?"

"January, Eighteen Sixteen," replied Bill Roche, laconically.

"This ship, Mr. Aylward, was driven into the Bay—"

“Don’t tell me of it over again,” pleaded Frank. “It is a gruesome tale, and pardon me if I do object to hearing of horrible things which don’t concern me, and which remind me of other horrible things.”

“I was only going to say that this unlucky troopship had on board a considerable amount of specie. For a long time after the disaster there were all kinds of tales abroad of people discovering gold on the strand, but these tales were fables. Now it is quite possible that, in the course of time, some portion of this wreck which held gold was washed into a cave which lies round the corner of Brownstown Head, and runs under Mr. M’Carthy’s land. Old-M’Carthy, or some of his people, may have discovered this treasure. They certainly have got money in some mysterious way. Only the other day, I heard of the old man calmly lending at a moment’s notice a trifle of about five thousand to an acquaintance of yours—Mr. Usher, of Bell Lake; and this very fact, apart from the fact of an old farmer planking down such a multitude of dollars—fixes in me certain suspicions.”

“In what way?” asked Frank. He was agitated by the statement that old Simon had given Usher a large sum of money. Possibly it meant something in the nature of an instalment of a marriage portion.

“In this way,” said Mr. Weekes: “old M’Carthy must have some good reason of his own for planking down these dollars, and coupling this with something I have also heard about a certain proposal of marriage, I think I am at long last on the right scent.”

Frank could now scarcely conceal his agitation, and he felt that it would be impossible to use his voice without revealing his agitation to Mr. Weekes. His uncles



and all that concerning Lord Clashmore had for the moment faded from his mind. His only thoughts were concerned with Geraldine. Could it be that Usher was to take her from him? Mr. Weekes was so intent upon his story, and upon the telling of it in his own way, that he hardly had any eyes or ears for his companion.

“Now Mr. Aylward, let me pick up another thread, Charles M’Carthy—the Red Man. You know who I mean?”

“Yes,” said Frank huskily.

“Well, his riches have not been acquired wholly in the business of butter. I have often wondered how they were acquired. Anyhow, in making searches *in re* some property of your uncle, he discovered that the Ushers had an old and forgotten title to some of the lands about Brownstown. He kept this knowledge to himself—at least, he thought he was keeping it secret—but I discovered this little bit of business which Master M’Carthy had unearthed. What does my brave Charles do but quietly drive out to Lake Cottage and make the proposal of marriage which I referred to a few minutes ago. The proposal fell to the ground—Eh? Did I hear you say ‘Thank God?’”

“Candidly,” said Frank, “I think I did say something of the kind, but I wasn’t following your narrative. I was thinking of something else.”

“Oh hang it all,” exclaimed Mr. Weekes testily, “this is too bad!”

“I admit it is, but I really don’t think I missed anything of importance in your story. When I drifted away from your words was only just when you mentioned Charles M’Carthy’s visit to Lake Cottage. All went be-

fore that I clearly took in, and I will promise not to allow my attention to wander again. Pray excuse me."

"All right. Well, if your wits only went wool-gathering when my narrative reached Lake Cottage they didn't go far astray. And to resume. No doubt, in order to rake up the forgotten title to the lands at Brownstown, and to upset your uncle's title to them, my brave Charles thought he couldn't do better than to unite the houses of M'Carthy and Usher; but Mr. Bob, though he listened to him, gave him the cold shoulder, and Miss Usher flatly declined to be a consenting party."

"Who or what did the Ushers decline?" demanded Frank eagerly, thinking that the project Weekes referred to was the marriage of Usher and Geraldine.

"There you go again, wandering from my narrative."

"I have heard every word you said. Who declined whom?"

"Miss Usher—I suppose I should talk by the card to you in your present mood—declined the honour of Charles M'Carthy's proffered hand with all the wordly goods it could endow."

"Oh damn you!" said Frank impatiently.

"What the devil ails you?" asked Weekes.

"Nothing—nothing. But since I got that blow from Mr. Corbett I have grown absurdly irritable. But don't mind me. I shan't offend again. Charles M'Carthy's proposal was declined by the Ushers—well?"

Mr. Weekes was considerable puzzled, but he struggled bravely onwards. "That scheme failing," he continued, "the only thing to do was to get a grip of Usher's property somehow—how long negotiations were pending I don't know, nor do I know on what date M'Carthy pro-

posed for Miss Usher, but I should say that it must have been before the trouble began with your uncle. The young M'Carthys, impatient with their uncle's diplomacy, and finding themselves suddenly noticed to clear out of Prospect House, conceived the wild notion of abducting Lord Clashmore and hiding him until such a time as their long concealed treasure was got safely out of the way. That's my reading of the case now."

"Faith, then it's a damned clever readin' too, sir, if you don't mind me sayin' so," came in loud approving accents from the perch of the outside car; "but maybe I could tell you something that might knock the bottom out of one part of it."



## CHAPTER XL

### A BIRD OF ILL OMEN

“ROCHE, you Infernal villain! how dare you listen to what I have been saying to my friend? and how dare you presume to make comments upon what you had the impudence to overhear?”

“Be aisy now, Misther Weekes! I plead guilty, sir, to the latter part of your charge against me, an’ beg pardon for puttin’ in my spoke.”

“I am very sorry, Mr. Aylward, for this piece of impertinence, but I must say I did not count on our driver playing the part of eavesdropper. You’ll pay dearly for this, Roche.”

“Sure, I couldn’t help hearin’ you, sir. How be reasonable. You know I’m not hard of hearin’, an’ that I don’t carry cotton-wool in my ears. And you ought also to know well that any private remarks made by a gentleman who’s dhrevin’ on my car are as safe with me as if they were said in the confession box.”

“Faith, your rascality is equalled only by your audacity,” fumed Mr. Weekes.

“All I can say, sir, is that I’m sorry I opened my mouth;

but I did it with the best intentions. An' tis well yerself ought to know that I regard anything said on my ear as bein' spoken in confidence. Many's the time yerself asked me to thry an' pump Misther So-and-So, or what did Misther Thingumbob say to Mr. Thingimajig; an', between man an' man, did you ever know me wance to give you a single bit of information? Ah, no, Misther Weekes, I know what's fair between a jarvey an' them that sits behind him."

Frank could not help smiling at the audacity of Bill Roche, and at the way he was turning the tables on the man of law.

"I think," said he, "that we are to blame, Mr. Weekes. You never suggested that our words should be spoken so as not to reach the driver, and to be candid I did not care who heard what you or I said. Indeed, it seems to me that everybody in the County Waterford knows everybody else's business."

"That's the right sperit to show, sir," said Bill Roche. "Sure I wasn't towld to shut my ears, an' I only spoke when I knew Misther Weekes was afther makin' a mistake."

"Oh!" said the man of the law, recovering his good humour, "there is no use in my struggling against odds. I plead guilty before the honourable court to having been indiscreet, and you may take my word for it, William Roche, that though you sit on the rostrum now and are laughing in your sleeve at me, I'll pay you off for your infernal impudence some fine day. But what is the mistake I made?"

"About Misther Charles M'Carthy, sir. You towld Misther Aylward that Misther Charles made an offer

of himself to Miss Usher before Lord Clashmore disappeared. I can tell you that you're mistaken there. The offer was made afther the lord was spirited away—to the best of my knowledge it happened while Mither Aylward was in Dunmore at Miss O'Dwyer's."

"Um!" growled Mr. Weekes. Then, turning to Frank, he said, "No doubt our coachman's information weakens my case in so far as my poking for a motive is concerned, but it does not interfere with the strength generally of my narrative chain."

"You seem to take it for granted," said Frank, "that our driver's information is not to be questioned."

"That's so," replied the attorney. "Bill is one of those individuals who never speak without authority. He could compile a wonderful history of the city and county if he only possessed some literary faculty. As you have interfered in this case, Mr. Roche," he continued, opening his mouth widely, "perhaps you would give us your private opinion as to the matter of Lord Clashmore's disappearance."

"Faix, the deuce a much of a private opinion I have of it all, sir," answered Bill "From what Corbett said today—an', like yerself, I'm inclined to believe that he was tellin' the thruth—it isn't at all unlikely that there was a general scrimmage at the ferry the evenin' Sam Backas was swallyed up, an' that in the scrimmage the lord met with an accident."

"Met with an accident, is possibly euphemistic, Mr. Aylward," explained Weekes. "At whose hands, Bill?"

"Oh, don't ax me, sir. The divil a know I know. But I make bold to say that there's no one in the county would be bad enough to go as far as to take his lordship's life."

“Perhaps the culprits who were in Corbett’s company at the ferry were in the habit of driving on your car, and are therefore in sanctuary.”

“I wouldn’t doubt you for a joke, Misther Weekes, but I don’t know who the parties were. I only have my suspicions, like yerself, sir. But I’ll tell you a bit of a tale now that maybe has no bearin’ on anything in the world, but it puzzled meself a bit at the time.”

“Fire ahead, Bill!”

“But you must let me tell you the tale in my own way. If you start cross-examinin’ me you’ll only moidher me.”

“All right, my worthy William. I’ll not interrupt you unless I deem it necessary.”

“Well, sir, I suppose you remember the last day of April?”

“That was the day Lord Clashmore disappeared.”

“The same. An’ unlucky day it was, as you’ll hear. I was engaged to dhrive a gentleman and his lady that day to Thramore, an’ we started from Mullin’s Hotel, where they were stoppin’, about ten o’clock. When we got about as far as where we are now—just over at the Black Rock there—the lady spied a solitary magpie in the field there beyond, an’ begor, she stopped the car. The deuce another magpie—bad cess to the black an’ white villains!—we could see, an’ the mischief a step farther the lady would go, though her husband thried to persuade her ’twas only foolishness to be frightened of a magpie. Anyhow, back I had to dhrive the pair of ’em; so you can see, sir, that it was an unlucky day when even the quality couldn’t stand up against it.”

“I suppose they paid you for the day’s hire, Bill?”

“Oh, begor, they did, sir. They were dacent people.”



“And, you graceless scoundrel, don’t you think it was a very lucky day for you to get a day’s wages for an hour’s work? You ought to pray for solitary magpies instead of cursing the poor piebalds.”

“Be herrins! I never thought of that way of lookin’ at it at all, sir; but sure ’tis yerself that can twist a thing any way.”

“Thank you, William. Well? What next?”

“Well, sir, lather in the day I got a job from Sam Backas to take some parcels out to Rhi-na-Shark house. Himself an’ the lord were in town that day, as I needn’t tell you. Anyhow, when I was dhrivin’ beck home from Rhi-na-Shark in the evenin’, what did I come across on the road, about three mile at the near side of Watherford, but a broken-down horse an’ thrap. It was Mither Charles M’Carthy’s. Begor, I thought of the magpie then. Anyhow, Mither Charles was standin’ on the road lookin’ at the thrap, an’ as soon as I drove up he axed me to see if I could lend a hand to mend the cart.”

“What time about was this, Bill?”

“I think it was purty near seven o’clock, sir. I stopped a good spell at Rhi-na-Shark discoorsin’ to wan of the grooms there about a little horse I was thryin’ to sell, but I could do no thrade.”

“That must have been the magpie endeavouring to balance the account. Go on, Bill.”

“Well, sir, I plainly saw it was no use thryin’ to mend Mither Mac’s thrap, for the two shafts of it wor broke, an’ the horse, moreover, had a bit of a cut on his knee. Mither Mac seemed greatly upset, an’ I was very sorry for him, for he’s a dacent man. All I could do was to get shelther in a farmhouse close handy for the horse

and vayhicle. I doctored the horse's knee as well as I could, an' then Misther Mac mounted my car. He was carrying a wooden box, an' when I offered to lift it on to the car for him he shook his head. I saw by the way that he was carryin' the box that it was heavy, an' I couldn't get it out of my head. Anyhow, I dhrove him home to Ballythruckle house, an' while he was gettin' some thraps packed, an' that I was to take him to the railway station to catch the night mail to Dublin. He carried the wooden box into the house with him, an' he brought it out again an' the mischief a hand he'd let me put to it, so begor that made me more curious than ever about it. When we got to the railway station, an' afther he'd paid me, and when his thraps wor taken into the station by the porthor, the box was still on my car. I made a grab at it, offerin' to carry it into the station for him, but he shouldered me aside. As luck would have it——”

“Stop a moment, Bill! What business have you to speak of luck in the favourable sense with that magpie in your brain?”

“It's the mischief to be up to you at all, Mr. Weekes. Well, as ill-luck should have it, if you like, sir, in liftin' the box off the car it fell to the ground, an' faix, I was on to it like a shot, an', though I'm by no means a wake man, it tuk a pull out of me to lift it. Misther Mac looked very black at me, but, of coorse, I hadn't done anything wrong, an' he let me carry the box into the railway carriage. An' to the best of my belief it must have been goold was in the box, judgin' by the weight of it; an' sure it's like enough that it was a sample he was takin' over to London with him—maybe some of the

stuff out of the *Say Horse*."

"Um!" growled the man of the law. "Did you find out, Bill," he asked, after a brief pause, "where Mr. M'Carthy had been that day?"

"He was comin' from the ould man's place, sir—Prospect house. He didn't tell as much, for, faix, he hardly spoke a word to me at all—indeed, I never saw a gentleman so disthressed an' anxious-lookin'—like as if he's heard some very bad news."

"And how do you know where he was coming from?"

"He gave me a long pasteboard box to put in the well of my car when wer startin' from where he broke down on the road, an' as I was puttin' it in I saw it was directed to a dhressmaker in town, an' that it was marked from Miss Geraldine, his niece."

"That is pretty fair circumstantial evidence certainly. Isn't there some talk of a match between Miss M'Carthy and Mr Usher?"

"Arrah, people do be talkin' of all sorts of things, sir. Begor, she's the finest young lady in the county—the divil a doubt about that."

"By which, William, I suppose I am to infer that in your opinion Mr. Usher isn't good enough for her."

"Oh, begor, I never said anything of the kind, sir. Sure, Mr. Usher belongs to one of the best families in the county, an' any girl might be proud to marry him."

"People are all so superlatively good or honest or beautiful or high-born hereabouts—according to our worthy jarvey at any rate," said Mr. Weekes, turning his attention to Frank, "that you could scanty think you spent the early part of this blessed day in that coroner's court. Now, Bill, upon your honour, and remember that I

haven't paid you yet, and that on your reply may depend the magnitude of your fare—aren't you now driving two of the finest gentlemen who ever sat on your cushions?"

"I wouldn't go as far as to say that, sir, for many a time Lord Clashmore sat on the sate you're sittin' on at present, an' if I towld yon that you wor a grander gentleman than his lordship, maybe, bein' his lordship's sollicithor, sir, you'd think 'twas thrying to belittle your client I was."

"Bill, you're a diplomatist," said Mr. Weekes. "If ever I am prime minister of Ireland you shall have a portfolio—say, as our ambassador in the Flowery Land."

The tale told by Bill Roche about Charles M'Carthy interested the two passengers in widely different ways. It strengthened Weekes' suspicions, and he felt that at length he had hit upon the motive which had caused Lord Clashmore to be snatched out of sight. He would cover himself with glory, even if the glory were merely local. What a crafty fellow Don Carlos was!

Young Aylward was turning over in his mind the hearing which the various things he had heard during the day had upon the relations between Usher and Geraldine. It seemed to him most probable, that if old Simon was desirous of seeing his grand-daughter married to Usher, Geraldine would do what would please her grandfather best—no matter what her inclinations were. And it was by no means unlikely that her own inclinations would run in the direction of accepting a husband of her own race and faith in preference to a stranger and an alien. This feeling depressed him considerably, but it did not in any way alter his determination to press his suit.

Then, endeavouring to dismiss his own immediate concerns from his minds, he began to consider the case of his uncle. He was of opinion that Weekes had got a clue to the mystery. If the M'Carthys had really abducted his uncle—and, worse than all, if through their machinations his uncle had suffered injury—this would place an additional barrier between Geraldine and himself.

As the car reached the outskirts of Waterford city, Frank, abandoning his gloomy reveries, and leaning across the well, addressed Weekes.

"I suppose," said he, speaking in a subdued tone (for he had no relish for giving Bill Roche another opportunity of exercising his discretion), "nothing will be done immediately in the matter of my uncle?"

"How do you mean?"

"Do you intend to place your present views of the case before the authorities?"

"*Festina lente* is a good working motto, Mr. Aylward. Also *audi altheram partem*"—Weekes was fond of thickening the pronunciation of his Latin scraps. "What I mean to do before I allow any dunderhead policeman to move in the matter is to tackle Charlie M'Carthy—to beard the leopard in his own den, and watch him as he changes his spots. When I show him a few of my cards, I think he'll throw up the sponge."

"And then?"

"Well, that's what is puzzling myself. Anyhow, you may rely upon one thing—that whatever I do I shall bear in mind that the interests of our client, Lord Clashmore, are above and beyond every other consideration. A solicitor cannot afford to have any private feelings any more than a detective or a politician."

“Do you feel your new responsibilities irksome?” asked Frank slyly.

“New, indeed!” exclaimed Weekes, lifting his voice. “I have been for years the head cook at Hugh Mason’s emporium, with all the responsibilities, and very little of the emoluments of office. But a new era is dawning, sir, and possibly we shall see brighter days in the south of Ireland, now that I am lifted on a lofty pedestal and can allow the light of my countenance to shine more brightly on the litigants in this benighted neighbourhood.” Mr. Weekes smiled with latitudinous lips. “I think we might have a drink after that burst. Here we are at Mullins’s hotel. Pull up, Bill!”

“It is not considered respectable in this city,” he stated, as they passed through the hall, “to drink at the bar, but a puisne judge might take a dram in the billiard-room without loss of dignity. Why, even bank clerks may drink here,” he declared, pushing open the green baize door of the billiard room, “without soiling their escutcheons.”

As Frank entered a dimly-lit room the first sound he heard—the click of the balls—was followed by an exclamation which startled him. He was in a nervous mood, which was new to him and distinctly unpleasant.

“Why, dash my buttons, if it isn’t Mr. Aylward!”

Larry Fitzgerald flung his cue away, and approaching Frank he held out his hand.

“How do, Weekes? You must think me a nice fellow, Mr. Aylward, not to have put in an appearance at Tramore today, but the fact is, I was very busy in another direction. I was occupied with something of importance. I’ll talk to you about it presently—it should interest

you.”

“I hope you haven’t been re-stocking any of our neighbouring lakes. Did you tell Mr. A. anything about local sharks, yet?” asked Weekes.

“Faith, I can’t remember that we ever did discuss the legal profession, local or general, Weekes; but there’s time enough for that, old boy.”

“For two pins I’d make you stand a drink as a set-off against that remark; but I’ll forgive you, Fitz. It isn’t often you say a smart thing, and perhaps you should be rewarded for your vivacity. Without prejudice, what’ll you drink? And you, Mr. Aylward? You’d want something stiff to warm the cockles of your heart after that dreary drive. And the sooner the refreshment is ordered the better,” he added, tugging at a bell-rope, “for I have got a lot of work to do in the office before I shall be able to seek the retirement of my humble suburban residence—three whiskies, John,” addressing a waiter—“in which abode I would invite you to dine this evening, but our chef is laid up with an attack of chronic indigestion, and our butler has been attending the obsequies of a mother-in-law, and his hilarity might be irritating. Another time we shall be in better trim, and then perhaps the pair of ye will honour me with a visit. A short time ago I would hardly be justified in making such a suggestion, but an attorney-at-law is entitled to the appellation of gentlemen, and should therefore be equal to the entertaining of other gentlemen. And here is our waiter with the amber-coloured usquebaugh.—Keep the change, John, and drink my health with it.—Success to our cause whatever the deuce that cause may be!” he exclaimed, holding up his glass and tossing the contents

down his throat. "I fear I shall have to tear myself away from ye. If you stop in Waterford over the night, Mr. Aylward, you might give me a call in the morning. And now once more into the breach, dear friends. Ta, ta!"

"Dreadful man!" exclaimed Frank, as he found himself alone with Fitzgerald.

"He's right enough when he is at his business," said Fitzgerald. "It's only when he is recreating that he loses himself—I expect he's a nervous man at bottom, and that when he finds himself collapsing, he tries to inflate himself with the exuberance of his own verbosity, to employ an expression of your famous prime minister, Dizzy. But tell me about yourself and about today's proceedings. All I have heard is that the verdict is one of death by misadventure; but tell me all the particulars like a good fellow. I meant to run out to Tramore tomorrow to see you."

"Stick to your good resolution." said Frank. "Or, better still, come back with me this evening. I should not mind putting up here for the night, if it were not for the fear of encountering Mr. Weekes. Let us order a dinner here, and afterwards, as we journey to Tramore, I can tell you all about the evidence at the inquest. It would spoil our appetites to discuss coroner's courts before dinner. Let us go for a walk somewhere—the exercise will take the stiffness out of my legs much more effectually than a dose of Mr. Weekes' medicine," pointing to his untasted modicum of whisky. "You might oblige me by ordering the feast. Somehow I don't feel up to much today."

As Frank and Fitzgerald started out from the hotel and proceeded up the quay, the former inquired for Fa-



ther Hackett. "I am afraid it may seem to him that I have treated him cavalierly."

"He doesn't think anything of the kind," said Fitzgerald, with some eagerness. "In fact, you are quite a white-headed boy of his. I saw Father John no later than today, under his own roof, and so far as I can judge he thinks he has offended you."

"How? or about what?" asked young Aylward quickly. And then he remembered the discussion in Tramore about Geraldine, and he was stricken with confusion, and fearful that Fitzgerald had heard of his love affair and might proceed to "chaff" him.

"Faith, I don't know how or why; but one thing you may be sure of, and that is that he is a good friend of yours, and mighty anxious that you should report yourself *mens sana in corpore sano*, as they say in the classics."

"I hardly need to be told that."

"And now the poor man is between two stools. He has got hold of some information in a strange sort of way, and he hardly knows how to act. If what he has heard is true, and if he acts upon his information, he is bound to get some old friends of his into serious trouble. He sent for me yesterday; today he laid the whole case before me, and, faith, he has put myself in a fix too, for I hardly know whether the thing is a hoax or not."

"What thing?"

"The information Father Hackett has. It doesn't tally with certain views of mine, and I'm rather inclined to think that for some reason or other there is a plot to put us on the wrong scent or to humbug us."

"And what is the plot concerned with?"

“What else could it be but with the Rhi-na-Shark mystery?”

“My uncle’s disappearance?”

“Exactly. Father Hackett thinks he is in possession of some direct information about your uncle, and he wants me to sift the matter without delay. When you give me an account of the evidence at the inquiry today, I shall, perhaps, know better how to act.”

“It is hardly fair to whet my curiosity and to go no farther.”

“Have patience, my dear sir. I’m burning with eagerness to be at work, but I don’t want to drag either you or myself into danger, or even into notoriety, for nothing. And fond as I am of a joke, I must admit I have a holy horror of being made the victim of one.”

“This affair of my uncle seems to have ever so many brilliant openings—some of them bewildering to a novice—but they end in a stalemate. When do you purpose beginning a new game?”

“To-morrow. But, faith, I’m growing so hungry that I don’t feel quite equal to further exertion. I intended conveying you to the top of that hill at the other side of the river. You’d see a view from it that might appeal to your artist’s eye—but we’d never get there and back in time for dinner. Tell me, without entering into details which would effect the appetite, were your friends, the young M’Carthys—I mean old Simon’s grandchildren—dragged into the evidence today?”

“Not directly,” replied Frank; “but, as we were driving from Tramore, Mr. Weekes disclosed to me a theory of his which would certainly implicate the grandsons. But when I consider Mr. Weekes’ theory it has rather a wild

air.”

“And considering your own experiences in the neighbourhood—”

“For heaven’s sake don’t remind me of the attack upon me. I feel quite out of sorts when I think of it.”

“No wonder. But to put my question without referring to unpleasant things, would you expect to find anything but wildness in or about Rhi-na-Shark? Any-how, let us pray for a mild day tomorrow, for I intend that you should entrust yourself to an old enemy of mine—in plainer language, that we two should make a voyage upon the Atlantic ocean. The expedition will pick you up, and chase everything gloomy out of your mind.”



## CHAPTER XLI

### AFLOAT

ON his arrival in Tramore Frank found a letter there from his mother. His correspondence with her had for some time been scant and irregular. The sight of Mrs. Aylward's handwriting caused him a curious sense of self-reproach, and this feeling was not lightened when he noticed that the letter had been forwarded through Father Hackett. He could not dismiss the idea that he acted a little deceitfully towards the good old man under whose wing he had been sheltering.

"Your last letter." wrote his mother, "has caused me almost as much anxiety as I suffered during that awful time when you were unable to write. I have little doubt that your medical attendant is in the habit of prescribing successfully for Irish patients, whose skulls in all probability have been annealed by a course of 'shillaylies'—I can't find the word in a dictionary—and that he is presuming on your strength. Doctor Dudley-Harley tells me that you have not had anything like a sufficient time for rest and recuperation. What upsets me most is that I do not recognize you in your own letters.

There is a reserve about you and a curtness which chill me and make me think that you are still far from being so well as you say you are.

“The dreadful trouble you got into disclosed to the world what you were doing, and your unfortunate selection of a certain *nom de guerre* has been commented upon in various circles. Your aunt, to put it mildly, is furious. She has made no quarrel with me, but I have heard of her speaking of ‘that wretched boy who has been dragging our name through Irish mire and mud cabins.’ Kitty is disdainful, and avoids all mention of you. This is, of course, a good sign, but a little bird inform me that young Doldrum (of the Blues) is in constant attendance upon her. This is not to be considered too lightly.

“I suppose there is little doubt that your uncle has shared the same savage fate as his man. I would strongly advise you to ascertain from Mr. Hugh Mason (who, to judge by his letters to me, is warmly attached to your interests) anything he may know about this supposed heir to Clashmore—I mean your mysterious uncle’s mysterious son. Of course we cannot make any move in the matter while this present condition of horrible uncertainty exists.

“I had serious intentions of crossing over to Ireland, and am still uncertain whether I shall go there or accept an invitation from your aunt to join her on a tour through Italy and Switzerland. If I decline her invitation I shall possibly offend her, and be adding fuel to the fire of your offence. And if I don’t go to Ireland, or see you, my dear boy, very soon here, I shall be suffering from nightmares in which your doings will be the

leading feature.

“Please write me all about yourself at once, and say when you propose to return.”

This letter did not lighten Frank’s rest. Visions of a battle royal between himself and his mother, concerning Geraldine and his cousin Kitty, haunted him through the watches of a restless night.

Shortly after ten o’clock next morning young Aylward found himself afloat on Tramore Bay, Fitzgerald his only companion of the voyage. The boat in which the pair had embarked was a small pleasure boat about ten feet in length, and Frank experienced a sense of uncomfortableness as he surveyed the boat’s dimensions.

“I hope,” said he, from his seat in the stern, “that your voyage will not take us far. I have no ambition to be wrecked, even in your pleasant society. I am forcibly reminded of those mariners of Gotham who went to sea in a bowl.”

“Don’t disturb yourself,” said Fitzgerald, as he tugged easily at the oars. “This little cockle-shell is as steady as a mail-boat—indeed, a great deal steadier than the mail-boat which conveyed me across the St. George’s Channel about a month ago. I have been round the coast here in this little punt, and have fished out of her in very queer weather. I don’t mean to convey that she is qualified to ride out a gale or to sneeze at broken water; but, pray, don’t be uneasy. Look at the ocean now, and the sky above it! Did you ever behold anything more peaceful?”

The sky was cloudless, and only a gentle swell ruffled the bosom of the bay, the waters of which sparkled in the sunlight. A great grey luminous haze spread itself

over the ocean in the far south.

“It looks all right.” said Frank, “but recollect I am not weatherwise. If I were I think I should suspect mischief out of the south.”

“Oh, that haze will lift when the sun gets up higher. We shall have a beautiful day. My prayers for calm weather don’t go for nothing. We shall want a wild day for our work.”

“And may I ask where we are bound to, and what our mission is? So far I am under sealed orders all that I know is that I am to steer for the two white pillars on Brownstown Head.”

“Well, now that you’re out of reach of land and at my mercy, more or less, I suppose I had better lay bare my plans. When I met you in town yesterday I feared, as I told you what was in my mind, that you would think my story a little outlandish; but, after hearing what Weekes has in his mind, I think you will not consider me a chaser of wild geese. Anyhow, this is my tale. A little time ago our friends the M’Carthys fell short of a hand at their dairy out on the brow of Brownstown there, and a young girl was initiated into the mysteries of butter-making. She was an inquisitive young damsel, and she noticed things which aroused curiosity. Amongst the things she noticed was, that the chimney of the dairy discharged smoke when there was no fire burning. She also noticed that a small room in the dairy was always carefully locked up. Miss Molly—that’s her Christian name was a little more enterprising than the average peasant child hereabouts. Perhaps it was that she has had a larger slice of education—she can read and write and speak the English language—she was the only dairy attendant



who did know anything but Irish—or perhaps it was only that she was suffering from that disease of curiosity which attacks all the female sex at some period of their life. Whatever was the origin of her inquisitiveness, she managed to get a peep into the Blue-Beard chamber. There was nothing horrible in it—indeed, nothing met the eye but a flagged roof and bare walls. Mistress Molly—I may tell you that all this is my version of an open confession she made to Father Hackett—was not satisfied, and one evening, after the dairy was locked, she abstracted the keys from Miss McCarthy’s room and hied her across the cliffs. I don’t know if you ever visited the immediate vicinity of this dairy—I showed it to you from somewhere about Prospect House, if my memory serves me rightly.”

“Oh, yes, I did venture close to it on one occasion,” said Frank, quivering with emotion, as the memory of his interview with Geraldine flashed through his mind.

“You do know it. Well, it’s a lonely place enough. Your eye must be pretty much on a line with it now. That’s it close to the two white pillars on the Head. Miss Molly opened the dairy door and let herself in. It was quite lightsome, and she was soon busy inspecting the locked-up chamber. At first she could find nothing in the least unusual, but as she walked across the floor a few times it seemed to her that one part of the floor gave out a hollow ring. Then she noticed that the flag-stone, which she thought rang hollow, had a groove in it; and, putting her hand into the groove and tugging hard, she moved the stone. She found there was a guiding rope leading down a lot of steps, cut into the side of the rock, and down these steps in the dark the young beggar scrambled.

She found herself on a platform of rock, but here there was some light, and she could hear the splash of water, so she guessed she was in a cave. Miss Molly crawled about in the direction from which the light came, and very soon she could distinguish things pretty clearly. It was an immense cave, she declares, spreading out into numerous galleries."

"And this, I suppose, is where we are steering for?"

"Well, that is what is puzzling me, Mr. Aylward. I was in Brownstone Cave only once. It is by no means a large cave, and doesn't, so far as I could see, burrow any considerable distance into the land. It is a place rarely visited. I don't suppose you'd find a dozen men hereabouts who ever were inside it. Certainly, Miss Molly's description of her cave doesn't tally with my recollection of Brownstown Cave. It is a good many years since I was there; but even the ocean, strong and active as it is, doesn't work very rapidly through solid rock. But to get back to our little milk-maid. As she got wandering about she espied in a sort of alcove a tall man. This alcove, as I may call it, was separated from Molly's ledge by a great chasm, and the ocean—or whatever the water was—was swirling underneath—how far down she could not tell. The sight of the tall man, who did not evidently see her—at an events he made no sign that he did—alarmed the youngster, and she crawled upstairs—if I may so term it—and got home more dead than alive. The whole thing preyed on her mind, and knowing of your uncle's disappearance, she fancied that the tall man she had seen in the cave was Lord Clashmore. She did not know his lordship's appearance, but she had often heard descriptions of him. Not wishing to do anything that

might get her mistress—Miss M'Carthy—into trouble, the young dairy-maid managed to preserve silence about her discovery, but her mind troubled her so much that she decided at length to confide in her confessor. Then she grew uneasy again. Her confessor happened to be more or less a stranger—Miss Molly comes from Father Hackett's neighbourhood. The day before yesterday she was sent on an errand to Father Hackett. He knew the little girl well, and his quick eye detected that she was in trouble about something or other, so he asked her what was the matter. Faith, Miss Molly was only too eager to tell, and she couldn't think of anyone in whom she could better confide her secret than Father John. That's my story now so far as it goes."

"And what does Father Hackett think of it?"

"Well, he hardly knows what to think. You see, when I was speaking to him last he knew nothing of the evidence which cropped up at the inquest, and, of course, nothing about Weekes' latest theory. He is convinced the little girl told him the truth, and his first impulse was to go straight over to Prospect House. Then it occurred to him that this might put the fat in the fire, and eventually he decided to call in the able assistance of Counsellor Laurence Fitzgerald."

"And what was the counsel's advice?"

"Counsel decided to investigate the cave personally, and if possible without drawing upon himself the suspicion of the M'Carthys. Also, I decided privately to take you with me. It would be well-nigh impossible to venture upon the expedition alone, and in this affair I didn't want to trust anyone but yourself. Of course, Miss Molly's man may be anything or anybody—a County

Waterford Baron Trenck or Man in the Iron Mask—possibly a relative of the Metal Man behind you. If it is Lord Clashmore, and if we hit upon his place of concealment, we shall have to look out for squalls; the young M'Carthys will be likely to give us a hot house-warming in that cave, if Weekes' suspicions have any foundation. Perhaps you don't feel that you'd care for the adventure. 'Pon my conscience, it never occurred to me until this minute that you might regard it is foolhardy or hazardous."

"I am quite complimented on your way of making up your mind that I am not one who is accustomed to weigh risks by avoirdupois. I'm with you here for all I'm worth."

"Good man! Well, whatever happens pray bear in mind that I am the leader of this expedition, and that you are to place yourself under my orders. If I should deem it prudent at any period of our voyage to cut and run, you must obey my command just as if I was an admiral of the Red, White and Blue. My taking you with me is an experiment of my own. If Father Hackett heard I was going to lead you into any possible danger, I expect he'd blow my head off, or excommunicate me. And then, who knows but we may be going to tumble Prospect House about the ears of the dwellers therein? There is another rub!"

The boat was now about half-way across the bay. As Fitzgerald spoke of Prospect House he drew in his oars, and turned round to gaze in the direction of the house of the M'Carthys. There was now scarce a sound upon the ocean; even the melancholy boom of the sea as it flung itself upon the rocks was inaudible to the two

men. Theirs was the only boat on the bay, and out to sea there was only one craft visible upon the ocean, and this solitary vessel was slowly disappearing into the haze which curtained the horizon.

“Yes,” said Frank moodily. “We may be about to do something which will cause trouble,” indicating Prospect House with a motion of his head; “but if they have done no wrong there we can do them no harm, and it may be that we shall clear them from a load of unjust suspicion. I’d stake all I am worth on the rectitude of the old man.”

“And, little as my all is, I’d lay it on the uprightness of Mistress Geraldine.”

A vivid blush suffused Frank’s cheeks, but Fitzgerald was wholly unconscious of having said anything which might be calculated to disturb his companion. “How calm it is out here,” he said, after a short pause. “That craft out in the south there can hardly find wind enough to steer her. She’s a handsome-looking article, mind you,” continued Fitzgerald, peering at the distant vessel. “I wonder what she is. She’s not exactly like any of the fishing-sloops which batten on these waters, and she’s not a revenue cutter or a yacht, I should say, by her build. She’s oddly masted, too; her lower mast is not taut enough by a long way, if my eyes don’t deceive me. Do you take an interest in ships, Mr. Aylward?”

“A little,” replied Frank, whose eyes were at the moment fixed on Prospect House. “I like to look at them racing, but I was never much of a yachtsman.”

Had he known was the oddly-masted sloop held, she would have interested him more than any ship which had ever sailed upon the water.



## CHAPTER XLII

### IN THE CAVE

IT was near midday when the little boat reached the mouth of Brownstown Cave. The entrance to the cave was about twenty feet wide at the water line, and the summit of its Gothic arched roof stood more than forty feet out of the water. Fitzgerald explained that the tide was still ebbing, and that it would be low water in about an hour. He had selected the time as a favourable period for visiting the cave. At high water a boat would possibly be crushed against the roof, especially if the sea was boisterous. "Indeed," he added, "it would be a very unsafe place to enter at any time of tide if the ocean was in a disturbed condition."

As they shot into the opening Frank leant over the side of the boat, and found he could see the gravelly bottom as clearly as if he was gazing at it through a sheet of glass. Fitzgerald estimated the depth at about twenty feet. A strong current was running out of the cave, and Fitzgerald had to tug hard at his oars in order to make any progress. The light penetrated a considerable distance into the interior, and Frank experienced

no sense of uneasiness or strangeness until the boat had to be swerved suddenly round a sharp angle. As they shot round this bend they were swiftly enveloped in darkness, and the younger man was irritated to know that he was the prey to a sense of timidity.

“Now we have got to advance gingerly,” said Fitzgerald. “I remember this place well. The cave swells out here, and to the right of you there is a stretch of shingly bottom which is quite bare a little before low water. We can beach the boat on the shingle presently, and then we shall explore the place on foot. I am prepared for the darkness. That parcel of mine holds a torch. This is dark if you like, isn’t it?” Then Frank was startled by a cry, “Tally-ho, there!”—a cry which echoed in a thunderous clatter of sounds. “That hasn’t fetched anybody,” observed Fitzgerald, after a few moments. “Let us try the shades with a more direct appeal. M’Carthy ahoy!” he roared, only to be answered by the reverberation. “Now let us keep quite still, and await the approach of the enemy.”

“We may have hit upon the wrong cave,” said Frank.

“I hardly think so. I know the coast pretty well, and there is no other cave which burrows under the head of old Brownstown. The current runs pretty rapidly still. Perhaps there is an underground river making its way out to the ocean in this secret way. By Jove! It never occurred to me before,” continued Fitzgerald, with a abort laugh. “Maybe this is where Bob Usher’s lake empties itself. I must bring away a sample of the water, and have it analysed. You don’t seem to enjoy this pleasant landscape, Mr. Aylward. I don’t hear your voice.”



“I must confess,” said Frank, “that I think we are acting a little rashly in pushing our way through the darkness here. If the bottom or the nose of our boat struck anything we should have a very poor chance of salvation.”

“The beach is close at hand. A swift pull or two of my right oar would shoot us on the shingle. I think we might light up now and see where we had best run our boat ashore.”

“It seems to me that we have embarked on a very unpromising adventure, Mr. Fitzgerald. That young girl’s story may have been invented for a purpose—perhaps to only raise a laugh against somebody. You are so fond of practical jokes hereabouts that one can’t help being suspicious; the hint of the comic presence is always at my ear.”

“I have been turning the whole thing over in my mind again, and I think we may dismiss the possibility of their being any joke at the bottom of it. This young dairy-maid would as soon think of inviting the Lord Lieutenant to play hide-and-go-seek with her as she would of telling a lie to Father John. Her story is right enough. The only thing that’s bothering me is the question of the cave, and yet caves of considerable dimensions don’t get fashioned—in these parts at any rate—in the course of an afternoon. No, I think we must be in the right place. Of course, it is possible that the M’Carthy’s have espied strangers and are lying low. If that’s the case perseverance and pluck will do the trick. Now then, let us see what our torch will reveal. You might strike a wax light, Mr. Aylward, while I keep the boat in her place. You’ll find that parcel of mine under your seat.”

Frank struck a light, and while it burned the two men peered round. The shingly beach of which Fitzgerald had spoken shone as the light fell upon it. The water here ran in a channel narrower than the mouth of the cave. The cave itself spread itself out laterally, disclosing to the left, a few boats' lengths in front of them, another turning—this time an opening to the left.

As the match died out Frank felt as if he had suddenly gone blind; and the gurgle of the waters beneath him sounded more loud and more melancholy. He was very much inclined to press Fitzgerald to retreat.

"Now Mr. Aylward," he heard his companion say, "you have forgotten the torch. I suppose you noticed a curious disturbance in the beach to my left?"

"I didn't give much attention to the bottom of the cave. My eyes were rather for the roof and the general configuration of it. What strange sight did you catch?" Frank asked, as he handed Fitzgerald the parcel which had been placed in the stern of the boat.

"I'll show you presently," said Fitzgerald, unwinding a waterproof covering in which he had enclosed the torch. "Now then, if you will hand me your match-box I will set this thing aflame, and then we'll feel more comfortable."

The torch was soon blazing, and, waving aloft, Fitzgerald shouted again, but was greeted with no reply. "Now," said he to his companion, "look at the beach here. You see it shelves rapidly, and that right in the centre of it there is a heavy furrow leading straight into the water. That denotes that a boat has been dragged through this—the furrow marks the track of her keel. A big boat I should say. I'll just work the nose of our punt into this furrow, and run her up as far as she'll go. You hold the

torch while I manœuvre the boat.”

Frank did as he was desired, and his companion skilfully worked the boat's head into the channel, and then, facing the bow and paddling swiftly, he sent the boat well forward. Then throwing down his oars he leaped from the boat, and gripping her nose dragged her up high and dry on the shingly beach. Young Aylward experienced a little difficulty in keeping his sea legs and holding the torch aloft while Fitzgerald was swiftly executing his beaching operations.

When Frank had disembarked, the two men ascended to the summit of the shelving counter of the beach, and Fitzgerald pointed out marks which, according to his opinion, indicated that the uppermost part of the beach had held for some time a craft of a at of considerable dimensions. “This is well above high-water mark,” he explained to Frank; “the surface is fairly dry—probably the sea mounts up here only in tempestuous weather. Then, here are blocks and tackle,” he added; “and see a little farther up there is a capstan.”

“And what does all this mean?”

“That a craft of some size has been hauled up here; and I wouldn't mind hazarding a guess that she has been launched quite recently—and with some difficulty, too. It would be a ticklish job getting a heavy boat out of this and letting her slip down that inclined plane of gravel under us.”

“Perhaps,” said Frank, “this gives some colour to Mr. Weekes' theory about that about that wrecked transport.”

“The *Sea Horse*? I should be very much inclined to say not. There was no wreckage here last year. I

inquired in Tramore if anyone had visited this cave recently. I could find no one who had been here this year, but a fisherman took a party of sightseers in here last summer, and he saw nothing resembling a wreck. He landed on this beach to show his party the extent of the cave. No; you may put that theory out of your head, Mr. Aylward. Now, our boat will be safe for many hours, and I think we might poke about in search of something more likely than evidences of a wreck three-quarters of a century old. Those doubloons you are thinking of are buried pretty deep by this time under the sands the bottom of my friend the Atlantic.

“Here are some odd marks,” Fitzgerald added—“planks on an inclined plane. This looks as if we are getting warm. Those planks weren’t formed by nature—the hand of man is here. They lead, it is plain, to the ploughed up part where, as I take it, a craft lay on her side. Something, no doubt, has been wheeled into her. Hold up the torch a bit. There, you see this planking leads to the bend round there to the left where I suppose the cave ended. I remember coming flat against the solid rock up there the last time I explored this den.”

Advancing along the shingle for about a hundred yards the explorers arrived at the turning, and about a dozen paces beyond this bend the cave seemed to end. Beneath them the water gurgled and eddied as if the sea had reached its limits here, and was retracing its course. Fitzgerald taking the torch from his companion, stepped out on a rocky ledge and peered downwards and inward, and it seemed no nook or cranny in the dark, wet walls which confronted him. He then decided to retrace his steps in order to see where the planking led

to.

As he turned round to join Frank his foot slipped on the slimy rock and he fell prone, the torch escaping from his grasp. A cry of terror went up from Frank. He had heard a splash, and the sudden loss of the torch's light appalled him; his terror had magnified the sound, and for a moment he believed that his companion had fallen into the black waters.

It was with an infinite sense of relief that he heard Fitzgerald's voice.

"Don't move! I'm all right. This is a cursed nuisance. Strike a match like a good chap."

Frank lit a match with trembling fingers, and saw Fitzgerald slowly rising from the ground.

"A narrow shave, old man," he said, as he approached Frank. "In my eagerness to clutch at our torch I got one leg over the side of the ledge, and for a moment I felt that my goose was cooked and that my sample of water would be found inside me."

"Thank God!" was all Frank could say, as he seized Fitzgerald's hand, just as the match burned itself out.

"This has given my nerves a bit of a shake," said the elder man, in an apologetic tone. "We'll have to be extra careful. As I was going for a sea trip I left my stick behind me, and now I feel helpless without a shillelagh. I hope you hate a good supply of matches, for with my usual foresight I forgot to bring any with me." Frank's heart fell at these words, for when he had struck the match a few moments before he discovered that there were only a few vestas remaining in his box.

"Now, Fitz," he said, dropping for the first time the word "Mister," and calling his companion by the abbre-

viated form of his surname, "I'm going to boss the show, and my first command is to retreat in good order and clear out of this accursed hole. Your nerve is a thing to be proud of. I thought I had some nerve myself, but you have knocked all the conceit out of me."

"You'll pick yourself up in a minute or two, Mr. Aylward."

"I have no desire to exhibit courage, Dutch or otherwise. And don't let me hear you mistering me any more; I'm Aylward to my acquaintances, and Frank to my friends."

"Then 'Frank' it shall be, old boy," said Fitzgerald, "odd as it may sound in my own ears. But discoursing like this won't do much for us. As to retiring—pray let that idea fall into the back of your mind for a moment. To let an opportunity slip of getting at the bottom of the business is more than I can stomach. Let us move towards the left. I watched the lie of the land while your match was on fire, and that's our safest road, if we are not making a bee-line for our punt. As long as we hear the crunch of the gravel under our feet we are all right—but when one of us touches rock let him holloa. Keep a grip of my arm. I have a sort of instinct for groping in the dark."

Feeling his way cautiously with his feet and hands, Fitzgerald piloted Frank for some considerable distance. Then he stopped, and said, "I've kicked a rock. We are either at some extremity of the cave, or in some spot where danger lurks. I think we might change another of our precious wax lights."

When the match was aflame, the two men saw that they were standing close to a low pillar of rock, and

that the top of the pillar formed a resting place for the wooden planking which led in one direction to the spot where Fitzgerald declared a craft had been beached.

"This planking must lead to somewhere in the higher portion of the cave—some safe place, too, and no doubt it will prove to be a clue to something."

"If it was a clue to the Garden of Eden I am not going to follow it," exclaimed Frank, as his match flickered and died. "My courage, I find, fails me in the darkness, and my curiosity keeps company with my courage. Every dark moment in this dungeon I feel as if I was going to find myself tumbling down some slimy, hideous precipice. I haven't the slightest doubt, Fitz, that if I were here alone without a light I should, in my present mood, lie down and die. I knew a fellow once who was lost in a cave on the Welsh Coast, and the tale of his experience, as he told it to me, sat like a nightmare upon me for weeks—and now all the horror of it comes back to me!"

"You'll knock the stiffening out of my nerves, Frank, old boy, if you go on like this, and that would never do. Already I am not over eager to go groping back a few hundred feet in search of our boat, and it seems to me that this discovery of this planking overhead is providential. While you were striking that last match I was saying a short prayer; and, faith, I regard our discovery as an answer to my prayer. Don't laugh at me."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"To get up on that plank, ascertain if it is securely fixed, and ten to lie along it, and haul myself to wherever its next resting-place is."

"And then find another rock or another plank, and

so on. No, Fitz, my friend, that won't do. We shall grope our way to the boat. Now don't be foolhardy."

"Look here. Let me mount to the top of this pillar, and see if I can discover what is at the other end of the plank. It seemed to me while the last match was on fire that the plank led to a cleft overhead in the rocks, but there wasn't time to concentrate my sight on this—the light went out just as I thought I saw this cleft. It is only about six or seven feet to the top of this pillar, so if you will hand me your match-box, and allow me to get up on your shoulders, I think I can easily manage the job."

Very unwillingly, young Aylward consented to the proposal, and in a few minutes Fitzgerald was standing on a ledge of rock over this companion's head. "Now keep your eyes open," he said, as he struck a light, and held it up cautiously, shading it with his hand. "I guessed it was so. There's not much more than a dozen feet between us and a cleft in the rocks, which holds the far end of one of these planks. I vote for the attempt to get into that opening, for this planking must lead to some place of safety. Come, give me your hand quick, and I'll haul you up before the match dies out."

Hardly knowing whether to refuse or to accept the suggestion, Frank lifted one hand, and Fitzgerald, stooping down, seized it, and as the light expired he was alongside his companion.

After a careful examination of the plank Fitzgerald pronounced it to be securely fixed. He straddled it, and, Frank following him, the two men slowly dragged themselves towards the fissure in the rock. As Fitzgerald reached the orifice a cry burst from him: "Hurrah! I see



a glimmer of light in the distance.”

This discovery revived young Aylward's courage, and in a moment he was standing alongside Fitzgerald on the cliff. “Don't move forward,” said his companion, “but crane your neck to the left, and you'll see a streak which I take to be the heaven's light struggling through some crack or crevice. Ill throw myself on my face and hands, and feel my way forward, until we be sure of our ground.”

In a few minutes the two men, after creeping through a narrow and tortuous passage, stood up, a cry of wonderment escaping from them. In front of them lay a wide and lofty cavern; it was feebly illuminated—a dim shaft of light found its way into it at the farthest end from some narrow opening in the roof. The eyes of the explorers, accustomed, as they had been, even for a short period, to grim darkness, exaggerated the normal effect of this glimmer of light, and Fitzgerald (with a show of confidence in his powers of calculating superficial areas) declared that the cavern was at least two hundred feet in diameter. Its roof, so far as they could see it, was dome-shaped and from it depended huge stalactites. The sound of running water indicated the existence of a stream at the base of the cavern.

“This is the place Mistress Molly visited,” observed Fitzgerald.

“No doubt,” assented Frank. “Do you get a peculiar smell—a smell which is not of the sea, an acrid smell, as of something burning or fusing?”

“I noticed it,” said Fitzgerald, “and I bare a shrewd suspicion that certain games have been going on in this inner cave which would account for a good deal of mystery. But let us be moving towards the light in distance.

My idea is that if we keep in touch with this planking, which seems to wind itself round by the walls of the cave, we shall be pretty safe. How many more matches are there, Frank? I gave you back your box."

"Four," answered the young man, examining the matchbox.

"A little light will go a long way now. Strike up."

The match revealed a passage-way, in some parts natural and in some parts evidently hewn, winding its way to their right round the cavern. As Frank held the match aloft for a moment, the two men also beheld the glint of a narrow stream flowing at the base of the cavern.

Groping their way along, keeping in touch with the side of the cave, the adventurers, after about a quarter of an hour, found they had reached the spot where the light filtered through the roof. Near this spot they came upon a dangling rope, and again striking a light they found that this rope was a hand-rope to ease ascent up a series of steps cut in the rock. Turning round here, and gazing backwards into the hollow, they observed an alcove in the rock, high up in a place where the wall of the cavern rose sheer from the base.

"That," said Fitzgerald, gripping his companion's arm, as the match flickered, "is in all likelihood the spot where young Molly saw the tall man. Whoever he was, he is no longer a prisoner here, or he would have revealed himself. There seems to be no means of ascent or descent leading from it. It would make a very secure prison, once you got your captive hoisted into it. No doubt we are now about to find our way up to old Simon's dairy. Perhaps we shall discover the enemy at

the top of this rock, or somewhere where they can easily make an end of us. A boulder hurled down on our heads now would give us out quietus very neatly. But, come. Never day die!”

“I expect the cave-dwellers—whoever they may be—have deserted these haunts, or we should not be here to tell the tale, even to each other. We must only chance a meeting with enemy or friend. I don’t want to remain an unnecessary minute in this place of darkness,” said young Aylward. Again his courage seemed to ooze out, and he was shaken with a vague sense of apprehensiveness.

Then minutes later the two men were standing in old M’Carthy’s dairy. The stone in the floor had been removed. The outer door of the dairy stood wide open. The building was deserted.

“All our birds have flown,” observed Fitzgerald, gazing round the silent house.

“Thank heaven,” said Frank fervently, “that we have escaped alive out of that Stygian pit!”

“And hang it all, Master Frank, what about our poor, forgotten punt?”



## CHAPTER XLIII

### AT PROSPECT HOUSE

EMERGING from the dairy Fitzgerald was for some moments dazed by the blinding sunlight. When his eyes ceased to pain him he turned his gaze seawards. There were a few fishing-boats scudding out of the bay. The haze in the south had not lifted, and the vessel which the two men had noticed when they were rowing towards the cave was nowhere to be seen; the mist enshrouded her.

“I think we had better push along to Castle M’Carthy,” said he, “and see what the dwellers there have to say. There is no one hereabouts evidently to give us any information. This is a rummy sort of business. I can’t quite fathom it.”

Frank was immensely relieved at his deliverance from the darkness, and was now ready for any enterprise which did not mean burrowing into the bowels of the earth. “What do you make of it all?” he inquired.

“It seems to me that the game is up—that the ship has been deserted. The secret which the M’Carthys were hiding in this cave has been found out, and I expect those

wild young devils have taken French leave. I hope they haven't carried old Simon off with them—it would never do to lose that valuable old link.”

Fitzgerald's words caused Frank some anxiety. Perhaps if her brothers had fled Geraldine had accompanied them. “Let us get along,” said he, following the path Geraldine and he had traversed the evening he had told her of his love for her. He was in no mood for conversation now. Neither was his companion. Fitzgerald was unable to satisfy himself that he had discovered all he wanted to know. He had yet to find the clue to Lord Clashmore's whereabouts.

When the travellers passed through the gate of Prospect House they saw old Simon sitting alone on a bench in the garden, gazing wistfully at the sea in the south. He turned round as he heard the approaching footsteps, and he rose from his seat as he recognised his visitors.

“Good-day and welcome, gentlemen,” said he. “Now, do you know. I was thinkin' of the pair of ye, an' wonderin' what ye'd think of us here at all when certain things came to yer ears; an' here ye are, I suppose, hot on the thrack? Sit down, anyhow. I hope you keep quite sthrong, Misther Aylward?”

“I am quite well, thank you,” answered Frank, as he seated himself on the bench.

“Thank God for that!” said the old man. “I needn't ask about Larry Fitzgerald, for he's one of those lucky men that never knew sickness, and that you couldn't kill by accident. Did you dhrive over?” he asked, turning to Frank. “I didn't hear the sound of wheels.”

The question confused young Aylward; and Fitzgerald, noticing his confusion, answered the old man.

"We did not, Mac. We came partly by water, partly by tunnel, and partly on our feet."

"I suppose it's thryin' to puzzle me you are, Fitz."

"Not at all, Mac. Fact is, we rowed over to Brownstown Cave, and we had a disaster there which was the means of putting us on the track of an inner cave which I knew nothing about before. Eventually, after encountering many perils, we found ourselves in your outlandish dairy; and here we are now at your threshold, and there's no use in denying that we are dying with curiosity."

Simon did not speak for some moments. Frank watched him narrowly, but could distinguish no trace of uneasiness or anxiety in the old man's face.

"Ay," said he at length. "An' so ye know all now, or nearly all. Well, it's a sthrange story sure enough, an' maybe as ye'll be sure to hear many versions of it ye'd listen to mine first?"

"Faith, we would, Mac, with the greatest pleasure in life. But where on earth is Lord Clashmore?"

"Now keep yerself quiet. As I often told you, yer curiosity is too sthrong for you. Do you remember my tellin' you, Masther Aylward." he continued, turning to Frank, "of my uncle Teague?"

"I remember his name well and all you told me about him," answered Frank, with a display of impatience; he was not in a mood to listen to any further family history.

"All right then. Well, afther yer great-grandmother left him he grew so dark in himself that he used hardly open his mouth to any of us, an' used to be always thryin' to be alone with himself, whether he was workin' or idlin'. One day he was diggin' gravel for the garden

here out of that little cove that runs in by the head of Brownstown, just round the corner of the bay beyond, when he sthruck something with his shovel that opened his eyes. Silver it was—no less—as rich a lode as ever you laid eyes on. There it was undher the canopy of Heaven, belongin', as he felt, to nobody but to him that found it. For many a day he worked away all by himself in this lonely little cove. Scarcely a soul ever visits the place—it's no aisy job to get down to it, and, moreover, anyone who ever saw him there, simply saw a heart-broken man who didn't like companionship of any kind. An' never a wan suspected anything. When I grew up he entrusted me with his secret, an' now an' again I took a spell of work in the cove. My uncle's whole and sole desire was Dhrumglass—to buy it back anyhow, or as much of it as the Aylwards held—and he filled me with the same desire. But 'twas slow work, an' he had to be cautious fearin' our secret would be discovered: an' then there was the throuble—the greatest throuble or all too—of gettin' rid of the silver without lettin' anyone know where it came from. Anyhow my brave uncle died before there was much money at all realised, an' I wasn't long workin' alone when the silver suddenly gave out, an' dig where I might I couldn't find another ounce. But I was fairly well off then, even if I had to banish from my mind the notion of buyin' back the lands that belonged to my forefathers. Perhaps you'll remember my tellin' you, Mither Aylward, that my eldest son, John—Lord rest him—was goin' for the priesthood, but found he hadn't a vocation.”

“I remember you mentioning that you had such a son.”



“Well, when he came back to live with me here he moped a great deal, an’ one day in ordher to give me something to think about I told him of the silver. Faith, the news fired him, and he used to go pokin’ about in the cove and on the cliffs an’ in Brownstown cave; but he couldn’t find a thrace of ore. It so happened we had a very wet winther some years afther I had told me poor boy of the silver, an’ there was a deal of damage of all kinds done round the coast here, an’ John was so eager about the silver that he was out in all weathers, an’ no doubt it was the hard winther that gave him the sickness he died of. It seems to me that there’s always some sort of a curse hangin’ to money.”

“Faith, I wish some one would curse me daily with it,” interposed Fitzgerald.

“You might be sorry you had your wish. Anyhow, one day John came across a small hole, or crack, in the ground out near the head—just about where the dairy is built—there was no buildin’ there then—an’ found that when he threw a pebble into this hole that it seemed to dhrop a long way. He listened and heard it raise echoes which showed him there was a cave underneath. He measured the Brownstown cave, an’, as well as he could calculate, this hole in the land was a thrifle farther inland than any portion of the cave, so this set him thinkin’. One day in Brownstown cave he came across a slit in the rocks high over his head. There wasn’t more than room for a hand to slip in, but he worked at it for a long spell, an’ hewed away enough of the rock to let his body crawl into the space. Anyhow, he discovered the cavern undher the land, an’ from what you have told me, Mither Fitzgerald, yerself an’ Mither Aylward came

through that same cavern to-day.”

“There’s not a doubt of that, I think,” said Fitzgerald. “Well, Mac?”

“In this inner cave, after many a long day’s gropin’, my poor boy struck the lode which we had got a sample of out in the cove. It wasn’t as rich as the lode that was in the open air, an’ John thought it would be aisier to sell silver than silver ore, so what occurred to him was to smelt the ore in the cavern. Of coorse, he had to work without attractin’ any attention to his doin’s, an’ it was undherstood between us that we’d not let any one else into the secret, an’ this made matthers move ahead very slowly. My second son took it into his head to emigrate about this time, an’ when he was gone the eldest boy hit upon the idea of puttin’ up a dairy as a cloak for the chimney of his smeltin’ furnace. No sooner was the dairy built than he fell into a decline an’ died, an’ I was so disthracted that I made up my mind never to let chick or child of mine know of the threasure hidden in the bowels of the land. Many years went by, an’ my interest in gettin’ back the Dhrumglass property almost faded out; but one day my two grandsons in exploring Brownstown cave hit on the slit in the rock which their father had cleaved his way through, an’ explorin’ the cavern they discovered the silver. They came an’ towld me, an’ I had to tell ’em all about it, warnin’ ’em of the dangers in from of ’em, an’ the curse that I believed hung over money. But the youngsters wouldn’t listen to me, an’ begor in the end they fired myeself when they towld me that all was in their minds was to make a great lady of their sisher—for they were as wild about her as if she was a sweetheart of theirs. Anyhow, I felt it would be

the safest plan to take into our confidence my youngest son, Charles, an' let him know all about the cavern. I remember well he shook his head an' towld the boys the silver wasn't theirs—that it belonged to Clashmore, or at any rate that a share of it did. So what they arranged amongst themselves was that they'd go on with the work, an' that when the time came they'd either buy the land from the Viscount or give him his due share of the silver. My son Charles arranged that he'd dispose of the silver from time to time, an' mony a firkin of it has been sent into Ballythruckle Lodge. Lord Clashmore declined all offers for the land here, but, in goin' into ould titles and things, Charles discovered that the best title belonged to the Ushers. While he was havin' this investigated, by some misfortune Sam Backas got wind that there was somethin' in the air, an' what he got into his crooked head was that it was coinin' the boys were in some unknown place hereabouts. He made the lord believe this, an' in ordher to stop what he thought was desperately illaygal work, Clashmore decided to bundle us off the land. The boys—my grandsons, I mean—had by this time got as much silver together in the cavern as would make a big fortune, an' Charles sold it in France or Spain—I don't rightly know which—an' the only thing was how to get it away unbeknownst to anybody. So Charles bought a small ship in Milford, an' he sent a few of the Rhi-na-Shark boys over to man her, an' one night after dismantlin' her they towed her into Brownstown cave, and beached her there. Then, in order that if any people chanced to visit the cave their passage up to where the craft was beached might be stopped, they blocked the channel by tumblin some rocks into

it. An' then they loaded the little vessel with the silver. Charles began to get afeard of the whole business, an' they say there's no fool like an old fool, an' instead of buyin' Usher's intherest in the land he felt in love with Miss Usher, maybe meanin' at the back of his mind to get at the property through her. Anyway, the grandsons got wind of what was in their uncle's mind, an' it dhrove 'em disthracted. Owing to an accident in beachin' the craft inside the cave they couldn't get her out without repairin' her, an' this they knew would be slow work, an' on top of it all was Clashmore's notice to quit, an' they felt certain that their ship an' the cargo would be pounced on the moment Sam Backas had his way. They fancied that someone had split on 'em, without meanin' it, maybe, to Sam, an' to get Backas out of their road at any cost was what they decided on. They never said a word to me about this or to their uncle or to their sither, but they arranged with Jack Corbett to snatch away in his yawl the Viscount and his man an' keep the pair of 'em in some place of safety until the little craft in the cave was on her way to France. You know what happened to Backas now, an' as for Clashmore, they took him out to sea an' put him into a safe place inside the inner cave. The evenin' that this was done my son Charles, who hasn't much pluck in him, an' changes his mind too often, came out here to tell me he had decided to put the whole case before the lord himself. He left here to visit Rhi-na-Shark House, an' as he got within sight of the ferry he saw Corbett's yawl startin' out of the creek, an' Clashmore on board of her. He guessed what was up, and he couldn't make up his shifty mind what to do. He knew nothing about Sam Backas, an' of

course he was well aware that no hurt nor harm would come to anyone at the hands of his nephews—especially to their kinsman the Viscount. So he thravelled over to London to settle matthers finally there with the people to whom he had sold the silver for delivery abroad, and about insurances an' other business matthers, thinkin' that by the time he got back everythin' would be in a fair way to be cleared up. That's the whole story now, so far as I know anythin' of it."

"An' a very strange tale it is," commented Fitzgerald. "But where is his lordship now, Mac?"

"Amn't I tellin' you that you're too curious for a youngster?"

"That may be; but my friend, Mr. Aylward, is more interested in his uncle, recollect, than in your ill-gotten and curse-laden silver. Another thing, Mac, is it true that you have bought Usher's interest, or supposed interest, in the lands hereabouts?"

"It's quite thrue," answered the old man, a smile wrinkling his face. "But that came about more or less by accident. My grand-daughter asked me to help her friend, Miss Usher, with a sum of money; an' it sthruke me that, old as I am, I could kill two birds with one stone; so I obliged my grandchild and the Ushers at the same time."

"And have you nothing on your conscience about that bargain?"

"Nothing; for I'll make it right with the Ushers or whoever proves to be the rightful owner of the land. There's enough for us all, an' plenty to spare. You're very silent, Mистер Aylward; an', without meanin' offence to anybody, I'd rather hear your voice than the noisy rattle

of your friend.”

“Pon my word, I hardly know what to think or what to say. Perhaps ‘All’s well that ends well’ is a saying that would fit the situation.”

“All’s well that ends well for the McCarthys, you mean,” said Fitzgerald. “It is very likely that Lord Clashmore will not think that this has either begun or ended well. You’ll plunge yourself into a deuce of an ugly lawsuit, it seems to me, Master Simon.”

“I’m ready to defend meself if any lawsuit is forced on me.”

“That’s your own look-out, of course. But, though you have finished your tale, according to yourself, you haven’t told us one end of it. Did that mysterious craft get out of the cave with the treasure on board?”

“She did. An’ only last night.”

“Only last night?”

“That’s so. She sailed away from the head of Brownstown this mornin’ with my grandchildren on board of her. I’ve been sittin’ here since breakfast lookin’ at her out on the ocean there. It was only this mornin’ they got the mast fixed, an’ even yet, I suppose, she isn’t in good sailin’ ordher, but the Rhi-na-Shark boys aboard of her are the handiest men afloat. She disappeared about an hour ago into the mist that’s coverin’ the sky out there to the south.”

“You said your grandchildren were on board. You mean those two young men whom I met here the first evening I visited you?” said Frank, in a voice that trembled.

“Ay, an’ the sither too. Mистер Aylward. She was not herself at all latterly, an’ one of the nuns of the

convent that she was educated in happened to write the other day invitin' her over to France; an' begor the boys seized on the invitation as an excuse for dhraggin' Geraldine with them. They told her they couldn't get on in foreign parts without an interpreter, an' they won me over by tellin' me they'd bring her hack again in something like her old spirits. My granddaughter herself didn't seem to know whether she'd go or not—one minute she would, an' one minute she wouldn't—an' this mornin' they found her in a mood that tallied with their own, an' off they rushed her down to the cove where the silver was first found. An' sorry I am to lose her. even for a short spell."

"What is the name of the ship, and what port in France is she bound for?" asked young Aylward.

"Well, I don't like to tell that just at present—it's hardly my secret, Misther Aylward, or I'd tell it to you with pleasure."

"You can trust me," said Frank.

"And me," added Fitzgerald.

"Very well, then. She is called after some Welsh river—the *Rhonnda*. Of coorse, they may change her name for safety's sake before they enter a French port—an' they may not be goin' to France at all—but *Rhonnda* was the name of the sloop when the boys bought her, an' France, they towld me, was their destination, though maybe they said so in ordher to answer my inquiries and keep me quiet. You know I'm a terribly talkative old person once my tongue begins to wag. Here I am romancin' to the pair of ye, an' forgettin' that either of ye had a mouth. Come inside with me, an' I'll see what there is to offer distinguished visitors."

He rose from his seat as he spoke, and catching hold of Frank's arm, he said, "An' when you have had somethin' to eat an' dhrink it mightn't be a bad idea at all if the pair of ye paid a visit to Rhi-na-Shark House."

There was a twinkle in the old man's eye as he offered this suggestion.



## CHAPTER XLIV

### LORD CLASHMORE'S CONFESSION

WHEN the travellers reached Rhi-na-Shark House they were met at the hall door by old Donnelly, the butler, whose countenance glowed with excitement.

"Welcome, gentlemen," he exclaimed, bowing. "And where did they pick ye up at all?"

"They? Pick whom up?" asked Fitzgerald, a puzzled look on his face.

"The pair of ye, sir. Why, we have been scourin' the country for ye since mornin' an' the last I heard was that ye had started out to sea from Thramore in a cockleshell of a boat, an' begor 'tis in dhread we were that ye were lost out in the ocean beyond."

"And what was the cause of your anxiety about us, Donnelly? Is there any news of his lordship?"

"Sure 'tis himself that was in search of ye both, air!"

"Himself?"

"Ay, sir."

"Phew!" whistled Fitzgerald. "This is turning the tables on us with a vengeance. And where is his lordship, Donnelly?"

“Begor, sir, he’s where every Irish gentleman ought to be at this time of day—undher his own roof. I thought you knew all about it. Why, the news of his return was all over this part of the counthry like wildfire before noon this blessed day.”

“And his lordship has been inquiring for us?”

“Ay, sir. Almost the first ordhers he gave were to summon ye here. ’Tis a great relief to us all, sir, an’ to the whole counthryside to have him back again. I’ll announce ye to him at wance. You’ll excuse me, I hope, for keepin’ you standin’ here, sir,” he added, addressing himself to Frank; “but we don’t know whether it is on our head or our heels we are to-day.”

The visitors were speedily ushered into the library. The tall man, who was pacing the room as they entered, turned and held out his hand to Fitzgerald.

“Well, Laurence,” said he, in a voice which rang pleasantly in Frank’s ears. “I fancy you are not sorry to see me again?”

“I am more pleased than I can tell you, my lord.”

“And this is my nephew, who has been in search of me,” said the Viscount, offering his hand to Frank. “Well, Francis Aylward, I have already heard a good deal about your doing in this wild part of the world, and I hope we shall see more of each other for the future. You have, I learn, been enterprising in your searches after me.”

“Amongst other things, my lord, he got a broken head, which very nearly put an end to his lease of life.”

“I have heard of his adventure Laurence.”

“I am glad to find you in good spirits, sir,” said Frank.

“Pon my life,” said the Viscount, “I don’t think I have

felt in higher spirits—I will not say better—for many years. I have often orated about the priceless gift of liberty, hardly knowing what liberty or the loss of it meant,” he added, with a faint smile; “now I can fully appreciate the meaning of the words. I have telegraphed to your mother, Francis.”

“It was very good of you to think of doing so, sir. Your message will be a great relief to her.”

“Might I ask, Laurence, if my nephew and yourself are aware of the manner of my abduction?”

“We have just come from Prospect House, my lord, and we have heard old M’Carthy’s version.”

“The old autocrat is very well qualified to give you accurate information.”

“You are taking the affair easily, sir.”

“Why shouldn’t I, Laurence? I got very well out of a nasty scrape. I have had a good deal of time latterly to ruminate over my affairs, and I think on the whole the adventure did not disagree with me. I shall possibly be the laughing-stock of a certain section of the public, but I can afford to stand that. I brought a good deal of the trouble on myself.”

“You are a very generous man to say so, sir,” observed Frank. “If I were treated as you have been I fear I should be nourishing thoughts of vengeance.”

“I nourished a good deal of vengeful thoughts in the early days of my imprisonment, but by degrees I began to see things in a different light I had brought the trouble in a measure upon myself, by doing a hasty act without making sufficient inquiry into the circumstances which led me to do it. I suppose you are aware that it was my unfortunate man Backas who prompted me to give

notice to the M'Carthys."

"Yes, sir," answered Fitzgerald. "Sam and I were never very fond of each other, but all the same I feel that his death is an ugly blot on the whole business, and one which can't be wiped out."

"That is the worst of it. But if he hadn't set about injuring others neither he nor I should have got into trouble. It is a poor thing to utter ill words of a dead man, and my words are spoken merely to explain what happened, and not to cast aspersions upon poor Backas. Whatever evil may have been in him, he was, I firmly believe, a faithful servant. Anyhow, his idea was—and I am quite certain he believed it—that the M'Carthys were coining money in some secret place—in their dairy-house, he fancied. He had heard the expression that they were coining money used more than once by the Irish-speaking peasantry in the neighbourhood, and he took the words literally. They chimed in with preconceived notions of his. The M'Carthys were certainly making money mysteriously, and this could only mean that they were making it improperly, and that they were coiners seemed a very plausible explanation. Backas used to be friendly with the M'Carthy family—I often heard him speak in high terms of them—but somehow a quarrel arose between them, and no doubt he nourished his anger. At all events he persuaded me that this coining business was being carried on, and that I could never get to the bottom of it or wash my hands of it unless I got possession of the property. Backas played on my feelings. He was aware that I would hate to have myself or my affairs dragged before the public, and that there was nothing for it but to act swiftly and mercilessly if

I wanted to save myself. He kept constantly prodding me to action, without unduly galling me, and at length I gave way—very unwillingly, I may truthfully add.”

Frank was delighted to find that his uncle was not aware of the cause of the quarrel between Backas and the M’Carthys. To have the subject discussed would have inflicted exquisite pain upon him. He was grateful to Fitzgerald for abstaining from discussing the probable cause of Backas’s enmity to Prospect House.

“A pity you didn’t mention the matter to me, sir,” said Fitzgerald. “I could at any rate have set your mind easy that nothing like coining was in the air hereabouts. Old Simon would, I believe, as soon think of taking to the highway for a living as of converting himself into a coiner, or allowing his grandchildren to taint themselves with any sort of felony—of course, barring treason-felony.”

“I had given my word to Backas to mention his suspicions to nobody,” said Lord Clashmore.

“I must ask your lordship to pardon me for suggesting that I might have been made your confidant.” said Fitzgerald uneasily, a slight flush mantling his cheeks.

“I can only say,” continued Lord Clashmore, ignoring Fitzgerald’s confusion, “that I wish, for everyone’s sake, I had not been so easily led astray. Those young M’Carthys,” he went on, with a trace of enthusiasm in his voice, “are splendid fellows. Disdainfulness—and it is a powerful weapon skilfully handled—had no visible effect upon them. Neither had threats. They knew their own minds, and they carried out their own projects with a determination that compelled admiration, even from an enemy. If I had the making of public appointments I’d send those young men to some part of the empire which

possessed a difficult population, who could be ruled only with an iron hand covered with a velvet glove."

"Would the kingdom of Munster occur to you, sir, as a likely spot for such an experiment?" asked Fitzgerald.

"Not at all a bad idea." said Lord Clashmore, smiling. "But when—according to the traditions—these M'Carthys ruled in Munster the velvet glove was, to use the hackneyed phrase, conspicuous by its absence. Of course, the proud invader has taught them something since that time."

"The invader certainly didn't introduce velvet gloves for use in the field when he landed in Ireland," said Frank. "And I fancy that a good deal of his teaching has been thrown away, and that it is better for Irishmen that it has been thrown away."

"If your invasion of Munster is productive of rebellious notions like these, Francis, I expect your good mother will have cause to regret your acquaintance with the county of Waterford. But, after all, it may only remind her of a very good man—her husband and your father—who in his early days used to alarm us fearing he might kick over the traces and do some mischief in this distressful country."

"I never knew that my father displayed any of this spirit of rebellion, sir."

"His army training and associations knocked a good deal of it out of him, and your mother completed the task. But we are wandering from our M'Carthy friends. They did everything in their power, I freely admit to soften the rigours and horrors—for horrible in many ways it was—of my prison life. One of them slept every night in the cave—not to guard me, for escape was impossible—

but to keep me company. The young fellows offered me any share I might demand in the result of their labours and I might have walked home any day if I gave them my simple word of honour that I would keep their secret and that I would not interfere with their projects. This I felt I could not do. It would be impossible for me to condone the lawlessness of their act in snatching me off and imprisoning me. To be quite candid, I must add that though I could not help admiring the boldness and the determination and the good humour which characterise these young men, I was not won over to admiration of them directly—it was their sister who conquered me. She tried in the beginning to get her brothers to see the guilt as well as the danger of their act, and, failing to impress them with her views, she insisted upon visiting me daily. She brightened my prison, read to me when declined to talk to her, and affected to ignore my boorishness. That girl is a brick, Laurence.”

“I’m glad you think so, sir. All of us who know her admire her, in a far-off sort of way.”

“There never was a day, as I have already informed you, that I might not have returned home if only I would consent to enter into a pact with the young marauders. There never was a day that I could not, unfettered by any pledge, have accompanied Miss M’Carthy as she quitted that horrid cavern. But I would not accept her escort. In the first place, I thought I was going to wear down those turbulent young men and I would have no favours at the hands of a M’Carthy, male or female. By degrees I learned in various ways that the young fellows had no thought for themselves. All their desires hopes and ambitions were centred in their sister. The treasure

they had amassed often at pave risk to their own lives, was hoarded and guarded with a view to making a great heiress of her. Even old Simon's ambition to acquire his ancestral estates was kept alive only by his desire to see his grand-daughter mistress of the estate. And all the time the young girl cared less than nothing for wealth or position, but she would not break the young fellows down by letting them know that in reality they were working and planning for nothing, so to at least as she was concerned. Towards the end of my prison days Miss M'Carthy and I became good friends, and she confided in me her intention of entering a nunnery as soon as she saw her wild brothers settled prosperously in the world. It would break their hearts, she knew, if they were made acquainted with her intentions now. She means to wait until they are settled down. Her idea is that with their riches they will marry well, and the ties between them and herself will naturally loosen. It seems to me a shame that a girl like Geraldine M'Carthy should find her way into a convent. If I were a young man and a bachelor," he added, with a short laugh, "I would move as much as heaven and earth as I could manage to move in order to prevent such a catastrophe; but the young gentlemen in these parts, Francis," he continued, turning to his nephew, "have no enterprise. The whole bent of their minds is given to horses and dogs, shooting, fishing, and card-playing; and when they do marry it is some marriage of convenience—the romance and poetry of life fall into the background. Isn't that so, Laurence?"

"Our poverty has a good deal to do with it too, my lord."

"And possibly the enervating and demoralising influ-



ence of the Atlantic is at work," said Frank.

"So our friend has given you the benefit of his anti-ocean views, Francis."

"Yes, sir; and more than that, he has almost made a convert of me."

"There is something in his idea," said Lord Clashmore. "I expect my long residence in front of the Atlantic has taken good deal of the energy out of myself; but there is much pleasure to be derived from absolute indolence, I am sorry to admin."

"To turn to another matter, my lord," said Fitzgerald, "did you know all the time what had become of Sam Backas?"

"No. It was only to-day I heard the very terrible tale. I was seated in Corbett's yawl at the time the unfortunate man fell into the quicksand, and I was too much concerned with my own affairs to ask any questions about him the evening I was abducted. I could learn nothing later, and I could only conclude he was imprisoned somewhere else. Had I known of his ghastly fate I expect it would have effectively steeled me against the M'Carthys, though, of course, they never intended to harm him. I expect what did happen has given those young men a shock they will not easily recover from, and I am now inclined to think that Miss M'Carthy's idea of immuring herself in a convent may have been forced upon her by some consideration of expiation—some one of her blood must atone for the accident of the Backas's death."

"This is a strange country, sir," said Frank, as his uncle paused. "It seems to me that its inhabitants are governed altogether by sentiment—and a very peculiar

kind of sentiment some of it appears in the eyes of one brought up at the other side of the channel.”

“Might I ask, my lord,” inquired Fitzgerald nervously, “when it was that you left your—what shall I call it?”

“My prison? This morning. I declined all favours at the hands of those young fellows. My time was up when they quitted the cave with their treasure. Though I wanted to say good-bye to them, and even to wish them God-speed on their voyage—wherever they were bound for—my pride won’t stoop to it. But I met Miss M’Carthy on her way to Brownstown Head, and I learned from her that she was either about to join her brothers or to bid them good-bye. I eased her mind about her grandfather. I gave her my assurance that no hurt would come to the old man at my hands. I think before I met her she was undecided whether she would or would not embark in her brothers’ craft, but I fancy that my assurance turned the scale.”

“Well, my lord,” said Fitzgerald, as the Viscount came to what was apparently the end of his recital, “you gave us a good deal to think about latterly.”

“So I understand. And the thinking wasn’t all on the one side. My imprisonment afforded me plenty of time for reflection, and most of my thoughts were of my past life. I am not a communicative man—my confessions this evening sound in my own ears with a certain air of novelty—and already I am beginning to feel that my old moodiness is returning upon me. Before I relapse into its grip I wish to say some few things to you two men about myself, and it was wit this object I sent out in search of you as soon as I found myself under my own roof-tree again. To-morrow my mind may be changed—

my high spirits will hardly last for long. And now I am sorry to be very abrupt. Possibly both of you are aware that my marriage did not prove to be the happiest event in my life."

Frank nodded, and Fitzgerald said, "I have heard so, sir."

"Yes," continued the Viscount, "I was a very young man when I married. I selected a wife out of a station different from my own, and apart from that, it was, altogether, a rash undertaking. Shortly after my son and heir was born the Viscountess and I quarrelled—it was a quarrel which could never be made up—and we parted for ever. An arrangement was entered into—for I could not bear the idea of dragging my troubles into the light—an arrangement under which she agreed to abandon all claim upon me, to forego the name to which she was legally entitled, and to quit the country for ever. So infuriated was I that I wreaked my vengeance upon the child of our marriage, determining to bring him up in comparative poverty, and never to avow him during my lifetime. The Viscountess died in Australia nearly twenty years ago. Her death gave me a shock, and, for a time, I felt I had treated her, perhaps, with over-harshness. Anyway, I was so discontented with myself and with the world that I threw up public life and retired to this melancholy spot, where I have done little except to brood over my wasted life. While I was in durance vile recently, events in which I had a part were constantly passing in review before me, assuming a new and more reproachful aspect. I was greatly humbled. Even my pride, which I once thought was impregnable, was conquered—I think Miss M'Carthy effected a good deal of the change which was

taken possession of me—and the moment I was my own master again I determined to ask forgiveness from two people—you, Francis, are one of these.”

“I, sir!” exclaimed Frank. “Why, I owe almost everything, in the worldly sense, to you.”

“Perhaps I am in the way, my lord,” interposed Fitzgerald.

“No, Laurence. You had best remain here.”

“I have kept you at arms’ length, Francis,” continued the Viscount, turning to his nephew; “left yourself and your mother to feel that your means of livelihood depended upon my humour. That was a base act, as I now see it. towards the son and the widow of a brother whom I loved more than any other being on earth, and with whom I picked a foolish quarrel. I don’t think I have ever before asked a man’s forgiveness.”

“You shall not ask mine, sir, at any rate,” said Frank, seizing his uncle’s extended hand. “I know next to nothing of the troubles you have related. All I know is that you have been generosity itself to one who had no real claim upon your generosity.”

“Very well, Francis. We shall not recur to this. My other task is more difficult, because it concerns me more closely, and because my offence is greater. When I discarded my wife I vowed that I would never own the son of the woman who betrayed me. I have done him an injury which is now past repairing, and which may for ever harden his heart against me. So eager was I to keep all knowledge of his identity from him that not only did I give him a name which could not be connected with his real name, but I artfully allowed him to be brought up in a faith which is not my own, believing this to be

one of the most effectual ways of hiding from everyone his connection with me. My son!" he cried, grasping Fitzgerald by both hands, "will you try to forgive me?"



## CHAPTER XLV

### A DISASTER

SLEEP denied itself to young Aylward during the short summer night. He lay in a cumbersome looking bed for many hours, turning over in his mind the events of an eventful day. He was too good-natured and unselfish to feel any pangs of jealousy or disappointment at the discovery that there was a direct heir to Clashmore. "A coronet would, I am afraid, press heavily upon me," he reflected. "How poor simple Larry will stand up to it I can hardly imagine!"

The previous evening Fitzgerald had exhibited no symptoms of anything but blank amazement. Lord Clashmore's confession had stupefied him. Father and son had spoken hardly a word at the dinner table; and after dinner, in order to give the pair an opportunity of being by themselves, Frank had retired to his room, stating that he had some important letters to write. To his mother he penned a long account of his adventures and of his uncle's disclosures. Then he tried to write a letter to Geraldine. He made at least half a dozen attempts but none of them satisfied him. At length he

decided that he would return immediately to London, and endeavour to ascertain the destination of the sloop *Rhonnda*. Her arrival in whatever French port she was bound for would doubtless be chronicled in some paper concerned with shipping. He could now assure his mother that Lord Clashmore would favour his suit—the Viscount's words, though they were not intended for his nephew's guidance, pointed an strongly to his high appreciation of Geraldine that he could not refuse to look with a favourable eye upon any "gentleman adventurer" who might seek to win her hand. And if his uncle was satisfied, how could his mother hold out against the project? If he met Father Hackett, he could now assure that good old priest that he would accept his advice—that he would speak to his mother before he spoke again to Miss M'Carthy.

If he had only known that the sloop which was sailing slowly into the south that morning held Geraldine! Why did not some subtle magnetism draw him to that little craft? and if he had pursued her, and had overtaken the sloop, what would Geraldine have said? What might her brothers have said, or done? No, it was better as it was.

He found an exquisite pleasure in picturing his meeting in sunny France with Geraldine. Her surprise passed before his mental vision, and then the splendour of her beauty dazzled him. Would she welcome him? He could not tell. There was this intention of her to enter a convent. Surely this could be combatted. Yea, he felt he would be strong enough to wrestle with every difficulty that might stand in his way. He meant to win Geraldine. He was resolute enough and earnest enough to battle



with every obstacle. Ho would win her.

The young man arose early and sought the open air as soon as the house was astir. His restlessness worried him a good deal; he ascribed it to his adventures of the present day. He had now fully made up his mind to start for home at once. A craving to be in his own house again seized him. This must be home-sickness, he told himself, endeavouring to smile at the idea of his being attacked by such a complaint. He would bid a hurried good-bye to his uncle, travel to Dunmore, and pick up there his few belongings; then he would proceed to Waterford, and either take the boat there for Milford or the train for Dublin.

When he reached the garden he was immediately joined by Fitzgerald, who had spent almost as restless a night as his cousin.

“Glad you are up so early, old fellow. I couldn’t sleep a wink last night. The whole thing seems like a dream; faith, I feel like the man in Lover’s song, that I’m not myself at all. The thing is too funny for words, you know—eh?”

“I don’t see anything very funny in it. I should be inclined, if I were in your place, to call it highly interesting and comforting.”

“Yes; and just think of me doing you out of a title and a huge fortune! My dear Frank, the thing is too ridiculous, I tell you. Besides, I’ll have you owing me a grudge just as we were beginning to strike up a real friendship.”

“I owe you no grudge; but if you continue to talk like this it is very likely that I shall get angry, and I don’t want to quarrel with you just as I am saying good-bye

to you.”

“Where away, fair cousin?”

“I mean to steer straight for home this very day. I have got a mother who is anxious about me—thinks I am still an invalid—and then I have a good many broken threads to pick up. Recollect, I have been quite an age in this foreign country.”

“And no doubt you have grown tired of it.”

“No; I can’t say that I have.”

“To run off now would be treating us all here very cavalierly; but I suppose there is someone who is nearer still and a dearer one yet than all others sighing for your return—eh?”

“Remember old M’Carthy’s advice, not to be inquisitive. And now I have a commission which I want you to execute for me. You remember my new horse and car. Well, the car should be in good order and condition again today, and I want you, as soon as I am safely out of the country, to pick it up. I’ll give you an order on the man who is repairing it.”

“Oh, now, come—come! This won’t do, you know.”

“What won’t do?”

“Playing the same old game over again.”

“I don’t understand—whatever the joke may be you have it all to yourself.”

“Don’t you remember about the former owner? Do you want to make me one of a procession of claimants who will be producing written orders for that horse and car?”

“Really, as the heir to a viscounty, you are too ridiculous, Fitzgerald. By the way, though, what am I to call you?”

“Faith, I hardly know. I understand my name and style In future will be the Honourable George Henry Laurence Aylward, eldest son of the third Viscount of Clashmore. I know that when I see the early portion of this on the back of an envelope for the first time, I shall get such fit of laughter that the buttons of my waistcoat will fly. But what about the trap?”

“I want you to wheel it over to Father Hackett and leave it with him as a memento—a modest contribution, as I mean to tell him in a note which I shall give you, to a museum which will never be founded.”

“Faith, the poor man will be like myself if you do anything of this kind. He won’t know himself. Seriously, Frank, I’m deucedly glad you thought of this. I can just picture to myself the two tears that will come into his eyes when he grasps the situation. What he’ll think of the Honourable Larry I’m bothered if I know.”

At breakfast the two men learned that, their host was indisposed. The excitement of the previous day had prostrated him, and he begged to be excused from putting in an appearance. His uncle’s indisposition made it awkward for Frank, but he had made up his mind that he would allow nothing to prevent him from starting for home at once, and his cousin promised to make all the necessary excuses and explanations.

After breakfast the Honourable Laurence conducted his cousin to the coach-house in order to give him the opportunity of selecting a conveyance which would carry him to town. As the two men reached the gate of the coach-house, Frank heard a rasping voice which sent an unpleasant thrill coursing through him. He was now in an irritable and petulant mood.

“This is an unexpected treat for you, Mr. Aylward, and for you too, Fitz,” exclaimed Mr. Weekes, coming forward, “but I thought it was only my duty to come out here at the first opportunity in order to receive *in propriâ personâ* whatever instructions his lordship may have the honour to entrust me with. This very instant I have arrived, cramped as to the legs, but elastic as to the upper storey.”

“Then you came on a fool’s errand,” said Fitzgerald, “for his lordship is indisposed today.”

“Nothing serious I trust,” said Mr. Weekes, twisting his mouth into a shape which he fondly hoped would express suitable anxiety.

“I believe not.”

“Well, Mr. Aylward, it’s an astonishing business the whole affair, and though I don’t know all about it yet, still I make bold enough to say that the theory I propounded to you when we drove into Waterford the day before yesterday was pretty near the bull’s eye. By the way, have you seen his lordship since his return, or are you, like my humble self, only just arrived?”

“We saw him last evening,” said Frank; “and if you will excuse us we have affairs of our own to attend to this morning.”

“Which is a polite form of telling me that I am in the way. Well, it can’t be helped. I suppose I can find a morsel to eat in the house, and then I’ll be resuming my journey.”

“It just occurs to me, Weekes,” said Fitzgerald, “that there is a petty sessions cut at Tramore in which one of us is closely interested. Isn’t the Corbett business set down for Monday next?”

“Ay, that’s the day, Fitz.”

“Mr. Aylward wants to return to London immediately.”

“Can’t be done, sir,” said Mr. Weekes, “unless, of course, he means to be back here on Monday next.”

“I don’t mean anything of the kind,” said Frank. “So far as I am concerned the case can fall to the ground. I don’t wish to hear of it again.”

“But it can’t fall to the ground. You have got nothing to do with it except to appear as a witness for the prosecution, and the police mean to fire ahead without further delay.”

“I suppose it can be postponed indefinitely?”

“I like that. Keep a man in jail indefinitely!”

“If I don’t appear the case will fall to pieces surely. I can’t be bothered with it.”

“There is a law, sir, in this land, and if the most exalted person in the country tries a fall with that law he will bite the dust. You will be committed for contempt, or outlawed, or broken on a wheel, or whatever may occur to the minds of the presiding justices. There’s no use in trying to shirk your responsibilities, Mr. Aylward. You can’t afford to enjoy the luxury of being murderously assaulted without paying the penalty of appearing on the witness table.”

Frank paused for a moment. “I am going to leave Ireland to-night,” he said. “I have some business of the first importance, which I may be able to transact next week or the following week at any risk I shall cross the Channel to-night, and I certainly cannot appear in Tramore next Monday. Something can be done surely?”

“There’s only one man can help you, and that is the

county inspector of police. I could get hold of him to-day in Dunmore, and perjure myself to the extent of declaring on oat, or rather with the assistance of several oaths, such as "Pon my honour" and 'By my sowl' and that favourite Anglo-Irish expletive, 'Begorra,' that you would not be in a fit condition to appear next week. The county inspector could arrange with the police. Postponement for a month, let us say. Of course, being a nephew of his lordship's here, no reasonable offer would be refused."

"That's the best you can do, Frank," whispered Fitzgerald, "if your mind is made up to go. And it will fix your return visit for an early date—a circumstance which will fill me with the pleasures of hope."

"Very well." Then turning to Mr. Weekes, young Aylward said: "I am much more obliged for your advice. I want to visit Dunmore on my way to Waterford; but perhaps it would be unwise that I should come into contact with your county inspector."

"You can drive over with me, and while you are transacting your business in Dunmore—which I suppose means the picking up of your baggage—I can keep our inspector friend out of the sight of you. Not that I think that makes much difference, except what we should respect *les convenances*, as we know them in the world of criminal jurisprudence. I'll be ready for you in half-an-hour. As I can't oblige his lordship to-day I must do the next best thing—oblige his lordship's nephew."

As Weekes moved off towards the house Fitzgerald said: "I'm precious glad you didn't reveal me to our legal friend. His congratulations would have imprinted a blush upon my cheek. No one but yourself knows

anything of it, except perhaps old Donnelly; but he is safe: he is a model of discretion. And so I am going to lose you, cousin mine, just as I have found you."

"The nearest and dearest, you know."

"But look here, dear boy, don't mind my saying it, but you don't look as well as you ought to look."

"I don't feel well, I admit. I expect yesterday's underground work disagreed with me."

"Father Hackett was afraid that you were too venturesome. I must confess I thought he was unnecessarily anxious about you; but faith I feel horribly guilty now for dragging you through that cave yesterday. Do stop here for a few days and pull yourself together. We can have as quiet a time as if we were a pair of Trappist monks."

"No; thank you all the same, Larry, but go I must."

"Tell me, is there a lady in the case—I mean a lady who is not your mother?"

"Well—yes," answered Frank slowly.

"Then I'm afraid I must leave you to yourself. I know from experience that this kind of feminine reason admits of no denial."

"And I am to congratulate you about another lady in the case?"

"If she'll have me—yes. But faith I'm afraid, with these blushing honours thick upon me, I'll frighten the wits out of her."

"There was never a woman yet who was afraid of a coronet, prospective or otherwise."

"My dear boy, don't speak of coronets, or you'll frighten myself. And may it be many a long day before I have the privilege of wearing one!" he added fervently.

On the journey to Dunmore Frank was glad to find that Mr. Weekes was not in his most expansive mood. Possibly the man of the law noticed, as Fitzgerald had, that his companion's face wore a drawn and anxious look. Frank was not suffering from any definite pain, but he had a dull feeling in his head, which depressed him considerably. Were it not for his burning anxiety to follow up the movements of the sloop *Rhonnda*, he would gladly have availed himself of his cousin's invitation to spend a quiet week in Rhi-na-Shark House. The jolting of the car over a badly-kept road did not improve young Aylward's condition, and when he reached Dunmore he felt positively ill, though he tried to convince himself that he was suffering merely from some slight indisposition, which would speedily pass away.

Mr. Weekes drove to the door of Miss O'Dwyer's cottage, and, leaving Frank there, he started off in search of the county inspector. He did not think he would be committing any serious perjury if he swore that young Aylward was ill.

Miss O'Dwyer was sincerely glad to see her guest once more. Her enjoyment was intensified at the knowledge that he was my lord's nephew. She chattered for some time to the young man, and she experienced a small sense of disappointment at finding that he was taciturn. After he had got his traps packed, Frank joined Miss O'Dwyer in the sitting room in her own little cottage, and then the good lady noticed that her visitor looked by no means well. She was afraid to make any inquiries about his health, and she supposed that he was still not quite recovered from the effects of the blow. She was aware that young men do not like to be cross-



examined about the state of their health.

Frank was feeling more ill every moment. He was glad to have a comfortable easy chair; he was almost afraid that he could not stand the jolting of the car on its way to Waterford. His head now pained him, and he was experiencing some of the unpleasant sensations which had visited him while he was lying ill in the bedroom in Father Hackett's house. He made a strong effort to rally, and Miss O'Dwyer—delighted to find him in conversational mood again—told him many things concerning anxieties about him while he was absent from Dunmore.

"I forgot to inquire about dear Mr. Fitzgerald," said she. "It seems quite an age since I saw him. How is he, Mr. Aylward?"

"I left him in excellent health about an hour or two ago," said Frank.

"He is at Rhi-na-Shark House then. He'll be well looked after there. He is a great favourite with his lordship, your uncle. Is he still at feud with the poor old weather-beaten Atlantic?"

"I think so," answered Frank wearily.

"Terrible things do happen upon the ocean," she said, with a sigh. "Only this morning we got news here of a very shocking disaster."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. There was a nasty fog out in the south yesterday. It was very thick, I am told, and covered the track, as they call it, which the trans-Atlantic boats take on their way from Queenstown to Liverpool. One of the liners ran into a little craft in the fog, and so far as we can learn, the little vessel sank like a stone with all hands. One of those accidents which give you such a

shock to hear of, even if you don't know the poor people who are suddenly snatched away."

"Do you happen to know the name of the vessel which was sunk?" asked Frank.

"Yes; they picked up a life-buoy belonging to her. She was called the *Rhonnda*. . . . My God! what is the matter?" exclaimed the old lady, as Frank threw up his arms wildly, a terrible wail of anguish filling the little room.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### IN GOOD HANDS

ABOUT five week later Frank Aylward was seated at the window of the room in which he had heard of the loss of the silver freighted sloop. It was the first day he had been allowed out of his bedroom—a blazing hot day of the first week in July. Opposite to him, near the window, sat Miss O'Dwyer, a smile lighting up her face.

"I have given a good deal of trouble recently, I fear," said Frank, shading the light from his eyes with a wan hand.

"Oh, now, Mr. Aylward, don't speak of the trouble," said the old lady. "Talk of anxiety, if you like—though indeed you should not be talking of anything but what is cheerful. You must know that I have felt most horribly guilty, for it was my thoughtless prattle that gave you the shock which prostrated you. I can't help being garrulous."

"I don't think you were wholly responsible, ray dear lady. I understand the doctors have labelled my attack 'meningitis,' and possibly if I hadn't broken down here I should have broken down on my Journey to London—

perhaps have fallen into careless hands. Was I a troublesome patient?"

"Oh, terrible," said Miss O'Dwyer, holding up both hands. "Why, the first week you nearly frightened the life out of me. The poor nun who was nursing you in the beginning must have had nerves of iron. Such a tiny little woman, too."

"Poor nun!" said Frank, pressing his hand to his forehead. "I hope," he added, smilingly, "that my language didn't shock her."

"Oh, It wasn't your language, but your cries; but don't talk of it, please. And the worst of it was I couldn't make out at all what was distressing you, and when the doctor did guess what was the matter we couldn't make it known to you that the people who were on board that unfortunate sloop had been saved. Oh, I shall never forget the misery we were all in. And indeed I don't think you'd have pulled through only for—now I oughtn't to be saying these things to you at all, Mr. Aylward, but my tongue runs away with me."

"Let it run on for a little bit longer. What were you going to say about my not pulling through only for something or somebody?"

"In my opinion, after God, of course, it was Nurse Number Two who brought you round."

"My mother?"

"No, sir. She didn't arrive here until your first terrible spell was over. Thank heaven, she was spared the sight of you in your worst time!"

"And who was the Good Samaritan—Nurse Number Two? Yourself?"

"Not I, indeed. Why, I'm no good at all in a sick-room.

It was a young lady that the doctor sent here. The moment she entered your room your delirium seemed to disappear, and so long as she held your hand you were as quiet as a lamb. But, there, I have already been chattering too freely to you, and your lady mother will be here presently, and then I shall get a fine rating."

"My mother is at Rhi-na-Shark House, I think."

"Yes, sir. She stopped in my cottage next door until you were quite out of danger, and then his lordship, your uncle, took her over to Rhi-na-Shark. She hasn't visited us for a few days now, but I expect her presently. She was in a sad way about you—but that's all over, thank God!"

"Poor mother," said Frank. "How is my worthy cousin?"

"Mr. Laurence, sir? Oh, he is first-rate, and now that you are out of danger, and that Miss Usher has said yes, he's the happiest man going. He, too, was greatly cut up about you."

"I seem to have had no lack of sympathetic friends, anyhow," observed Frank.

"Indeed you hadn't There was his lordship, your uncle, here almost every day, and Father Hackett, and Mr. Usher from Bell Lake, and Miss Usher, and Mr. Weekes from town, and old Simon M'Carthy and your cousin, Mr. Laurence, of course—oh, I couldn't think of all the good people who used to be inquiring for you. This little room here has often been crowded with notabilities."

"You mention old M'Carthy. Did my mother and he meet?"

"They did," answered Miss O'Dwyer, with a demure smile; "and a most amusing meeting the first one was—but they're great cronies now."

“What!” exclaimed Frank.

“That’s a fact. I have seen them on a wet day sitting for hours discussing the respective merits of Irish and English pedigrees. I never saw old Simon afraid of anybody before. I am glad to see you laugh Mr. Frank. It’s a long time since I heard it last. But I think that’s the sound of carriage wheels. The house is becoming quite aristocratic,” she continued, rising from the seat and making play with her hands. “Carriages all day long, and visitors so grand that I have laid in a stock of haughtiness which will last me for the rest of my days. But don’t tell tales on me. I was warned not to gossip too much with you.”

“You haven’t said anything that would injure me, I assure you. I feel almost fit for anything today—even to giving you a character for taciturnity.”

“Just tell them I had only a few words with you—that’s all I’ll trespass on you to say in my favour, Mr. Frank. The carriage has pulled up next door. Your lady mother generally alights there,” explained Miss O’Dwyer, in her primmest manner. “I must go and tell her that you are ready to receive her.”

Frank was experiencing all the languid pleasures which are reserved for the convalescent. The terrible weight had been lifted from him many days before. The treasure-laden vessel had been sunk, he had learned; but the voyagers in her had saved themselves in the sloop’s boat, though the “liner” supposed and had reported all hands had been lost. The sea was perfectly calm when the collision had occurred; and the *Rhonda’s* boat had been towing astern. The voyagers failed to find the destroying steamboat in the dense fog, and

had drifted far away from her, and were picked up later by a steamer bound for Waterford. All this young Aylward had been told the moment it was deemed prudent to satisfy his craving for intelligence of Geraldine.

Frank stood up as his mother entered the room and embraced her warmly.

"My dear boy," said she, forcing him gently back into his chair. "You are looking splendidly—comparatively so—but you must not spoil everything by taxing your strength too much. It is some days since I was here, and then I only saw you asleep; the change in you is marvellous."

"I feel like a young phoenix," said Frank.

"Yes, but you must not be presumptuous. It was your over-confidence that brought on your recent attack. That fine old clergyman, Mr. Hackett, tells me that he was fearful at the time you left his house that you were taking yourself too soon out of the doctor's hands."

"I shall be very patient this time, I promise you. But sit down, mother. I heard you were not very well during the past few days."

"The slightest of indispositions. Laziness at the root of it."

"Let me look at you with a critical eye. You seem to me to be younger than ever. This detestable country must be agreeing with you."

"My dear boy, it agrees with me only too well so well—indeed that I shall never again say an ill word of it. Something in it—the climate or the solitude, or the associations—something, at any rate, has effected extraordinary changes in my views about many things views which I used to think were as fixed as the stars.

There is a seductiveness about everything here. I who am nobody in the great world have been treated in this little world here as if I were an empress, unattached. Not that there is any cringing or snobbery about the people, but there is a sort of chivalry which is new to me. I suppose I'd grow tired of it—that the charm would wear away—but the novelty of it so far is refreshing. Your cousin Laurence is a delightful creature. It would spoil him to polish him. I hope his objection to crossing the Channel will remain rooted in him. He persists in regarding me as a personage, and of course he is never done singing your praises.”

“Don't you find that a little embarrassing, mother?”

“Possibly I would in London town, but here everything wears a different aspect. And, however you have managed it, Frank, you have raised up a host of friends for yourself in this wild part of the world.”

“I shall be blushing directly.”

“Well, if you had any sense of propriety, you would never cease to blush for the remainder of your natural life.”

“Possibly not, but I don't quite follow you, and I can see by you that you have some merry jest at the back of your mind . . . Oh, no doubt I said a lot of foolish things when I was delirious.”

“This is hardly fair of me, but you look so like your old self that I felt I might talk to you as of old.”

“Now you have piqued my curiosity, and you will make me ill again if you don't satisfy it. What should put those permanent blushes into my cheeks?”

“Well, if you must know, your words about a certain young lady. I never in my life heard such dreadful lan-



guage. And the worst of it all was that a good deal of it was poured into the ear of the very person you were speaking of. The poor nun who was nursing you had often to leave the room crimson with shame, but the other lady affected to ignore everything except the interests—hygienic, of course—of her patient.”

“Mother, mother!”

“My dear Frank, I can’t help it. I don’t really see how the young lady can ever face you again.”

“She was one of my nurses, I suppose?”

“Yes. One of your doctors conceived the happy notion of calling her in when you were at your worst; and verily I believe it was her presence—not to talk of her attention to you—that pulled you through.”

“Mother, now that I am no longer delirious, may I make a confession to you?”

“About *Geraldine*, is it?” said Mrs. Aylward, emphasizing the name, as she glanced archly at her son.

“Yes,”

“That you are in love with her. My dear boy, don’t trouble yourself to make any such confession. I don’t want to be told that you are love-sick. To begin with, it makes me jealous, and I am aware that you are head over ears—fathoms deep—oceans deep in love with Miss M’Carthy. Why, if you looked at your face now in a glass and saw the ecstatic expression which her mere name has called up!—But, Frank, my dear, I must grow serious.”

“I wish you would, for you are confusing me hopelessly. I don’t know whether you are trying to poke fun at me or not.”

“Frank!”

“Yes. But it is not a matter which I think lightly of, or which you must think lightly of. I am going at the first opportunity to ask Miss M’Carthy if she will be my wife.”

“And most likely if you do anything so rash you will be refused. I have tried to study this young girl who has fascinated you—to study her in your interest, Frank, I mean—and what I fear is that you will experience serious difficulty in winning her.”

“You fear it?”

“Yes. Is that so very wonderful? I don’t think she cared for you overwhelmingly before your last illness; but, of course, she heard so much of your views about love and about herself in connection with the holy, or unholy flame, while she was attending upon you, that if she hasn’t an extraordinary passionless heart you must have infected her with this disease called love. But we can talk of this another time. What you have to do now is to get strong again. You are in good hands here.”

The implied acquiescence of his mother to his wooing of Geraldine was all that Frank wanted to make him supremely happy. The winning of Geraldine might be a formidable task, but he told himself that he would succeed. There might be difficulties in the way; it would be a pleasure to surmount then. Hope surged triumphant through every vein and nerve.

“I was only to have an hour with you to-day, Frank,” said Mrs. Aylward, after a brief silence, “and I have occupied a good deal of that hour already. I think I hear footsteps,” she continued, rising from her chair. “I am going to be warned that my time is nearly up.” She opened the door of the little sitting-room, and standing

in the doorway she said: "It is you, my dear! Well don't be afraid to come in. I want you to see some of your own handiwork. Here is my poor boy whom you—I don't meant to say intentionally—have made such a wreck of. Geraldine, do you hear me? Now, don't be nasty. Come in and have a peep at your patient. He is a very harmless poor boy now. Frank, dear," she continued, turning round, "let me introduce a young friend of mine, who is, perhaps, not unknown to you."

Frank's heart beat wildly and he rose from chair and stretched out his hand to meet Geraldine's.

"I must have a word with Miss O'Dwyer before we start," said Mrs. Aylward. "Geraldine, dear, you will keep your patient company for a few moments? Sit down, Frank; you have no business to be standing. Go back to your seat." And with a cheerful smile Mrs. Aylward made her exit.

There was silence in the little room for some minutes. Frank nervously broke the silence.

"It was only today I learned that amongst other things I have to thank you for nursing me. I had a sort of dim consciousness that I had seen you at my bedside, but I put the vision down to a trick of my deranged brain."

The young girl could not find her voice some moments. She was trembling in every limb.

"I am so glad to know that you are out all danger," she said, in a faltering voice. "I seem to have been the cause of much ill fortune to you."

"Geraldine!" said Frank passionately, stretching out his hands and seizing hers. "Why should I hesitate? Why should I not to you again that I love you? Do not

afraid, do not turn from me. There is need I know to speak the words—is there? to tell you I love you—I love you. Will you listen to me?” He drew nearer her as the words gushed from him. “Will you let me look into your eyes—into your beautiful eyes? They will tell me if I may hope. . . . My beloved! My treasure! My life!”

A little later Mrs. Aylward stood in the doorway. She hesitated at the threshold, held up her hands, and exclaimed: “This is positively dreadful. Frank! Have you no sense of proprieties?” . . . “My daughter!” she whispered, as she folded Geraldine in her arms, and kissed her on both cheeks. “God bless you. I did not think my poor boy would win you so rapidly. Be good to him, dear!”

THE END.