

The night nurse / by the author of "The surgeon's log."

Contributors

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THE NIGHT NURSE

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE SURGEON'S LOG"

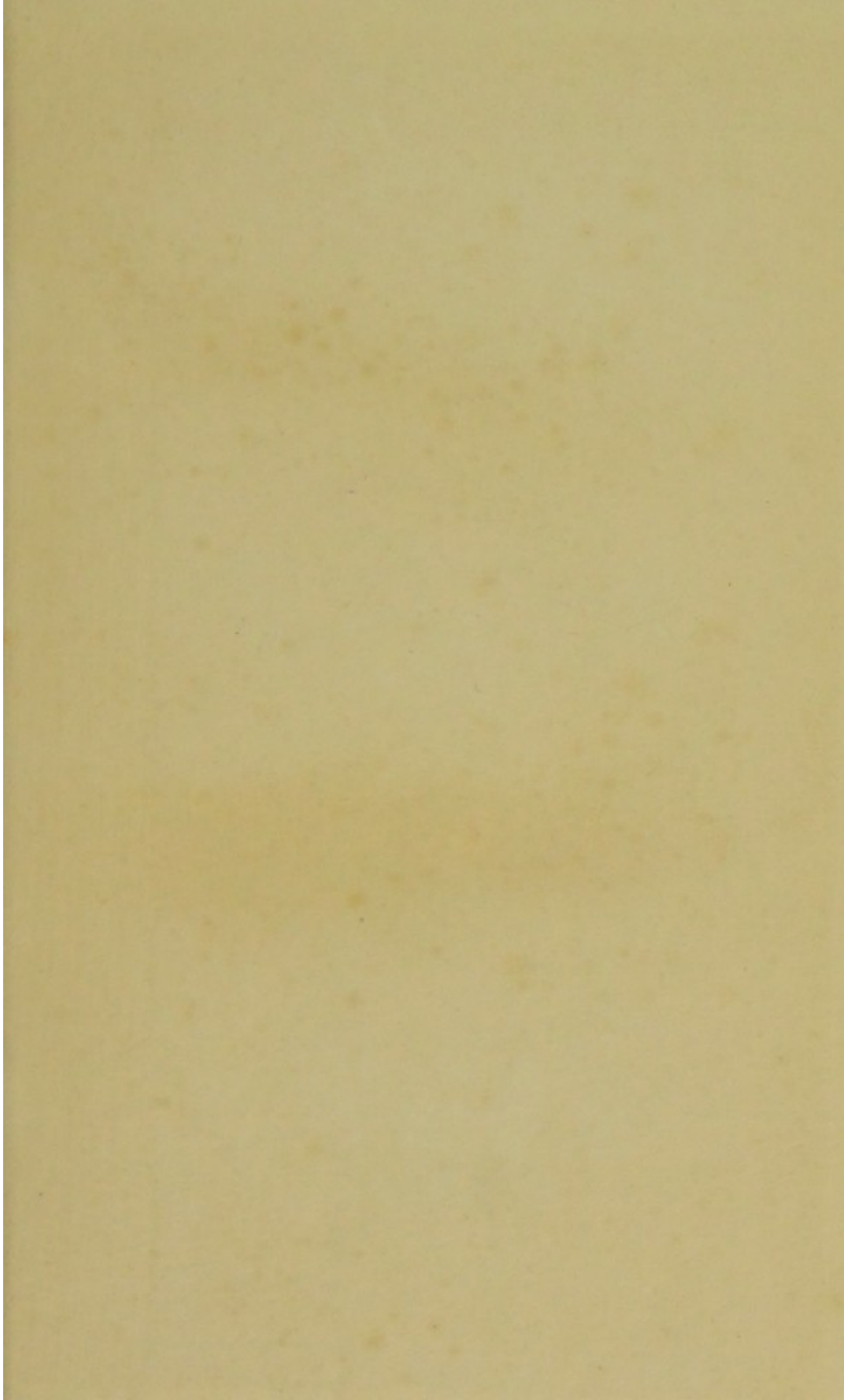
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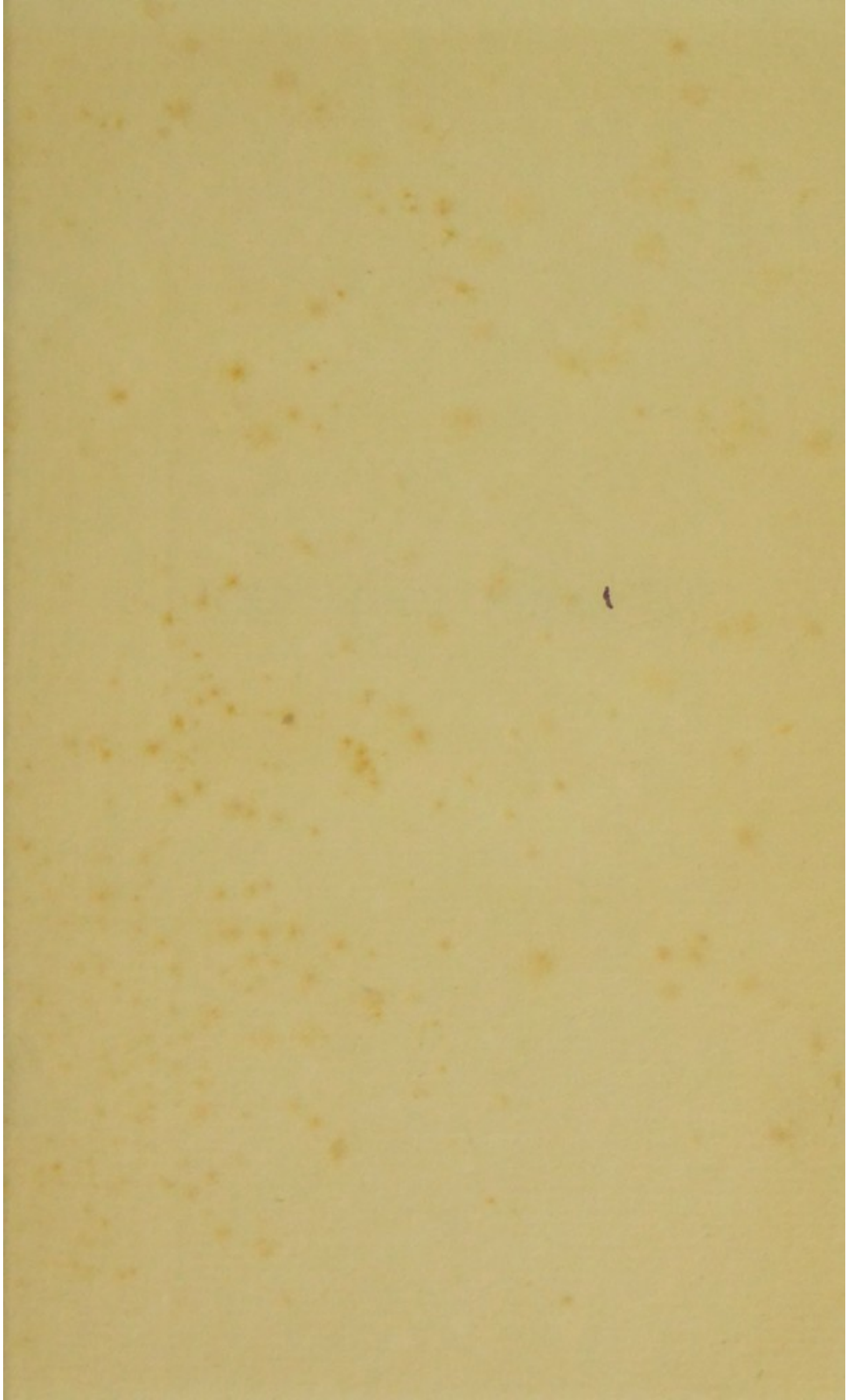
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THIRD EDITION

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THE NIGHT NURSE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING PIP, NORA, AND THE PAINTER—ALSO THE
COMMENCEMENT OF THE MADNESS OF FITZGERALD

GERALD FITZGERALD, otherwise known as "Pip," came nonchalantly through the end door, down the three wooden steps, past the screen, into the studio, sniffing audibly at the hot, confined air, with its mingled odour of paint, turps, linseed oil and hot stove-pipe, coming as he did from the raw afternoon air of Donnybrook outside; and Nora, sitting posed on the high model's "throne" at the far end, relaxed somewhat from her strained attitude, smiling a silent welcome down on him.

"Am I too early?" he queried.

At the sound of his voice La Touche looked up abstractedly from the easel, and turned round. The lighted stove was between him and the visitor, its long, dusty, cobwebbed pipe angled over his head, sloping gradually towards the roof above. Mechanically he rubbed his chin through his short Vandyke beard with the knuckle of his thumb, his paint-brush still in his hand. The movement seemed to rouse him.

"I had no idea it was so late," he said, waking up, and turning to Nora. "Are you very tired? I'm afraid I've been taking it rather out of you," he added apologetically.

"Oh, not at all," she answered. "You see, I'm used to standing for hours in hospital, looking like a graven

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image at the bedside, while one of the staff is lecturing to his class of students."

A look of relief came to La Touche. He glanced up at the light with the remorseless self-concentration of the artist in the fever of composition, and Pip, interpreting his mood, said immediately—

"Look here. Shall I make tea? The light will be fading by then. You two can go on till it's ready."

"Very well," said Nora.

"Thank you," murmured La Touche.

Quietly, therefore, keeping well behind so as not to disturb them, Pip found the kettle, set it on the almost red-hot stove, foraged in cupboards for the tea-things, and, finally satisfied, seated himself on an oak chest from which the tasselled end of a crumpled purple velvet curtain, carelessly thrown in, protruded.

Lazily he let his eyes wander round the bare workman-like room, with its buff-coloured walls stacked round their bases with dusty frameless canvases, faces towards the wall, crayon sketches, mostly of the nude, stuck up carelessly with drawing-pins, odds and ends of property-furniture, old swords, tumbled pieces of armour—all wearing under the cold north light and top-light of the studio that curiously disreputable appearance one only sees on the stage by daylight, or when furniture is out of doors.

Close beside him a particularly shabby looking lay figure, apparently by its attitude in the last stages of vinous inco-ordination, grinned sardonically. Somehow it seemed to leer especially at him, and unconsciously he found himself grimacing back in answer to the challenge.

For some time he watched La Touche, working at the canvas, as he stood in his paint-smeared smock, in front of the easel, beside a rickety kitchen table littered with jam-

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jars containing brushes soaking in turpentine, crumpled tubes of used and unused colours, several old pipes, an unscrapped palette, a Venetian dagger, its blade dulled with grey paint, a battered Cromwellian helmet, and a grinning skull with a splash of red paint above the left orbit.

Then his eyes wandered over the clear space of polished floor, covered with some precious Persian rugs, that intervened between the easel and the model; and he found himself studying Nora, robed in mediæval garments of green and gold, as she leant forward with appealing arms on the shabby canvas-covered "throne," close to the other unlighted stove, used only when a model was posing for the "nude," and it was necessary, therefore, to heat the large bare workroom thoroughly. Even in the unbecoming light he was conscious of the sculptured classic loveliness of her every line, and could appreciate, in consequence, La Touche's eagerness to make the most of every moment of the jewelled opportunity thus presented him.

Suddenly the kettle boiled over, recalling him to the duties he had undertaken; and five minutes later, therefore, released from the purgatory of silence, he was able to call out gaily—

"Time's up, children! Tea's ready! Now smile, Miss Townsend—smile, and bring out the dimples," he urged in mock entreaty. "I just adore dimples—they remind me somehow of the innocence of the Garden of Eden. But I don't believe our dumb friend over there, gloomily chewing the paint-brush, has ever even noticed them."

As he spoke, he watched her with the open admiration which is the privilege of youth; and she accepted the attention as part of the licence women permit in the man who does not count.

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In reality there was very little difference in their ages; but developmentally a woman always feels older than a man of her own years, and in this case an actual seniority gave tangible weight to the attitude of mind.

“You absurd boy!” laughed Nora, as he came forward to help her down; and then, just as he had hoped, the little maelstrom formed, deepened, wavered, diminished, and finally evanesced, leaving the smooth roundness of her cheek again unruffled.

La Touche looked up suddenly from the canvas; his grave eyes travelled to both the bright young faces; and then he too smiled.

“It’s in the right cheek only,” he said. “I painted her mother. She had them on both; and Nora really got hers by falling out of a pram.”

Pip grinned cheerfully. “Sat upon! Sat upon—from an eminence,” he admitted. “But I decline to accept any such materialistic explanation of Miss Townsend’s charms—charm I mean.”

They gathered laughingly around the coffer that acted as a tea-table near the stove—La Touche, freed from his mood of concentration when he had doffed his smock and washed his hands, chaffing them both impartially.

“Some more tea?” said Nora to Pip in one of the intervals.

He hesitated. “No. I think not. I’ve got another call to pay. In fact, I really ought to be there now,” he said.

La Touche’s eyes twinkled.

“You see, Nora, Pip’s still in that happy between age when he enjoys—actually enjoys—paying afternoon calls. A few years ago wild horses would not have dragged him to such a thing. Later on he will look back on his present beatitude with envy.”

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“He’s rubbing it in,” said Pip ruefully. “And all because of that old paint-brush, and me trying to prevent him meeting a lingering death by chronic lead poisoning. When I reach the years of indiscretion, which seems to come at the time when one passes a lingering hand over one’s scalp and begins to study ‘hair’ advertisements, I may agree with you; but in the meanwhile I hold to the good old maxim: ‘Let me eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we dye, or wear a wig.’ So sorry I must be off now,” he added. “Good-bye, Miss Townsend—I’ll see you on Thursday, won’t I? As for you, sir,” he continued, his voice hardening in mock defiance, “my cartel will reach you to-night—pistols for two, coffee for one, in the Phoenix Park to-morrow.”

When the door had closed on him, Nora smiled freely. “How absurdly young he is,” she said.

La Touche sat for some time in silence.

“The age of man,” he said at length, “is not to be reckoned in years, but in his attitude towards women. A boy becomes a man when he first falls in love with some particular one of them. Pip is in the chrysalis stage when the glamour is over almost all women, and every petticoat in consequence conceals a Venus. It is a very delightful peach-blossom stage. Some men, artists and poets, and most Irishmen, never quite grow up and get beyond it. Every man has in him somewhere the remains of it.”

“I do not think that I quite like the idea,” said Nora doubtfully.

“No woman ever does,” he answered gently. “Woman is essentially monogamous; man isn’t. You have faced the world; you are a nurse; and you ought to know that it is man, not woman, who is the eternal child.”

As he talked he watched the light on her face, the soft

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downy oval of her cheek, the full passionate red of her lips, the determined dimpled chin.

"I shall never marry," she said.

Intuitively he followed the line of her thoughts. "You mean you would hate to think that, if you loved a man, your image did not fill every part of him; and so, if what I say is true, you would prefer to remain outside the garden of Eros rather than risk it. My dear, I do not think you really mean that. It is the philosophy of the dwellers in the plain; and if I remember anything of your race they always had a fancy for the mountain-tops."

She threw up her head restively; "I want to remain as I am," she said. "Getting married has no attractions for me. Most women seem to marry for a home. I used to think that degrading till I came to see it was largely due to their economic dependence. I know enough of life now not to blame them—their work is so badly paid, poor things. But for myself, as you know, I am happily independent of such things; I am comparatively well off, and so have no temptations that way. All this talk about love leaves me cold."

"What age are you?" he said suddenly.

"Twenty-three. Why do you ask?"

He smiled.

"Oh. Nothing."

After she had gone La Touche sat quietly thinking. "I wonder," he said aloud. "I wonder. Either my intuitions, or her theories, are at fault. A beautiful woman like that! Lord, how the years glide by! Twenty-three! It must be twenty-five years ago, and she is dead, and I am painting her daughter—a daughter who talks of love as if it were a mathematical formula—painting her, too, not as 'Pallas Athene,' or even 'Atalanta,' but as the stooping princess whose heart has been wakened

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to full life by the first passionate kiss from the lips of her predestined mate.

His eyes wandered back to the picture.

It was still very unfinished, only the face of the bending figure having been completed. For this he had used Nora as a model; but in it unconsciously he had visualised memories a quarter of a century older, memories of passionate regret, scented by the lavender of years. It was an open secret to Nora that he had loved her mother. With the subtle intuition of womanhood, which is beyond logic, she had divined it all; and in some impalpable way had made him feel that it was a secret bond of sympathy between them. Now the violet eyes of the mother gazed at him from the portrait of the daughter, filling him with a vague uneasiness.

“With a mouth and chin like that, love is sure to come into her life. She has a celibate brain, but her body is built for delight. I suppose I am a Pagan; but I sometimes think beautiful women should not possess a soul. It only mars their happiness,” he thought. “As yet no breath of passion has ruffled the mirrored pools of her soul. Instead, she has moved serene, unsullied, handling the ragged edges of life, conscious only of the pity of it all. The ‘Stooping Princess.’ I wonder if my picture is the foreshadowing finger of destiny.”

Thinking of her, he became so absorbed that he did not hear the knock on the studio door, nor the footsteps that followed. It was the voice over his shoulder made him turn; and instinctively, as if afraid of exposing his thoughts, he got up defensively with his back to the easel covering the canvas as he turned.

“Oh, it’s you, Fitzgerald,” he said, with a faint embarrassment, making, however, no apology for his action; and it was characteristic of the man who had entered that he,

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on his part, made no comment upon it either, knowing and understanding, as he did, the curious dislike the artist feels lest any profane eye should gaze upon the work of his imagination before completion.

"Yes. I called in passing, thinking I might find my cousin here."

La Touche stepped aside with relief.

"Oh, Pip. He was here; but like Mercury, he has winged feet. He's pouring oblations elsewhere now to the great gods 'Assam' and 'Pekoe.'"

"Well, then, I want you to fix a night to dine with Connellan and myself at 'Kingsbridge.' You know we've moved in there from the 'Pembroke,'" he said.

La Touche started.

"I didn't know you had changed hospitals."

"Oh yes, a month ago. Thought Pip would have told you," he answered easily.

La Touche hesitated for a moment, and then said—

"Curious thing. There's the daughter of a very old friend of mine a nurse there—Nurse Townsend. D'ye know her?"

"No," said Fitzgerald casually. "Probably on the medical side, or private nursing. I'll look her up, if you like," he added perfunctorily; and then, not waiting for a reply, continued: "Let us know a day or two before we may expect you."

"I will. Thank you."

While they were talking, La Touche was conscious of a vague idea at the back of his mind which made him say—

"Have you time to let me make a crayon sketch of you before you go?"

Fitzgerald laughed.

"What is it this time? If I remember rightly, you've

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done me as Sir Galahad, and also Fagan. I think, too, I'm in a stained-glass window as St. John the well-beloved. Are there any more?"

La Touche smiled back at him.

"I believe there are," he confessed. "Fact is, your features rather lend themselves to reproduction."

"I know, worse luck," groaned Fitzgerald. "Only three months ago I discovered that Robbins, the poster-man, had used me as an advertisement for somebody's cigarettes; and so I was confronted with my counterfeit on all the dead walls of Dublin—besides God knows where else—smoking a brand I wouldn't be seen dead with. Everybody spotted it; and I thought I'd never hear the end of it. Worst of all, Robbins wouldn't even confess he did it."

"Oh, well, if you'd rather not——"

"Oh, you! I don't mind you! In fact, I'm secretly bucked. I suppose you want to 'work me up' into something."

"Yes. I don't quite know what; but I have an idea I want you."

"Fire away, then," he said, with comic resignation.

On his way back to hospital Fitzgerald boarded a waiting tramcar in College Green. It was raining; and the car became uncomfortably packed before it started. All around him was the damp musty smell that rises from the garments of the poor; and it was with distinct relief that he noted the car was beginning to empty again as it progressed towards its destination. Finally a bloated red-faced woman with a shawl, holding a basket which had protruded over his knees, got up from beside him, and he was able to move from his cramped position. His eye followed her as she stood, swaying slightly, her figure overflowing her bodice, an odour of stale porter and fried

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fish emanating from her. Slowly she worked a staggering way past indrawn toes ; and his eyes, still following, suddenly became aware of a face, clean-cut, pure, cameo-like under the glare of the electric light.

A tingling wave of pleasurable surprise swept over him. "La Touche's princess," he murmured.

It was a sheer physical delight to look at her after the vision of grossness that had just been handed off by the conductor; and with the quick facility of the Celt his eyes grew introspective; the chilly raw grey night melted from his consciousness; and in his mind he wove a glamour picture of the time when he had seen her last.

It was late afternoon in far Arcadia; and, from where he lay concealed near the altar of Rhea, looking across the valley towards the wood beyond the vineyard, where the sun shone low and red between the oleasters, he could hear at intervals the mellow pipes of Pan, as he waited for her to come towards him with rosy feet across the grass, her face shining in the glory of the afterglow, unconscious of the passionate eyes that watched her daily coming to perform the ceremonials devolving upon her as priestess at the high altar of the Mother of the Gods.

The tram stopping with a jerk brought him back to himself.

"Kingsbridge Lane, miss."

The conductor was calling the priestess "miss." Evidently she had asked to be put down there. With a start he realised that he, too, must get out; but when he did so she was twenty yards ahead, hurrying past the dead wall of "Drapiers" to reach the friendly light above the hospital postern. Mechanically he hung on his step, for it is not etiquette for a nurse and a house-surgeon to arrive together. After a short interval, therefore, he too knocked at the closed postern. The grille slid back, and the

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wrinkled face of Fogarty, the lodge-keeper, peered through the bars.

"All right, Fogarty," he called.

"Yissir, yissir," and the door swung open.

"Who was that went in just now, Fogarty?"

"Nurse Townsend, sorr," answered Fogarty, as he shot the bolt and ambled wheezing back to his warm fire again.

"So. Her modern name is Townsend," he murmured to himself. "Lord! my heart is going like a sledgehammer."

Mechanically he felt his left radial. "A hundred and twenty," he murmured, "and I thought I was immune." He stretched his two hands, palms upward, straight in front of him, bringing them close together on a level with his eyes. Even in the dim light he saw, as well as felt, that they were in a fine tremor.

"I won't," he said aloud. Then he passed under the ancient archway, with its ponderous nail-studded door and enormous scroll-work hinges, into the dim-lit square beyond. All was very quiet; and his footsteps in the stone-flagged cloistered colonnade that ran around the square echoed cavernous, ghostly. The hospital seemed as dead as the dodo. Not even the figure of a nurse flitting from ward to ward was to be seen. Even the lights shining through the windows above, looking into the square, were shrouded, dim. At one corner of his path, however, as if to accentuate the gloom, a broad strip of light fell across the flag-stones, and drew him moth-like to the open door of the accident-room. He looked in to find it, too, was empty; and a feeling of depression thereupon swept over his mercurial temperament.

"I wonder where all the other men have got to?" he muttered irritably.

Overhead in the clock tower the bell slowly clanged the

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hour of seven; and at the same moment a white-coated figure swung out of No. 4. It was Connellan, one of the house-physicians, with whom he shared a sitting-room.

"Hello, Fitz, that you? Dinner-time. I'm devilish peckish. The others are all out, so buck up."

"All right, Conn, I'll be with you in two shakes. Thought every one was dead," he called out, feeling more cheerful.

The meal was a comparatively quiet one, for Fitzgerald was not in a talkative mood. Once or twice Connellan glanced curiously at him; but Irishmen are temperamentally variable, and so, sympathetically understanding, he merely dimpled the silence at intervals by a desultory trickle of conversation requiring no effort to answer.

In their sitting-room, afterwards, each sank into one of the comfortable dilapidated arm-chairs that had been moulded into shape by the shoulders of many generations of residents, and with their feet on the club fender lay back silently smoking.

Suddenly the telephone rang three long, followed by two short, strokes.

"Me," said Fitzgerald resignedly, unwinding himself. "Hello—you, sister— Oh yes— What?— No. 14—temperature up again. What rotten bad luck. Put her on a three-hour chart, and I'll have a look at her to-night. You've got the operation list for to-morrow? Thanks. Nothing else? Good-night."

He dropped back into the arm-chair, and suddenly became talkative.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Conn, that we are a pair of double distilled idiots," he said energetically.

Connellan grinned cheerfully. "Strictly between ourselves I have noticed that you, at any rate, are a little bit mad at times," he admitted. "But why this thusness?"

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Fitzgerald sat up with a jerk. "Just look at us. We're the two first men of our year, aren't we? You're a clinking fine physician. I'm not too 'dusty' as a surgeon."

"'Granted,' as the tea-shop girls say when you beg their pardon," said Connellan comfortably.

"Well. What are we aiming at? When we leave here I suppose we'll stick up our plates in the consulting area, and begin waiting the weary wait till the public find us out—if they ever do. It means years of hard grind, of heartbreak, of doing the work that others get the credit for, of feeling that the years are creeping over us and we're getting no 'forrader.' It means being hard up. It means we cannot afford to marry—cannot even afford to fall in love. Lord, the prospect is appalling. I want to know is it worth while?"

Connellan glanced at him gently. There was a very deep understanding between these two friends whose minds were so dissimilar—a love almost passing the love of women. It had started when they met as strangers, two shy undergrads sitting beside one another feeling rather lonely on their first appearance with a hundred and fifty others in the big chemical amphitheatre. It had grown steadily ever since, the very dissimilarity of their minds as well as bodies acting as a link between them—Fitzgerald quick, impulsive, witty, good to look upon, easily excelling in games, a typical son of the south; Connellan slower, more philosophic, deeper, his ugly face redeemed by beautiful brown eyes and a mouth of sardonic tenderness. Each acted as the complement of the other; they were mutually dependent; the friends and enemies of one were the friends and enemies of the other; and their confidence in one another was complete.

"Don't be an ass, Dermot. You know it is worth

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while," said Connellan energetically. "You know it as well as I, in your sane moments. But the risk for you is, and always will be, some woman. Women have a way of curbing the course of high ambition. Instead of building a cathedral they make one satisfied to furnish a nest. You and I and people like us cannot afford to marry. Of course, there's something wrong with the system that penalises us, and allows the buck navy to fill the world with his offspring. From the standpoint of Eugenics it's deplorable, but we cannot alter it. We've got to accept things as we find them; and the cold truth is that, as you say, we cannot afford to bring children into the world until we reach an age when, biologically speaking, we are past our prime."

"I think we're fools," said Fitzgerald, sullenly.

"That means you're in love," commented Connellan.

"No, old chap, not quite; but I easily might be. I've seen some one, and I'm rather frightened. The others—I never was scared before, I always felt I could pull up. But this—I just want to drift and dream, and be foolish like other men—lucky devils—who have no overmounting ambitions to live up to. I'm tired, Conn. I want to think of soft white arms, of the curve of a neck I've seen, of the way the light glints in the mystery of her hair. I just want her, Conn. I feel that I have always wanted her, have always been seeking her. All the other women that have attracted me have drawn me by protoplasmic memories of her. I knew they were not her all the time; but it was sweet to watch the shadows of her in them. And all the while I felt I was only waiting, that some day she was sure to come."

"And she has come?" said Connellan quietly.

The two men stared into each other's eyes.

"Yes; and I don't want her to," said Fitzgerald.

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“Thank you for not saying ‘Damn fool,’” he added, with a half-hearted attempt at a laugh.

“It’s—it’s not Otway?” said Connellan tentatively.

Fitzgerald laughed. “Oh no. Moira is a dear, but I’m in no danger there. Besides, she’s engaged to a man in South Africa whom she calls ‘Marmaduke,’ because, as she explained to me, she didn’t want the other nurses to know his real name, and thus cheapen it by repetition.”

“Then I won’t ask you who she is; and you needn’t tell me,” said Connellan, after a pause.

“Thank you, Conn. I won’t, if you don’t mind, just yet.”

They smoked in silence for some time, both gazing into the depths of the fire, until the sound of the accident-bell forced Fitzgerald from his chair.

“I wonder,” thought Connellan, feeling more disturbed than he cared to confess even to himself, a strange jealousy of the unknown beginning to creep over him, a feeling which, as far as he could remember, never had taken possession of him before.

He tapped out the contents of his pipe nervously on the upper bar of the grate, and was beginning to fill it again from the jar, when he was interrupted by a message from the accident-room asking him to come down. Quickly he followed the nurse. Fitzgerald smiled at him from behind the patient’s back. There was an amused twinkle in his eye. He seemed to have entirely forgotten his gloom of a few minutes before.

“This seems to be more in your line than mine,” he said, indicating the patient, a shabby, depressed little fellow with dubious linen.

“Well, what is it?” said Connellan kindly.

The little man turned to him eagerly. “For the love

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of God, dochter, for the love of the Virgin, will yez shut me up?" he said entreatingly.

"Why?" said Connellan.

"Because it's a danger to the public Oi am," he replied, clawing nervously at Connellan's sleeve, raising at the same time a pair of crazy watery blue eyes to the house-physician's face. "It's me cough that does it. Oi'm explosive. Iv'ry time Oi cough people be in mortal peril. Just this very av'nin' in the Phænix Park I've shot three cows, two nursemaids, and a bull-pup, wid me cough explodin' violent loike. For the love of God, dochter, will ye shut me up, or O'll be after doin' somethin' desprit."

"Who are you, anyhow?" said Connellan solemnly.

The little man looked round mysteriously, tripped to the door, looked out to see if any one was listening, and came back.

"Oi'm the late Julius Cæsar," he whispered.

Fitzgerald sat down abruptly. "Oh, you are, are you?" said Connellan quietly.

"Yis, shure, an' what's more, Oi'm Alexander the Great, too. Bein' two people—that's what makes me so explosive," he added mysteriously.

"But—how—do—you—manage—to be both?" gasped Connellan slowly, controlling himself with difficulty, seeing Fitzgerald quivering, weak with suppressed laughter.

"It wuz by different mothers," the little man explained gravely. "Oi'm what they call a harumphrodite."

Fitzgerald bolted hurriedly out of the room into the neighbouring dispensary, purple with suppressed emotion; and as rapidly as possible Connellan joined him. He found him rocking in an agony of laughter, the tears running freely down his cheeks.

"Great jumping Jehoshophat, what a specimen," he gulped. "I'm the late Julius Cæsar."

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"Also Alexander the Great," added Connellan severely.

"It was by different mothers," almost shouted Fitzgerald.

"I'm what they call a harumphrodite," echoed Connellan, gravely.

Presently they sobered down, the hopeless pathetic side of it beginning to obtrude upon their minds. Fitzgerald drew a long breath.

"Lord! I'm sore all over. You'd better take him in hand, Conn. Poor devil. He's just about hopeless," he said, speaking more and more soberly as he thought of it.

"Yes. Just about," said Connellan in the same tone. "Sort of sorry I laughed. I've got a spare bed. I can 'dope' him with bromide for the night, and send him on to the 'Richmond' in the morning. I'm off on my night round now."

"Come in to '9' when you've finished," said Fitzgerald. "I'm going up there now."

A Colles' fracture arriving just then, however, delayed him for another ten minutes while he examined and set it with the aid of the accident nurse. Presently, however, it was straight, and the splints had been rapidly adjusted.

"Swing it in a triangular, please, nurse; and tell her when to come up to-morrow morning," he said, as he turned to leave the room.

"Very well, Mr. Fitzgerald," she murmured.

"By the way, where is the night-super?" he added casually, looking back.

The nurse looked up demurely. "He is wondering if it is safe to go to '9' for tea yet," was her inward comment. Aloud she said: "She's down in isolation, sir."

CHAPTER II

ON SUPPERS, ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION, AND THE TERROR BY NIGHT

It is a fixed law of all hospitals, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians, that nurses are not permitted to give supper-parties to the "residents," under any pretext whatever. Such things are forbidden because it is the object of every matron to train her staff into a nun-like unconsciousness of man. It is constantly impressed upon them, therefore, that they may speak to the house-men only upon things professional, details of the case in hand, observations made, symptoms noticed, in their mutual occupation—the care of the sick and wounded. Everything else is taboo; and dire penalties are inflicted accordingly, for obvious infringements of these unwritten laws.

Such penalties, in the natural injustice of things, almost always fall upon the women, because, owing to their superfluity, the supply of would-be nurses is unlimited, and losses by dismissal for trivial lapses can readily be replaced; whilst, on the other hand, men sufficiently keen to do the gratuitous hard labour which is the lot of the average overworked house-surgeon or physician are not so easily found, and cannot, therefore, be sacrificed on the altar of discipline without sufficient cause.

Such a condition of affairs is not, as it might at first blush seem, an outcome of the natural injustice of man towards woman. On the contrary, it is the inevitable result of putting power over other women into any one

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woman's hands; and, leaving aside the question of supply and demand, is directly due to the inability of woman to trust other women in matters where the mutual attraction of sex is the moving factor.

Human nature, however, being what it is, it is not surprising that in every hospital an enormous amount of ingenuity is expended, daily, in breaking these regulations, as well as avoiding their consequences. The mere fact that they are forbidden makes them infinitely attractive. A smile, a whisper, a trivial conversation, becomes a matter of breathless adventure; a surreptitious supper partakes of the glamour of high romance. There is an all-pervasive free-masonry of knowledge encircling the hospital, amongst the nursing and resident staff, from which the matron and most of the sisters are rigidly excluded. Every one below a certain recognised grade knows perfectly what every one else is doing; and the conspiracy of silence towards the higher powers is absolute.

When Fitzgerald inquired, therefore, casually of the nurse on accident duty, whose name even he did not know, as to the whereabouts of the night-superintendent, he knew he was speaking with absolute safety, and tacitly assumed that she was cognisant of his every move—the wordless understanding between them being complete.

“If you want me, nurse; for anything, you can ring up No. 9. I shall probably be there,” he said.

Ostensibly it meant in case he was needed for an accident. Practically she understood, in addition, that she was expected to ring up should the sister unexpectedly return before her time. She was a very junior nurse, still without the dignity of “strings,” which are donned usually at the end of one or two years' duty, according to the hospital; but she had imbibed sufficient of the curious hospital spirit to look forward eagerly to the time when

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she, too, should have risen to the dignity of "charge-nurse," which would allow her to indulge in the dangerous joys of surreptitious tête-à-têtes; and so she watched with veiled eyes, his tall figure, in its loose, spotless, long white coat, move leisurely along the stone-flagged colonnade, her lips curling in an unconscious smile. Then she turned her attention again to the bandaged arm before her.

Fitzgerald meanwhile proceeded leisurely on the "night-round," visiting his wards in succession, giving the necessary instructions to the "charge" in each, and eventually winding up in "9." There was no one in the kitchen, and so he went on quietly into the ward. "Fourteen" turned restlessly, moaned, and turned over again. The rest were breathing peacefully. A pile of "case-sheets" awaited him under the shaded light at the central table; and so he moved softly over and sat down. All was quiet in the long, white, dim-lit ward. From the kitchen presently came a faint noise of movement, the sound of a fire being poked, the rattle of ashes falling. Then it, too, ceased; and again all was still save for the quiet breathing life around him. Drawing the "sheets" towards him, his pen began to scratch rapidly over the paper, filling in the record of the day's observations, bringing them up to date. At length he reached the last.

"Damn!" he murmured to himself, looking at the chart. "So! She's going in for that—is she? The 'chief' will be sick, after her doing so well."

There was a frou-frou of skirts in the ward.

"Well! You really do," said a cool, pleasant voice. "How long have you been here? I was only in '8½' for a minute. Even the night-super cannot steal in as quietly as you—luckily for us all."

"I have a constitutional objection to noise, 'Otter.'

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Where's the junior?" he answered, smiling up at her.

"Oh, matron's put her on 'relief' to-night, as this ward is not heavy just now. Economy, you know."

"Probably wants the committee to raise her salary," remarked Fitzgerald sarcastically, "and is economising out of her nurses' bones. Bother the matron, and all other women who overwork their fellow-women." Then he tapped the chart before him dolefully. "This is rather rough luck on us, isn't it?"

"Who? Oh, '14.' D'ye want to look at her?"

He nodded, and presently, holding a shaded candle-lamp, she led him to the bedside. The patient slowly turned a wasted putty-coloured countenance towards them, and blinked feebly, her pupils contracting sharply in the sudden light. Automatically his fingers slipped to the warm, damp wrist.

"Feeling better to-night, Mrs. Moriarty?" he murmured cheerfully.

"Yes. Thank you kindly, dother," she answered dully.

"Well, Nurse Otway's going to prop you up presently, to make you more comfy. You'll go to sleep that way; and I'll be round to see you smiling at me in the morning," he said. Going back towards the kitchen he murmured—

"Put her up in 'Fowler's position,' and start the continuous saline, 'Otter.' Wish I'd ordered it a week ago. 'Fraid she's going to slip us."

"'Fraid so," she echoed.

That was all. They had discussed a probable tragedy; looked at it with calm, untroubled eyes, arranged to do the best humanly possible to avert it, and then pigeon-holed the matter till it should again become urgent.

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Such things had ceased to be matters of feeling with them, not because their sympathies had been blunted by frequent harrowing, but because experience had taught them the necessity of husbanding their emotions. She had cried herself to sleep over the first death that had occurred amongst the patients she had nursed; and as a consequence had been almost useless next day, forgetting important things even under the lash of the sister's tongue—a tongue that had called her, she remembered, an “hysterical amateur.” He had been tortured, at first, by the constantly recurring thought: “If I had done this, or that, or the other, should I have pulled him or her round?”—worried till he found himself unable to give proper attention to those that were left. Looking back, he compared his former attitude with that of the tender-hearted country doctor who half pulled a tooth, and then stopped because he could not bear to give the patient any further pain. Experience since had taught them both, not the futility of effort, but the rigid necessity of never allowing their emotions to cloud the clearness of such effort; it had emphasised the increased efficiency produced by being able to switch off into another channel; and demonstrated forcibly the extra quickness in emergency possible only to those cultivating such a detached frame of mind, a mind capable of seeing in proper perspective, unbiassed by the unessential details of the immediate foreground. Both of them had learnt their lesson. So he was able to say, quite naturally, as he left the ward—

“I’m going round for a smoke now. Can I bring back Conn to look at a case?”

Her eyes twinkled. “Tea for three,” she murmured. Then her face sobered. “I don’t know,” she said dubiously. “Conn and I are not very good friends at present. I owe him one for something.”

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"Well, just as you like," he said.

"Oh, well, never mind. Let him come," she answered, with a shrug.

Half-an-hour later Connellan followed Fitzgerald into the kitchen with the cautious air of one who knew he had no plausible excuse should the sister be present. He was a house-physician, and No. 9 was a surgical ward. They found the kitchen empty; but the kettle, sitting on the turned-down upper bar of the great open fireplace, was singing merrily. A polished copper sterilising tin stood on the table, ruddily reflecting the flames; on one side were a number of vases filled with flowers intended for the ward tables on the morrow, whilst a pile of newly rolled bandages littered the rest of the table.

Presently she rustled in from the ward. "Hello, Conn; 'llo, Fitz."

"I say! I've got no biscuits," she exclaimed.

"I think I know where I can raise some," said Connellan.

"Well, buck, then," said Fitzgerald, seating himself comfortably at the fire. He watched her idly as she deftly cleared away the impedimenta from the table, flashing about in her neat uniform, the delicate bloom of her complexion thrown into relief by the coils of dark coppery golden hair arranged coquettishly under the peaked cap of snowy white, the broad linen "strings" of which, tied in a square bow under her chin, gave her a quakerish look, belied by the dancing hazel eyes and smiling, curled-up lips. He followed with sleepy content the supple curves of her rounded figure as she rapidly reduced the kitchen to that scrupulosity of neatness that Listerism has made the dominant note of modern hospitals.

"You're a very satisfying woman to look at, Otter," he murmured idly, breaking the silence.

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"So they tell me," she answered, with a sidelong glance.

"How is the love affair getting on?" he queried.

"Which one?" she murmured demurely.

"Oh, the last—Bunny Rogers, wasn't it?"

"Oh, that!" she pouted. "I thought you meant—
That's all over a week ago. I've promised to be a sort of step-sister to him, assuring him that 'Marmaduke' was a real person. Funny how none of them will believe me, because, of course, I am not allowed to wear my engagement-ring nursing."

"Can't make out why I'm not head over ears in love with you myself, like most of the others," he said lazily.

Again she glanced at him sideways.

"Oh, you! You dear old thing! You couldn't be serious if you tried. Besides, you're just eaten up with ambition. Now stop bothering me with your nonsense, and get the spoons out," she said laughingly.

"I'm heart-broken, but I'm hanged if I'll confess it," he retorted.

"Just keep an eye on the kettle, would you?—it's on the boil. And scald out the tea-pot, and make the tea, while I have a look round," she said, ignoring the remark, leaving him alone in the kitchen.

She returned as Connellan re-entered with the tin of biscuits.

"Tea's ready," announced Fitzgerald, reaching for the tin.

"Hello, we're in luck. They're Café Noir. I call this ambrosia."

"Spoils of war," chuckled Connellan. "Stolen from old Macintyre while he slept."

"Bet you ten to one he'll blame this raid on me," said Fitzgerald casually after an interval, reaching for another biscuit.

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“Very likely,” said Connellan calmly. “In fact, more than likely. I left one of your cards in their place, with ‘Mr. Fitzgerald’s compliments and thanks.’”

“The devil you did! Here, ‘Otter,’ hold me, or I’ll commit suicide on him!”

“Oh, you boys, you boys! You’re too young, either of you, to be trusted with a cut finger,” she protested.

“I say, Dermot, what do you think of that? Criticism of superior officers. Insubordination. *Lèse-majesté*. Very serious case,” said Connellan solemnly.

“I think,” said Fitzgerald slowly, “the case is almost hopeless. Artificial respiration is the only chance. It might save her.”

Simultaneously, before she could move, they had pinned her arms; and then they commenced slowly and solemnly moving them up and down, pump-handle fashion, in spite of her struggles, while they counted slowly one, two, three, four—one, two, three, four. All at once she became still. She listened intently. Her eyes widened suddenly.

“Night sister,” she whispered.

Instantly they both let go. To be caught in such a situation meant nothing short of a catastrophe for her. With the celerity of much practice each at once acted independently of the other. Fitzgerald slipped quietly into the ward, picked up a chart, turned slowly and came back as if on his way to leave. Connellan was about to follow him when she caught him eagerly by the arm.

“No, no. In here. You cannot be seen in the ward.” Before he had time to think he found himself shut up in a long cupboard in the corner used for storing splints.

Presently Fitzgerald came sauntering slowly back into the kitchen, to find her standing demurely by the fire waiting for him.

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"Why—where——?" he said. Then he noted the three cups set out on the table, still undisturbed; and it suddenly dawned upon him.

"Gosh! So you have—have you? But where's Conn?" he said laughingly.

She seemed to think deeply. "I've mislaid him somewhere. Where was it?" wrinkling her pretty eyebrows. "Let's clear the things away. I'll remember in a minute. Oh, I have it now. He's shut up over there in the splint cupboard till I've had a talk with him."

"But why this furore?" said Fitzgerald, laughing.

"I'm paying him out for something he said about me. He—he said I was the biggest flirt in the hospital," she exclaimed, with rising indignation.

"Not far out," murmured Fitzgerald to himself.

"I wouldn't have minded that," she added, with continued heat, "but he said also I'd even flirt with the apothecary if there was no resident handy."

"Oh, come, that's too thick," said Fitzgerald, with mock solemnity. "He deserves to die the death."

"You needn't laugh," she exclaimed indignantly. "You're just as bad as him. But I wouldn't. It's not true. I wouldn't—I wouldn't—I just hate beards."

Meanwhile Connellan was getting more and more uncomfortable. At first he dare not move, lest the sister should hear. Then Fitzgerald's voice came, laughing carelessly, to him, and he began to wonder. He pressed the door gently. It had been bolted; and by now he began to feel a cramp in his back, and an increasing stuffiness. Slowly it began to dawn upon him that he had been hoaxed. He tapped gently on the cupboard door.

"These mice are beginning to get quite bold again," she said distinctly. "I think I must get some more traps."

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A muffled voice came through the cupboard door—

“I say, nurse, pax.”

“What curious noises one hears in these old wards at night! That might have been a ghost,” said Fitzgerald slowly, distinctly.

“Oh, rot! Let me out,” came the muffled voice.

“I think it must be the wind,” she said gravely.

The telephone buzzed suddenly in the silence that followed, introducing an unexpected sinister note into the lightness of the comedy. Even Connellan, cooped up in the cupboard, heard it and was still.

“Night sister,” they both exclaimed in unison.

Fitzgerald glanced quickly at her, and she read his thoughts without utterance.

“Yes. Leave him to me. Slip through ‘8½.’ There isn’t time. I’ll manage.”

Fitzgerald nodded silently and glided away.

“Keep still,” she said in a sibilant whisper at the cupboard door, as she rapidly cleared away the incriminating cups, while the sound of skirts came swishing up the corridor.

“Just in time,” she thought, with a sigh of relief, as the sister entered, a thin, ascetic-looking woman, with sombre, melancholy eyes suggestive of the soul, cold-blooded, fanatical within. Spectre-like she glided along the dim-lit corridors, which seemed to be her normal habit at night. She was so essentially of the shadows that it was only by a stretch one could imagine her living in the light of day.

She blinked as she came into the light, and her pale blue eyes wandered furtively round.

“Has Mr. Fitzgerald been, nurse?”

“Yes, sister; he’s only just gone.”

“Everything all right with you?”

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"Yes, sister."

"Well, I want a dozen three-inch domettes for No. 1."

"I've got them ready, sister," she said. Then she proceeded to pile them into the porcelain tray awaiting them, while the sister stood absently looking on.

"And—oh yes; I had almost forgotten—I want a padded posterior splint. They're in that cupboard over there, aren't they?" pointing to the press where Connellan was still incarcerated. Nurse Otway's heart almost stopped beating. She felt her throat getting dry, as she made a rapid swallowing movement. It was an awful moment of suspense. Did she know, she wondered, or was it only the wanton cruelty of fate? For a moment the necessity of saying something, of acting, battled with the inertia of despair. Then she heard her voice saying—

"Yes, I think so, sister."

And then for a second time the telephone buzzed in the ward. They both heard it, and for a moment she held her breath in suspense.

"Just get one out while I go and see what it is," said the sister, turning into the ward.

Instantly she was at the door, and had wrenched it open.

"Quick, for your life!" she gasped.

He was out like a flash of lightning, and half-way down the corridor before she had time to stagger back to the table, weak with the reaction after the strain.

Then the sound of the sister returning made her feel she must pull herself together again. She turned to the cupboard and selected a splint rapidly.

"It was only Mr. Fitzgerald ringing up to know if we had a bed on the medical side in case of accident. He thinks of everything, that man," said the sister admiringly.

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“Yes, he thinks of everything,” echoed Nurse Otway.
The sister yawned slightly as she took up the splint and the tray of bandages.

“We seem to be having a quiet night,” she said.

“Yes, very quiet,” echoed the nurse.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND INTRUSION OF PIP. OF LOVE, LAUNDRYMEN, AND THE FURTHER MADNESS OF FITZGERALD

PIP slid further down in his easy-chair by the fire. The pale sun of a spring afternoon was shining into his rooms in the "Bay." He yawned slowly, and the *Elements of Logic* which he had been perfunctorily reading slipped to the floor. Out in the front Quad some one was dolefully tolling the Campanile bell, making him feel depressed, deserted. In addition, his chum Kinsella, who shared rooms with him, as is the pleasant custom at Dublin, was away working in the anatomy-room, in a sudden fit of virtue induced by some caustic remarks of the chief demonstrator. This, coupled with the fact that he, too, had been working, gave him a feeling that he was being ill-used, that he deserved better things of fate.

Heavy footsteps coming through the doorway made him turn.

"That you, Macmorrhagh?"

"Yissir."

Macmorrhagh was his college "skip," the servant whom a thoughtful junior dean had chosen for him when he first came into residence. He marched now across the room, a trim, well-set man with old soldier written all over him, and proceeded mechanically to make up the fire.

"What am I doing this afternoon, Macmorrhagh?"

Pip referred everything to Macmorrhagh. He was the

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official keeper of his memory, and he loaded him, therefore, consistently. The "skip" came to attention sharply.

"Oi think, if Oi be mindin' rightly, sorr, there's a lady comin' to tay."

"Great Scott! So there is. It's Miss Townsend." He sat upright at once, all animation.

"Let me see, you're not using all my white shirts this week, doing waiter, are you?"

"Me, sorr?" said Macmorrhagh, with an air of injured innocence.

"Yes. Don't protest, Macmorrhagh; it's amateurish. And do you think you could find that blue scarf that's been missing for some time?"

"Yissir. Certainly, sorr."

"And get me a cake, and a box of chocolates from O'Reilly's—the best they've got. But don't charge me more than twice what you've paid for them, or I might get annoyed."

"Yissir."

"And just flap a cloth round a bit, will you, so as to let the dust see we must disturb it at least once a month, to prevent it claiming tenant-right."

"Yissir."

"Do it gently, Macmorrhagh. No use in hurting its feelings."

"Yissir. No, sorr. Certainly, sorr."

"Then lay the cloth, and make yourself scarce."

The "skip" took it all with the impassive face of an Oriental. He was accustomed to it, and would not have changed to another set of rooms, or another master, without very considerable inducement. So when Pip sallied forth half-an-hour later to meet her everything was in scrupulous order.

"I say, you do look ripping!" he exclaimed when she

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arrived where he was waiting for her outside the gates in College Green.

"Thank you, Pip. Think I'll do?" she said smilingly.

"Do! Watch me purr. Then note the effect our—your—entrance produces in Coll."

He conducted her past the Lodge into the Front Square.

"Here comes Molyneux of the first fifteen. In the ordinary way he just condescends to know me. I'm only a 'jib'—haven't got the Littlego yet—so I'm very small potatoes to a great man like Molyneux. Now watch."

The great Molyneux came slowly along, caught sight of Nora and straightened up. In response to Pip's recognition he smiled openly, taking off his hat with the air of one who had been accorded a privilege.

"There! You see! I'm rising rapidly in the social scale," said Pip, with a twinkle, as he conducted her through "Botany Bay," bubbling with laughter. "It's your fault. Why were you born so young and yet so beautiful?"

She glanced laughingly at the fresh, mischievous young face.

"If I were eighteen I'd be falling in love with you—you'd be turning my head so with your blarney," she exclaimed.

"What jolly rough luck on me you didn't choose your birthday later, then," he retorted. "Here we are, and there's my chum, Kim, turning the corner, looking horribly virtuous because he's had to do some work."

"How are you, Mr. Kinsella?" she said as he joined them at the foot of the staircase.

"Enjoying very poor health at present, ma'am. Thank you kindly all the same. I've swallowed too many dry facts since lunch for comfort," he said dolefully.

They ushered her into their sitting-room, and then

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closed their outer door, as an indication that other callers were not wanted. Pip put her into their most comfortable chair, while Kim, with the air of an expert, proceeded to get the tea-things ready. Her eyes wandered round the old-fashioned, low-ceilinged room, with which the big, pleasant open fireplace with its comfortable hobs one on either side seemed to go so well. A pair of crossed oars, ribbed black and white, accompanied by three photographic groups of crews over a couple of fencing foils, filled the space between the two crowded bookcases on the wall opposite her. Pip's eyes followed hers.

"Oh, those are Dermot's, my cousin's, when he stroked the senior eight three years ago. He passed these rooms on to us. I say, Kim, the kettle's boiling."

"All right. Push it on the hob, will you?" answered Kim from the depth of the "skippery," appearing immediately afterwards with the tea-caddy.

"You see, Miss Townsend, I do all the work here, while Pip does the basking, and claims the credit. I am the Martha of this shebeen."

"Jealousy, sheer jealousy," exclaimed Pip. "It's because you haven't noticed his 'trophies.' Kim's as mad on collecting them as a Boston school-marm doing 'Yurruip.'"

Nora glanced round smilingly. A great number of placards fastened here and there on the walls disturbed the studious impression produced by the number of books, causing a confused feeling such as one might experience on suddenly discovering a bishop masquerading as a Russian ballet-dancer. An "Exit" over one door led the unwary into the coal-bin, a "This way to the mountain railway" pointed to Kim's bedroom, a "Please do not touch the exhibits" adorned the pipe-rack.

"How did you get that?" she said, nodding at an

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enormous signboard over the fireplace high up next the ceiling, labelled "Khan Tellum, the Persian Palmist."

"That," said Pip, "is Kim's finest sample. It also represents a tragedy of unrequited love."

"Rot!" said Kim hurriedly. "Don't listen to him, Miss Townsend."

"It happened in this way," said Pip, ignoring Kim's distressed grimaces. "There was a bazaar at the Rotunda, and on the last night we spotted this over a tent in one corner. 'That's ours,' said Kim. 'Righto,' said I; and so we borrowed badges from some people we knew who were helping, got a step-ladder, marched boldly up to the thing, and began to take it down. Half the people don't know the other half in these bazaars; so every one thought it was our own. We had a cab outside; and Kim handed it down to me. Just then out burst the Persian palmist, a fellow in a conical hat, blue glasses, a big false beard and whiskers, and a long gorgeous flowing robe. 'Scoot; I'll tackle him,' said Kim to me; so I scooted. 'My sign—my sign!' shouted the palmist in a high falsetto voice, making after me. But every one was talking, and no one took any notice, except Kim. Kim grabbed him as he was trying to follow me, and pulled him back. 'I'll fight you for it, or I'll toss you half-a-sovereign to nothing, whichever you think is fairest,' said Kim. 'You won't want it now the bazaar is over.' But the palmist was no sportsman. He didn't answer Kim at all. He simply tried to push him off. But Kim wasn't going to be pushed off, and so they mixed a bit; the conical hat fell off, and the false beard shifted behind the palmist's left ear.

"'Excuse me,' said Kim, who is always the pink of politeness, though you might not think so, 'excuse me, sir, but your shave's slipped.' He twitched the beard as he spoke, the whole thing came off, and Kim nearly had

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a fit—the palmist was a girl, and a jolly good-looking one at that. Kim was so startled that he fled after me with the beard in his hand. There it is over there. But the worst of it is he's madly smitten on the girl."

"I'm not," protested Kim. "He's romancing, really he is, Miss Townsend."

Pip took no notice of his protest, but continued—

"He's met her at two dances since, and she won't allow him to be introduced. He sees her regularly in Grafton Street, and she just stares through him. It's a sad, unforgiving world."

"It's all rot," said Kim.

"If it isn't true, it ought to be," said Nora, with a laugh. "Never mind. She can't keep it up much longer. I expect she's dying to forgive you really."

"Do you honestly think——" he began eagerly.

A burst of merriment made him pause. "Have some tea," he said hurriedly.

"Thank you very much, but you haven't put the hot water in yet," she answered gravely.

"I am an ass," he confessed ruefully.

"Sorry, old man," said Pip, with sudden belated regret. "It isn't fair to rag you, but Miss Townsend is a sport, and she won't split."

"Why, of course not," said Nora promptly.

In the midst of the light chatter that followed there came a knocking at the outer door.

"I'll see," said Pip, proceeding into the "skippery" instead of towards the door.

"He's squinting through the 'dunscope,'" explained Kim. "We've got a topping good one."

The "dunscope" is a Dublin invention of Jacobean days, used originally, as its name would imply, to avoid the unpleasant attentions of tradesmen's duns. It has been

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found so useful for other things that it remains even unto this day. Practically it is a cylindrical tunnel of about two inches diameter, pierced through one wall of an undergrad's rooms, in such a position as to command a full view of any one rapping at the outer door. It is usually rather artfully concealed, and the visitor is, therefore, quite unconscious of the scrutiny to which he is being subjected.

Pip came out of the "skippery," the light of battle shining in his eyes.

"It's the laundryman with our things," he said.

Kim uttered a joyous chuckle. "Gosh!" he murmured.

"Well," said Nora, "why don't you take them in?"

"Because," answered Pip gravely, "there has been some slight difference of opinion between ourselves and the laundryman during the last few weeks. Our exchequer, I may explain, has been temporarily embarrassed of late; and at such a time one naturally expects all one's kind Christian friends to rally round. The laundryman, however, has turned out to be no Christian—he has refused to rally round. Instead, he has been asking us, a little rudely, to pay our bill, and refusing to leave our things unless we do. Consequently the normal pleasant relations that should subsist between gentlemen have become rather strained, and we've been skirmishing with one another now for about a month."

"I see," she murmured, with twinkling eyes.

"At first," continued Pip, "he used to rap, and then, when we did not answer, he would leave our things outside while he carried Craig's parcel upstairs, intending to take ours back on his way down. When he came down, however, by some curious coincidence he usually found

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that one or other of us had just arrived and kindly taken it in for him——”

“And then thoughtfully gone out for the afternoon,” she interpolated laughingly.

“Correct,” said Pip gravely.

“But how did you manage about your soiled parcel?” she inquired acutely.

“Oh, when he took to refusing it we used to dump it into his van when he wasn’t looking. But he’s got on to that now, and has a boy in the van. He’ll carry our parcel away, too, if we do not answer—no more leaving it to be sneaked in when his back is turned.”

“You seem to have come to an impasse,” she remarked, with a note of regret.

Pip smiled a slow, sweet smile.

“No-oh. I think not—not just yet.”

Again the rapping sound came dully through the outer door.

“Shall I plug him one in the ear with the pea-shooter through the dunscope just as a passing courtesy?” said Kim cheerfully.

Pip strolled casually to the window and looked out.

“No. I have an idea. Give me the pea-shooter,” he said. He opened the window gently. Outside stood the heavy van, in which a small boy, seated behind, was idly dangling his legs. Concealed behind the curtain, Pip took careful aim and fired. Immediately afterwards the horse threw up its startled head, gave a jerk forward, and the small boy was sent flying out by the unexpected movement, uttering a high-pitched yell as he reached the ground. Through the hastily opened window Pip yelled in unison, somebody outside whooped, and the old horse, startled out of its seven senses, now broke into a shambling trot, which soon degenerated into a lumbering gallop as

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parcel after parcel tumbled, banging out, in the van's lurching career around the "Bay," and yells, cat-calls and other forms of violent encouragement smote its ears from all quarters, raised by the quickly gathered crowd of laughing undergrads.

A sound of heavy feet tumbling downstairs indicated that the laundryman had become cognisant of what was going on.

"He's sure to have dropped our things on the stairs. Get them," said Pip, as he rushed down after the man.

By now, looking eagerly out, Nora found that the other windows in the "Bay" were lined with interested faces. She saw the van disappear into the front square, leaving a trail of parcels behind it, and the vanman toiling after it. Then, a few minutes later, the van reappeared again, the horse, led by the man, looking very dejected, the small boy, trotting in the rear, picking up the parcels.

At this moment Pip reappeared breathless round the opposite corner, having, she found out afterwards, stopped the horse himself.

"Quick, our soiled parcel—on the window-ledge."

She dropped it into his waiting arms, and he left it in the middle of a number of others lying on the ground.

Kim, coming down the stairs, met him at the door.

"I've got our clean things. They were on the top landing," he cried exultantly.

They found Nora sitting laughing helplessly in her chair.

"And the poor man knows nothing about it, and will pick up the parcel I dropped you with the rest," she gurgled.

"Yes. He did us down last week. I think we're about square now," said Pip.

"What about sending the bill to Dermot at the

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hospital, then? He'll pay it like a shot when we tell him the story," said Kim.

"Good idea. We've had our fun out of the laundryman. It's about time we really squared up. Yes, let's send it to Dermot," said Pip.

"Your cousin must be very good-natured," said Nora.

"Dermot! Oh, Dermot's the best in the world. Haven't you found that out yet?" said Pip.

"No. We haven't even met yet," she answered slowly.

"Why, of course. I keep forgetting he's only just gone to 'Kingsbridge,'" exclaimed Pip.

Kim was gazing out of the window watching the last of the parcel lifting, and he now turned to the others with a smile.

"Talking about the devil, Dermot's just turned the corner, and he looks as if he were coming here."

Pip immediately put his head out of the window and hailed, while Nora at the same time stepped back involuntarily and picked up her gloves.

"But you're not going!" exclaimed Kim. "Dermot will be so disappointed if you do."

"Oh no," said Pip eagerly, turning round; "you can't go without meeting Dermot. He's coming up now."

For a moment she hesitated. Instinctively she felt that she did not want the imminent meeting to take place. Like all residents, he had been very freely discussed in the nurses' home on his arrival in the hospital, and the stories of his rapid friendships had prejudiced her unfavourably against him. Residents are invariably spoiled in every hospital: like curates in a country village, they get an exaggerated idea of their importance, which only the rough-and-tumble of the outside world afterwards effectually deflates.

It was an attitude of mind that stirred in her a cold

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disdain, earning her, even in her first month, the nickname "Duchess," which had followed her throughout her training. As a result she had developed an aloofness which kept her, in spite of her physical attractiveness, outside the radius of those *affaires* which bud, flourish and decay with such startling rapidity in the tropical atmosphere so characteristic of hospital life; and a certain nun-like attitude of mind had slowly grown in her, which was in reality a paradoxical example of sex-awareness, coming, as it did, into evidence when men of the resident type alone were concerned, leaving her free to express her natural self only with men much older or younger than herself. Consequently, as the sound of Fitzgerald's rapid footsteps came up the stairs, the gay, impulsive, smiling Nora receded into the background, the Nora who had recently dropped a parcel out of the window, thoroughly enjoying her part of the plot, disappeared; and a statuesque, beautiful, but rather cold Nora—the "Duchess"—quite incapable of any such escapade, took her place.

"Hello, kids! What devilment have you been up to now?" came a cheery voice, and he was smiling at the door.

Then his eyes fell upon her with a quick, thrilling surprise that checked his footsteps dead. For a moment he hesitated as his heart stopped for a fraction of a second, and then began to race again with suffocating speed. He hardly heard the formal words that opened to him the gateway of all knowledge. He was conscious only of a slim, cold white hand, and of an insane desire that possessed him to kneel and raise it to his lips.

"How d'ye do?" she said evenly.

CHAPTER IV

TREATING OF OPERATIONS, THE GREATER AND THE LESSER LOVE, AND THE "COMPLETE HOUSE-SURGEON"

THE telephone rang suddenly in his room, and Fitzgerald, putting aside the *Jacobson*, hitched down the receiver.

"That you, Fitz?" came a voice. "Want you to come down and look at a 'Dip' with me in 'Accident.'"

Going below, he found the owner of the voice, Perry, the second H.P., standing alongside the accident sister looking down at a child of about four lying on the couch. A nurse was hovering in the background; and outside in the waiting-room he passed an untidy, tearful, bloated woman, dressed in rusty black, evidently the mother, waiting in helpless abandon the verdict he was summoned to confirm.

Silently the three sets of experienced eyes watched the hoarse breathing. It was a case of diphtheritic laryngitis, and it was evident from the retraction of the little exposed chest that the most dreaded complication of all in this condition, namely, obstruction of the larynx, was threatening.

"Had any serum?" he queried abruptly.

"No. Hasn't been seen by any one before. Mother only became alarmed when the breathing got bad," answered Perry.

"She says, 'what could she do,' with a drunken husband and six children, and her out all day charing to feed them?" explained the sister in the matter-of-fact tone of

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one so accustomed to such details that they had ceased to stimulate her feelings.

Silently Fitzgerald felt the tiny thread-like running pulse. Then he looked at Perry.

"Well?" said Perry.

All three understood the question to mean, "Is it any use giving serum and waiting, or must the child be taken in and a tracheotomy performed at once?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Fitzgerald answered to the unspoken question. "We'd better do it as soon as possible."

"It will mean two 'specials,'" said the sister, looking at it from the administrative point of view.

"Can't help it," he answered shortly. "See to it, sister. Get the out-patient theatre ready. I'll tackle the mother," he added briskly, his mind being by now absolutely made up.

"Will you want stuff?" said Perry, moving off.

("Stuff" is hospital slang for chloroform.)

"Yes. Just a whiff."

"Righto."

The mother was now brought in, a mass of tearful ineptitude.

"Must yez keep her in, docthor?" she wailed.

"I'm afraid so, missus. We'll have to do something to her, you know."

"D'ye mean an operation?"

He nodded in reply.

"Och, docther jewel, docther darlin', don't be tellin' me that!" she wailed. "Wud ye be afther hurtin' me poor innocent darlin'? Couldn't ye be givin' her some-thin' to aise her like, an' let me take her home?"

And then followed the usual scene of more or less patient explanation which is the daily experience of every

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hospital. In things surgical it is so difficult for the young resident to appreciate the absolute ignorance of first principles amongst the public, so fatally easy to get annoyed by their apparent stupidity, their obstinacy even in the very face of death, their exasperating procrastination at times when every moment is worth untold gold, that many a worried, overworked house-surgeon finds himself at such times giving vent to his natural irritation in ways which he is heartily sorry for afterwards, sometimes even from sheer weariness and disgust at their seeming ingratitude permitting lives to be carried home to die—though this, perhaps, is seldom—not appreciating that what is as clear as noonday to his trained mind may not be so strikingly obvious to some one brought face to face with it for the first time, seeing it, too, in addition, through the distorting veil of natural emotion.

The nurse looked on with professional calm, faintly irritated, while Fitzgerald explained, as simply and quietly as he could, to the ignorance of the distracted mother. He was getting very tired, and a glance at the child showed him that the precious moments were slipping. At length he reached the ultimatum.

“You’ll have to choose, missus. If you take her away she will certainly be dead inside an hour; but if you let us do what we want you’ll probably have her home, smiling, in a few weeks.”

She did not understand the reasoning; but she listened to the statement, and looked at the kindly face. The quiet, confident eyes appealed to her, and she exclaimed impulsively—

“Oi’ll trust ye, docthor, to do what ye think best.”

“Thank you, missus,” he said quietly.

Then his manner changed abruptly. “Take the child away then, nurse,” he said briskly. “No, no, missus.

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Good God! you mustn't kiss her," he exclaimed hurriedly, catching her arm as she swept forward impulsively. "It's too frightfully contagious for anything. You wait here, and we'll let you know in ten minutes how she is."

All was ordered haste now. In less than a minute he was in the theatre scrubbing his hands, with a nurse waiting to help him on with his operating coat. Quickly he ran his eye over the instruments laid out, ready sterilised, in their white glazed trays awaiting his use. Then he nodded to Perry, who, chloroform mask in hand, was waiting at the head of the operating-table on which the pitiful little mite lay gasping for the precious oxygen denied it by a larynx half closed by the deadly membrane.

Presently the sweet, sickly smell of the anæsthetic stole through the white-glazed immaculate theatre. Everything was very quiet. Perry's eyes were fastened on the mask; Fitzgerald stood silently waiting the signal to begin; the sister stood opposite him ready to assist if necessary; and in the background the nurse was stolidly threading needles.

"Not much," said Fitzgerald, looking at the chloroform mask.

Perry took off the mask, pulled up an eyelid of the patient, looked up and nodded. The child lay perfectly still.

"Ready," said Perry.

The words seemed to galvanise the other into action.

"Knife," he said, stretching his hand towards the sister without looking, his whole attention being concentrated on the line of the throat his left fingers were carefully palpating.

Silently the sister put the knife into his waiting fingers; there was a rapid flash and cut; blood spurted and was as

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quickly checked; and he straightened his back for a moment.

"Hook, sister," he said quietly.

She handed it to him with leisurely haste.

"Now! Catch hold."

They changed hands; and with another clean straight cut the larynx was entered, and the hoarse sound of bubbling, rushing air was heard. He drew his face back rapidly to avoid the deadly splutter of the escaping fragments of membrane. His brows relaxed.

"Got it?" said Perry, calmly closing his drop-bottle as Fitzgerald slipped the dilator into position. Fitzgerald nodded, and the little fluted tracheotomy tube slipped home.

"Thank you, Perry. Thank you very much, sister," he said.

Perry nodded, and sauntered out of the room.

"It's the quickest you've done yet," commented the sister, as she tied the strings in position. A pleased smile came into Fitzgerald's eyes.

"Thank you," he said.

The child had fallen into a peaceful sleep, and the poor little struggling, overworked chest was now moving evenly up and down. Fitzgerald stood looking at it with quiet satisfaction.

"What about the mother?" queried the sister.

"Great Scott! I'd clean forgotten about her. Bring her in," he exclaimed.

She must have been just outside the door, for she was beside the table almost immediately.

"Is she all right, docthor?" she gasped, looking at the pale, death-like little form.

"Oh yes, mother. The worst part's over," he said cheerfully.

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“Och! Thanks be,” she gasped, sinking down weakly on the anæsthetist’s enamelled stool beside the table, smiling through her tears.

The sister watched her for a moment with rigid, professional calm. In her mind she looked upon her as a blot; for, with her tear-washed face, draggled skirts and mud-splashed, shapeless boots, she was an object of offence in the spotless, shining out-patient theatre—an object that irritated by its mere presence any one trained for years in the rigid discipline of asepsis.

Mentally she decided to give her five minutes before bundling her out; but by the time Fitzgerald had finished washing up her patience was exhausted.

“Now then, Mrs. Nolan,” she said briskly, “I think you’d better go home and look after the other children. You can come back again this evening and ask about your little girl. She’ll be all right now.”

Fitzgerald watched with a faint smile as she kindly, but firmly, bundled the mother out. Then he went over to the patient.

“I’ll carry her up to the ward, sister. You’re rather busy, I know,” he said.

The sister’s hard face relaxed somewhat as she watched him lift the child, wrapping the blankets carefully round.

“If they were all as considerate, and as good at their work, this hospital would be a lot easier to run,” she commented to the nurse when he was gone.

The nurse made no reply. Nurses are not expected to express elaborate opinions when a sister is around.

“I thought matron would have made a fuss about the extra nurses when I told her—this is the third in a fortnight—but she only said, ‘Oh, if it’s Mr. Fitzgerald’s case it’s all right,’ knowing he wouldn’t take one in unless it were necessary.”

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"I think she likes him," commented the nurse, encouraged by this unwonted loquacity.

"I'm sure she does. 'This set of residents don't worry her nearly so much as some. I remember when they used to plague——'" She stopped abruptly when she saw the look of rising interest in the nurse's face, and remembered her official position again.

"We'll have to hurry and get these things tidied up, and the instruments dried. I'm off duty now, really," she said sharply.

Meanwhile Fitzgerald was proceeding rapidly along towards the observation ward with his precious bundle. There he found the matron.

"I hope I'm not too much of a nuisance to you, matron," he said apologetically.

"Oh no. I've got two extra nurses in the home just now. I can give you a 'special' for night easily."

Together they watched the tent being rigged up for the bronchitis kettle, before he began getting his anti-toxin syringe ready. After the injection they stood looking quietly down at the child.

"By the way, I hope you're giving me a good nurse for night," he said casually.

"Yes, an excellent one—Nurse Townsend. I don't think you know her," she answered.

* * * * *

Throughout the afternoon, whenever his mind lay fallow for a moment, he found it constantly recurring to the prospective meeting in the coming night; and a haunting fear in consequence obsessed him lest any one should guess the tenor of his thoughts. It seemed, therefore, to his hypersensitive mind almost more than a coincidence that Connellan should remark, apropos of nothing, as they were smoking quietly over the fire after dinner—

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"I can't get over Gibbon getting engaged to a nurse."

"Why not?" he asked rather abruptly.

"Why not! You know as well as I that it's a fatal thing to do. I don't blame 'dressers' getting infatuated. We've all done it in our time. But when you've reached the hoary antiquity of a house appointment you ought to know better. For one thing, the costume is so attractive that no one can tell what a nurse really looks like till he has seen her in the disillusionment of ordinary clothes, and compared her with other women. For another, the common interest in disease covers incompatibilities of mind so much that they often only appear when it is too late to be warned by them; and, if you want a third, nurses never have any money, and so, if a man wants to marry one, unless he's got private means, he's got to rush into the first rotten practice that offers to make a home for her, overworking himself to save money afterwards, pursued always by the dread that, until he does so, if anything should happen to him—and he knows what the risks are—she will probably be left penniless on an unthinking, careless world. Nice prospect, isn't it?"

"Oh yes; I know all that," said Fitzgerald dismally. "But if you fall in love, it isn't that you're thinking of—it's just what sort of a chance a worm like you can possibly have at all, at all. Nothing else counts."

On his night round an urgent desire to postpone his visit to her ward took possession of him. He felt that he must delay the period of his visit until as late as possible, so as to prevent himself from staying longer than was absolutely necessary. It was that feeling that kept him lingering in "No. 12," till a growing restlessness in the charge-nurse penetrated to his mind, usually almost feminine in its intuitive perception, suggesting he was no longer welcome.

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“By Jove! I must be off. Good-night, Nurse Marr,” he said.

“Good-night, Mr. Fitzgerald,” she answered, with evident relief.

She waited till she saw him turn the corner at the end of the corridor; and then, following him a few yards, stopped at a door opening on to the corridor, gave a peculiar knock, and hurried back to the kitchen. In a few seconds the door opened quietly, and she was presently joined by Hickey, another of the residents, evidently in a very bad temper.

“What kept that stuck-up ass Fitzgerald so long to-night?” he growled jealously. “Was he making love to you?”

The smile faded from her eyes, and she answered wearily—

“Och! Are you at it again? Sure, ye know ye have no call.”

“I want an answer, not back-chat,” he said sullenly.

“No, he wasn’t, and you know it, Michael,” she answered, wilting painfully. “Why are ye always quarrelling with me?”

“D’ye love me?” he said hoarsely, clutching at her shoulder.

She drew back quickly from his grasp. “Love ye!” She laughed hysterically. Then, hushing her voice to a passionate whisper, “Love ye! It’s cause to know, ye have, that I love ye, and that’s what makes me think you’ll be tiring of me now.”

Her hands fumbled for a moment in her apron, her eyes blind with unshed tears, her shoulders drooping pitifully. Suddenly his arms came round her, all repentance.

“I am a brute, Sheila, and you’re far too good for me;

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but I can't stand that fellow Fitzgerald, somehow. He gets on my nerves. Forgive me, darlin'."

"You do love me, Michael, don't you?" she said, nestling her head on his shoulder.

"Yes, sure."

Meanwhile Fitzgerald had found his way to the observation ward containing his case. When he entered she was bending over the cot holding a feeder to the little patient's lips, and for a moment he stood arrested, quietly watching. Then his eyes softened with that strange, unquiet yearning which is the expression of the deepest primitive instinct—"biological continuity," the physical basis of all love—as he noted the unconscious Madonna-like attitude of the unstudied pose, throwing into relief as it did the alluring sex curves of breast and hip, the long white rounded throat below the uptilted chin, the coaxing, clear-cut lips, startlingly red against a complexion of ivory white.

His entrance had been so quiet that she had not heard, but now the feeling of his eyes made her turn; the long eyelashes curled upwards—he never forgot the sudden beauty of the movement—and the violet eyes were gazing at him. If his life had depended on it he could not have spoken at that moment. He stood arrested in the same attitude, unconscious that he was still staring at her. A faint colour spreading from behind her ears began to invade her cheeks. She straightened up.

"Good-evening," she said, and her voice brought him to himself.

"I beg your pardon, nurse," he said hastily, finding his tongue. "I came to see how my kiddie was."

Mechanically she handed him the chart. "She's pretty fair," she said. "She's coughed the inner tube out once since I came on, but she's taking very well."

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Together they bent over the flushed little figure; and, the routine of years now gripping him, all feelings of restraint, embarrassment, emotion vanished, temporarily at least, to the limbo of things forgotten. They were simply doctor and nurse; each fell into their respective positions with the celerity of constant practice, and each was quite at ease.

As they watched a sudden spasm seized the worn little body, the child's face became swollen, blue, the eyes bulged horribly, desperately she fought for breath. Mechanically the nurse's hand stretched back to the table for a feather. His eyes followed the movement.

"No; I never use them. Let's have the inner tube out," he said.

Silently she bent to obey the order, her face just over the child's neck in the dim light; and then a sudden horror seized him, a dread which by its unexpected violence took him absolutely by surprise. With a quick, dexterous movement his hand came between her eyes and the tube.

"Keep back," he said quickly, urgently.

At the same time his fingers closed on the little silver flange, and in a moment the tube was in his hands. A hoarse, spasmodic rattle followed, and something wet struck the back of his turning wrist. It was a piece of the deadly diphtheritic membrane that had been blocking the tube. He held his wrist up to her.

"Thank you," she said quietly, looking at it and then glancing up at him. "One ought to think of the risk, but one never does."

"No, one never does," he echoed.

Every year life after life is lost through this same cause, and every year one hears the same remark; but knowledge of an ever-present danger dulls by its mere frequency the minds of those exposed to it; and no class of people suffer

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more from this common characteristic of human nature than those associated with the art of healing.

The child was now breathing quietly again, the cause of the attack having been removed. Mechanically he moved over to the steriliser and dropped the infected tube into its softly boiling contents.

"Have you got the other?" he said over his shoulder.

"Yes."

"Well, put it in while I wash my hands."

He turned as he spoke to the wash-basin in the corner, and there, having carried out his last order, she presently joined him, holding the towel ready for his dripping hands.

A slight noise in the ward made him turn round as he was stretching for it.

"Good-evening, sister," he said.

"Good-evening, Mr. Fitzgerald," the little moth-like woman answered, fluttering to the side of the cot, where she looked at the "steamer" and shifted its funnel slightly under the tent.

"Busy?"

"Not very. We've just taken an 'extra-capsular' into 'No. 1.' I think he's going to have D.T.'s," she answered in the same monotonous voice, the fact that the man was, as she said, likely to develop delirium tremens not being to her a subject for emotion, merely representing instead the probable necessity of an extra nurse.

"Oh, well, if he does, there's no one can handle him better than you, sister."

The remark was quite spontaneous, the result of having seen her, a week before, control a great burly navy whose violence two residents had previously not been able to subdue. She flushed slightly under the commendation, showing there was still some red blood in her veins. Coming fresh to the hospital, his quick mind had noted in

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her some characteristics that had escaped his predecessors. It had been a tradition that between her and the residents there was constant war. They treated her as an open enemy, and she had retorted with the corresponding courtesies. By accident Fitzgerald discovered he had known her father, the one being in the world she absolutely worshipped, and the mere kindly mention of the fact gave him an immediate position in her atrophied emotions. His memories of the quite obscure country practitioner, eminently vague, had been somewhat diplomatically brightened afterwards, and she had been drawn thereby out of her shell to an extent that was a source of furtive amusement to the nursing staff, who saw in it merely a Machiavellian manoeuvre to lull suspicion, overlooking the natural kindness underlying it all. Even Nora, watching them now with level eyes, wondered what was his object; for she knew, as everything is known in hospital, the already pronounced partiality of the sister towards him; and her rigid mind, intolerant of subterfuge, already suspected him of diplomacy.

Had she heard the rest of the conversation after they left the ward together she would have more than suspected—she would have taken the view prevalent in the home as incontrovertible.

“You’ll keep an eye on the child during the night, sister,” he said in the corridor. “I shall be round later in ‘9’ writing up this morning’s ‘ops.,’ so I’ll drop in again on my way to bed. It’s been a tiring day. I wish old Martha was awake. I feel I shall fall asleep if I don’t have some tea.”

“Has she gone to bed?”

“Oh, sure. I’d half a notion of asking the nurse in ‘9’ to make me some, only I’m afraid it wouldn’t do.”

“Oh no; it would never do,” she echoed hurriedly.

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"No, of course not. Against all regulations, worse luck. I think I'll just make sure Martha has turned in. I'm dying for a cup. Good-night, sister."

"Good—eh—night, Mr. Fitzgerald," she said hesitatingly, watching him disappear down the corridor, feeling vaguely, yet uncomfortably, in her stiff, old-maidish, custom-ridden mind that she had been guilty of inhospitality—a cardinal sin amongst Irish people.

"I should have offered to send some round to him," she murmured to herself. "But that would have been just as bad," she added, on thinking over it, "for I couldn't have taken it to his rooms myself. I wonder if——"

Half-an-hour later, when he appeared in "9," he was met with a profound salaam of mischievous solemnity.

"Why this thusness?" he said.

"How did you do it?" she retorted.

He looked suspiciously blank, and she laughed in his face.

"Don't tell me you haven't worked it somehow. Sister's just been in, and she has actually suggested—the sister—suggested—that I should give you some tea to-night. It's incredible. How did you do it?"

"It's a spell I learnt from a leprachaun. After the last narrow squeak I felt something must be done; so I've put the formula on her."

"I see. You've explained it perfectly," she said. Then she chuckled suddenly. "It was so funny. She was so sorry for you—thirsty—all alone—and me with your tea-things ready in the cupboard. It was hard to look sympathetic, and say, 'Yes, sister; no, sister.' I think I've hurt myself, twisted something, trying not to laugh. But I didn't, and here we are."

She gave a reminiscent smile.

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"I can't get over it. I think you're almost too clever at times, Fitz. That telephone call the other night, for instance, was an inspiration of genius. I could have kissed you for it——"

"You can do so still. Never put off till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day," he murmured, with twinkling eyes.

"No, no," she said, retreating rapidly. "I don't feel anything like so grateful now."

"Laodicean!" he murmured reproachfully. "Why didn't I come round when you were glowing?"

There was a faint call from the ward, and she left him to attend to it. "I can't make out why I should be able to play at love with Moira Otway so easily, whereas when I am alone with Nora Townsend I feel like a tongue-tied fool," he thought. "I suppose it's the risk makes me so afraid. Oh, Lord! Women are a nuisance! Let's get to work."

He turned irritably into the ward, seeking in the anodyne of routine to forget. Finding his pile of notes carefully laid out for him, he drew his chair up, and presently, to his own surprise, when he thought of it later, became so absorbed that even the frou-frou of her skirts several times in passing did not make him look up.

"Are you nearly finished?" she murmured finally, with mock plaintiveness. "I'm getting quite hot and cross—like a bun."

"Another five minutes," he answered, barely glancing up.

Sitting opposite her in the glow of the great kitchen fire afterwards, while he was smoking a final cigarette, they fell into desultory talk. She was busy over a set of "strings" of drawn linenwork intended for the "string supper" of a nurse who would be attaining to that honour

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in another week's time; and while her eyes were bent over the work he watched the firelight flickering over the downy smoothness of her cheek, losing itself in the coils of her hair, rising and falling, accentuating now the curve of an eyelash, now the tip of her half-hidden ear, suggesting, half revealing, as if actuated by the very spirit of the divine imp Eros himself. Slowly, as he watched, a curious wish formed nebulous in his mind, grew gradually concrete and was born—a wish that this woman, and not Nora, was the woman that he loved, that she could by her presence evoke the strange, disturbing, painful, yet delightful, psychic stimulus produced on him by the other woman against his vehement wish.

Of Nora he knew nothing—her temperament, her likes and dislikes—the currents of her being were an uncharted sea to him. He did not know even if she gave him a single thought—the probabilities were that she did not—and he resented with all the vigour of his strong young mind the dominance her presence exercised over him. As a natural reaction, therefore, he turned almost unconsciously to the vivacious, warm-hearted, impulsive woman whom he had recognised as a kindred spirit the very first moment he came into her ward, a stranger, introduced by the resident leaving.

Suddenly she looked up, caught his eye on her, and smiled.

“Well?” she said. “I’ll give you the penny later.”

“I was just thinking what a dangerous thing a woman doing needlework is,” he answered. “She can stoop over it when she wishes to hide her thoughts. She can lift and readjust it when she requires time to evade a question or answer a remark. Again she can look down, ask a question casually, and, looking up, suddenly surprise the answer

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before one has time to conceal it in speech. In fact, it is like the fan in the hands of the Spanish beauty : a weapon equally powerful in attack or defence."

"And what about poor man?" she laughed.

"When snuff went out with swords and knee-breeches man's last defence was gone," he murmured regretfully. "A snuff-box, judiciously handled, must have helped our forefathers enormously. It was chiefly that, I think, gave them their reputation for repartee. I have seen good work done in a modern comedy with an eyeglass, but there is a suggestion of vacuity associated with it that makes it perilous. Fixing your scarf-pin suggests a hasty and incomplete toilet. Pulling the ends of your moustache looks fatuous, specially if you are clean-shaven like me. Fiddling with a watch-chain suggests the heavy father, and twiddling one's thumbs is simply idiotic. No. I'm afraid we're done for. The modern man is utterly defenceless. That is why he dreads afternoon calls so much; for then, in desperation for something to do, he finds himself proposing and getting accepted sometimes before he knows where he is."

"Were you ever in love, Dermot?" she said, carefully picking a thread.

He started slightly; but she did not look up. Instead, she bent further down to search for her scissors, which had fallen on the floor.

"Dozens of times," he answered, at the same time retrieving the errant scissors.

"Not that sort. I mean seriously," she pouted, looking a little flushed after the stooping.

"They were always serious, but no one would believe me, knowing it is the main duty of every right-minded house-surgeon to make love to his nurses."

"There's a mistaken idea prevalent amongst the public

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that they're in hospital to look after the patients," she retorted.

"Same thing," he answered hardily. "You know as well as I that one never looks after one's wards as thoroughly as when one has an *affaire* in each. That should be one's ideal. It's a bit wearing, of course, at times, and one wants a good memory not to mix the appointments outside. But it's so good for the patients."

"Dear me! But how self-sacrificing of you, and how complicated life must be! You really ought to write a book about it, and call it the *Complete House-Surgeon*," she laughingly retorted.

"You have discovered my secret," he exclaimed dramatically. "I am writing it up. I have got the first chapter ready."

"Pig!" she exclaimed indignantly. "And you never told me. Begin!" she commanded, leaning back comfortably in the creaking basket-chair, and kicking one little foot leisurely to and fro. He watched the delicate curve of the instep showing through the openwork stocking for a moment in silence.

"I can't," he said. "Your ankle's distracting me."

Instantly the offending member was withdrawn.

"Thank you. Chapter one. The heart—always begin right at the centre and work both ways, 'Otter.' It's the modern method. The older school of novelists spent many pages recording the family tree of the heroine, in order, I think, that parents and guardians might know she was thoroughly respectable, and a fit person for the young things to meet—the young things for whom all novels were supposed to be written in Victorian times. Now that the young things of the present day themselves write all the risky novels, in lurid covers at a shilling, which one

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buys and hides behind the bound volumes of the *Quiver*, all this preliminary clearing of the ground is unnecessary, and one starts with a half-sentence in the middle of a conversation." He stopped suddenly. "Where was I?" he said.

"You were talking about the 'heart,'" she reminded him solemnly.

"Oh yes. The heart is situated, roughly speaking, behind the fourth left rib. This may seem to you a useless anatomical detail; but I can assure you, after watching the stage lover placing his hand on what he fondly imagines the correct spot, I have been forced to the disagreeable conclusion that he does not know he is placing it, not over the centre of his affections, but of his digestion."

"Perhaps in these days he is nearer the mark than you think," she interrupted, "and that may account for the value of Punch's advice on how to keep a husband's affections."

"You may be right," he answered sadly. "For I think there is no doubt that as man and the race grows older, the seat of the affections, obeying the laws of gravity, does sink. The heart," he continued, "is not heart-shaped, notwithstanding the attempts of pastry-cooks and valentine artists to make us believe so; neither does it leap up when it beholds a rainbow in the sky, in spite of the assertion of St. Paul to that effect."

"It was Wordsworth," she protested feebly.

"In addition," he continued, taking no notice of her correction, "those people who state that at times their hearts have come into their mouths, or sunk into their boots, are putting an anatomical strain on the credulity of the British public, a strain which is quite unjustifiable outside politics."

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"But I've heard of people who wear their hearts on their sleeves," she interpolated.

"Well, if they do it's a very dangerous habit, and shows a morbid taste in jewellery which I would be sorry to see you imitate, 'Otter.'"

"I don't intend to," she answered hastily.

"Of course not," he murmured absently. "You may have heard of people who possessed hearts of stone. I remember reading a chapter in a novel entitled *Mary of the Stony Heart*. It's a myth, 'Otter,' believe me, for I have examined several reputed specimens."

"Were they nice to you?" she queried.

He took no notice, but continued—

"I now approach the most important part of the chapter. It is divided into sections: how to approach the heart of a 'probationer,' a 'staff-nurse,' a 'sister,' a 'matron.' The differential methods are very delicate, and require prolonged study. I am still collecting material."

"Is your study of staff-nurses complete?" she said hardily.

"The subject is vast. There is no finality," he answered, looking at her gravely.

Glancing up at him, she laughed with a laugh he could not fathom.

A silence fell between them. The foot that had distracted him came out into the flickering light again. Leaning forward, she poked the fire skilfully; and the light, shooting up strongly, outlined the piquant profile of the small uptilted face, and the curves of the tender, gravely smiling mouth.

As he watched her, something sweetly desirable in the pose—visions of a home of his own, a fireside, the company of such a woman as this—got into his throat. A curious hungry sensation of loneliness took possession of

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him. He felt the desolate obsession that comes to a man in a strange city when he chances upon a pair of lovers—eyes seeking eyes in brightening gladness—and feels there is not one in all the teeming thousands round whose heart would pulse for him.

“I was thinking of something,” he said softly.

The change in the timbre of his voice caught her ear. She turned and looked at him oddly.

What he intended to say he never afterwards knew; for, in the pause while she waited, the “buzzer” sounded clearly in the depths of the ward, bringing him sharply to himself by the call of duty.

He passed his hand over his eyes as if removing some nebulous obstruction. “Probably me,” he said, moving with leisurely haste into the ward.

Then in the silence she heard him say—

“Yes, sister. I’m still here. Yes, I’ve finished. Why, of course I’ll come and give you a hand. Yes, now, at once.”

She watched his face as he came through again. The professional mask had fallen over it. Everything else but the call in hand had been forgotten. He looked at her absently.

“Good-night, ‘Otter,’” he said mechanically.

“Good-night, Fitz,” she answered, her eyes following him down the corridor curiously. “I wonder what it was,” she thought.

CHAPTER V

A RIVER INTERLUDE. THE THIRD INTRUSION OF PIP. LOVE AND THE BACHELOR GIRL

IT was a pleasant afternoon in early spring; and so reacting to the barometer as he always did, and blissfully conscious that he had no more lectures to attend that day, Pip's spirits rose.

"I'll go and root up old Dermot before I go to the Boat Club," he thought. Half-an-hour later, therefore, found him passing through the hospital gates, the sound of voices and the sharp ping of tennis rackets coming to him as he went under the archway. It was Connellan and Perry working off their superfluous energy while they were confined to hospital by accident duty; and accordingly he sauntered leisurely along the cloister inside the hospital quadrangle until he found a seat under its cover from which to watch the play. The ward doors on the ground floor opened directly on to this stone-flagged promenade, those on the two succeeding ones on the enclosed corridors supported by its columns above. The open windows of these corridors looked out upon the quadrangle; and through them the white-capped heads of passing nurses could be seen. Two of the latter had stopped in "9" corridor and were looking down on the game below, as he settled himself comfortably on the garden chair, and proceeded to light a cigarette.

It was the end of a set, and both the players, flushed with exercise, came over to him.

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"Have a go with me, Pip. Conn's too good. He doesn't give me time to get my blood up," said Perry. "It doesn't matter about boots on this asphalt court."

Pip smiled at him sweetly. "So! And you want me to act as punch-ball, do you? Thanks awfully, old chap; but my doctor only allows me the gentlest of exercise in my present delicate state of health."

"What a useless beggar you are, Pip," grumbled Perry in an aggrieved tone.

"Now, don't get abusive. Why not try him again, instead? Look! The eyes of beauty are upon you."

They both glanced up at the two watching faces. A low mellow laugh came echoing across the square, and the heads temporarily disappeared.

"There! That was for you, Perry! Conn's waiting. Go in and win!" He lay back comfortably, and watched them as they played.

"That's it, Perry. Keep him on the base-line. Don't let him near the net or he'll finish you."

"Distinctly my rôle is to sit and smoke and give sage advice," he thought, sunning himself contentedly. "On a day like this one wants nothing better than a bovine existence—to stand knee-deep in the lush green grass with eyes full of a great nothingness, and thoughts reduced to their simplest rudiments. Heigho." He watched the faint blue smoke curl languidly from the tip of his cigarette, the strenuous figures in the foreground rushing frantically after the elusive ball adding by contrast a double contentment to his mood. The two faces appeared once more at the corridor window. It was obvious matron was not in the hospital.

"If it were not for women," he thought, "life would be much less complicated, but—Lord! wouldn't it be dull."

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Overhead in the old bell-tower the clock struck four, and two rookety-cooing pigeons, startled from their amorous wooing by the sound, flapped across to the roof over "11." He looked at the players. It was a "sudden-death deuce" game, and Connellan was straining every muscle to bring it off. Twice, however, in his over-anxiety he smashed into the net. "Game, and——" said Perry quietly.

Connellan nodded, exhausted, wiping his forehead with his bare forearm.

A faint sound of applause came from the open window above. Perry looked up and smiled. Then the two heads disappeared, but as they did so a bunch of violets fell on the middle of the court, at his feet.

"Spoils to the victor," said Pip.

"Silly ass," retorted Perry.

"I say, who is coming up to the boat-club with me, and where is Dermot?"

"I am, if you give me fifteen minutes to tub and change, and if you can persuade Dermot to chuck microbe hunting in the lab. and come with us. Chivvy him out while I am dressing," said Connellan. Then he glanced whimsically at Perry. "Matron's out, so Perry will be only too delighted to do duty for both of us; for, from what I see in his hand, I think he'll have an urgent call to the 'sterilising-room' shortly." As he spoke he moved rapidly out of reach.

"I'll break your neck if I catch you," said the exasperated Perry, who was one of those people whose sole idea of repartee is to threaten violence.

Twenty minutes later the three friends were swinging along the Island Bridge Road.

"Hello, Fitz." "Hello, Conn." "Buck up, Pip, we're waiting for you," came several sets of voices, when

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at length they found themselves in the big dressing-room. There were some ten or twelve men about in various stages of *déshabille*. A couple of juniors in aggressively new sweaters and "shorts" were sitting on the table, ready dressed, waiting for a coach.

The captain came bustling in. "Hurry up, you beggars. Sides!" he called out, and the crew rapidly got ready and clattered down to the slip.

Then he caught sight of the two visitors.

"I say, Dermot, you're just the man I want."

"Don't, Trench, don't," he groaned. "Don't, if you love me. I see in your eye you want me to exert myself. Have mercy," and he spread out his hands deprecatingly.

"Och, stuff, Dermot. I want you to get up a decent 'scratch' crew to breathe the 'trial eight.'"

"Good Lord deliver us! I say, just feel my arms. Putty! And look at the lower chest I'm raising. I couldn't do it. Honestly, old chap, I couldn't. Besides, where the deuce am I to raise a crew?"

"Oh, there's yourself, and Conn here, and Perry, and I could get you one or two. Where's the difficulty?"

"My dear fellow! Three men out of one hospital at once. You speak as one that knoweth not. Grasp the fact that the health of Dublin is hanging on our shoulders."

"Bother the health of Dublin! You're only blather-skitin', Fitz. Honestly, I want you rather badly, and if you'll only hold them from the 'Church' to the 'Big Bend' it's all I'll ask. Just to oblige. I know you're the one man to get a crew from nowhere."

Fitzgerald shrugged his shoulders in comic despair.

"Hear to him, Conn! Shure it's the County Cork that can butther yees! I suppose we'll have to do it. Damn you, Trench."

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"Thanks awfully," said Trench. Then, his mind relieved, he glanced round.

"Hello. What are you two youngsters doing? Why aren't you out tubbing?" he said, noticing the pair who were now alone with them in the room.

"Our coach hasn't turned up," said one meekly.

Trench turned quickly.

"I say, Conn, d'ye mind taking these kids out as far as the bend? Keep them out of the way of the 'eight.' You don't mind, do you? I want to talk to Fitz," he said briskly.

"Certainly. Come along, youngsters."

A blue-coated boatman put his head inside the door.

"The crew's waitin', sorr," he said to Trench.

"All right, Thomson. Down in a minute."

"There's another bike below, so come along, Fitz. I want you to have a look at them. They're a bit 'rough' as yet, but they're a likely lot."

Together they went down to the slip. The crew were manœuvring into position, and as Trench and Fitzgerald appeared on the open the clear voice of the cox came to them.

"Paddle bow and three. Back down stroke and six. E—e—easy all. Paddle bow. E—easy. Trim the boat——"

The sharp nose of the "eight" was now pointing directly up-stream, and at a nod from Trench the watching cox gripped his tiller-ropes more firmly.

"Forward—are you rea—dy—paddle," came the quick, sharp summons, and the beautiful boat, as if the words had made it alive, shot instantly upstream, the long yellow oars, ripping through the mirrored water, catching the sunlight on the wet blades as they feathered, rising and

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falling to the powerful even swing of the crew, with the regularity of a clockwork mechanism.

"Not bad," said Fitzgerald, watching with the critical eye of an expert.

"Not too dusty," muttered Trench.

The rhythmic click of the oars came down to them on the soft afternoon air as they mounted and started along the tow-path in pursuit. Behind them Connellan and his "pair" were moving slowly from the slip.

Trench with a megaphone cycled in front. Fitzgerald kept a yard or so behind. Their inverted images undulated in the disturbed water till they came level with the crew, when they broke into a thousand glittering fragments gyrating in every direction like a phantasmagoria.

"Sit up—three— Eyes in the boat—two,—time, damn it— Time—" roared Trench. Then they cycled level with the crew for a hundred yards in silence, cox glancing sharply over at the coach at regular intervals, till at length he nodded.

Then, waiting till they were gripping the water at the beginning of the next stroke came the order—

"E—e—asy—all."

The oars came up with a flash, each man turned his blade flat, letting it skim over the water, and there was a curling swish, as the boat slowly lost way and finally stopped.

The stiff figures relaxed, elbows on knees, and looked at Trench, who had got off his bicycle and was leaning over it.

"Bow," he said, "you're 'washing out' still. Remember what I said to you, and bring your blade high up on to your chest. Two," he continued (in real life it was Pip he was speaking to, but in the world of sport it was merely two), "how often have I told you to keep your eyes in the boat. You're not here to enjoy

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the scenery, but to watch the back of the man in front of you. Keep your eyes glued to his spine. Three, your slide's 'rocky' still. You must hold your back like a ramrod, and get in at the beginning, or it will run away with you. Four, don't 'screw,' and don't hang over your 'beginning' so. Five, you're letting your head wobble. It disturbs the trim of the boat. Six, you're swinging better. Keep it long. Seven, watch stroke carefully. Bowside is just a trifle late in picking up the time. Stroke, don't let them hurry you. Keep it long. All of you—watch the time. You're better together, but you're far from perfect yet. Stroke, I want you to paddle a bit—no work. Then when I say 'Row,' put it in for all you're worth. All right, cox. Go ahead."

Cox sat up sharply like a terrier.

"Paddle bow and two. E—asy. Trim the boat. Forward all. Are—you—ready—Paddle."

They swung off like an automaton, the eight backs rising and sinking in unison, the oars gripping the water with a crisp uniformity that brought a look of satisfaction into Trench's watching eyes. Silently he and Fitzgerald mounted and followed. As they came level he suddenly shouted "Row."

The rowlocks rattled with a vicious click, the oars caught the water with a simultaneous zip, zip, zip, raising each a rounded hillock of green water at regular intervals as the long delicate boat shot like a racehorse against the stream.

Trench and Fitzgerald cycled rapidly to keep level.

"E—asy all," shouted Trench. The oars flashed up, turned, and were still.

"That's much better," he said cordially, and the crew looked pleased. They rested for a minute.

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"You might turn her now, cox, and we'll have a couple of starts home."

On the way down they passed Connellan's pair in "fixed seats," lying near the off bank, and he turned his head to watch them.

"That's what you fellows have to imitate," he said. "Arms working like pistons, backs like ramrods, oars pulled in high on your chest as if you wanted to smash it, then down as if to break your knees, and forward as if to knock the wind out of the man in front." His "pair" looked at the rhythmic precision of the "eight" with envious eyes.

"I suppose we'll get the hang of it some time," said bow in a discouraged voice.

"Lord, yes! Of course you will," said Connellan cheerfully. "Let's get back now. Paddle, stroke. Back down, bow. E—asy. Paddle, bow. E—asy. Forward all. Paddle."

When he got up to the dressing-room full of men playfully squabbling over the shower-bath in the corner, or rubbing each other down, he found Fitzgerald sitting on the table waiting for him, and Pip just struggling into his collar.

"We'll have to buck up, Conn. I rather fancy Perry wants to go out, so we'll bring Pip back to dinner with us, as an antidote to Mr. Michael Hickey's undiluted company," said Fitzgerald.

"Don't forget about that 'scratch' crew, Fitz; I'm depending on you," Trench called out as they were leaving.

After dinner Pip followed the other two from the mess-room to Fitzgerald's sitting-room.

"I say. That fellow Hickey is rather a snorter," he

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murmured casually, as he drew the most comfortable chair in the room up to the fire.

"Class B," said Dermot shortly, striking a match on the sole of the inevitable evening shoe which residents in almost every hospital wear morning, noon and night, because they make so little noise, and are so easy to get in and out of.

"He's the fly in the ointment. We've got a very decent crew here otherwise, though most of them are 'Surgeon's' men," said Connellan.

"Get's my rag out somehow," said Dermot.

"I do not love thee, Dr. Hickey,
'Tis not because thy name is Mickey,
But that somehow I cannot stick thee.
I do not love thee, Dr. Hickey,"

improvised Pip.

Dermot turned to say something; but at that moment the telephone rang. Casually he unhitched the receiver. "Accident. Yes, all right, I'm coming," and he strolled towards the door.

Pip allowed a silence of about a minute to elapse; then he turned sharply on his half-somnolent neighbour. "I say, Conn. What's the matter between Dermot and Nora Townsend?"

Connellan opened his eyes wide in surprise. "What?" he said, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

Pip looked disappointed. "You haven't noticed it, then?"

"Noticed what?" said Connellan lazily, yet inwardly very much on the alert.

"Look here, waken up. I want you to think. Let me put it like this: here's the best-looking woman either of us have seen for a month of Sundays. She's shut up practically with no one but Dermot to talk to. He

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ought to be making love to her. Now, why isn't he? Is there any one else?"

"No, there's no one else. But why should he?" said Connellan amusedly.

Pip shrugged his shoulders with impatience.

"Why should he? Because he ought not to be able to help it. Don't you know that every beautiful woman expects to be made love to, every pretty woman demands it, every plain woman hopes for it. Every man, deep down in his heart, thinks he is a Don Juan; every woman, no matter how plain, clings to the belief that she is a siren. Given youth, passable good looks, and constant juxtaposition, it is almost impossible, therefore, to avoid making and being made love to," he said with conviction.

Connellan laughed gently.

"How do you know they're not?" he queried.

"Oh, well, of course I'm in love with her myself," answered Pip airily, "so I get her to meet me in Grafton Street sometimes, just to make the other fellows envious. I saw her there yesterday; and I discovered that Dermot doesn't stay more than five minutes, on an average, in her ward on his round. That's how I found out he was madly in love with her."

Connellan sat up sharply.

"Great Scott! Why? Where's the logic in that?"

Pip gazed at him compassionately.

"Man. You make me tired. There's no other way out of it. You know every nurse cooped up like that expects to be amused; it's the plain duty of the man in charge of the case; and it's a duty he usually performs cheerfully, unless she is a 'gargoyle.'"

Connellan nodded sagely.

"Well, then. If Dermot were making love to Nora Townsend it would only be what one would naturally

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expect; but if he isn't—and we know he isn't—one has got to look out for something abnormal. That means one of two things, love or hate. If he hated her, you would have been sure to know; there would have been some cause; he would have had no reason for concealing his dislike. You can see at once, then, that the chances of him hating her are rather remote. That leaves only the other.”

Again Connellan nodded gravely.

“Yes. But how, then, do you account for him avoiding her?” he said, waiting curiously to see if Pip arrived at the same explanation as himself.

“Oh, that's easy. Old Dermot has always had a dread that he might fall in love with some one whom he would want to marry. Dermot's a wild bachelor. He doesn't want to run any such risks; and recognising that Nora Townsend is a great danger, is afraid to stay in her company any longer than is absolutely necessary. Does that satisfy you?” he said after a pause.

Connellan gazed at him with open admiration.

“If I live long enough I shall see you Lord Chancellor,” he answered.

“I dare say,” murmured Pip, with characteristic modesty. “But look here,” he added. “This is between ourselves. The dear old boy mustn't think we're butting in. It's his 'funeral,' savvy?”

Connellan nodded. “I savvy,” he murmured solemnly. “But what about her?” he added as an afterthought.

Pip paused a moment. “I don't know,” he said. “I'm not so young as I used to be; and so I no longer profess to understand women. Of course, a beauty like Nora Townsend is rather used to admiration. She's quite accustomed to men bothering her; and has developed a somewhat icy power of protecting herself from undesired

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attentions when she likes. But all the same, though she probably doesn't want to be bothered with Dermot or any one else, it's quite possible she may be rather surprised that he has not tried to make more use of his opportunities, particularly as she knows it's not in the least like him to refrain—he is rather a gay old dog. I think, therefore, it's quite on the cards she may be curious. It is a most interesting problem, and with or without Dermot's permission I propose to reconnoitre."

An hour later, therefore, saw him, in defiance of all hospital regulations, calmly seated in the observation ward talking to her with merry, shining eyes. Dermot had brought him round, carefully read the day report, asked a few questions, given the necessary directions, and then left him in possession.

It had all been strictly professional, a model of how such things should be done. For a moment the automatic perfection of it had completely absorbed his attention: for Dermot's minute observance of detail, his rapid comprehensive survey of the child's progress, the careful directions he gave in case of eventualities, had been a revelation of the complete scientific method to his keenly analytical mind. He had had it explained to him why an attempt to leave out the ordinary tracheotomy tube permanently had been found premature; and Dermot had demonstrated for his benefit the mechanism of the ingenious two-way substitute they had inserted in its place, intended to gradually accustom the larynx to resume its normal functions eventually unaided. He had noticed how she stood, listening with the quiet deference of the perfectly trained nurse, looking absolutely capable, answering Dermot's questions shortly and simply, taking in the directions he gave with a quiet nod of comprehension, her large violet eyes looking at him the while.

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It was a Dermot he did not know, and like every one of any imagination watching a perfect workman for the first time, he felt proportionally impressed.

"You will have to be particularly careful to-night, nurse," said Dermot gravely, in leaving.

"Yes, Mr. Fitzgerald," she answered in the low, mellow voice that always sent his pulses thrilling underneath the mask of apparent coldness. That was all. There was a complete absence of emotion, as if both had been cleverly trained automata. Even Pip's eye, keenly on the look-out for any sign, no matter how trivial, had not been able to detect one; and so thrown back upon himself he began to doubt his diagnosis.

"You people take the responsibilities of life and death very calmly," he remarked, after Dermot had gone.

"Do we? I suppose we do," she answered. "Would you like some tea before sister comes round?"

He laughed at the characteristic reply.

"Thank you. I'm a curate for tea. Do you ever offer it to Dermot?" he inquired casually.

"Oh no. He has his in '9,'" she answered with baffling evenness.

"Then I'm the first Fitzgerald to be honoured. I wish it was a love-philtre," he murmured lightly.

"Why, you absurd boy?" she laughed.

He bowed gallantly. "Not for present use: that is unnecessary, but just as a support against future trouble when I become eligible. I have been reading Shaw, and I'm frightened," he explained.

"Shaw! That's the man who writes 'prefaces,' isn't it? But surely he's rather pre-Edwardian now?—and what has he got to do with love-philtres?"

"Everything. His vision of wide-eyed womanhood

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stalking unconscious man with a butterfly net gives me cold shivers, makes me watch every attractive woman with suspicion; and stimulates me to sympathise even with such useless people as Cabinet ministers, anti-suffragettes, police magistrates, and other foolish old ladies. I really am pitifully afraid. But if I had your philtre handy, I could regard the whole thing not only with equanimity, but even with delight; for then I should be under the happy delusion that there was no greater joy in life than being shut up in a glass case, with a large black pin stuck through my middle, labelled 'Genus "Man," species "Bachelor"—extinct.'” I wonder if that will rouse her? he thought.

It did. She rose to the bait with unconscious ease.

“Don't jeer, Pip. I don't like it,” she protested. “There isn't an atom of truth in the theory. Only the colossal arrogant conceit of a man could have evolved it. It might have been more or less true in Victorian days, when every woman was taught that her sole object in life was to secure a husband. But it isn't true in the present age. There are no old maids now, only bachelor women; and the difference represents an entire change of thought. To be up to date you must be twenty years ahead of current opinion. Shaw is now orthodox, and so he obviously must be labelled hopelessly old-fashioned and pre-Georgian.

“The woman of the future,” she continued warmly, “will probably eliminate sex almost completely from her mind. Already she is beginning to find out that she, not man, is the race; that she can carry on the work of that race almost completely without him; and that there are not too many women in the world, but too many men. She is growing stronger physically every year. She is shaking herself free from the trammels of maternity.

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Very soon she will be selecting a certain fixed number to carry on that function, leaving the more intellectual free to pursue the work best fitted to them. Man's day is over."

Pip gazed at the beautiful flushed face with increasing interest. "Shades of my maiden aunt," he thought. "What will women be talking about next?" Aloud he said, "What will you do with the drones, then, when you come into your kingdom? Will you kill them off according to the inevitable law of the hive?"

"Oh, by that time," she answered readily, "we shall probably have discovered the laws that govern sex; and we'll make most of the children girls," she added triumphantly.

Pip looked at her gravely. "I suppose you have determined not to marry?"

"Certainly," she answered promptly.

To her surprise he laughed suddenly.

"Don't tell any one," he chuckled. "If you do, it will make you as fatally attractive as a high church parson with celibate convictions."

"Why?" she said, smiling in spite of herself.

"Why? Because any one knowing it will be able to indulge in the luxury of a hopeless passion without ulterior risk," he exclaimed. "It's what Americans call the Dante-Beatrice stunt." He chuckled softly to himself for a moment.

"You ought to hear Dermot talk," he said. "He has come to the very same conclusions as yourself—only from an entirely different starting-point. He thinks because every man is born a bachelor he ought to remain so. He believes that a surgeon runs the risk of spoiling his detachment by marrying; for if he does he may any time be tempted to operate for the sake of the fee, rather than the

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patient, driven by the necessity of providing for a wife and family."

"Oh no. What a horrid idea," she protested warmly. "You've made that up," she added acutely. "It's a lawyer's thought—never a doctor's. His whole training is against it. Confess!"

The best defence is an unexpected attack in the moment of the enemy's victory. He smiled at her.

"Perhaps so. But at any rate it's a good thing he's such a confirmed bachelor, otherwise, seeing so much of you, he'd be as hopelessly in love with you as I am," he retorted with mock plaintiveness, looking at her suddenly.

She laughed a trifle constrainedly.

"You really are too absurd, Pip. You don't believe I mean a single syllable of what I've been saying?"

"Not a word," he answered cheerfully.

Meanwhile, Fitzgerald on his round had arrived at "9."

"You're later than usual," she said.

"We've had Pip, my cousin, in to dinner," he explained.

"Why didn't you bring him round? I'm dying to see him."

"I left him with Nurse Townsend."

"Oh! The 'Duchess'!" with a faint note of acerbity.

"Is that what you call her?" he said, a little stiffly.

She stared at him curiously for a moment; and into her heart came a new disturbing thought. When he left, her eyes followed him down the corridor with a veiled, brooding look. What was it that hateful Nurse Marriott had said as they came on duty: "You'll have to watch your resident now. The 'Duchess' has come back."

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She had turned on her with contemptuous surprise as she murmured: "What resident?"; and the woman had laughed spitefully as she answered: "Oh, you needn't look so innocent. We all know about those suppers and things."

At the time she had taken no notice. It was sheer jealousy, she told herself, the bilious outpourings of the woman who had been passed over. Shut off, as they were, from the world in the intimate hot-house atmosphere of hospital life, it was impossible to avoid such rivalries, especially as there were ten nurses to every resident, and to be able to attach one of them to one's train was in consequence a triumph over those who could not.

Under the circumstances she knew it was inevitable that there should be a constant, quiet, all-pervasive struggle to attract, to hold, to capture from one another, each for herself some one particular resident; and that close contact with this one man, working under him, following his directions, being trained to implicit dependence on his initiative, seeing the decisions of life and death hanging on his judgment, must, of necessity, raise him in her estimation for the time being to the position of a little tin god. She laughed as she thought of the absurdity of it all; yet, at the same time, recognised that it had a very real value. They were all young, all at an age when Nature, ever thinking of the next generation, makes the most of the attractions of every secondary sexual curve. Some of them were more than good looking. Most of them had at least the glamour of muliebrity. All of them had a knowledge of the hidden things of life, unknown even to their mothers, a knowledge that made the ordinary barriers of convention futile, a knowledge absolutely undreamt of by the sheltered unmarried woman of their outside acquaintance. As a consequence each

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fought for her own hand with the openess of a man combined with the subtlety of a woman. Frequently the personality of the man favoured was not of so much importance as the sex that he exemplified—he was used often as little more than an indicator of power; for to be able to induce him to single her out amongst so many was an individual triumph, a sign that in the sex race she had some subtle characteristic that vibrated to its complement in man, as deep calleth unto deep—a mysterious something that other women appearing equally or even better dowered by Nature, apparently seemed to lack.

Without thought for the future, therefore, it gave an immediate pleasurable sense of power, which the others, not so gifted, acknowledged by a curious deferential envy—for no matter how we may disguise it, even to ourselves, it must be admitted in the secret places of the soul that the power to arouse the emotion of love in others is the most desired of all the gifts the gods can bestow upon mortal man—and this particularly so when the heart is young, the pulses rise responsive to the delights of the eye, and all the multitudinous joys of life run riot in one's veins.

Instinctively, without troubling to analyse them, Moira had always been conscious of these under-currents, but had never had urgent occasion to consider them deeply. Dowered with a certain kittenish grace, she had had no difficulty from the first in having what she called "a good time." The fact that she was already engaged kept her from regarding her numerous flirtations with any seriousness, made her look upon them rather as pleasant interludes in an otherwise somewhat exigent calling. Conscious of admiring eyes she had played consistently in the limelight, avoiding without premeditation the shadows beyond; and when any one had attempted to encroach too seriously on her natural insouciance, she

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had used her claws with all the unconscious playful cruelty of her prototype.

When Fitzgerald joined the hospital a certain joyous élan had marked him as a kindred soul immediately; and the friendship between them had been correspondingly rapid in its light-hearted growth. Almost unconsciously they had drifted into an intimacy the depth of which she had never thought of fathoming. Now the casual remarks of a jealous-minded woman, calling her suddenly to a mental halt, made her feel that the necessity of analysing her position was becoming imperative.

"Your resident." The words recurred to her with a shock almost physical. She threw up her head proudly. "Well! And why not?"

They had never said or done anything they would have been ashamed of a third person knowing. They were friends—great friends. "Why shouldn't they?" she thought.

"Her resident." Looking back, she saw now that she had gradually discarded the others; and began to see why she had been so annoyed by Connellan's remarks.

Finally she faced the question that had been disturbing her since she had caught that curious inflection in his voice, the question as to how she would like to give up these pleasant, quiet, fireside talks to another—how she would feel if he spent that time with—the Duchess, for instance.

A desire to avoid the answer, even to herself, caused her to get up restlessly and fetch a bundle of "domette" material that lay ready torn into strips for bandages.

Screwing the roller firmly to the table, she began to wind them, half mechanically, with the skill acquired by many months of practice. The even movement seemed to give her thoughts a freer play. The soft white rolls

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grew steadily under her hand. She was conscious that she was making them more carefully than usual, because, after they had been sterilised, he would be using them on the morrow.

“Why shouldn't I?” she said aloud, as if to an unseen objector.

The sound of her own voice in the stillness of the night seemed to waken her. Guiltily she looked around. All was quiet. Then alone amid the double row of softly breathing, half-seen, ghost-like forms she blushed—blushed furiously.

In the morning when she came off duty she did a curious thing. Rummaging in the bottom of one of her trunks, she unearthed a framed photograph, and placed it on the top of her chest-of-drawers. For a long silent minute she gazed deeply at the quiet grey eyes and firm, clean-shaven lips of the photo.

“I wish—I do wish you would come home,” she said. Then, closing the door of her cubicle, she went slowly downstairs to the night-nurses' supper.

CHAPTER VI

A SUNDAY MORNING. EUGENICS; AND HOW NOT TO PROPOSE

It was Sunday morning, and the erstwhile busy hospital lay bathed in a languorous Sabbath calm. The breath of spring was in the scented air, and the mellow piping of a blackbird in the quadrangle came to Fitzgerald as he proceeded leisurely along the colonnade towards "No. 1." Idly he stopped to gaze at it, whereupon the bird in its wicker cage cocked a golden-yellow eye at him and ceased. Beneath the surface calm of his mind he was conscious of a vague unrest, a longing for something with a lingering taste of sweetness, an indefinite craving for he knew not what—a craving whose very tenuity of outline precluded the possibility of satisfaction. The bird still stared at him with its beady eyes; and he began to wonder casually whether it, too, was subject to vain longings at times—longings for the free life beyond, with all its uncertainties, dangers, joys; or whether, instead, it had come to acquiesce in its fate, accepting safety, and the constant mess of pottage, as compensation for the freedom it had lost.

Tired of staring at him, the bird hopped down from its perch, and began to feed in the bottom of its cage.

He laughed a trifle cynically.

"The oracle hath spoken. I am an ass. It is the feeling of spring in the blood, the subconscious influence of the lush green sap springing up in the dead world all around. What I want is a twenty-mile tramp."

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Overhead from the old clock-tower the cracked, insistent tinkle of the chapel bell, calling the devout to morning service, pursued him with its continuous summons from ward to ward.

"Are you coming to church this morning, Mr. Fitzgerald?" said the sister of "No. 7."

It was an unexpected question, for as a rule the residents did not attend. Sometimes they had not the leisure, more often it was inclination that was absent; for the service was usually dully monotonous.

Fitzgerald gave the stereotyped reply.

"Oh, but you ought to, this morning. Nurse Townsend will be singing now her case is free from infection," exclaimed the sister. "Even Mr. Macintyre is coming to hear her."

He looked at her in surprise.

"She has got a wonderful voice, you know," she explained.

"I didn't know."

"Oh, well, then, come and hear for yourself."

He slipped quietly into a pew under the gallery of the little old-world chapel, well at the back, so that, as he was on duty, he might escape with the minimum disturbance if called. It would have been ample excuse for his absence, but Perry, Rogers, Macintyre and Johnson, four of the other residents, having also heard she was singing, told him they were going, and he thought that it would appear conspicuous if he refrained; for the natural lack of perspective that makes one imagine others are as keenly conscious of one's emotions as oneself obsessed him; and though in his mind he laughed at the absurdity of it, yet in his heart he felt it none the less.

Idly he gazed at the rows of grey-clad uniformed backs in front of him, each row surmounted by another of peaked

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and snowy linen caps, the occasional white drill costume of a sister breaking the monotony pleasantly. Behind them were the other residents; and these, with the nurses, a few convalescent patients, and some strangers from outside, made up the congregation.

Some one in a white surplice read the lesson in an even, modulated voice that seemed to give his mind the power to roam at large. The old familiar service went on peacefully, slumberously. The spirit of prayer and meditation, the monotonous intoning voice, the chromatic shadows from the storeyed windows, the softly thrilling pulse of the organ overhead, all combined to act on him like a pleasant sensuous sedative. The Sunday calm crept round him like a mantle. Once or twice a smiling glance would come back to him through the penumbra from one or other of the rows in front, and he would slowly smile in answer. Once or twice he caught a glimpse of her clear-cut profile in the front row; but gradually the calm encircling him caused the feeling of detachment to spread, and his thoughts grew more and more nebulous.

A stir of interest brought him to himself. She had got up to sing; and where she stood the sunlight from the stained-glass window fell across her face and hair like a prismatic halo. The simple puritanic costume, the golden haze, the pure, sweet face, the mellow swell of the organ, made him think inevitably of the beautiful story of St. Cecilia. For a moment the impression was complete. Then she began to sing. It was Newman's hymn—

“Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.”

The beautiful, soft, tremulous voice, appealing, con-

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fidng, sobbing, rising in hope, dropping in momentary fear, clinging with the confidence of a tired child, penetrated to his innermost soul. An odd fulness came into his throat; he felt the tears welling up in his heart, the emotional side of his nature rising and sweeping everything before it in full flood.

The voice sang on, silvery sweet with an undertone of passionate regret, a wail for the sins, the waywardness of years, sinking with a suggestion of intermittent sobbing after tears, rising at the last in confident appeal as to One who had all power, and was infinitely willing, to stretch out a comforting hand in the darkness, till in the glory of the morning all was peace.

Finally the voice stopped, and for a little space there was a tense silence. Then a ripple of movement started, gathered and spread in every direction; the bodies of the listeners relaxed, and the almost painful stillness was over.

She sat down, and he could no longer see her face. Feeling he could bear no more, he slipped out quietly into the hospital quadrangle again.

There in the morning sunshine all was quiet. A grey cat slunk stealthily out of sight down the basement steps from the matron's quarters. A few noisy sparrows chirruped and quarrelled around the old-world lamp in the centre of the quadrangle. The hospital seemed asleep.

Coming from the emotional atmosphere of the chapel into the normality of everyday life he felt a sudden chill, an unexpected shamefacedness. The quiet all around seemed to mock him: mock the power of his emotions over his intellect, mock the restlessness he could not suppress, the feelings he could not keep under control.

"Oh, damn!" he said irritably. "Why should she have a voice as well? It isn't fair."

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His eye caught the flutter of a dress.

"Can you come to 'No. 5' at once, Mr. Fitzgerald?" she gasped. It was a new probationer left in charge for an hour, her eyes wrinkled with anxiety, her figure bent by the weight of the greatness thrust upon her. He hurried rapidly with her, therefore, to the ward.

A glance at the cot told him her anxiety was all unnecessary.

"Give me a pillow. Thanks. Now take the child so, turn him this way, and bring the arm round so. He'll be all right now, nurse. Thank you very much for being so prompt."

She smiled gratefully; and he left her relieved, not telling her the call was quite unnecessary, having made it a rule always to be sympathetic when a young nurse was concerned, and never to laugh at over-anxiety; for time and experience usually modified that; and it was better to suffer gladly a hundred unnecessary calls than have one fatal delay from over-confidence or fear of ridicule.

Indeed, instead of being irritated on this occasion, he felt almost absurdly grateful; for the sudden call upon him had restored his balance again, and it was with a mind normally self-centred he went out into the square once more.

Above, the sky was of a cerulean blue streaked by fleecy golden cirri, the air was seductively warm, and the garden seat in the sun opposite the entrance to "No. 4" drew him unresisting with its suggestion of lazy comfort.

Presently through the blue haze of his pipe he saw the congregation begin to come out. Perry came slowly across the grass and sat down quietly beside him. A cluster of grey uniforms gathered around the chapel door and slowly began to scatter, those off duty coming round the square in groups of two and three past where he was sitting.

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"There's Townsend. Lord! what a glorious voice that woman has got!" murmured Perry.

Fitzgerald did not answer. He was thinking, "I must speak to her to prove to myself that I am under control again." So he watched her coming round, and as she came level leaned back and looked up at her.

"Thank you so much," he said quietly, smiling.

The violet eyes met his for a moment gravely in passing. A faint tinge of colour came into her cheeks. She bent her head slightly, and smiled at him with her eyes. Then she passed on, hospital etiquette permitting nothing more.

Nurse Otway, coming slowly behind, saw the movement and the smile. She turned to her companion, and became so engaged in conversation that she passed him without a glance. At the foot of the staircase, turning to go up, she paused, however, and looked back. Fitzgerald was holding a lighted match to Perry's cigarette, and did not see her. Then she, too, went slowly up the stairs.

Perry drew thoughtfully at his cigarette, took the holder from between his lips, and gazed absently at the glowing end.

"I say, Fitz, we'll have to do something about that fellow Hickey," he murmured.

"Hang the brute! What's he been up to now?"

"He came in paralytic, blind to the world, last night, and hasn't turned up to-day at all. I've done his round for him. That's the third time," explained Perry.

Fitzgerald whistled softly. "What do you think we ought to do?" he inquired.

"Bothered if I know. I don't suppose any one would accuse either of us of being Puritans. Every fellow goes through a state when he rather prides himself on his carrying capacity; but when a man gets to the position of a

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resident it's about time he stopped, otherwise he becomes a d——d danger to the public."

"It's rather difficult," said Fitzgerald thoughtfully. "You see, he knows we rather bar him, and puts it down to 'side.' Personally, I think he's the 'outside edge.' We 'porcupine,' he and I, when we meet; and so we mutually endeavour to avoid one another. Now he's rather under an obligation to you. Couldn't you give him a hint? If I tried it we'd have a second case of—

"Perhaps you were right to dissemble your love,
But why did you kick me downstairs?"

"I'll have a try," said Perry, without enthusiasm.

The subject of their conversation appeared at the Sunday mid-day dinner looking very subdued. No one made any comment on his want of appetite; but when the others had gone Perry came back and found him ordering some extra strong coffee.

"I've done your round for you this morning, Hickey," he said quietly.

Hickey looked up at him gratefully. "Thank you very much, Perry. I do feel rather cheap to-day."

"D'ye know you ordered that heart case of yours in the men's ward five grains of morphia last night?" he said in a low voice.

Hickey jumped up as if he had been stung, his pupils dilating with excitement. "What?" he cried.

"Yes," said Perry quietly.

"Jerusalem! Was I as bad as that?" he gasped. "Did she give it? Holy Mother of God! I'm ruined if she has," he cried, making for the door with frantic haste.

"No, no, no. Of course not. Sit down, man," said Perry, catching at his arm. "No nurse would be such a fool, and this one is a very sensible woman. She said

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nothing at all about it; but she just showed me the card when I came round, and I scratched it off for you. No one knows except the three of us; and no one else need know."

Hickey gasped with relief. "Heavens! What an escape!" He turned impulsively to Perry, tears standing in his eyes. "You are a good chap. I'll never forget it to you, Perry," he added brokenly.

The exuberance of his gratitude began to embarrass Perry. "All right, old chap, don't guff. Only I wouldn't run a risk like that again, if I were you. Chuck it," he said earnestly.

"I will. I never intended. Only I met some fellows from the 'Louth'; and one 'round' followed another, till I knew I was getting squiffed. I did think I'd have had enough sense, though, to go to bed instead of doing a round. Never again," he said earnestly.

"Well, that's all right. Cheero!" said Perry.

"Rather," exclaimed Hickey.

"I think," said Perry to Fitzgerald that evening, "I've put the fear of God into him this time."

"Hope it'll last," murmured Fitzgerald dubiously, as he knocked his pipe out preparatory to starting his night round.

When he reached "9" he came upon the night-sister talking to Nurse Marriott, and then he remembered it was Nurse Otway's night off duty. For a moment he felt a spasm of irritation, he disliked her substitute so; then he smiled and went on into the ward.

"I shan't want you just yet, nurse. Finish with sister first," he said, when they broke off their conversation on his entrance, and the nurse prepared to follow him into the ward. Absorbed in his notes, he did not hear her footsteps until she stood beside him.

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“Well, how are you?” he said resignedly.

“Oh, my wretched head’s bothering me again,” she said in a plaintive, querulous voice. “It’s fit to burst to-night. Can I have some more acetanilide, please, Mr. Fitzgerald?”

“I dunno, nurse. You do swallow an awful lot, you know. Why not try aspirin?”

“Doesn’t do me a bit of good,” she said in the same plaintive voice.

“Let me see. I gave you six powders a week ago——”

“I know. I’ve used them all. Please may I have some more?”

“I don’t like it,” he said reluctantly.

“I’m very sorry,” she answered helplessly.

“Oh, all right, then. Only don’t let it come to matron’s ears,” he said, getting up, and feeling a brute, because the tears were standing in her eyes.

He was annoyed at himself for feeling distressed, because he knew her woes were mainly hysterical; he was still more annoyed with her for causing this distress, because he believed in the general suspicion that she was that most despicable of all things in the eyes of a nurse or resident—a “matron’s spy.”

“That’s a dangerous woman,” his predecessor, Ryan, had said when taking him round. “You’re sure to see a lot of her for your sins. She’ll try to create an interest in your mind by worrying you to prescribe for her. Whatever you do, don’t kiss her. There are some women who, if you do, immediately assume an air of ownership, and openly treat any other woman you’re friendly with as a potential burglar. She’s one of them. I’m telling you this because I was an ass once—only once. She is pretty in an anæmic sort of way, and I had been dining out. But, Lord! she did play the cat and banjo with my fun

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afterwards. Night-sister always seemed to know where I was. I couldn't meet a nurse outside without matron hearing of it. She turned herself into a spy to watch me, and it's my belief she's one still."

"I see," said Fitzgerald thoughtfully.

His own experience later had substantially confirmed Ryan's opinion; and it was always a source of annoyance to him, therefore, to find her in his wards.

"Send the junior in the other ward down in about ten minutes, and she'll find them outside the 'dispensary' door," he said in leaving. "But you really ought to have your eyes tested, nurse, if you're always having heads like this."

"Yes," she said non-committally.

"If he knew how much I know about him," she thought viciously, "he wouldn't think there was much the matter with my eyesight."

"Your friend, Mr. Fitzgerald, spent over an hour in 'observation' last night," she remarked, by way of being pleasant to Nurse Otway the following evening as they were coming on duty.

Nurse Otway smiled.

"He can't have found '9' very pleasant, then," she murmured sweetly.

Nevertheless the remark produced a feeling, starting from the coeliac plexus, as if something had tumbled over inside her, followed by a curious dull ache in the spine that she recognised as an emotional danger-signal.

"So! The Duchess has got hold of him. I knew it was bound to happen some time," she thought. "I felt yesterday I'd have done nearly anything not to have had the night off. Now it has happened, and I can see just how. He can't stand 'the Marriott,' wouldn't have tea with her for worlds, wandered in to the Duchess, and she

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kept him. Somehow or other I felt she would, for all her coldness. I wish I knew why. I wish I knew what she wanted. I wish——”

In the main her reconstruction was correct. Nothing had been further from Fitzgerald's mind when he went to “observation.” Mentally he had decided to devote the rest of the evening until midnight to an easy-chair by the fire, a pipe, and the *Lancet*, looking in for a moment, merely at the child, in passing.

The effect of the morning's emotions had worn off; he was able whimsically to smile at himself again, and had no wish to linger in her company.

But when he got to her ward a certain recklessness, a curious irritable inclination to talk, seized upon him. Together they bent over the sleeping child.

“She is practically well now, and I shall discharge her in a day or so to her squalid, miserable home again. You and I between us have pulled her back into life—I wonder what for. Probably to die of typhoid later on; or, worse still, grow up a feeble-minded degenerate,” he said cynically.

The tone jarred upon her woman's sensitiveness to any criticism of the divine rights of the healing art.

“Some one has arranged” (she did not say it was herself) “to pay the expenses of the mother and family at the seaside for a month,” she said somewhat coldly. “I hope you do not mind.”

“Of course I do not mind, but what's the good of it?” He stared at her antagonistically. “Come to think of it, what's the good of three-quarters of the work we do? We're only helping the unfit to live—and, worse still, propagate. The amateur philanthropist,” he continued sarcastically, “who is financing this family is simply abet-

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ting the campaign in aid of the survival of the unfit, who are going to swamp us all in the course of another century. We—you and I and this soft-headed person—are trying to put back the hands of destiny.”

“But surely you believe that with good food, fresh air and healthy surroundings we can improve these people into useful citizens,” she exclaimed in a nettled voice, not in the least appreciating being called, even by inadvertence, a soft-headed person.

“No, I don’t. That is the theory upon which nearly all present-day philanthropy is based. It is the old exploded notion that ‘acquired characteristics can be transmitted,’ rehashed with modern emotional trimmings. It’s too simple to be true. If it were, then by docking the tails of terriers for several generations we’d be able to breed them tailless. We know perfectly well we cannot; and yet we ignore the logic of it when we come to deal with human beings.”

She smiled faintly, and he noted it.

“Yes, but it’s no good laughing it off by saying that human beings haven’t got tails,” he said, interpreting her thoughts. “They have got many other objectionably characteristic appendages we’d like to cut off. Take this child, for instance, the daughter of an inebriate, probably of a succession of inebriates. She’s almost certain to be feeble-minded. Suppose we could bring her up protected, put her on a prohibition island, for instance, and so get rid of her inebriate tail. Supposing we allow her to marry eventually into a similar strain. What chances do you think the third generation would have if allowed to go unprotected? Ten to one the transmitted hereditary tail would start wagging again. Heredity works both for good and for evil. We are all in its grip. The grim old Calvinistic divines called it ‘predestination,’ and our casual

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philanthropic efforts are about as much use to counteract that as boric ointment is to cure a cancer."

He talked on, knowing that three-quarters of what he was saying was unscientific, feeling that her mind was absolutely antagonistic, and that, woman-like, she was transferring her distaste for the views he was expressing to himself. The thought filled him with a reckless desire to commit mental suicide in her presence, and it was with some difficulty he was able to get the impulse finally under control. When eventually he did so, he continued his remarks in a milder tone.

"The trouble is not that the birth-rate is declining—that would matter very little if the quality were improving—but that the best women have begun to look upon marriage as a career beneath them."

She looked at him steadily for a moment.

"Do you blame them for that?" she said.

"Not at all. On the contrary, I thoroughly agree. I go even further. I think any one who marries is making an immense sacrifice for the race. It's the highest form of altruism. Why any woman who has an independent income, or is able to earn one, should ever marry puzzles me, since, in addition to acting as an unpaid housekeeper, she is called upon to risk her life possibly several times for the sake of posterity—and, as Boyle Roche has said, 'What has posterity ever done for us?'"

She nodded approval, too earnest to smile. "That is not the usual man's standpoint," she said. "Forgive me for saying so, but I hardly expected you to see it from our point of view. Men claim all, and give nothing."

"No, I cannot accept that. A man can be absolutely comfortable as a bachelor on less than a quarter of the income he requires when he is married. Why women should be such an expensive luxury, even without children,

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is a mystery every married man has to face. Very often it means that such a man has to work so hard to make the extra income required that he is worn out before his time. That is why men are marrying later, and marrying less. That is why in the lower stations in life men are so jealous of the competition of women, not because they are women, but because they are reducing men's chances of a livelihood by underselling them in the industrial market, and so preventing them earning the salaries necessary to keep up a home. The thing becomes a vicious circle, because the slump so produced in the marriage market forces more and more unmarried women into the world of business. What will happen eventually, I suppose, will be that each will have to provide his and her portion of the household expenses, and the State will look after the children. If it weren't for the love element I don't believe any one in their sober senses would ever undertake the sacrifices marriage entails."

She was silent after he had spoken. Then she said slowly, as if following an unspoken chain of thought, looking into the fire—

"I shall never marry."

"Always assuming that Eros does not play tricks with you, and you find you cannot avoid it."

"No, I shall never marry," she answered positively.

He looked at her gravely for a moment.

"I would like to say the same; but I cannot be so certain for myself. I do not want to. I am very poor—that is, I have a place bigger than my income—and I am very ambitious. To marry would be suicidal to my chances till I have made my position secure. I cannot afford even to fall in love."

He hesitated suddenly, glanced at her, and then added rapidly—

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“You say you will never marry. Will you do something for me?”

A chord of emotion crept into his voice, in spite of his efforts to suppress it; and she glanced at him curiously. With the instincts of a woman, she was instantly on her guard.

“What is it?” she said.

He faced her resolutely. “What I am going to say may annoy you very much, but I hope you will forgive me when I explain. Ever since I first saw you I have felt that we have met and known each other in the past. It may be true, it may be pure phantasy, but I feel it every time I have come in contact with you, and the feeling grows stronger every day.”

She moved her head, and her wide eyes now gazed at him with a new veiled, startled look.

“When I am near you I am conscious of an intense physical attraction. When I am away from you it passes off——”

“But why are you telling me this?” she interrupted hurriedly.

“Because I am afraid some day I shall lose control over myself, and propose to you.” He stopped, and suddenly began to flounder. “Would you mind—will you—I mean I should be most awfully grateful if you—would you help me not to——? It’s pure impertinence on my part, I know—but will you?”

“Well, of all——” she gasped. “It is a good thing I’m going off duty to-night.” She laughed confusedly. “I ought to be extremely angry—you really are the oddest man——”

There was a slight creaking noise behind her.

“And so, of course, we had to operate at once,” he said in a level, penetrating voice.

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She stared at him, wondering if he had suddenly gone mad. Then she understood, as, looking over her shoulder, he said—

“Good-evening, sister.”

“Good-evening, Mr. Fitzgerald,” said the sister, who had just entered.

CHAPTER VII

AN AFTERNOON ON THE RIVER. THE RECANTATION OF FITZGERALD

IT was the day of the Term Races, and Fitzgerald's scratch crew had finished their contest with the trial eight, holding their own gamely till just beyond the "Big Bend." There, however, they had shot their bolt, fitness told, and the men in training waltzed away from them, making the rest of the race a procession. They gave up at the "enclosure," and, pulling themselves together, paddled quietly home with the high feather reminiscent of old Ringsend days when water was choppy, and "crabs" dangerous. The younger men, resting on their oars just above the weir, and waiting for them to land first, after the time-honoured courtesy to the vanquished, regarded them curiously. Used to the calm waters of the Upper Liffey, they watched the high feather with that smiling good-natured superiority the rising generation always feels for those whose full athletic days are over, not reckoning that they, too, in a few years, will have to give way to the generation already treading on their heels—for such is the tragedy of youth.

Fitzgerald stepped half blindly on to the "slip." His heart was thumping thunderous in his throat. Great grey blobs floated before his eyes. His head was swimming, and his lower limbs felt as if they belonged to some one incapable of co-ordinating them. He had rowed himself out; the men behind him were in much the same plight,

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and so they were only half conscious of the groups of gaily-dressed ladies, promenading with their attendant escorts in front of the club-house, scanning the half-clad men with curious eyes, growing ecstatic over the "lines" of the beautiful racing boats, and getting cheerfully in the way of all the crews coming in and out.

Trench was waiting for him at the landing-stage.

"Thanks awfully, old man. You have given my men a breather they won't forget. It's worth weeks of coaching. But, by Jove! you do look bad. Come right up and have a brandy and soda."

"It's all right, old chap," he said, swaying slightly. "We will be as right as ninepence when we've had a tub. Sides," he called automatically.

His men slipped into position, and the boat was lifted clear.

"Turn the boat."

A rapid concerted movement followed; and the water shipped during the race came splashing out, causing skirts and dainty shoes to be hastily withdrawn from the danger area.

Mechanically, from long practice, they moved steadily up through the spectators to store their boat in its rack in the club-house. As he passed under the balcony something made him look up. Their eyes met; she bowed, and immediately a warm glow seemed suddenly to surge through him. He had been holding on to his outrigger almost mechanically, dazed by the unwonted exertion, his knees weak, his arms aching. Now he felt like a giant whose strength had been renewed: for the whole wide world had straightway become transfigured by the magic of her presence. Instead of the tumbled watery blue of the sky overhead he saw a broad expanse of tear-washed violets. The pale spring sunshine altered to emanations from the

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halo of a great new mystery. Where others saw a graceful woman in a grey tailor-made costume leaning over the balcony, his eyes beheld Cytherea incarnate bending from the heights of High Olympus down towards him.

It was a week since they had met; for as soon as his case was out of danger she had been transferred. At the time his feelings had been a mixture of relief associated with an irritable sense of loss; and the unusually heavy number of serious cases that had absorbed his every hour in the interval had been welcomed as a very opportune anodyne. Now the delight of seeing her again came almost as a breathless shock; his sense of *déjà vu* rose for the moment to the point of retrocognition; and he knew—knew with a certainty beyond demonstration—that he had loved her in the past not once or twice nor thrice, but many times. The narrow limits of his present personality melted into the shadows of dim distant centuries, linking by a mystic thread of gold his multitudinous egos, overlapping, commingling, ever with the same dim outline of the one and only woman in the world.

A solemn wonder assailed him, a wonder that he had been so blind as not to have known it all before. Looking back, he remembered the first time he had seen her, and the strange disturbing effect she had produced on him, an effect which further contact had accentuated, and which with a coward fear of the unknown he had resolutely tried to suppress, feeling there were elements in it which might launch him on troublous seas, lead him away from the goal he had set his eyes upon, cause him to reconsider those plans of life which had been stereotyped into a groove of comfortable familiarity.

For the first time he had come full against the tide of one of the great primitive emotions; and it had taken him absolutely by surprise.

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The student of medicine grows early familiar with the mysteries of sex. At an age when his contemporaries in other walks of life are still under the obsession that women are solid from the waist to the ankles that illusion had ceased for him, and the mystery of the unknown had faded in the pitiless light of anatomical certainties.

Mixing for several of his most impressionable years practically only with nurses, he comes to regard women, not as objects to be put reverently upon pedestals, but as useful accessories in the struggle with disease and death to which he has dedicated his life. The fact that they are working under him gives him necessarily a dictatorial bias. If he escapes the passion wave during his first few months in hospital, the likelihood is that he remains immune till some years of practice rehabilitates the natural man in him; and till then he comes to look upon marriage as a risk that may be taken with due caution any time in the indefinite future, and then only provided all the circumstances are favourable. His materialistic training tends to atrophy his deeper emotions; and nothing takes him so utterly by surprise as to find himself the victim of the sudden temperamental glow that casts a glamour over some one woman, so intense as to make him feel that life without her is unthinkable.

Fitzgerald had developed in this school of thought almost of necessity. He had come to look upon nurses practically as a third sex, useful to a degree, splendid companions in moments of relaxation, beings whose training had given them a breadth of view that made their inherent femininity recede into the background. The fact that there was such a background was part of the added charm. One knew one was talking to a woman, and yet felt that their depth of knowledge made the hiatuses essential in conversation with ordinary women

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unnecessary—they were in the profession, and one could talk to them with the same large freedom as with men.

To all of this he was familiarly accustomed; but now a new, strange iridescent world of unexpected thrilling possibilities was opening up before him; he felt the wings of his awakened soul beating against the bars of custom; and the steep transition almost took his breath away.

Hurrying through his cold tub and the exhilarating rub down afterwards, he hastened, immaculately clad, bright-eyed and glowing, to the club balcony, threading his way by instinct through the gay chattering throng around the tea-tables.

Pip had somehow managed to get dressed before him, and now he heard his gay voice at her side—

“I say, Kim, can't you hang on to some one else's sister, and leave Miss Townsend to me?”

“Pip always wants the limelight. He's as vain as an actor-manager, isn't he, Miss Townsend?” grumbled Kim.

“It's my belief you're both practising flattery on me so as to be in training when the right time comes,” she said laughingly.

“If they are, it's useless, Miss Townsend. When a man's like that he is tongue-tied by his inability to express the multitude of things he feels,” said Fitzgerald, coming up behind them.

She turned and looked up quickly, her eyelids widening, her violet pupils dilating. There was a vibrant ring in his voice that struck a sudden deeper chord in the atmosphere of light-hearted banter.

Pip glanced up quickly from the deck-chair in which he was lounging. Then he rose casually.

“Take this chair, Dermot, old man, and amuse Miss

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Townsend while we forage for some more tea. Come on, Kim, and help me to field some food."

Fitzgerald dropped into the proffered chair a trifle stiffly. She noticed it, and there came a soft glow into her eyes. No woman, not even a confirmed spinster, can help feeling an increased interest in the man who has openly confessed that she has a strong fascination for him, provided always, of course, that his attentions are not absolutely distasteful; and Nora, though she probably would not have subscribed to it, was no exception to the rule; for during the week that had intervened since his unorthodox request she had found herself recapitulating the scene in her mind more than once, with a particularity that showed how deeply it had impressed itself on her mental retina.

"You do look tired," she said gently, "and I don't wonder, considering. You needn't talk. There's an extra cushion here. No. Don't say a word," as he raised a protesting hand.

With the primitive instinct of womanhood she was beginning to mother him, for had he not confessed that he belonged to her; and seeing its infinite possibilities he thrilled with the secret joy of it. Recognising the importance of preserving the illusion, therefore, he sank back gratefully with half-closed eyes, restraining the almost overwhelming impulse to touch, if only for a moment, the hands that were settling the cushion for his head, feeling that thereby the fever in his blood must inevitably communicate itself to her consciousness, introducing an emotional element that would have played sad havoc with his present happiness.

It was a delightful sensation, this, of being looked after like a helpless infant; and there was just sufficient physical basis in his weariness to make him feel the part. He was

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tired. She had said he was not to talk. Through his half-closed eyelids, therefore, he was able without apology to study her clear-cut profile as she sat wide-eyed, gazing with interest on the animated scene below, her lips curled upwards in the glimmerings of a smile in unison with the atmosphere of light-hearted camaraderie all around.

Suddenly an intense desire to look into her eyes assailed him.

"The 'crisis' is over. I'm convalescing now, and permitted to talk a little to my friends," he said, watching for the adorable upward sweep of the dark eyelashes as she turned.

"There's an undertone of apology in your voice which I do not take as a compliment," she remarked, smiling at him with a faint note of mockery. "I can assure you my own thoughts entertain me—quite."

His quick mind followed the underlying feeling.

"Yes, I know," he groaned. "Women are getting so sufficient unto themselves these days that we are becoming rather superfluous—we men. In twenty years' time we'll merely be tolerated in a gynæcocratic world. The idea makes me shiver. Thank goodness, here comes Pip with tea."

A faint line puckered between her eyebrows. She was wondering if he carried this detached attitude of mind ever with him; was his tone of faint sardonic mockery towards all the daily incidents of life inherent; could he be unfalteringly relied on when the soul cries out for comfort, strength and succour; or would he fail when put to the test in the deep things of life? The fact that the question seemed to be of importance to her marked an unnoted milestone in the progress of her attitude of mind towards him.

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Fitzgerald observed the pucker, and his gift of uncanny intuition made him say almost in answer—

“From the Saxon standpoint we Celts have a fatal gift of misplaced humour. At times when an Englishman would be suitably solemn we fall victims to some incongruity, give utterance to a joke, and so get absolutely no credit for any depth of feeling we may possess on the occasion. It is characteristically Irish. You will see it exemplified, time and again, in Shaw. That’s why the English don’t understand him. It is quite true that if we could we would laugh at our own funerals. I suppose it is really a form of hysteria.”

The arrival of Pip created a diversion for which they both were grateful.

“I have made several enemies, trodden on five different sets of toes, and brought back my tray victorious,” he said breathlessly.

“You are the modern knight-errant personified,” she answered laughingly. “But what have you done with Kim?”

“Paid him out. Introduced him to a carrotty-haired girl with a Belfast accent,” he answered.

“But why this dreadful punishment?” she laughed.

“We are rivals in love. Didn’t I tell you I managed to make the acquaintance of the Persian palmist? Well, I did, and she’s great. But as soon as he knew of it he worried me to death till I introduced him. Now the ungrateful beggar has cut me out completely, and every time I meet her she’s always talking about him. Pleasant for me, isn’t it?” he grumbled. “But I think I’ve tied him up for the rest of this afternoon, anyhow,” he added with a grin.

Nora and Fitzgerald both laughed. “You haven’t. Here he comes,” exclaimed Nora.

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Pip looked round, and suddenly smiled.

"Escaped, have you? How on earth did you manage it, Kim? Thought I'd fixed you."

"Not you," said Kim, scornfully. "She asked me if I knew 'Portydown'; and when I said I'd never been in Scotland, she just cut me dead, so I came away. There's nothing makes these Northerners so mad as to suggest that they're Scotch. It works every time."

A blue-jerseyed boatman coming towards them caught Fitzgerald's eye.

"What is it, Tompson?"

"Sides for the second four, sorr."

"Great Scott! They're waiting for us," said Pip hastily. "Come on, Kim."

Left to themselves, Fitzgerald smiled a little wearily. Mechanically he took the cup she handed him, turning stiffly in his chair, his tired muscles resenting the movement after the short period of inaction.

"I love those boys," he said. "The edge of their palate is so unspoiled. I remember when I used to laugh at the Northerner, just like them. I don't now, for I have learnt that the whole future of Ireland lies with them. We of the South know what we ought to do. They know and do it. We see the goal just as clearly as they do, but instead of trying to attain it lose ourselves in dreams of it. Dreaming is the curse of the South. It is all I can do to keep it under in myself. And yet—and yet," he continued softly, with a characteristic change of front, "dreams are very precious things to the world weary. All poetry is of the stuff that dreams are made of. Men write poetry out of the depths of their sensations; women read it in anticipation of the joys they hope to experience. And it is all just dreams—dreams of the colour of illimitable blue, steeped in the memory of

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forgotten amethysts. Dreams make the ragged places of the world appear as gardens of roses and honeysuckle, the cooing of the wood-pigeon at peep of dawn a message of connubial contentment, the scent of wallflowers in full afternoon a passionate love song. Tears of remembrance are in the smell of lavender under the stillness of the autumn stars. Dreams are the anodyne of life. I am sorry I abused them." His voice trailed off, and then with a sudden whimsical change, which she was beginning to recognise, he laughed. "Forgive me for talking like a minor poet. I always do when I'm physically weary," he said.

Nora had been listening to him, her eyes velvet with memories, an ever-growing wonder in her mind. She had started her acquaintance with a prejudice against him. The gossip of the nurses' home had led her to expect the usual all-conquering somewhat condescending resident whom she particularly disliked, and whom, be it confessed, she had taken a special pleasure in snubbing in the past.

The reality she had found singularly different. To start with, he had always treated her with a deference which, though her due, had not always been accorded her. She herself was too well trained ever to take a liberty; but nevertheless it came to her as a welcome surprise that she had never found it necessary to stimulate a similar frame of mind in him. Again, he had forced her respect by the obvious knowledge of his work which he possessed, the extreme attention he gave to every one of his patients, and the feeling of reliance he was able to induce amongst even the most timid of them. That in itself was a great asset; but a man might be a good surgeon, and yet not a desirable acquaintance, just as in a lower plane another might be a good blacksmith by day and an expert burglar by night.

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She had reached this stage in her estimation of his character on the night when she had seen him last, and he had made his curious request. Looking back on it afterwards, she knew that it had marked a crucial turning-point in her life's history.

More than once already she had listened to the confession of a man's love for her; but never before had it been put in such a way that she had found herself unable to give a direct answer. The freakish element in it, moreover, had riveted her attention, piqued her curiosity, raised a complex sensation in her mind as if she had been proposed to and rejected in the same breath, making her feel doubtful whether she should be flattered or annoyed—all of which tended to keep him in the background of her thoughts with a persistence that caused her alternate surprise, amusement, and a disturbing feeling which she dubbed annoyance.

It was with an ill-defined but none the less earnest impulse to clear her mental field of vision that, accordingly, she had accepted Pip's invitation to the "trial eights," knowing she was almost certain to meet Fitzgerald there, and feeling that the sight of him more rapidly than anything else would sweep accumulated images from the palimpsest of her mind. She had been complacently conscious, therefore, of an accession of interest when she had seen his crew swing, rhythmically beautiful, from the slip on their way up the river, and correspondingly disturbed by the subliminal uprush of protective tenderness she had experienced when she watched him return, stumbling blindly, hanging on to the outrigger grimly mechanical, as he directed his crew bringing their defeated boat to its resting-place beneath the balcony. She had been acutely conscious of the purport of the message of her eyes immediately after she had looked down on him—

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for she had noticed its, to her, unexpected effect. Now in their conversation he had shown her a new undreamt-of Fitzgerald, some one startlingly different from the clear-eyed surgeon that she knew, some one quite incompatible with the Fitzgerald of gossip in the nurses' home. Instead of the clarifying effect she had anticipated, she found the satisfaction of the label denied her more and more. Furtively, with the way women have of seeing without appearing to see, she began to study him, not as an abstraction but for the first time as a man, noticing the curve of his ear, the glisten of his hair, the soft down on his cheek, the square outline of his jaw.

He was very still, leaning forward, his brown eyes resting on the wooded heights beyond the river—a mass of tender darkening green serrating an opal sky on which high up two bronze-gold cumuli slept peacefully.

Gradually the people had gone to watch the other races; the balcony was almost deserted; and the sound of water tumbling solemnly over the weir came to them in a liquid lullaby of undertones, broken at intervals by occasional snatches of light-hearted laughter from the promenaders on the tow-path below.

Had she been a conventional woman of the world she would have felt the necessity of avoiding this hour when the earth yawns sleepily in the face of night before the final stillness, the hour when shadows lengthen, and love, which is a daughter of the moon, curls round before awaking. But no such thought obtruded on her hospital-tinted mind. Subconsciously the impression of weariness his shoulders and his silence conveyed created the impression that she was on duty as a nurse, that she must wait until he moved; and it was not until Fitzgerald turned to her that the illusion vanished.

All the while, however, he had been acutely conscious

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of her presence. Their chairs were close together; and the folds of her skirt wimpling over his ankle gave him a curious thrill of intimacy. Secretly he had let his arm drop till his fingers touched the rough texture of the tweed; and the contact seemed to still the restless ferment in his blood, making him content to let his soul range large in sympathy with the quiet in her eyes.

"You are thinking," he said quietly, as if continuing a conversation, "that you do not know me so well as you did when we were on that case together. You had a certain impression of my identity, just as I had another of yours; but we were probably both wrong, for no one has an entity clear-cut and gemlike, every one is a complex composed of the remains of what he has been and the possibilities of what he will be. We rise from the graves of our ancestors, and every man is an Antæus. We are living in the bodies of our descendants, as much as if they were already alive for us to look upon. You and I and all these jolly people around us are just links in an infinite biological chain. The fact that we are alive proves that the chain has never been broken since the misty times when our troglodyte ancestors slew the hairy mammoth with their stone hatchets. To-day I have been seeing visions of the great round world spinning silent on its axis, and I'm feeling very small. I wonder how it strikes you."

She shivered slightly, but did not answer, and he continued as if he had not expected any comment.

"The other day I asked you something, something which now seems to me very impertinent and very foolish; and so to-day I feel like asking you to forget it all, and let us start afresh. Again to-day I have the paralysing feeling that I am simply repeating myself, that I have said all this to you before not once but many times. The trouble is

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that I cannot remember your answer, and so I do not know what to do. May I ask you a question? ”

“ Yes,” she said slowly and reluctantly.

“ Do you know? ”

“ No, I do not know,” she answered, as if the words were being forced from her.

“ Then the time is not ripe,” he said.

A distant shouting came undulating down the river, and brought them back in touch again with mundane things. Nora was the first to recover. She shook herself mentally and rose.

“ That will be Pip’s four,” she said.

Fitzgerald rose stiffly after her.

“ Yes, shall we go down and shout? ”

“ Let’s. I want to cheer,” she answered steadily.

Afterwards, when he returned to the automatic round of hospital duty again, he found himself becoming continually absorbed in an atmosphere of rumination from whose thrall only a vigorous and sustained effort sufficed to momentarily tear him.

“ You’re very dull to-night, Fitz,” said Nurse Otway, as he sat idly on the kitchen table gazing absently into the fire while she prepared the tea.

He woke up with a start, and looked at her.

“ You’re rather quiet yourself, ‘ Otter,’ ” he said, turning to look at her.

There was a tired line under her eyes, and an unusual droop at the corners of the humorous mouth that caught his attention, bringing him sharply out of his preoccupation.

He was feeling very tender towards one woman, and, as is the way with men, his tenderness overflowed towards

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all the sex that night. Unconsciously his voice, coloured by the tenor of his thoughts, took on an emotional note.

"What is it, little girl?" he said softly, his hand falling gently on the drooping shoulder near him.

He caught the misty glint in her eyes before she withdrew her shoulder hastily with an uncertain laugh, and his responsive nature, strung up by the episodes of the day, made him feel suddenly how very sweet she was.

"What is it, little girl?" he repeated, repossessing himself of the shoulder and drawing her again towards him unresisting.

"Oh, everything. I'm tired. Life is horrid, and I've got the pain niggling at me again," she said unsteadily; and then, recovering herself with an effort, added: "Don't pet me like a dear boy, or I'll break down, and hate myself and you."

Again she drew away from him, and this time he did not attempt to retain her. Instead, he started to cut some bread for the toast; and then, after giving her a minute to recover, began to talk easily about some of the cases under her care till the limpness had gone out of her figure.

"I feel better now," she said presently. "Thank you for being a dear, and not laughing at me."

"You're going off duty to-morrow," he said decisively.

"No."

"Oh yes, you are. I'm quite determined about it. You know perfectly well you'll have to have that appendix out if it starts bothering you any more. You want a rest, and I'll just browbeat matron about it in the morning."

"No," she said again, but this time more weakly.

"Stuff," he answered brusquely. "Don't start criticising your superior officer's prescriptions. That's settled."

CHAPTER VIII

THE EFFECT OF THE PICTURE

LA TOUCHE stood quietly beside her, with a feeling of intense accomplishment, looking at the picture.

"I have named it 'The Stooping Princess,'" he said.

"Yes," murmured Nora softly, looking steadily at the central figures—the beautiful queenly girl sacrificing all for love, the chivalrous young knight accepting the gift, a rapt wonder of adoration in his eyes as he held his arms for her descending from the postern door, into the dry moat, in the moonlight—both oblivious, for the time being, of all other things mundane.

It was the moment of meeting before the flight; and the fear of surprise was cunningly indicated by the grim air of alertness in the two squires, weapons in hand, near the horses, and the tension of the frightened figure of the tire-woman, following her mistress through the half-opened door in the high wall, looking backwards fearfully at the shadows behind as she did so.

Only the central figures seemed oblivious of everything except the anticipated joy that their hearts, aching for one another, would presently be satisfied.

It was the first time Nora had seen the finished canvas. A month before, on her last visit, the woman had been almost completely limned, but the head of the knight had not been even started. It was this that now absorbed her growing consciousness, intensifying the effect to a degree

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disturbingly intimate, reverberating on the shores of her soul in lapping waves of unexpected amplitude.

For the head was the head of Fitzgerald, used, with the unconscious differential selection of the artist, as the fitting complement to her own.

Knowing La Touche as she did, it never occurred to her to doubt that the juxtaposition on his part was unconscious—she was sure of it. Nevertheless the effect was almost startlingly real. She recognised at once the characteristic turn of the neck, the faint lines radiating from the eyelids, the curve of the nostril, the smiling mouth that softened the effect of the determined chin, the eyes, the hair—all were to the life. She caught herself wondering why she knew them all so well, why she should see what the artist, though able to depict, had not yet really seen. Stirred by a subtle emotion, she stared at the eyes; and it dawned upon her with a sudden realising thrill why she understood. She had seen them speaking thus before, but had not felt their meaning. Now she knew; and La Touche, glancing at her, wondering why she was so silent, noted the change in her, and felt the glory of his creation sweep over him—for now the light in the picture was reflected in the glory of her eyes; he knew it had not been there before, and thrilled with the knowledge that the magic of his hands had brought it into being.

“You need not speak. Thank you for what you feel,” he murmured quietly. Then he drew the curtain over it, and turned aside, unconscious that a wave of crimson had overswept the ivory of her averted face, and neck, and ears.

After she had gone he returned anew to luxuriate over it. Thinking of her recalled the hospital; and then he was aware of an irritating break in the sequence, a link which he possessed but could not find, something at the back of his brain necessary to complete the chain of

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thoughts waiting to unwind itself from the penumbra. At times he seemed to be on the verge of it; then it eluded him, and a blankness greater than before oppressed him. An odour of food came wafted through the open studio window from the house behind. He stopped before the canvas, and suddenly all the links were complete—Nora—the hospital—dinner—Fitzgerald—he had promised to dine at the hospital that evening—Fitzgerald——

He was looking full at the picture.

“Great Scott!” he exclaimed, stepping back, and then again leaning forward to stare at it. “Fitzgerald! I wonder did she notice it? She must have. What was I thinking about not to have seen it before? Fitzgerald! Good Lord! what must she think—and Fitzgerald? I wonder how it would strike him. There isn’t a man I’d rather see—— But there’s all this masquerade about her money, and he’s just chock-a-block with pride, and poverty. He ought to be in love with her. Lord! what a mess—— I must find out if I can. I can’t possibly exhibit it without their joint permission.”

That night after dinner they were sitting in Dermot’s room. Connellan had been called off on casualty duty, and they were alone together. La Touche tapped his cigarette on his left thumb-nail before accepting the light held out to him. Then he said quietly:

“D’ye ’member last time you were in the studio, I was in the act of putting away an unfinished canvas?”

“Yes, I remember,” said Fitzgerald guardedly.

“It’s finished now, and I’d like you to see it before I send it to the Academy. It’s a romantic subject. I’ve used Miss Townsend, my ward, as the model for the head, and I want your opinion on it,” said La Touche, with apparent carelessness.

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"I'll come. But I know what I'll say already. Forgive me. I saw the head before you covered it, and recognised the original," he said rapidly.

La Touche started.

"But you did not know her then."

Fitzgerald moved restlessly in his chair, restrained himself with an effort, and gazed moodily into the fire.

"I didn't know at the time, but it was a very lovely, haunting face you had painted, La Touche, and I—well, you're her guardian, and you may as well know—I couldn't get it out of my head after I left. Then—as I was on my way home I saw her; and I—it just bowled me over. I recognised her at once. I thought I was pretty safe against that sort of thing. I didn't want to fall in love—not a little bit. I don't want to even now. I've tried like the very devil to keep her out of my mind. I've even thought of making love to another woman—but it's no good. I don't think I can stand it much longer——" he said miserably.

"Does she know?" said La Touche quietly.

"In a way, yes. I think she must; I've said such mad sort of things to her. But I've never dared to put it to the touch. How could I, when I'm so conscious of how little I have to offer? As you know, I've got a rotten old place down in the Co. Waterford that I can't even keep in repair. The land brings in almost nothing now. My father had his service pay, and would not evict. Outside politics, he said, they were all such decent fellows, and fine sportsmen, he couldn't do it; and besides, I know every mother's son of them, and the old man would turn in his grave if I attempted to dispossess them. I owe something to his memory, too, because I disappointed him in life. He never could understand why I didn't want to be a soldier, why I insisted on being what he called a d——d

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Linseed Lancer. The Fitzgeralds have always been soldiers, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should follow the family tradition. He gave in at last, however, and here I am. But I didn't break with the dear old governor to try the easy way. I wanted the best that could be got out of it. I fixed my ambition on being an operating surgeon. That's how I'm placed now; and that's the root of all the trouble."

La Touche stared thoughtfully at the fire after this outburst. At length he said quietly—

"But why should this keep you from Nora?"

Dermot smiled bitterly.

"Why? Because I'll be starving for years before the public find me out. Realising that, d'ye think, then, I could possibly go to her and say, 'I know I'm not good enough to black the dainty shoes you stand in; but I love you, and want to marry you, if you can wait ten or fifteen years for me'? Nice sort of impertinent pulpy ass I'd look. I don't see myself doing it, do you?"

La Touche half opened his mouth twice as if about to say something; then, "No, I can't," he thought; "that is her affair."

Aloud he answered, "Don't you think that if a man loves a woman, and there is just the chance that she has seen, and thrilled to the joy of it, that it would be only fair to give her the right of saying 'Yes' or 'No'?"

"No, I don't. No man has the right to make the woman he loves the drudge of his poverty," retorted the hard young voice. "A man can't help falling in love; but he can at least in honour avoid dragging the heart of a woman through a murder of weary years, spoiling her chance with some one more fortunate than himself till she reaches an age when the dangers of maternity are too great

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to be faced by any one with a knowledge of the awful risk she runs."

La Touche smiled a little wearily. He was thinking of a woman who would have gladly taken any risk, had the love her soul craved for not been hidden till it was too late.

"Women, God help them, always seem to have the worst of things," he said at length. "A man can make up his mind to speak, or to keep silent; a woman—a real woman—and that is the horrible injustice of it—can only wait. There are women, of course—we have all met them in our lives—who can force men's passions into utterance by the tricks of sex; we need waste no sympathy on them, they can always find a mate; but the real woman, the woman one wants to marry, would die rather than do that; and that is why one often finds such wonderful old maids wasting an infinity of love on children not their own. It makes me weep sometimes for the blindness of the world."

Connellan had come in quietly as he spoke, hearing the last half of his remarks.

"I don't know that I can quite agree with you," he said. "Temperamental people, such as artists"—smiling at La Touche whimsically—"and fellows like Fitzgerald here, when they allow the natural man to override the trained scientist, are inclined to wrap themselves in rainbows where women are concerned. Their visions are coloured by chromatic aberration. There are some women who attract us physically, others who satisfy us mentally. Either quality without the other is a defect—that is, if you want to be sure of your children, for, after all, the only excuse for marriage is children. A woman who is all brain and no bust ought to be a school-marm; a woman who is nothing but sexual curves is all right as a dancing

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partner; but when it comes to choosing some one to have breakfast with all the rest of your life you don't want either. It's no use saying I've got an undraped mind. I dare say. But it's true, all the same."

He threw his cigarette-end into the fire, and, picking up his stethoscope, held out his disengaged hand to La Touche.

"Must be off on my round, so I'll say 'Good-night,' sir."

There was a silence after he had gone. At length La Touche rose to leave.

Fitzgerald saw him to the hospital gate, and there La Touche turned to him.

"In spite of everything, if I were you I should try," he said earnestly. "At any rate," he added hastily, to cover Fitzgerald's silence, "I want you to come and see the finished picture."

"Thank you very much. I should like to see it; though, when I do, I'm sure I shall hate the idea of any one buying it like the devil."

"It is not for sale," said La Touche shortly. "But it might come handy as a wedding present," he thought.

The kitchen was empty when he got to "No. 9," and he proceeded into the ward to write up his notes.

Presently the sound of skirts came to him.

"Evening, 'Otter,'" he murmured, without looking up.

A low laugh answered him, and he was on his feet in a moment.

"You!"

"Yes, me. Don't look so disappointed," she laughed.

"Do I look disappointed?" he exclaimed, the blood rioting through his body in excess of joy over his unlooked-for good fortune.

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Involuntarily she stepped back out of the circle of light, for her unexpected appearance had surprised the look she had been trying to forget ever since she had seen the picture.

"But you ordered Otway off duty yourself," she said sedately, schooling her voice to a less emotional plane.

"I know; but I had forgotten," he answered simply.

A little pulse of pleasure thrilled in her. She knew—every one knew—what fast friends they were; and the fact that he had forgotten seemed to accentuate the effect. The unexpected call of the picture had caught her unawares; she had thought about it that evening more than she cared to acknowledge even to herself; and now, when she saw him again, she found herself studying him in a new, strange, intimate light that caused a wave-like flow of feeling within her of which she was embarrassingly conscious.

To break the silent influence of his eyes she said prosaically—

"Will you be going round now?"

At the tone of her voice he pulled himself together with an effort. "Yes; let's," he answered.

So together they progressed slowly from bed to bed, and by the time they had finished, and she had collected two extra "boards" for him, he had regained control of himself, and was able again to give his attention to the interrupted note-writing, while she sat on the other side of the table opposite him busy with her needle over details of the ward linen.

His head sank lower and lower over his case-sheets; and her eyes in consequence wandered towards him with increasing frequency, noticing and tabulating in her mind the accuracy of the points in the portrait she had subconsciously already known.

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“What about ‘10’s’ hypodermic?” he said, looking up suddenly to find her eyes on him.

Her eyelids flickered for a moment. “That’s the case transferred from the medical side to-night,” she answered slowly. “It’s only ‘if required,’ and she’s sleeping all right.”

“I see,” he answered, pushing the last “board” from him. “La Touche was dining with us to-night,” he added in a conversational tone. “If I had known I might have brought him round. He’s asked me to see his Academy picture.”

“Are—you going?” she said a little breathlessly, taken back by the suddenness of it.

“Yes. I want to feel how it looks completed. I have only seen the woman’s head so far.”

An intense sensation of relief swept over her. In the back of her mind she had been dreading a knowledge as complete as her own; and in the reaction she almost laughed aloud.

“What did you think of her?” she said, before she could stop herself.

He looked at her gravely; but she refused to raise her head, bending with lowered eyelids over her needle.

“Do you want me to answer?” he said slowly.

She glanced round hurriedly, still refusing to meet his eye. As she did so she caught the flicker of a shadow in the kitchen, and a look of relief came into her eyes. “Sister,” she whispered, rising quietly.

The night-superintendent had glided wraith-like into the ward an hour before her time. He stared at her wonderingly; and then something in the gravity of her solemn eyes seemed to strike a chill into his chameleon-sensitive intelligence.

“What is it, sister?” he said.

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"Matron says, 'Can you come to the home at once,' Mr. Fitzgerald? Nurse Otway seems to be very bad."

Instantly a sickening grip seemed to settle on his heart. He felt a dull pain in his spine. In the sweep of his own emotions he was conscious that he had been forgetful, and inwardly he was ashamed.

"I'll come at once," he said sharply, rising instantly into action. "Find Dr. Connellan, sister, and ask him to hurry after me."

Then he turned to Nora. "Good-night, nurse," he said abruptly.

"Good-night, Mr. Fitzgerald," she answered quietly.

CHAPTER IX

OF A MIDNIGHT OPERATION, THE FOOLISHNESS OF MOIRA, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

"I'M so sorry to be such a bother," she said weakly, with the unconsciously expressed feeling of a nurse that she should never be ill.

Fitzgerald smiled cheerfully to hide the anxiety tugging at his heart.

"Just listen to her, matron, would you," he said, "with her talk about bother. What nonsense. Temperature?" he murmured urgently, not looking at the matron.

"96.6," the matron whispered cautiously; and again he had the feeling of the same dull grip at his heart.

Mechanically he felt for her wrist, and looked at his watch. The pulse was feebly slurring at 140; she was watching him keenly for a sign; and so he forced the stiff muscles of his face into a spasmodic smile as Connellan glided quietly into the cubicle, and the eyes of the two house-men met.

Presently he relinquished the pulse.

"Get quite straight in the bed, nurse, if you can," he said softly.

Automatically the matron removed the blanket and turned down the sheet. The two house-men withdrew to the bottom of the bed, and silently watched the abdominal respirations.

"Put your finger where you feel the pain most," said Fitzgerald.

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She did so, and the house-men nodded simultaneously.

"Just over McBurney," murmured Connellan.

Fitzgerald moved quietly to her side, and his long delicate fingers travelled gently over the painful area. It was as hard as a board, and told him that his worst fears had been realised.

"Been sick?" he said quietly.

"Felt very sick; but it was the dreadful pain," she answered feebly. "It's not so bad now. I feel I want to sleep."

Fitzgerald nodded. Then he drew the sheet up again to the lower border of the ribs, after turning to Connellan to see if he wanted to examine her. Connellan, however, shook his head.

"Perhaps you'd better exclude 'chest,' all the same," said Fitzgerald. Connellan nodded again, and moved to her side.

Presently he straightened himself, and put his binaural into the pocket of his white coat without a word.

"We'll be back in a moment, nurse," said Fitzgerald, collecting the others with his eye.

Outside in the corridor the matron turned to him anxiously.

"Well?" she said.

"There's nothing in the chest, Con?"

"No."

"Thought not." He turned to the matron. "I'm afraid she's perforated this time," he said slowly.

"As bad as that!" exclaimed the matron, dismayed.

"'Fraid so. What do you think, Conn?"

"Sure of it," said Connellan. "It's pretty desperate."

"Poor little girl," said the matron with unexpected impulsiveness. "I could never help liking her."

Suddenly an intense feeling of nervous irritability over-

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swept Fitzgerald. "We've got to do something at once," he said querulously.

The matron straightened up, and became practical.

"I'll order the theatre to be got ready—stretcher—bed in 'No. 8,'" she said.

"Right," said Fitzgerald, ashamed of his burst of irritation, the feeling of action soothing him at once. "You'll see to it at once, matron. Conn, you'll give the 'stuff,' and you might ring up Sir John and tell him all about it. I'll just go in and say a word to her. She'll agree to anything I tell her."

As the others hurried off he re-entered the cubicle, and stood for a moment gazing down at her. Something in the way the little pinched face, framed in its fleecy cloud of coppery golden hair, looked up at him caused him to swallow rapidly with emotion. A wave of protective tenderness welled up in him. He sat down on the edge of the bed, and her hand slipped into his.

"Am I going to die?" she said steadily.

His eyelids flickered a moment in hesitation, and she noticed it.

"Don't be professional, Fitz, dear old boy. It's useless with me, and I'm not afraid. Tell me," she said in the same small, steady, feeble voice.

"Not if we can help it," he burst out hoarsely.

"Have I perforated?" she queried steadily.

"Yes," he answered reluctantly.

"Then it's pretty nearly——"

"No. No. I'm d——d if it is," he interrupted with the roughness of tears in his voice. "And it's all my fault. I hate to think I didn't make you have it done last time. What a rotten fool I was," he muttered bitterly, almost breaking down. "I wish to God—it isn't fair somehow—oh, damn——"

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A hoarse, dry, painful sob shook the bed, bringing a sudden beautiful light into her tired eyes. Impulsively she drew his hand up against her cheek till it sank in the softness of her hair; and then, by the curious reversal of things which is of the nature of woman, she began to mother him as if he were the one in peril, not herself.

"Don't take on so, dear old boy," she said gently. "You've got to keep your hands steady for me. Now, listen—in case—in case I don't pull through. You see, I have no one to depend upon but you."

She glanced at his bowed head quickly for a moment, before making up her mind to speak.

"I'm troubled about—Marmaduke. It's three years ago, and—he's grown a trifle misty in my mind at times. But I wouldn't like to hurt him—wouldn't like him to think lightly of me afterwards if——"

She paused and looked at him half fearfully, half tenderly.

"I want you to do something for me."

"Anything—anything," he said brokenly.

"There's a book—a diary in my trunk I want you to keep for me. If I pull through I want you to give it back to me unopened. There are things in it I wouldn't like any one but you to know, and not even you unless I die. If I don't, I want you to read and then destroy it. Will you?"

He patted the hand inclosed in his.

"Yes—yes, little girl, of course I will."

She lay back smiling, satisfied. "The key is in the Saratoga. The book is on the top shelf. It's a red-backed book. Have you got it? Yes, that's the one. Put it in your coat. I can face anything now," she said contentedly.

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There was a sound of approaching feet in the corridor; and he got up quietly, opened the door, and looked out.

"Bring the stretcher in here, Mooney," he said, wondering for a moment at the evenness of his own voice.

Two porters, followed by a nurse, entered. The nurse wrapped a blanket round her, and then Fitzgerald leant over the bed.

"Put your arms round my neck, nurse."

She did so, and he skilfully lifted the slight little blanket-wrapped body in his arms, and placed her gently on the stretcher.

"Right, Mooney."

"Right, sorr."

The two porters clumped steadily through the doorway, followed by the silent nurse. As they did so she turned her head and smiled.

"See you later," she said, game to the last, looking at him as they turned into the corridor.

There was an air of busy quiet in the beautiful lofty operating theatre, with its white marble walls and tessellated floor reflecting the glare of the big electric lights, when a little later they were all assembled. In one corner Sir John and Fitzgerald in waders, their arms dripping with antiseptics, were struggling into rubber gloves, while at the same time they were being robed in sterile white operating coats by a satellite nurse. A faint hum came from the exhaust-fan overhead, a subdued bubbling from the steriliser. Opposite the operating table a neat-waisted nurse, with rolled-up sleeves showing her dimpled elbows, was arranging the instruments with a faint metallic rattle in their trays on the glass-topped instrument tables, while another behind her was threading needles, curved and flat, with sutures, and cutting lengths of silk to be instantly

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ready if required. Outside from the stillness of the night came the clanking sound of shunting railway wagons.

Presently the folding doors from the anæsthetic room opened quietly inwards, and Connellan in his white coat appeared, pushing the anæsthetic couch on its silent rubber wheels before him, the matron and night-superintendent following, the latter carrying his swivel anæsthetic stool. No one spoke. In silence the three transferred the swathed inanimate patient on to the operating-table, her face covered with the Clover's mask, her copper-coloured hair lying in two long plaits on her breast in front, a ribbon of forget-me-not blue untied at her throat exposing the slender white neck and softly heaving bosom. Neither of the assistant nurses intent on their occupation looked up, for each had her own appointed task, and the discipline of years had ingrained self-suppression in them, even when, as was the case here, one of their dearest friends was coming under the knife.

Sir John had little more than looked at the patient, his confidence in the diagnosis of his house-surgeon was so complete. He was only mildly interested; he scarcely knew the nurse even by sight; and the breathing figure on the table was only one of a long chain of many hundred similar cases to him.

Apparently he was not even thinking of the operation, for his old cracked voice came booming across the stillness to Connellan's ears—

“—and after winning at twelve to one, dashed if I didn't find I'd put my money on with a 'welsher.'”

“She's ready, sir,” said Connellan quietly across the theatre.

Sir John looked round sharply. Then he walked to the instrument table and glanced quickly over the trays.

“Throw that d——d needle-holder away,” he said

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abruptly. "Didn't I tell you never to let me set eyes on it again?"

"Yes, sir," said the nurse, quite unmoved.

They were accustomed to Sir John's irritability and large freedom of language. Every one knew it was entirely impersonal and of the moment. No one took any notice of it.

Fitzgerald stood opposite Sir John at the patient's side. He was very pale. Quietly he stretched his hands before him, smiling faintly when he found that they were perfectly steady. Then he arranged the sterile towels carefully around the operation area.

"Can we start, Connellan?" exclaimed Sir John irritably. Connellan deliberately pulled up one of the patient's eyelids, looked at the pupil, and touched the cornea.

"Yes, sir," he said, and replaced the mask.

Sir John glanced quickly at the square of exposed skin. He measured it with his eye.

"Knife," he said abruptly, swinging his arm behind him.

The nurse put it into his waiting fingers; there was a flash, and a long, raw, red ellipsoid appeared in the area of breathing iodine-stained whiteness. Automatically Fitzgerald's swab covered it, the red creeping quickly up the virgin purity of the sponge. He raised his hand sharply, a little vessel spurted six inches high, and his artery forceps coming down with a clipping precision stopped it instantly. Swiftly, steadily, working in the absolute unison of knowledge and mutual practice, the four sets of fingers manipulated the wound.

"Peritoneum," said Sir John, twenty seconds later.

"Scissors," he barked, and again the instrument was ready to his fingers.

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There was a quick, clean snip, and he was in the abdominal cavity.

"Packing," he said. The gauze was ready to his hand.

Very carefully he walled off the area around the appendix. Then he inserted two skilful fingers, turned half round, and looked up at the ceiling.

This was the critical moment. Fitzgerald stood stonily, his mind almost a blank, his two hands holding the retractors mechanically.

"Got it," said Sir John. "By Jove, it's sloughed off right at the attachment of the mesentery."

He withdrew his fingers, carrying with them the green gangrenous end of the sloughed-off appendix.

"Just in time. You were quite right, Fitzgerald," he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," said Fitzgerald perfunctorily.

Sir John stared at the matron.

"She may consider herself a d——d lucky young woman," he said.

"Yes, sir," murmured the matron, fixing the head light for him at the same time.

Very carefully the old adhesions were separated, an enterolith discovered and removed, the stump ligatured and invaginated, and the area of infection swabbed clear.

Fitzgerald stretched his long back cramped by stooping; and held the edges of the peritoneum for the sutures.

"You can stop now, Conn," he murmured.

Connellan took off the Clover, pulled up an eyelid, nodded, and stood aside. In a few minutes more the operation was completed, the final sutures had been adjusted, the dressings applied, and the still, white, mummy-like figure was being wheeled off along the corridor to the ward.

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"Will she be all right now, do you think, sir?" said the matron quietly.

Sir John paused in the act of disembarassing himself from his operating coat.

"I hope so—thanks to our young friend's quickness in diagnosis here, and barring accidents—she ought to do."

A smile of relief broke over the matron's face, as Sir John turned to Fitzgerald with a twinkle.

"I think we've both earned a cigar," he said genially.

"I'll send some coffee round to Mr. Fitzgerald's rooms, sir," said the matron.

"Pretty girl—nice hair," said Sir John later, apropos of nothing.

"Yes, sir," said Fitzgerald without enthusiasm.

Sir John looked at him keenly.

"Got over the 'nurse-fever' stage," he laughed. "Glad to see it, for there's the makings of a surgeon in you. I don't want to embarrass you, Fitzgerald, but that was an excellent diagnosis of yours."

"Thank you, sir," said Fitzgerald diffidently.

Sir John rose ponderously.

"Well, it's pretty near daylight now, and we both want to get to our beds. Just one thing, Fitzgerald. Your father and I went through the Crimea together; and no man could have wished for a better comrade. Strictly between ourselves, there'll be an assistant-surgeoncy vacant here inside a year. Forget I told you."

Fitzgerald smiled at him.

"I will, sir."

Going round to see how she was, before turning in, he met Connellan in the corridor.

"Yes. She's come round all right. I'm off to bye-bye." He yawned elaborately; and then smiled suddenly.

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"I think she'd better have some morphia—inclined to gabble—name not 'Marmaduke'—awkward—matron."

"Gosh," exclaimed Fitzgerald, feeling for his hypodermic. When he got to the one-bed ward, kept for such emergencies, he found Nurse Marriott had been put on as "special" over her.

"Get me some sterilized water, nurse," he said, thus getting rid of her for a few minutes. Then he leant over the bed. She stared at him with wide dilated pupils, closed her eyes deliberately, opened them again, and looked at him.

"Feeling better?" he murmured.

At the sound of his voice she began to weep feebly. It was obvious that under the influence of the anæsthetic her control was in complete abeyance, that her innermost thoughts might jump to the surface on the slightest provocation.

"You've got to go right off to sleep now," he said in an urgent tone of subdued suggestion.

For a moment it looked as if the order was going to have effect. Her eyes closed for a second; then suddenly she jerked her head, and opened them again.

"I do—love you—oh, so dearly. It's all—all in the—book. Kiss me—Dermot," she entreated.

Fitzgerald drew back aghast.

Instinctively his hand went to the pocket of his coat. Somehow he felt utterly ashamed, guilty of a crime, conscious of an unpardonable eavesdropping. "Oh, my God!" he groaned inwardly, feeling a cowardly inclination to do anything to get away from the revelation of her eyes.

Suddenly she began to sob bitterly. Two thin arms came out from under the coverlid.

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"Why—are you—so cruel—to me? Why—won't you?" she wailed.

He glanced at the open door distractedly. The nurse might return at any moment; and, if she found them thus, it would be all over the hospital before the morning. There was only one thing to do. He leant over her quickly.

"Will you be good and go to sleep if I do?" he said soothingly, as if talking to a little child.

"Oh yes," she assented.

Gently he kissed the pale little lips, and immediately she was calm again, closing her eyes contentedly like a child in its mother's arms after the horror of a nightmare.

"I'm going to give you a hypodermic," he said gently.

She opened her eyes sleepily, and smiled at him.

"All right," she answered.

A self-conscious cough made him look up. Nurse Marriott was at the door, her eyes watching them stealthily, something in her manner making him feel as if he would like to strike her. He gave his injection; watched till it took effect; and then abruptly left.

In the morning she was sleeping when he came on his round before the day's operations; the temperature had risen, and the pulse rate fallen, showing that the shock of the operation was already passing off.

His mind freed, therefore, from one trouble, was able to dwell on the other; and so he was all the more conscious of the anxiety he felt for her sake as to how much she would remember of the details of the night.

In the afternoon she was awake, feeble but smiling, when the ward sister brought him in to see her.

"Nice scare you gave us last night," he said in mock severity. "What do you think of it, sister?"

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"Disgraceful," said the sister, smiling, and handing him the chart.

As he was looking at it a nurse appeared in the doorway. "Dr. Murray, sister," she said. It was one of the visiting staff, and the sister looked apologetically at Fitzgerald.

"Don't wait, sister. I can manage all right," he answered quickly to her unspoken question; and so, with a murmur of thanks, she left them.

Immediately a restraint seemed to fall upon the patient. She looked at him shyly, but his face was quite impassive; his whole attention seemed to be given to the chart; and so she plucked up courage to ask hurriedly—

"Did I say anything when I was coming round?"

All the morning he had been considering how he would answer such a question, hoping her memory would be vague enough to make his word decisive, having arrived at the conclusion that, even if things were as she had stated, she would rather have died than give utterance to them at any time when her feelings were under proper control.

"Didn't give you a chance," he said with a laugh. "Marriott was on 'special' with you; and so I just squirted you with morphia, and you went off like a log."

A smile of immense relief came over her face.

"Wise old thing," she said, recovering her archness at once. "I don't mind the headache it's left behind at all now."

"Thank goodness that's over," he thought, with a sigh of relief. Then he smiled at her.

"Have you any idea how effective you look as a 'flapper?'" he murmured, letting his eyes dwell on her admiringly. "With your hair parted in the middle, and those two big bronze pigtails, one on either side, you

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look too demure for anything but the lid of a chocolate box."

"Nice boy," she said, now absolutely satisfied, making a moue with her lips at him.

On the fourth day Sir John pronounced her practically out of danger. His prognosis, however, had already been anticipated; and the nursing and resident staff had almost ceased commenting on the hurried midnight operation. Even the patients in "No. 9" began to leave off asking how she was getting on, accepting it as a matter of course that she should be lying in the next ward, and some one else doing her duty.

That day matron stopped him in the corridor.

"Might I take the 'special' off now, Mr. Fitzgerald? I can give you Nurse Townsend in '9,' and with her and a good 'pro' you ought to be all right."

"Yes, matron," said Fitzgerald slowly, "that ought to be all right."

When Connellan heard of the arrangement he chuckled, knowing fairly accurately how things were.

"I see a gaudily complicated time before you, Dermot, old man," he laughed. "That's the penalty you 'general lovers' have to pay for your fatal powers of fascination, and too expansive hearts."

"There are times, Conn, when I'd like to do you slowly to death—something lingering with boiling oil," retorted the exasperated Fitzgerald.

That afternoon when he went round to see his patient he brought the unopened diary with him. She pushed it rapidly under her pillow with an embarrassed laugh.

"I feel like the lady in the melodrama when the incriminating papers have been restored to her by the poor but chivalrous hero," she said flippantly to cover her con-

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fusion. Then her eyes softened. "All the same, there isn't any one else in the wide world I would have trusted this little book to with such absolute confidence as yourself, you wicked old thing," she added.

"Thank you, Otter," he answered gratefully.

Shortly after he rose to leave, and then, woman-like, she disclosed the subject that had been prominent in her mind since morning.

"So the 'Duchess' is taking my place in '9,' I hear."

"Yes, I believe so," he murmured with elaborate carelessness, exposing, however, his interest immediately after by adding: "Why don't you like her?"

She thought a moment. "I'm afraid we're mutually cold. The 'Duchess' doesn't quite approve of me. She thinks I lack dignity. I, when we meet, find myself murmuring, 'peas, potatoes, prunes, and prisms.' I'm sorry, but I can't help it."

Fitzgerald flushed slightly.

"She's a very beautiful woman," he said a trifle quickly.

"Yes," she assented dryly, "and yours is a typical man's answer."

When he had gone she lay back thinking.

"I don't care. She's not going to have him," she murmured to herself, softly fingering the back of her restored confessions.

CHAPTER X

THE CLIMAX OF THE MADNESS OF FITZGERALD

HE came away from the studio wrapped in a tingling chromatic aura, which made the whole world seem suffused with tenderest rose-madder, the air around appear to vibrate, golden-glad, synchronous with the pulsations of his heart. It was with difficulty he kept himself from shouting out with the sheer joy of life as he walked briskly, swinging his cane, through Merrion Square.

In Nassau Street a ragged little urchin thrust an evening paper at him; and he felt that half-a-crown was the very least he could offer in exchange for the courtesy, and in acknowledgment of the existence of this wonderful world.

When he passed, the boy bit dubiously upon the coin, grinned, and then proceeded immediately to execute a series of cart-wheels on the pavement, to the intense delight of two little girls with their governess, and the disgusted annoyance of a retired Indian judge, with whom he nearly collided, coming out of the Kildare Street Club.

Unconscious of all this, Fitzgerald hastened on until the glow of massed colours in a florist's windows caught his eye, and focussed his ethereal mood into action, making him feel as though he ought to take the whole of the great piled perfumed masses in his arms and strew them knee-deep around her, in an attempt at adequate expression of his gratitude for her mere being alive.

When he entered the shop the multitudinous perfumes

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rose to his head like new wine. He felt suddenly at a loss; but the slender black-robed attendant acolyte seemed to enter into sympathy with his mood. Tactfully she suggested roses; and he watched while she placed them carefully in their dew-sprinkled bed of soft green moss, before consigning them to the tender mercies of the Post Office.

In the street again he looked at his watch. He could not possibly see her before eight o'clock, and not without some plausible excuse before ten. "Lord! what an eternity!" he groaned.

Connellan glanced curiously at him once or twice during dinner.

"He looks as if he had a temperature," he thought. "I wonder how he's going to manage between the two of them. If I didn't know that, in love, a man always wants what he's afraid he can't have, I'd back little Otway, hands down."

Connellan, however, was not in the secret of his exaltation, and could not, therefore, know that, for the time being, only one figure occupied the centre of his consciousness.

A bad compound fracture coming into "No. 1" male surgical at 8.30 p.m. absorbed Fitzgerald's mind for over an hour, whilst, with the patient under an anæsthetic, he trimmed and purified the lacerated edges, and reduced the protruding fragments into position.

"That looks all right now, sister. Barring sepsis, he ought to do without wiring," he said, contemplating his work with satisfaction from the bottom of the bed. "Thank you very much, Perry," he added, as the anæsthetist gathered his things together to depart.

Lighting a cigarette, he strolled along the cloisters, calmed by the routine of his work, feeling at peace with

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all the world, filled with the sober satisfaction of things accomplished, confident in himself.

It was a beautiful night of stars. A brooding silence lay over everything. The air seemed tremulous with the impalpable spirit of growth. He thought he could almost feel the earth breathing. The peace of the great world enveloped him. Stopping in his walk, he leant over the back of a garden-seat, sensing it all, a dim white figure, his face faintly illuminated at times by the glow of his cigarette-end.

Slowly from overhead the bell in the old clock-tower faltered the hour of ten; and his eyes, following the origin of the sound, watched the dim silhouette, with its tarnished gold vane stationary against the sky, until the sound had ceased.

Ceasing, it seemed, by its physical impact, to have shattered an illusion; for, slowly in the silence that followed, the old restlessness came back to him; and he seemed to hear, as it were, the ticking hands of time urging him on to some long fore-ordained solution. He felt as if he were a pawn in the hands of an unseen omniscient fate. A curious reluctance to move obsessed him—a feeling that, if he stood quite still, destiny might pass him in the glimmering darkness unperceived, leaving him to his dreams.

Opposite him the light in the doorway of "No. 4" was obscured for a moment by an entering figure. It was the night-sister on her rounds; and somehow, as if it had been the summation of a number of unperceived stimuli, the movement seemed to wake him to himself; he threw the glowing end of his cigarette on the flagstones, flattened it with his heel, and turned resolutely to the stairs.

The first thing he noticed was that she had two of his rosebuds fastened in her belt. He had been schooling him-

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self to quietude; but the sight of them made him feel that if he spoke he would betray himself. At the moment of entry, however, she was talking to the junior nurse, and he had time, therefore, to pull himself together before her long black eyelashes curled up at him as she turned.

For a few moments his attention was so completely absorbed by the intensity of the thrill produced by the mere sight of her that at first this fact alone occupied the centre of his consciousness. Presently, however, in the consequent enlarged area of marginal sensation produced by this sharpness of concentration, he became sensitive to the fact that, when she turned, she did not look him straight in the face, as was her wont; and this impression, working inwards, as the first intensity of sight stimulus began to fade, suddenly produced, by a chain of suppressed conclusions, the conviction that, somehow or other, intuition had told her he had now seen the completed picture, and the roses she had pinned in her belt were an answer to his unspoken question.

In the centre of this common thought, which bound them thus secretly together, came, however, the disturbing effect of the alien eyes of the probationer; and this somehow seemed to him to raise a barrier which checked the secret mutual permeation of their thoughts, causing him to say with a coldness he himself could scarcely credit—

“Is there anything you want me to see particularly, nurse?” Immediately he had spoken he was conscious of a wave of chilliness following the remark, a result of the fundamental difference between man and woman.

For a man, unless he is very young, is always shy of the public expression of emotion; whereas a woman, with the certain knowledge that she is loved, openly glories in its avowal, although, until she is sure of it, she is even more careful than a man never to betray herself.

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Since the revelation of the picture Nora had been conscious of a change of aspect in herself towards the emotional side of life, a change by which she was visibly perturbed. By an effort of will she had managed to drive it from her surface thoughts; but deep down she was aware that it still lurked, ready at any moment to spring into actuality. Subconsciously she was aware of a drifting; consciously she refused to recognise the tendency. Nevertheless she had been stirred by the message suggested by the flowers, and had tacitly responded by allowing herself to wear them.

The cold rigidity of his tone, therefore, came to her almost as a physical rebuff, for unconsciously one judges the emotions of others by their actions; and immediately she jumped to the conclusion that it was all an idle jest on his part, of which she was the unconscious plaything. A raw red pain throbbed through her at the thought. For the first time in her life she was aware of an hostility in which impressions of another woman were entangled; and with a start she realised that the demon jealousy had found a lodgement in her soul. Then a sudden anger of shame surged within her, ebbing to leave her icily cold.

"Sorry to detain you from more important things; but there's a new burnt baby I think you'd better see," she answered, with chilling politeness, lighting the candle, and leading the way into the ward.

The probationer gazed after them curiously, as he stood frigidly aside to let her pass before him.

"How these two hate one another!" she thought. "I wonder why?"

He stood at the end of the cot as she leant over the child, turning down, with gentle hands, the coverlet from the tortured little face masked in ointment-smearred surgical lint. All the hard lines had gone from her mouth; she

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looked like an angel of mercy; and his heart ached with the thought of it as he contrasted the effect his presence had upon her. The light placed on the locker alongside outlined her face sharply in the silent, dim-lit ward, giving her an air of almost ethereal purity painful in its infinite tenderness. He longed with an almost savage hopelessness for anything that could possibly bring such a light in her violet eyes for him; and envy even of the scarred little body in the cot assailed him.

With an effort he drew his thoughts together, and leant down to feel the fluttering tiny pulse. Then the surgeon in him awoke to sudden energy: his capable, resourceful self came back again.

"Saline," he said sharply.

"Yes, sir," she answered, and moved off quietly to get the instruments and the help of the probationer.

Inside a minute she was back with everything ready, having, indeed, anticipated his request. Together they bent over the cot, the probationer holding the light.

He pushed the needle in, and knelt, silently watching the shrivelled skin expand again, feeling the response of the pulse to the life-giving fluid.

"How much?" he said abruptly, without looking up.

"Ten ounces so far," she answered, looking at the indicator. He pinched the tube, shifted the needle to the opposite axilla, and waited.

"Tell me when we reach twenty."

There was an interval of silence. "Now," she said.

"Shut off," he answered.

Quietly the probationer removed the apparatus, and they were alone.

He looked up for a moment to find her wide eyes on him. They were instantly withdrawn; but the scientific

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detachment that had momentarily overlain his mood went with them.

“How is Mrs. Tomson in ‘8½’?” he said awkwardly.

“98·8, 84,22. Sleeping. Would you like to see her?” she answered mechanically, taking up the light.

He had no wish to see Mrs. Tomson. She was obviously all right; but he was helplessly loathe to leave, and so he followed her haltingly along the dark passage between the wards, dimly lit by the guttering candle. Behind them the door into “9” banged loudly, driven by the wind from the open passage window; with a smoky side-sweep the light at the same moment went out; then, in the overwrought state of her nerves, she dropped the candle, and they were alone in the darkness, in the breathing quiet of the night.

He moved forward a step; his foot struck something metallic, and, putting out a wavering hand, he brushed against a soft, round, stooping shoulder. The touch acted on him like the release of a hair-trigger. A wild, fierce wave of passion overswept him. Like a flash his arms were round her in a vice-like grasp, and he was raining hot, passionate kisses on her hair, her eyes, her lips.

He had taken her completely by surprise, and for a moment she lay passive on his breast. Then her waist hardened, her hands pushed desperately against him, and she found her voice.

“Let me go! Let me go!” she panted. “How dare you?”

“No!” he gasped fiercely, holding her with unconsciously cruel strength.

For the moment the whole veneer of civilisation had slipped from him. He was the troglodyte man capturing his mate with stone hammer and reindeer thongs, the Benjaminite falling upon the fair woman of the plains,

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the Roman outlaw seizing his Sabine mate. It was the blood of the old fighting Fitzgeralds—looting, plundering, burning from the time of Strongbow downwards—breaking through the thin crust of custom overlying the passionate nature that was now rising up in him.

A fierce pleasure in the silent, strong way she battled against him, a fiercer delight in the greater strength that made her efforts futile, surged up in him. In the darkness he could not see the humiliation of her proud face. He only felt he wanted her, wanted her with every fibre of his strong young body, wanted her at all costs, and would not let her go.

At length words came to him. "Nora, sweetheart, I love you. I want you so—every little bit of you—your beautiful, proud white face—your tender, soft red mouth—my God! how I want you! I have been hungering for you for months. Why have you been so cruel to me? Your eyes soften for every little dirty urchin from the streets, but not for me—who would give my very soul for you. Nora, darling, won't you answer?"

"Let me go!" she gasped exhaustedly. "Oh, you are torturing me!"

Her waist had softened. She had almost ceased to struggle. A wave of pitying love swept over him. He felt that to touch her with his lips again, without permission, would be an outrage. But deep down in him some virile instinct told him it would be fatal to release his hold. She had given no answer, and if he was to succeed he must tear it from her. His right arm was round her neck, but she had twisted her face into the hollow of his elbow. Hoarse with emotion, he whispered to the little ear—

"Darling, darling, I don't want to hurt you. It's tearing my very heart-strings. But I do love you, and I can't

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stand the suspense any longer. I've never felt like this towards any other woman before. Don't keep me waiting. My life is just an aching world of misery without you. Tell me——"

Involuntarily his arms slackened.

"Will you—let me go—if I tell you?" she panted in a smothered voice, moving a little in his arms.

"Yes, sure," he answered tenderly, something telling him to loosen his grasp.

He leant back against the wooden partition, breathing rapidly. He could not see her, but the faint perfume of the crushed roses came to him in the confined space. Nevertheless, without the touch of her he felt lost, despairing; and his hands, pushed forward blindly for comfort, came inadvertently on her shoulders again. He was trembling violently with suppressed emotion, and she could feel the vibration shaking through her body. Still she was silent.

"Quick!" he said hoarsely.

Suddenly he felt her fingers grasping his down-turned elbows, and then her voice came in a rush.

"Oh, you dear, you dear!" she said brokenly. "I do love you. I'm not proud any more, and I don't care. I think I've loved you right from the very first without knowing it."

Very gently, now, he drew her towards him till he could feel the heaving of her breast against him.

"What a brute I've been to you, Nora, darling!" he said remorsefully.

"I don't care," she repeated recklessly, "as long as I know you do love me. I liked to feel the strength of you crushing me. I thought I was going to die once—you held me so hard—but I didn't care when you told me. I wouldn't have minded dying then. I just wanted my

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man." She laughed hysterically. "I love to feel you trembling for me."

She ran her hand up the wide sleeve of his ward coat, along the hairy, knotted arm, until she came to the elbow.

"How strong you are! I just love to feel it's my arm. Oh, I'm just a human animal to-night. I know I'd be ashamed of what I'm saying in the light. Stop me, Dermot——" She laughed recklessly.

He swung her up lightly, holding her like a baby.

"Put your arms round my neck," he said. "Now say, 'Dermot Fitzgerald, I love you with all my heart.'"

"Dermot Fitzgerald, I love you with all my heart," she repeated.

"Now kiss me 'for always,'" he said.

His lips came over her mouth, and he waited.

"For always," she breathed, and the surrender was complete. He put her down gently.

"Oh, I've stepped on the candlestick!" she exclaimed. He struck a match, but she had already found it, and she blew the light out instantly.

"No, no; I don't want you to look at me. I'm all untidy. My cap's anyway, and my hair's all over the place. Go out in the dark, dear. I'd rather you didn't look at me now. I wonder what the 'pro.' must be thinking!" she exclaimed, gasping, wakening again to actualities.

"Bother the pro.!" he protested. "I want to arrange when I'm to see you again."

She caught him by the shoulders laughingly.

"Go and see Mrs. Tomson, while I fix myself straight in the bath-room. You can come into the kitchen and say a sedate good-night to me afterwards. No, no; not again. Well, then, if you must——" She held her lips up to him obediently.

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Ten minutes later, when he turned with apparent carelessness into the kitchen, he felt, on looking at her, that it must have been all a dream of impossible delight he had been going through—the statuesque, unruffled beauty of her struck him so afresh that it was with difficulty he was able to believe it was the same woman whose passionate arms had been around his neck not a quarter of an hour before.

A great humbleness came over him, a wonder at his former courage, greatly daring. He blessed the breathing darkness of the night that had made that courage possible. She looked the same imperial, unapproachable beauty as before; and yet not quite the same. There was a reminiscent happy curve about the lips that was new, a softness in the wonderful eyes he had dreamt of, but never before seen.

The probationer looked up demurely from the copper sterilising tin she was polishing. She rather liked Mr. Fitzgerald, and wondered why her senior found him so distasteful.

“If the burnt kiddie shows signs of collapsing in the night, send for me to give another infusion, nurse,” he said, looking at Nora.

“Very well, Mr. Fitzgerald,” she answered.

Something in the timbre of the voices seemed to strike the probationer. She glanced up under downcast lids, heard an imaginary call in the ward, and left them apparently unconscious of any undercurrent. But she had noticed two things that set her wondering. There was a curious crumple on Nora’s apron, fresh donned that evening, and a long black hair lay prominent on the collar of Fitzgerald’s white ward coat.

When she left them alone they stood opposite one another. For a moment neither spoke; but under the worship of his glance her eyelids dropped dewily.

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"I can't believe it, somehow," he said humbly.

Then he knelt swiftly on one knee, and raised her hand to his lips in homage.

"Good-night, princess," he said. "Forgive the sacrilege."

Her eyes looked tenderly down on his bowed head. She fully understood the impulse that had prompted his action, the thoughts that underlay the act; and with her disengaged hand she gently touched the hair on his brow as if in accolade.

"Good-night, my own true lover," she answered softly.

CHAPTER XI

A FURTHER INTRUSION OF PIP, AND OF THE PERTURBATIONS OF NORA

THE luncheon party in Pip's rooms had broken up; and he was sitting disconsolate, amid a havoc of plates, staring at the cause of his guests' somewhat precipitate flight—a notice placed prominently on the mantelpiece, bearing the legend—

“PLEASE DO NOT STAY AFTER TWO
O'CLOCK.

“OUR MR. PIP IS READING FOR THE ‘LITTLEGO.’”

It had been limned in a moment of pious resolution; and the author was now feeling somewhat aggrieved at its unlooked-for success, recognising, ruefully, that each of his friends had felt that such a resolution on his part was of so delicate a constitution that it required the most determined encouragement from them to prevent it suffering that most melancholy of fates, “nipping in the bud.”

Macmorrhagh came in silently, and began slowly to remove the dishes from the table, glancing hesitatingly at Pip, as if expecting him to say something of importance.

“I'm working this afternoon, Macmorrhagh.”

“Yissorr,” said Macmorrhagh, dully disappointed. “The coal's done agane, sorr,” he added.

“Great Scott! again? You're sure you're not running a private gas company on your own, Macmorrhagh?”

“Me, sorr? No, sorr.”

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"Well, then, order some more."

"Beg pardon, sorr, but they won't deliver unless we pays the last. They do be sayin' we owes for two months now, sorr."

"The brutes, after all we've had, and haven't paid for, from them. It's base ingratitude, don't you think, Macmorrhagh?"

"Yissir. It's kind o' mane, Oi've been thinkin' meself."

Pip laughed suddenly.

"How much money have we, Macmorrhagh? I think you'd better pay. And oh, by the bye, Mr. Dermot saw your little girl this morning. I telephoned him up, and he says there's nothing much to worry about."

Macmorrhagh straightened up suddenly. The weight of depression he had brought with him into the room vanished. There was a slight tremor in his voice.

"Thank ye kindly, sorr, an' Mr. Dermot too. It'll be a relief to 'herself' that same."

Pip kept his eyes studiously turned away. There were tears of relief in the old soldier's eyes, which he knew he would not care to have noticed.

"Yes. I thought 'herself' would like to know, so just you put the Greek Dictionary on the table, and clear off to her."

"Yissorr. Thank ye, sorr," said Macmorrhagh briskly.

Left to himself, Pip gradually screwed himself down to work.

"Now for that rotten old 'catalogue of the Ships,'" he thought. "If I get 'Mahoff,' he's sure to stick me on to it. How Homer could have been guilty of perpetrating such a monstrosity I can't think. My own belief is that the poor old fellow never did. It's an interpellation. Shouldn't be surprised to find it was a cryptogram cun-

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ningly inserted by Bacon to prove that Shakespeare really wrote Homer too. Never mind, here goes."

At the end of an hour he banked his books in a heap, and sighed with relief.

"Thank goodness that's over. I've done enough for to-day. Now I can go out to more important things."

A quarter of an hour later, therefore, found him strolling in Grafton Street, pleasantly sensible of the well-dressed affluent atmosphere around him, the flutter of femininity, the faint suspicion of perfume, the kaleidoscopic charm of colour, the aura of youth, high hopes, and laughter-tinted voices.

Presently he noticed, in a shop window, a girl arranging a number of those small useless silver presents with which one victimises friends. She was distinctly pretty; and he stopped and gazed solemnly at her till he caught her eye. The faintest suspicion of a twinkle drew him into the shop; she had turned; and, neglecting the other attendants behind the counter, he walked straight to her.

"I want to look at some wedding presents," he said evenly.

The twinkle died down in her eyes.

"About what price, sir?"

"Oh, about a shilling," he replied, with the spacious manner of a millionaire ordering the whole shop.

The twinkle came back, and then died down again demurely.

"Will it be for a lady or a gentleman?" she inquired.

"Combination! You see, they're going to be married," he explained.

A person with a mottled face, a waxed moustache, an immaculately fitting frock-coat, and a general air of "What can I show you, madam?" came slowly down the shop. The girl's eyes flashed suddenly sideways, and came back.

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“I think you’d better come upstairs, sir, and let me show you some articles that may be suitable,” she said distinctly.

Quickly he suppressed a smile. “Very well,” he said resignedly.

They passed the shopwalker sedately. He had a wicked knowledge that the man was consumed with jealousy—a knowledge that made him almost laugh aloud.

In the comparative quiet of the show-room above she paused.

“We have something here very pretty in pencil-cases,” she said in her best professional manner. “They are three-and-six marked down to one-and-eleven because we have a ‘sale’ on now.”

“I see. Yes. Of course, that makes them a little dearer,” he murmured gravely. “In a ‘sale’ I understand it’s the people, not the goods, that are ‘sold.’”

The corners of her mouth twitched slightly.

“Yes. I suppose so. It would be one-and-six in the ordinary way; but people toss goods so, and the expense of labels—things must be a little dearer at a ‘sale’ to make them pay.”

He nodded intelligently, handling the pencil-case.

“I like this very much, but I’m afraid it won’t do. You see, I want something they can both use at the same time, because I shouldn’t like either of them to feel slighted.”

She was very patient with him.

“Well, then. Here’s a Noah’s Ark—only sevenpence-halfpenny, reduced from sixpence.”

“But they’re quite grown up,” he protested, “and then they might take it the other way, and think me rather—premature. You see, they’re not married yet.”

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She shot a quick glance at him, refused to smile, and knotted her brows thoughtfully.

"It's the combination that puzzles me. We've got lots of things for ladies, and quantities of presents for gentlemen; but combined—I must think."

"I don't want to take up too much of your time," he said diffidently.

"Oh. That's nothing, sir. Ladies often spend hours here, and then go off with a pennyworth of ribbon."

"I think," he said slowly, pointing to a plate d'oyley, "I'll take that penwiper thing for myself. Perhaps if I came in some other day you might have thought of something in the meanwhile."

"Yes. I'll try to think of something that might do," she said smilingly, as she wrapped up the d'oyley in tissue paper. "They're not going to be married just yet—you can give me time, I hope?"

"Oh yes. I think so. I'm sure they'll postpone it when I tell them the reason."

"Thank you, sir. Then if you come in some other day, I'll be thinking in the meantime what you might be liking."

"Perhaps I might meet you accidentally outside some evening, and you could tell me," he ventured.

"Perhaps," she replied, with a faint smile.

"What is a good time for accidents?" he queried.

She appeared to consider deeply for a moment.

"We close at six. A quarter-past might do."

"Thanks awfully. You *do* take a load off my mind. This thing has been preying upon me for—months."

The little parcel was now safely wrapped up.

"Shall I send it for you, sir? What name?" she inquired with apparent innocence, pencil in hand.

With equally apparent innocence he ignored the

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question. Instead, he took the parcel from her solemnly with a sensation of a soft little palm; and, balancing it in his hand, replied—

“No, thanks. I think I shall be able to carry it. If not, I’ll take a cab.”

“Very well, sir. Good-afternoon. Pay at the desk below, please.”

She watched the careless, graceful swing of his shoulders, as he went down the stairs, with a slight dewiness in her eyes, and an unconscious tender curving of the mouth, which was not due so much to the man himself, as to the perennial call of youth to youth represented in his person. She never expected to see him again; it was only a passing episode in the weary round of trying to please a fractious public; but unconsciously she was contrasting the slender, active, brown young figure, in simple, well-cut tweeds, with the somewhat rotund person in funereal black whom she knew, with the instinct of womanhood, to be more than interested in her, and felt uneasily persuaded was in all human probability destined to be her fate.

With a forlorn little shrug of her shoulders she slowly descended. The shopwalker eyed her moodily. The peach did not seem as ready to drop into his mouth as he had anticipated. She passed him rapidly, looking steadily ahead; and did not seem to hear his preparatory “ahem.” Great bodies move slowly; and so she was industriously fixing her window again before he discovered his opportunity was gone. The two other black-robed girls behind the counter looked on silently; and then glanced at one another with understanding eyes. Nature had put them both beyond the risk of temptation; and accordingly they watched with jaundiced eyes while she flouted the chances either would have given her eyes for—the manager, just think of it, two hundred and fifty a year, and his wife

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living the life of a lady. Neither could understand her.

"She's leading him on, the minx," said number one.

"Yes, sure," said number two.

Meanwhile Pip was strolling back towards College Green. Suddenly he saw a pair of shoulders he recognised in front of him.

"Hello, Dermot," he cried affectionately, swinging him round. "What on earth brings you here? You look as if some one had left you a fortune."

Fitzgerald smiled.

"I'm feeling very fit, old boy," he acknowledged.

"But what—oh, I say, there's Nora Townsend—and looking perfectly stunning."

Fitzgerald turned eagerly. "Where? Oh yes."

She was standing at the corner of College Green; and the light that jumped to her eyes, when she saw them, set Pip's quick mind whirling in a rapid chain of probabilities.

"Great Scott! he's done it," he murmured to himself. "That accounts for him wasting his time here of all places. Lord, I must make myself scarce."

And so, after they had shaken hands, he said aloud—

"Sorry I've got to leave you—urgent private affairs—that dog still——"

"But——" protested Nora weakly.

"I'm so sorry, but I can't, really. Bless you, my children," he said, and hurried away, Dermot making no effort to detain him. Pushing his hand into his pocket to find his cigarette-case, after leaving them, his fingers came upon a little paper parcel, and he laughed.

"I shall have to buy that wedding present after all," he said.

At intervals Fitzgerald gazed secretly, diffidently, at

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her over the flowers on the damask table-cloth, in the little alcove whither a discreet waitress had piloted them. It was the first time they had been alone together since the blinding light of the new realisation; and consequently, every time he looked at the sculptured perfection of her, he was conscious of a feeling of Pygmalion breathlessness, the spirit of incredulity contending almost successfully against the facts of memory.

He was ruminating on it while she was bending over the tea-cups, when looking up suddenly she surprised his eyes; and something of the message they conveyed started a resonating note deep down in her. So, as he watched, the classic calm melted; the delicate eyelids flickered upwards; the violet eyes became suffused with the hidden inner light; and a tender whispering curve came to the vivid, clear-cut lips. Then the eyelids dropped again, and a faint roseate flush, as of early dawn, swept forward over the rounded, creamy loveliness of neck and ears and cheeks.

It was the answer poets have dreamt of, men have given their lives for, throughout the ages. It told him everything he could possibly want to know; and the pure golden joy of it thrilled through every fibre of his being.

“Do you take sugar—Dermot?” she said, hesitating deliciously for a second over the name as she regained composure again.

“And cream,” he answered, feeling as if he were being offered ambrosia.

For an hour they lingered, breathing deeply of the joy of life. The world seemed full of such wonderful things, since, in their exalted mood, all the objects in it were bordered, as it were, by an iridescent fringe of faëry gold.

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Laughter bubbled to their lips. Time fled on winged feet. It was only when a growing silence invaded their minds, and the waitress suggestively rattled the tea-things she was removing from a table near, that they woke to the fact that Time had been busy all the while, and the restaurant was now almost deserted.

With a sigh of regret she began to put on her gloves.

"I have been very happy—happier than I can ever remember before," she said in a curious wistful tone, as she surrendered her gloved wrist to his fingers to button.

"I would gladly die to save you a single moment of unhappiness," he answered deeply, his heart vibrating instantly to the vague sadness that had crept into her voice.

All the rest of the evening she kept thinking why this note had risen in her, and, by the time he came to say good-night, it had defined itself more clearly in her mind, moving her suddenly to put her hands on his shoulders, look up in his face, and say, very earnestly—

"You do love me, Dermot?"

"Sure. Heart of all the world," he answered steadily, looking deep in her eyes.

"And you'll always be good to me?"

"Sure," he repeated, slightly puzzled, trying to follow her mind. "What is it?" he added coaxingly, linking his two forefingers in her belt.

She laughed a little shamefacedly.

"I'm sorry, Dermot dear. I find I'm just an ordinary sort of woman after all. I'm so happy that it frightens me. Before I knew you I was content—I thought even that I was happy. I had mapped out my life; and believed that nothing could occur ever to ruffle my peace of mind, because I was sufficient unto myself, and other people did not matter. Now you have come; and you've just made

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me love you, in spite of myself. And so, suddenly I find my future lies entirely outside myself. I cannot control it any longer. It's in your keeping; and it frightens me. If anything were to happen to you—if any one came between us, I feel—oh, I cannot tell you how. I just want to be sure—sure—sure——”

Now he understood; and a deep, welling tenderness overflowed in him towards her.

“My dear,” he said, deeply moved, “you make me very proud and very humble; proud when I think of the great heart you have given me, humble when I think of how little I deserve it. No. You needn't protest. It's quite true. Somehow I feel I do not deserve it. Perhaps no man ever does.”

Her eyes, filmy with emotion, gazed up at him. She put her hands on his shoulders.

“Heart of all the world,” she said.

A vertical line puckered in the middle of his forehead.

“I feel such an iconoclast,” he said, dropping his hands to her waist. “If I had let you alone you would have been quite happy. I have broken the tenor of your life.”

She made a little movement of protest in his grasp.

“You would rather that I had not loved you?”

“No. It isn't that. The trouble is I cannot ask you to come to me for ages—I who feel that nothing can be too good for you. The thought keeps worrying me that it isn't right that I should hold the sweetness of you through so many weary years of waiting. If any one else came along——”

“Dermot,” she protested, wondering at the same time should she tell him. “How can you think of such a thing?”

“I'd hate it like the devil, but it would be fairer to you,” he answered. “I dare say if I went into general

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practice I could manage it all right," he added more brightly.

"And give up all your life's ambition," she protested, her heart warming to him, nevertheless, at the mere suggestion of the sacrifice he was willing to make for her.

He laughed a little ruefully.

"Perhaps I'll have to do it after all," he said. "The other is so slow. Only yesterday Sir John was chaffing me. He said the only way was to pick out a wealthy wife. But I don't see myself in that galley. I want to feel that I'm working for the woman that's to be my wife, not living on her charity."

A vague trouble came to her with the words. At first she was glad she had not spoken. Then a wish that he already knew, a fear that he might think afterwards she had been deliberately deceiving him, oppressed her.

She was about to speak when they both heard a slight noise in the corridor. Instantly he stepped back.

"Of course it didn't really matter, as it turned out, for she got quite well eventually," he said distinctly, at the same time stooping down for his pocket-case. Then he turned round.

It was only the junior nurse; but a shyness of every one lay on them still. They wanted to keep their wonderful secret to themselves; and so her entrance broke the charm.

"Good-night, nurse," he said formally.

"Good-night, Mr. Fitzgerald," she answered in the same tone.

CHAPTER XII

A TRAGEDY IN THE NIGHT

It was close upon midnight on the next day, and Fitzgerald, blissfully comfortable in his arm-chair, was lounging by the fire, his heels resting precariously on the mantelpiece above him, feeling at peace with all the world. A copy of the *Lancet* lay on the floor beside him, his mind too full of rosy recollections to be able to concentrate on its profundities. He smiled continually to himself; and Connellan, glancing up at him occasionally from his evening paper, wondered, cynically indulgent, how long this state of halcyon bliss would last, smiling the superior smile of the man whose pulse had never risen responsive to the filmy look in the eyes of the one woman in all the wide, wide world for him.

Through the open window, in the stillness, came the distant sound of horse's feet, accompanied by song. It was too far off for the words to be distinct; but the tune penetrated to Fitzgerald's ears, and unconsciously he hummed one of the verses—

“Sure I don't give a micky for O'Hara,
Paddy Murphy, not to mention Macnamara,
Or the Sooltan of the Turks,
Or the Irish Boord of Works,
For they're spoilin' all the dhrink in Connemara.”

The sound of singing voices came nearer.

“Some blighters out on a 'gin-crawl,'” said Connellan indulgently.

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Fitzgerald woke up at the voice.

“Eh? What? Oh yes!”

“Seems to be coming nearer,” commented Connellan. “Hope it isn’t our dear friend Hickey on the ‘blind’ again. I noticed he wasn’t in to dinner to-night.”

A frown crossed Fitzgerald’s face. He felt aggrieved, like some one wakened from a dream of untold wealth.

“They’re coming this way,” he said shortly.

Undoubtedly the sounds were nearer; the car was now passing the hospital, and the words of the chorus came distinctly, floating in on the still night air from one sweet tenor voice, slightly husky—

“Said the Sooltan to the Czar of all the Roosias,
Och! Niver moind the Impror of the Proosias;
Paddy Murphy, he’s the terror!
It’s a fac’, replied the Czar,
For he’s a bould, bad man, from the town of Mullingar.
Hooch!”

At the final line, shouted in unison, the car stopped, there was a confused murmur of voices, and then a hammering came at the postern.

“Fef-Fogarty! Fef-Fogarty! Letushin!”

“That’s Hickey’s voice. No doubt of it. Ought we to go and give Fogarty a hand?” said Connellan.

“No. Hickey’d want to fight me. He always does when he’s ‘sprung,’” said Fitzgerald irritably. “Fogarty’ll manage all right. He’s been through this sort of thing before, and he won’t let any one in except Hickey.”

They listened in silence. A shout of disappointment, and then a renewed hammering, came to them.

“He’s got Hickey through, and banged the door in their faces. Good old Fogarty!” was Connellan’s explanation. The knocking ceased, there was a vacant laugh, and then the sound of wheels again.

“They’re off,” commented Fitzgerald. “Damn the

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fellow! He's lowering the prestige of the whole resident staff. We can't put up with this much longer."

"Well, you're the senior, and it's 'up to you' to make the move. He can't say we haven't given him rope enough," commented Connellan.

Fitzgerald shrugged his shoulders irritably.

"Yes, I know. But I'm rather in a hole about it, and don't feel sufficiently dispassionate to be certain of being just. We've always rubbed each other the wrong way, Hickey and I. But there's something more. His father keeps the pawn-shop in Knockeeny, near our place; and he knows I know, and is ashamed of my knowing—though I've never mentioned it to a soul before. Old Hickey is quite a decent sort in his way, and awfully proud of his doctor son in Dublin; but, after the damnable nature of things, the son, of course, is ashamed of his father—the best man of the two. I never came across him till you and I came here; but, of course, I knew all about him, and, equally of course, he knew about me."

"It's deuced awkward," commented Connellan.

Fitzgerald nodded, and continued—

"But that isn't all. Suppose we make it hot for him, and he has to leave. Do you think he'll blame himself? Not he! He'll put it all down to me; and his father will only hear his version of the affair. Now old Hickey is rather a power. He lends money; most of the small farmers are hopelessly in his debt; and he controls the 'League' down there. So, you see, he could make it most uncomfortable for me in the neighbourhood. Though I get practically nothing from the land, I'm hoping to sell under the Wyndham Act, and consequently have no ambition to be called 'rackrenter,' 'absentee landlord,' 'rancher,' and all the rest of it. In addition, poor old Dubidat, the dispensary doctor down there, is about

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finished; there'll be a vacancy soon; and this drunken 'swipe' will be absolutely certain of getting it, if he wants it. Nobody else would have the ghost of a chance, as, of course, the 'League' controls the guardians. Nice sort of permanent enemy I'd be having on my doorstep then; while all the time I'm only wanting to live peaceably with my neighbours, having no burning ambition for martyrdom at all, at all. That's how it stands between me and Hickey."

"Great snakes!" commented Connellan.

The subject of their conversation, meanwhile, was making a devious way up the corner staircase to his quarters. The buoyant hilarity with which he arrived had left him, now he was alone; and an irritable feeling of the injustice of the world, coupled with an intense poignant pity for himself, had taken its place.

Tears stood in his eyes. He could have sobbed in an ecstasy of self-commiseration. The need for some one to whom he could appeal for sympathy grew imperative; and so he staggered onwards, past his rooms, along the top corridor, until he found himself, rocking unsteadily, clinging with both hands to the doorway of "No. 11." His hat, with a smear of drying mud on it, was perched perilously, slightly askew, on the back of his head; one long lock of black hair wandered down over his forehead between his bloodshot eyes; the ends of his scarf, pulled out, fell over the front of his waistcoat; and thus arrayed he peered solemnly, like an owl blinking in the light, across the table at her as she rose, shrinking slightly, a world of disappointment in her liquid eyes.

"Again!" she said sadly.

To be met with reproach when he had come for sympathy, to have his self-pity suddenly checked, to have to justify a position which, even in his present state, he knew

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to be untenable, raised a sudden fierce, illogical indignation in him, flaring at her in slurring speech.

"Wa-sheer-mean?" he stuttered thickly. "I'm allri. I'm nosh dirunk. Wa-sheer-mean? Gimme sish-some coffee

She glanced at him helplessly, fear in her eyes.

"I daren't. The sister will be comin' round in a minute." He dropped obstinately into a chair.

"I wansh some coffee," he repeated sullenly.

She threw up her hands tragically.

"Och!" she said wearily, "it's a heavy heart you've given me this blessed Sunday morn, and you promisin' so fine niver again to touch the drink. Now would ye be ruinin' me entirely with your calls for coffee? Go, if ye love me—go," she whispered urgently, seeing him falling forward, already half asleep, with his arms outspread before him on the table.

She glanced hurriedly at the clock. The sister was due any minute. His room was not five yards away. If she could only get him to it!

Swiftly she got behind him, and pulled him up in her strong young arms.

"Michael, darlin', come on. Waken up, for the love o' God—just for a minute," she urged desperately.

"I wansh some coffee," he repeated dully, his legs scissoring beneath him, his head falling forward loosely.

With straining arms she half carried, half dragged him across the corridor. He was as limp as a sack. His hat fell off, and her right foot stepped through the yielding felt. Mechanically she kicked her ankle free, and fumbled for the door-knob, her whole mind concentrated on getting him inside his room before the sister came.

She glanced fearfully along the corridor. All was still. Suddenly he had a passing flash of energy, and, taking her

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completely by surprise, tore himself free, pushing her brutally from him.

"I'm nosh goin' to bed," he gurgled; and, catching his foot in the relics of the hat, came down full length in the corridor, striking his head against the opposite wall.

He lay so still that a sudden cold hand seemed to grasp her heart. Swiftly she bent over him, and turned his head. His eyes were closed, and a thin stream of blood from a cut on his forehead, running down his cheek, trickled over her fingers.

Desperately she caught him under the arms, and dragged him over the doorstep, his heels catching in the mat and pulling it over after him. In the middle of the room she let him go, and with shaking hands switched on the light. He looked so pale and ghastly in the electric glare that she flew to him instantly.

"Michael, darlin', are ye hurt? Speak to me, honey!" she cried in mortal terror, slipping an arm round his neck.

His eyes opened slowly. "I'm allri," he said; and instantly her passionate red lips were clinging to his.

"Och, darlin', I thought ye were dead!" she sobbed hysterically, pillowing his head on her breast.

There was a sound in the open door, and then: "What is the meaning of this, nurse?" came an astonished incisive, deadly voice, which penetrated even to Hickey's dulled sensorium.

"God Almighty!" he muttered, struggling, completely sobered, to his feet.

The worst possible catastrophe had befallen them. Instead of the night-sister, the matron stood squarely in the doorway, a grim figure of fate, her cold, furious eyes glaring at them.

The nurse rose petrified, unable to speak. A deathly paleness overspread her countenance; her eyes projected

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a paralysing sensation of blinding faintness came creeping over her. She gasped for breath. Her limbs felt leaden. A murderous vice seemed to be crushing in her brain. She saw in one swift lurid vision her whole career toppling in indelible disgrace: herself, after three hard, strenuous years, dismissed, dishonoured, thrown on the world without a single credential, unable to gain admission into any other hospital, branded as a pariah; conscious that, against the overwhelming evidence of her own eyes, no excuse would be of any avail in postponing the inevitable decree of the grim beckoning hand now calling her from the room.

Blindly she stumbled forward. Her foot caught in the overturned mat. For a moment everything seemed to swirl around her in a blurred grey vision of spots, and then something seemed to give way in her brain.

“Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!” she cried, the wild, maniacal, mirthless laughter ringing out sinister in the quiet of the night as she collapsed, like a wooden figure, writhing in the corridor.

Hickey made an impulsive movement forward; but the matron turned with a snarl on him.

“No, sir. You’ve done enough harm already. Good-night,” she said icily; and, like a beaten cur, he slunk back as she closed the door in his face.

Footsteps in the corridor made her turn. It was Fitzgerald on his night round; and without a word his keen eyes took in the whole significance of the scene.

The matron met his glance squarely. At the moment she was feeling vindictive towards the whole race of men, and particularly residents, for here yet another example of the futility of her efforts to counteract the overwhelming attraction of sex for sex lay before her.

Swiftly he realised that, if he wished to do any good,

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words were useless, no matter how fully he might appreciate the justice of her position. With quick resourcefulness a counter-stroke came to him. He leant over the twitching figure, and then looked up sharply.

"Get some water, matron," he said abruptly; and, almost unconscious of what she did, with the instinctive obedience ingrained by a quarter of a century, she was hastening to the kitchen before she realised that the situation had been taken out of her hands.

Kneeling beside the now unconscious figure, he rapidly began to unbutton the close-fitting bodice, thus exposing the white column of her neck. Subconsciously, as he unhooked the corset, he was wondering why she laced so tightly; then the trained eye automatically noticed something, and the explanation jumped into his consciousness with the sharp-flaming anger of an unexpected pitiful surprise.

"Och! The poor thing—the unspeakable brute!" he muttered between his teeth, hastily drawing the lace edge of the camisole together as he heard the matron's returning footsteps.

In grim silence she knelt beside him, helping to bring her round. Presently the nurse's eyelids fluttered, and the need for speech stirred in him at the sight.

"She's coming round. What about duty? She will hardly be fit——" he said tentatively.

"She won't have the chance," the matron answered grimly. "She has disgraced the uniform she wears for ever. Never shall she darken these doors again."

With an effort she checked herself.

"I've telephoned for the night-sister. What can be keeping the woman, I wonder?" she said irritably. "Oh, there she is."

The little grey woman glided silently up to them; and

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the sharpness of the matron's voice showed clearly the nervous tension she was labouring under.

"Sister, take charge of nurse, here. I shall send Nurse Thurston to take her duty. Pack her off to bed as soon as she is able to move," she said.

Then she turned to Fitzgerald, her voice softening.

"Thank you for your sympathetic silence, Mr. Fitzgerald. This has been a painful shock to me. Good-night."

It was the *amende honorable*, and he accepted it as such.

"Good-night, matron," he answered gravely.

It flew like wildfire over the hospital. All morning the nurses could talk of nothing else, whispering furtively to one another whenever the sisters' eyes were turned away. Even the latter scolded in lower tones than usual. A feeling of suspense was in the air. Every one, down to the latest probationer, felt as though the unseen eyes of the matron were watching her; and voices were lowered accordingly as if at a funeral. They went about their duties with a haunted air. No one doubted for a moment what the inevitable result to the unfortunate nurse implicated would be; and sickening qualms over risks taken light-heartedly in the immediate past by almost all of them disturbed their minds in the outward calm of the Sabbath morning.

Mingled with these feelings came an intense pity for the unfortunate victim, accompanied by a gradually swelling indignation against the cause; but only a few of the bolder spirits expressed their thoughts openly.

"It's him, not her, ought to suffer," said a tall nurse in "No. 6" kitchen rebelliously.

"Nurse Morrissey, when you have done chattering, will

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you kindly tidy '3's' bed?" came the acid voice of the ward-sister.

"Yes, sister," she answered, unabashed.

Most of the residents knew nothing about it till breakfast; and so, Hickey being absent, they discussed the matter excitedly at the table, a feeling that their honour had been dragged in the mud being the dominant note. It was Thompson, who usually had nothing to say for himself, voiced the common feeling, at the last, when he spluttered energetically—

"We've had about enough. The 'swine' must go. Otherwise we'll all be tarred with the same brush."

Later, when Hickey came slinking in to breakfast, all the other residents had gone, with the exception of Perry, who had lingered in the mess-room over his coffee and the Sunday paper.

Hickey had been dreading this first meeting with his colleagues; but when he found Perry alone his eyes brightened, for Perry had been a good friend to him in the past, covering his shortcomings from a feeling of *esprit de corps*, which had been interpreted instead by him as a personal liking.

"Morning," he said.

Perry's cold blue eyes looked up at him, and then looked through him. He rose deliberately, folded his paper, and sauntered out of the room without a word, his silent contempt cutting to the raw like a whip-lash.

With flushed face and clenched hands Hickey glared after him.

"Damn him! Damn the whole hypocritical crew of them!" he muttered, pulling savagely at the bell.

"What d'ye mean by being so slow?" he snarled, when at length old Martha appeared with his breakfast.

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Martha made no reply; but, back in the safety of her own kitchen, she nodded sagely.

“Champagne at noight manes reale pain in the mornin’,” she murmured, her ideas of “high life” being derived largely from those lurid theatrical posters which invariably depict the acme of vice as a black-browed person, in evening dress, with a magnum of champagne at his elbow, seated in an impossible-looking restaurant, where highly coloured ladies display a minimum of corsage, associated with a maximum of leg encased in very openwork stockings, and very high-heeled shoes.

After an attempt at breakfast, Hickey started on his morning round in a spirit of irritable bravado, conscious of the intense feeling against him, feeling the weight of the world’s injustice pressing heavily upon him.

The first nurse he met in his ward deliberately turned her back on him, and his sensitive anger flamed instantly uncontrollable.

“Nurse, get me the testing things,” he said, with suppressed violence.

She turned an elaborately blank three-quarter face towards him, but made no effort to obey the order.

“D’ye hear? Are ye stone-deaf, or only stupid?” he exclaimed thickly.

“Nurse Morrissey is not on duty, Dr. Hickey,” came the cold voice of the ward-sister. “Can I get you anything?” she added, with icy politeness.

“Damn!” he muttered thickly, turning into the corridor again, a mocking laugh following his retreat causing a wave of inarticulate rage to surge to his bloodshot eyes. An insane wish suddenly rose in him that the necks of the whole nursing staff could be concentrated into one, so that he might take and strangle them all together in the murderous grasp of his strong, hairy hands.

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Meanwhile, on his rounds, Fitzgerald was feeling that the tension in everybody's minds was reflected in the way they looked at him, trying, as it were, to gauge from his appearance the attitude the residents intended to adopt—conscious as he was at the same time of a shame for his department that made it almost seem that he himself was guilty in their eyes as long as she alone appeared to suffer.

Nurse Otway was in tears when he went in to see her.

“Poor thing, poor thing!” she cried weakly. “What a shame! What a disgrace! However will she bear it?”

She dabbed her swollen eyelids with her handkerchief.

“I'm sorry, Fitz,” she said contritely, “but I was so awfully fond of her.”

“He'll be sorrier still when we have done with him,” he said grimly.

“Why? What do you mean to do?”

“Kick him out,” he answered shortly.

“He deserves it. But what good will that do her?”

“I dunno. At any rate it will rid the hospital of his shadow. He ought to marry her, if he has the courage of a man; and perhaps we can make him, for even if he doesn't care for her, he owes that much to his honour. No man has the right to compromise a woman, and then leave her in the lurch like that. By God! no—I beg your pardon, ‘Otter.’”

She smiled at him queerly.

“You think so. You think that any man who calls himself a gentleman ought to marry a woman who has got into trouble through him.”

“Certainly.”

“Even if he did not love her,” she persisted, curiously intent on an answer.

“Yes, even if he did not love her,” he repeated slowly.

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"It would be hard on him, but if he were a gentleman he'd do it."

"I see," she answered quietly, looking away from his eyes.

By this time Hickey had decided to abandon his round for the day, a feeling of leprous uncleanness driving him to his rooms, a sensation of innumerable mocking eyes pursuing him.

It was in this mood that Fitzgerald met him at the corner of the stairs, half-way up to the top corridor. Sullenly he turned his head away when their eyes met; but Fitzgerald, looking quickly round and finding no one within ear-shot, seized the opportunity presented him.

"I want to speak to you, Hickey," he said evenly.

Hickey turned.

"Well?" he said truculently.

"I want to say two things," said Fitzgerald coldly. "First, I suppose you understand it's impossible for the rest of us to work with you any longer here?"

Hickey snarled angrily. "You mean I'm not good enough for the precious crew of holy teetotallers," he sneered. "God! I'm sick of the sight of you all, and I wouldn't stay now if ye went down on your bended knees to me. But I know," he continued, his voice rising with passion, "whose doin' this is—who's drivin' me out; and, by ——, if I ever can get even with you——"

Fitzgerald's eyelids flickered. He was keeping a fierce rein on his excitable, fiery temperament. With a sudden gulp he controlled his voice to calmness.

"Don't talk like the villain in a 'Queen's' melodrama," he answered coldly. "I'm glad you realise the position, and the impossibility of your staying here; but there's another question I'd like to put to you." He paused and

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stared at Hickey. Then he said, suppressing all emotion from his voice with a tremendous effort, "We want to know—I want to know—what you're going to do about her? Are you going to marry her?"

For a moment it looked as if Hickey would have hurled himself at him. He was a big, burly fellow, with all the makings of a first-class "forward"; and, in a strangle grip, Fitzgerald knew that, tough as he was, the odds would be against him, that he would have to depend on his superior agility, and knowledge of the gloves, to keep such an adversary at arm's length.

Fiercely the two men glared at one another on the broad landing, the basic antagonism of their respective natures stripped bare at last, naked to the light of day. To Hickey the question had been like a lash on the raw, and his head went back, the veins bulged on his forehead, and his eyes flamed as it smote upon his ears.

"Suffering blazes!" he exclaimed thickly. "How dare you! What, in the name of all the d——s in h——l! By G——, I'll smash your face in!" he raved.

"Keep back," exclaimed Fitzgerald in a tense, deadly voice, bracing himself instinctively. "I've known her ever since she was a little girl. I want your answer. I have a right to know."

The dawn of an unexpected idea rose in Hickey's face. With an effort he made a supreme attempt to control himself. Then he laughed harshly, triumphantly.

"So you wanted her too, did you?" he said coarsely. "I thought so; but I've beaten you there, and I'll marry her or not just as I please," he jeered triumphantly.

Fitzgerald stared at him, choking with disgust. Then he burst out: "You unspeakable cad! You think you can choose, do you? I tell you that you cannot. You've got to marry her."

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“Who’s going to make me?” sneered Hickey.

Fitzgerald paused, and glared at him. Then in a tense low voice he said: “I will. There is a reason. You know, she knows, and, what’s more to the point, I know. You can guess what that reason is; and, by ——, if you don’t recognise it, I’ll see that you never dare show your face in Knockeeny again. If I whispered that reason to her brother your life wouldn’t be worth five minutes’ purchase. Don’t tempt me to tell him.” As he spoke he advanced threateningly towards Hickey; but at the revelation of his knowledge all fight had died out of him.

“It’s a lie,” he cried, falling back.

“You look as if you were,” sneered Fitzgerald. “I’ll give you a month to atone. After that——”

Deliberately he turned and walked slowly down the stairs, Hickey staring after him. All the way down he was swearing at himself.

“I’ve made a mess of it,” he muttered bitterly. “I’ve let my rotten temper run away with me. Poor girl! What will the end be?”

Above, Hickey stood staring down at him, fascinated, till he turned the corner. Then he seemed to shake himself out of a lethargy.

“Damn him! He will, too. It’s all up,” he groaned.

In the safety of his room he bolted the door, threw himself into the creaking basket-chair, and covered his face with his hands. Slowly the attitude the hospital and the residents had adopted towards him began to permeate his mind. At first he had thought only of himself, of the trouble and annoyance, the possible injury it might do him. Up to now the case of the woman had taken a secondary position in his mind; but in his crude, violent way he did love her, had even risked his father’s anger for her sake. It was a long story. Dully he began to unravel

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the details. Even as a boy he had hankered after her, when he was the son of the richest man in Knockeeny, and she was only little Sheila Marr, the daughter of old Marr the "horse-couper."

His father, however, had set his heart on him making a match with Mary Rourke, whose uncle owned the "Dan O'Connell," once known as the "Fitzgerald Arms"; and there had been trouble over his youthful infatuation, trouble in which, at last, Father Keenan had to be called in.

Things straightened themselves, however; Sheila went off to "service," he to his medical studies in Dublin; gradually she had faded from his memory, and he began to look with more complacency on the idea of Mary Rourke.

But he had never forgotten. When, therefore, he came to the hospital and found, to his delighted surprise, that his old love had somehow managed to rise to the status of a Whitehall Street nurse (an institution whose pupils were trained with the ordinary nurses in the hospital), then the smothered flames had broken out with redoubled force again. And it was that, and his fatal weakness, had brought them to the present impasse.

Now, in an agony of tender recollection, it all came back to him.

"And to think that I've ruined you entirely, my poor darlin'! God! What devil can have possessed me?" he groaned aloud in an agony of remorse, adding brokenly, "I'm not fit to live."

A horrible depression seized him. Blindly he got up, and groped in the cupboard for the whisky. Instead, his fingers encountered a squat stoppered bottle. Mechanically he turned the phial round in his fingers, watching the deadly powder roll with the circular action. There was

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enough, he knew, and more than enough. Just a long, quiet sleep, with no awakening.

When he made no appearance at the mid-day Sunday dinner, every one felt relieved.

"He's got some sense of shame, after all," commented Thompson.

At supper-time Fitzgerald said—

"What about Dr. Hickey, Martha?"

"Oi dunno, sir. Oi took him up some tay at four o'clock, but sorra an answer could I get at all, at all."

"Well, try him again with some supper, Martha," said Connellan uneasily.

Half-an-hour later a tap came to their door.

"Come in," said Fitzgerald sharply; and old Martha stood in the doorway. They stared at her with a faintly growing vague suspense.

"Oi've tried, sorr, but there's no answer, no light. He does be as silent as the grave."

Dermot glanced at Connellan uneasily. "Let's go," said Connellan, voicing his thought. Together they went up to his rooms, and banged heavily at the door.

"Hickey, your supper's outside. Open and take it in."

No answer. They waited a few seconds. "He's sulking still, and won't come near it while we're here," said Connellan, trying not to feel alarmed.

"Think so?" said Fitzgerald doubtfully.

"What other explanation is there?" answered Connellan sharply.

"Oh, none, of course. Let's try again."

For a second time they banged on the door.

"Hickey, do you hear? Your supper is outside. We're going away. If you don't come for it inside five minutes we'll break open the door."

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Still no answer.

"Let's walk the length of the far corridor and back," said Connellan nervously.

Fitzgerald looked at his watch and started without a word. The minutes seemed to drag with leaden feet. They came back slowly. All was quiet in the long, dim-lit corridor. A quick, furtive glance showed the supper-things were still outside.

"It's only four minutes," said Connellan, struggling with a feeling he dare not express.

Suddenly Fitzgerald impulsively pushed him aside. "I can't wait," he said, with a break in his voice, as he hurled his shoulder at the door.

It rattled, but did not yield.

"Come on," he cried impatiently. "What the devil are ye waitin' for?"

Together they rushed at it, and something rattled inside.

"It's the key falling out. Let's kick at the lock," panted Fitzgerald.

At the next onslaught a panel splintered, and then another combined rush forced the door. For a moment both hesitated; then Fitzgerald stalked resolutely into the room and switched on the light. Hickey was lying in his chair apparently asleep. A bottle, a measure and an unopened hypodermic case lay on the table beside him. At the sight suddenly a calm fell on them; their training returned. From an ill-defined fear he had become a definite certainty.

Fitzgerald sniffed at his mouth and nostrils, shook his head, and then looked deliberately at his pupils.

Connellan, kneeling down beside him, fingered for his pulse.

"I can't feel it," he murmured, dropping the limp arm and fumbling in his pocket for his stethoscope.

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A sensation of eyes made Fitzgerald turn round. Three frightened nurses were gazing through the battered doorway.

"Send for sister, and get the other residents here," he said sharply.

The faces disappeared. Meanwhile Connellan had pulled his shirt open and placed the stethoscope on his chest.

"It's no good," he said slowly. "He's done for."

Fitzgerald swore viciously at him.

"Oh, damn! We must try something—permanganate—atropine—artificial—the battery—anything," he exclaimed, the man of action chafing desperately against the clinical despair of the physician.

Connellan shook his head solemnly.

"I tell you it's no good. It's ten hours since he took the stuff, and he knew his business well enough to take sufficient. He's—dead—quite dead."

By now the room began to fill with solemn faces, Perry, Thompson, Macintyre, Morris—all the other residents, the night-sister, the nurses from "11" and "12." Suddenly one of the women began to sob, and at the sound Fitzgerald groaned in an agony of self-suppression. It was Thompson, the quiet, came to the rescue.

"Let's put him on the bed, and leave him to the sister; we can do no more good here. He has squared the deal. 'De Mortuis——'" he murmured solemnly.

When Fitzgerald got to "9" in a pitiful attempt to finish his work he found that Nora had already heard; and at the sight of his haggard face and weary eyes her great heart rose to him in a wave of pitying love.

"You poor dear! Yes, I know," she said, pushing him gently into a chair.

He looked at her wearily.

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“I don’t think I ought to let you touch me,” he said. “I feel somehow as if I were his murderer; for in a way I helped to push him to his doom. It’s an awful thought. I—do you think—— Oh, all the time I was looking at him, so calm, so peaceful, I kept feeling that in the end he had outplayed us all. After all, if it had not been for the—you know—he wasn’t such a bad fellow; and who was I to throw the first stone? It makes me feel very small—very humble—very guilty.”

His head dropped between his arms on the rough deal table; his shoulders heaved convulsively; and at the sight her arms came softly, protectingly, around his neck.

“My own dear boy, I know—I know. But it wasn’t your fault. It was nobody’s fault. It just had to be. No one could have foreseen such an end. You’re overwrought. Don’t try to do any more to-night. There’s nothing here that need keep you. Go right off to bed——”

Gradually, under the soothing influence of her calm, steady mind, he began to gain control over his nerve-racked sensibilities again; his balance returned; with an effort he was able to pull himself together; and she had the satisfaction of seeing him leave the ward with something of his old self-confidence regained.

On his way to his rooms he came across the matron, roused from her bed by the tragic suddenness of the dénouement; and he was sufficiently in command of himself to think of something that had been overlooked by them all.

“Does she know yet?” he said quietly.

The matron stared at him, and stiffened slightly.

“Has she any right to know?” she said.

He paused to let the full weight of his question sink in. Then he said quietly, insistently—

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"Yes, I think so. She has the deepest right in all the world to know."

Slowly the stiffness melted out of the matron's figure. After all, under the disciplinarian, there dwelt a woman's heart.

"Thank you, Mr. Fitzgerald. You are quite right. I ought to have thought of it before. Death balances all things. I will bring her to him myself," she said softly.

And so he went to his room comforted, for he felt that in one way at least he had done a little to atone.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TROUBLE OF THE AFTERMATH

FOR a week the shadow of the tragedy hung over the hospital. Then, such is the recuperative power of the mind, the sequence of subsequent events began to dull the sharpness of the image left on memory's retina; and, timidly at first, then more boldly, smiles and laughter, other joys and fears, jests of the moment, all the inconsequent trivial things making up the warp and woof of everyday hospital life began to resume again their wonted sway.

Only to the principal actors there still remained remembrance. Outside the hospital, however, not even a whisper of the truth was known. Fitzgerald had seen to that. A private interview with the coroner, when all the details had been laid bare, paved the way; and everything was arranged with the large tolerance which probably only is possible in Ireland. A perfectly illegal jury of residents, porters and laboratory attendants, with Perry as foreman, sat privately in the hospital; the witnesses, by some oversight, were not sworn; and the coroner summed up as follows—

“I understand from the evidence, gentlemen of the jury, that in the victim's rooms two bottles were found, one containing morphia, the other trional. The bottles—identical in shape—were usually beside one another in the cupboard; and it is known that the victim was in the habit of taking trional for insomnia. The suggestion, then, is

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that he took the other by mistake, and thus the tragedy arose. If you consider that that is the probable sequence of events, your verdict, therefore, would naturally be: 'Death by inadvertence.'"

And thus the jury found without leaving the box. Hickey's reputation, and that of the hospital, was saved. Even his father, present at the inquest, was left in charitable ignorance of the true nature of events; and when Fitzgerald saw him off at Kingsbridge the old man was able to thank him with a quivering voice in which there was no hint of shame.

"It's a sore blow to me, yer honour—doctor, I mean—for I'm a done ould man now. But I'm relieved; for, in a sort of way, I was afeared." He glanced hesitatingly at the still face beside him. "I'm glad I can go home to Knockeeny still proud of him; and I thank ye kindly for all ye have done for me and mine," he said.

It was as much as Fitzgerald could bear; but he managed, somehow, to say the right thing, and send the old man off in peace.

"Thank God, that's over," he murmured, with a sigh of relief, as the train glided out of the station.

Meanwhile, in the case of the other victim something in the nature of an anti-climax had occurred; for in the atmosphere of the greater tragedy her dereliction from duty sank to the size of a peccadillo. Every one felt it was no longer possible to treat her as an outcast; and in consequence an urgent request for a nurse, to cope with an outbreak of fever down in the wilds of Mayo, came to the matron as a line of escape mounting almost to a special intervention of Providence. She grasped the opportunity at once; and so, on the morning after the inquest, Nurse Marr set out on her journey, accredited once more.

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Two or three friendly nurses saw her off at Broadstone. She was very quiet, hardly speaking except in monosyllables. As the guard blew his whistle, however, she leant out of the carriage window, and, rather to their surprise, kissed them all affectionately.

"Good-bye," she said. "You have been good. I shall never see any of you again. Good-bye."

"Oh, nonsense," said Nurse Thurston brightly. "We'll expect you back in a month."

"I shall never come back," she repeated quietly, unemotionally. "I don't know why I say so; but I feel quite sure of it. Good-bye."

The train began to move, and she waved her hand to them. Tongue-tied, they gazed after her, chilled by the finality of her tone. Nurse Morrissey shivered. "She's fey. She's heard the death clock," she said in an awed tone.

"Rubbish," retorted Nurse Thurston shakily.

When Fitzgerald heard of it he shook his head.

"That's bad. Where's she going to?"

"Westbar," he was told.

"Let me see. I know the man down there slightly. He sent us up a case some time ago. Joyce is his name. I'll write to him, and tell him to look after her."

He did so, and the answer came back in a few days.

"She seems a good nurse, but rather quiet and subdued. There are a lot of cases, and I'm afraid we'll both be overworked soon. I wish some of your fellows could come down and give us a hand for a month. It's 'typhus,' and I think we're in for an epidemic."

"Typhus. Good Lord!" ejaculated Fitzgerald, as he read the letter. "The deadliest fever of them all."

Meanwhile in the hospital things were slowly settling down to normal again; but none the less there came the inevitable aftermath. A quite perceptible tightening of

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the strings of discipline made itself apparent. The night-superintendent developed a habit of appearing and re-appearing at irregular intervals during her rounds; worse still, the matron took it into her head to pay surprise visits to the wards at night; and thus the old familiar sense of security was completely shattered for the time.

No longer was it possible to hold those pleasant *al fresco* suppers in the kitchens which had been such a marked feature in the past. No longer could one linger in light-hearted banter when the work of the night was over. It was felt that to the nurse the risk of reprimand, or worse, was much too serious to be thus risked; and grumblings at the dulness of life were audible therefore on every side.

To Fitzgerald the limitations thus put upon his freedom were particularly irksome, for in his position as senior resident he felt the onus of especial carefulness; and the intensity of his feelings made him dread still more the chance of any slip endangering in the slightest Nora's career, situated as he was in such a position as to be unable to take her out of it immediately if necessary.

That he did not know such scrupulous care was, in her case, unneeded, was not his fault; he looked upon her present life as her career; and both her independence of it, and the changes in her attitude of mind towards it were therefore hidden from him. Formerly it had been a cause to which she gave herself ungrudgingly. Now it had sunk into the background, and was assuming almost the appearance of a masquerade—a masquerade of which indeed she began to feel vaguely uncomfortable.

She would not have been without the knowledge it entailed for any consideration. She felt stronger, saner, wiser, much more capable of facing the facts of the world because of it. Besides, had it not brought her into contact

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with the "one man," opened an iridescent world to her of which before she had been blissfully unconscious?

Of all these things she was actively aware, and for them she felt duly grateful; but nevertheless she could have left them all behind her now without a pang.

She had no wish, of course, to dim her record by any lapses from professional etiquette; but a sense of secure superiority over any such thing as a matron's power induced in her a feeling of restiveness under the new restrictions; like all deep natures stirred to the depths by her freshly discovered possibilities, she felt the need of expressing them intensely; and a sensation of uneasy wonder at the restraint practised by Fitzgerald began to stir the elements of doubt within her.

It seemed the particular unkindness of Fate, therefore, that for some reason or other the sister began to make "9" her head-quarters; and invariably seemed to be present when he came to the ward. Consequently he was almost frigidly professional, and there never seemed a chance of being able to exchange moods.

In addition, afternoon-leave for night-nurses had been absolutely stopped, except on their "long" evening off duty; and as he was always busy in the mornings they could not meet outside. No other method of communication except the post was therefore open to them; and this they knew was much too dangerous—his characteristic handwriting would have been instantly recognised by the home sister when sorting the letters, and both felt they could not descend to the subterfuge of having them addressed by some one else.

On the other hand, to Nora's annoyance, and slightly to Fitzgerald's embarrassment at first, the sister did not appear to mind him stopping with Nurse Otway—she almost seemed to expect it, for she would leave him in

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“8” with the nearest approach to a smile she was capable of, apparently anticipating his wish to remain after their mutual formal visit. There was no doubt she had a weakness for Moira; knew how dull the weary hours must be for her; and was quite willing she should have such relaxation as was possible. For the time being she was a patient, not a nurse, and she treated her accordingly.

So, almost unconsciously, Fitzgerald dropped into the old habit of spending an hour with her every night. In her presence he did not feel the same rigid necessity for self-suppression, because his liking for her was not on the plane of intensity it occupied with Nora, and the necessity of protecting her was not so ever present with him. She amused him. He knew she liked him in what appeared a light-hearted, careless way; and some of the suppressed tenderness welling up in him found expression in the teasing make-believe they mutually indulged in.

In addition, the door of her ward was not five yards from the kitchen of “9”; if it was not the throne-room it was the nearest approach to it; and he could feel the presence of the princess in occasional sounds, and perhaps by a glimpse of her when leaving. She absorbed his thoughts so much that it never occurred to him she might possibly misjudge his actions. His reasons for keeping away from her were so obviously logical to his mind that he forgot in matters of the emotions a woman is not a logical being. Neither did he consider how Moira might be construing it. It is true he remembered the night of the operation; but he attributed her actions then to the after-effects of the anæsthetic, having seen such manifestations before in other patients who remembered nothing of them afterwards.

One evening Connellan, the looker-on, smiled at him sardonically.

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"Still at it, Prophet Brigham Young," he murmured. "I don't know how you do it. For my part I find that it's only safe, and not very safe even then, to make love to two women when one is on 'day' and the other 'night' duty."

Fitzgerald laughed irritably. "Don't be an ass, Conn," he said. Connellan shook his head regretfully. Fitzgerald's sense of humour was deserting him, he thought.

Thus things drifted, till one night on his rounds, rather late, he came along the corridor towards "9." As he did so he saw the night-sister entering.

"Bother the woman," he thought irritably. "She's always there when I don't want her. She ought to be in '4' now. I'll just drop in to 'Otter' for a minute until I see whether she's going or not. I must see Nora."

He was so absorbed in thought that he went into the ward without knocking; and so, on pushing aside the screen quietly, he took her unawares sitting up in bed tying a blue ribbon on the end of one of the two big plaits in which her hair was done. She was glancing down at her manipulating fingers, solemnly three-quarter face, petite, frilly white, giving the impression of a child surreptitiously up when supposed to be asleep. He laughed softly, and at the sound she glanced up suddenly, her eyes glowed, a delicate pink came into her cheeks, she slipped down rapidly in the bed, and pulled the coverlet up to her chin.

"Nasty thing. You startled me," she pouted.

He laughed again.

"You absurd child. You seem to get younger every day. When you cease to 'flap' I shall be desolated."

She shook her head at him sadly.

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“It’s a sure sign of approaching senility when the taste for ‘flappers’ revives in a man,” she retorted. “Stoop down until I see if there’s a bald patch coming at the back of your head.”

At the impervious order he bowed his head laughingly.

“No, there’s still a chance for you,” she exclaimed, breathing in mock relief.

“It’s my opinion,” she added sagely, “that men enthuse over the ‘flapper’ because they think they can impress their image deep on her unmirrored soul. It’s a fond delusion. They can’t. For already she has had ‘passions’ for the good-looking drawing-master, the gym. instructor, the brother of her best friend, several actors and soldiers of whom she has photographs, and one or two boys she has been demurely conscious of when walking out in ‘crocodile.’”

“Stop! What a confession! You make me feel quite giddy with the number of them all,” he protested, sitting down beside her, and idly toying with the ribbon on the end of the plait lying nearest him.

A step behind him made him drop it; but not before he heard a voice—

“Will you have your milk now, nurse?”

It was Nora with a tray; and he stood up at the sight of her. She looked at him calmly, and then past him at the nurse.

“Oh yes, presently. Put it on the locker for me, Dermot,” Nurse Otway answered casually.

They had been laughing gaily when she entered; but immediately a restraint fell on them; and Nora, stiffening at the sound of the Christian name on another woman’s lips, was conscious of a sudden stabbing pain that caused a sickening wave of jealousy to oversweep her, hardening her features into marble.

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Swiftly the eyes of the two women met in deadly antagonism.

"I shall be in presently," said Fitzgerald, to break the restraint of which he was acutely, though confusedly, conscious.

Nora glanced at him coldly.

"Please do not trouble. There are no temperatures above 99 to-night. I am sorry to have interrupted. Good-night," she said, and turned to leave the room.

A faint flush rose to Fitzgerald's face. He felt as though he had been unexpectedly smitten between the eyes. It was the snub direct. From the bed Nurse Otway laughed a little shrilly.

"Don't apologise, please," she said lightly. "I'm jolly thirsty. Hand it right here—Dermot."

Presently when he left the ward, he stood a moment irresolute in the corridor, and glanced quickly into the kitchen, hoping painfully, eagerly, to see her. She was not there.

"I wonder—no, I can't go looking for her. If I didn't care so much I might; but I daren't risk it," he thought miserably. Then he turned and walked slowly, heavily, back to his rooms, and Moira, listening intently, smiled a bitter little smile of triumph.

In the stillness afterward she heard the faint sound of breaking glass. It was a vase that had fallen over in the kitchen; for, had he known it, the other woman was there, standing out of the line of vision, listening also for his footsteps; and as he paused her heart had given a great bound, and her arms were open ready to receive him. But he did not know; and the sound of his receding footsteps echoed cavernous like a passing knell in her world-weary heart.

"If he loved me he would have come to me," she

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thought drearily. "He would have known I never meant it. What right had she to call him 'Dermot'—and before my face? It was shameless—shameless. I wonder is he tired of me already. I wonder have I been too open—let him see too clearly how I love him. They say men tire when they feel secure. She is pretty; and she knew him first. He likes witty women. I wonder were they laughing about me. If I thought that——"

Some one called, and, at the sound, her jangled nerves made her jump, knocking the vase from the table.

Stilling herself, she went into the ward.

"I'm so sorry, nurse. My pillow's slipped on to the floor; and my back does be achin' so," the patient murmured weakly.

"You poor thing. Yes, I know," she answered soothingly. "Just let me slip an extra one under you, here. That's better, isn't it? We'll soon have you well. It's always trying for the first day or two after operation."

Courage came to him with the morning; and, throughout the day he ruminated over things with the result that certain aspects gradually clarified in his mind. By evening, therefore, he had decided to go round early, determined to clear up what remained of the misunderstanding.

Fate, however, has a way of laughing at mentally prearranged conversations; and disappointment met him on the threshold in the form of Nurse Marriott.

"Oh, yes. Nurse Townsend's out on 'long pass' till twelve o'clock," she explained, smiling at him intently, deliberately overstating the time by half-an-hour.

"Why, of course!" he murmured quietly, as he went on into the ward to write up his notes. Outwardly calm, he was conscious inwardly of the bitterness of gall and wormwood; for, under the stress of events he had com-

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pletely forgotten that it was her night off. Impotently furious at the malignancy of fortune, he thought with gnawing envy of how, but for the tortuosity of life, he might now have been luxuriating in her presence, basking in the sunshine of her smiles, pouring forth all the suppressed adoration of the week in her responsive ear, safe from the unsettling sensation of ever-prying eyes. It was the punishment of Tantalus. He felt vertiginous at the thought of all that he was missing.

Presently, when he had finished his notes perfunctorily, the nurse joined him, and they went round.

"Would you like some tea?" she said. "The sister will be busy in '1' for another hour."

He glanced at the clock.

"No, thank you, nurse. It's very kind of you; but it isn't safe any longer; and we've all given it up. We're brewing our own now, in the mess-room."

"I shouldn't care," she said airily.

"I should," he answered quietly.

In the corridor he paused, hesitatingly. Connellan was out for the evening; the thought of his lonely rooms appalled him; the need for human company in his present mood, for smiles, for laughter, seemed irresistible; and he succumbed.

"I'll just go in for a few minutes," he thought.

"I can't make it out," said Nurse Marriott to Nora, later. "I wonder sister allows it. He was with Otway over an hour."

It was not ten minutes in reality, but Nora could not have known that. Nevertheless she answered shortly—

"Why not? She's a patient."

"Yes. But one doesn't spend an hour with every patient; and everybody knows she's just mad about him, in spite of her being engaged. It isn't right."

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Nora hated herself for listening, but she felt she must know.

"There's nothing in it," she said.

"Isn't there?" Nurse Marriott sniffed. "You should have heard the things she said coming out of the anæsthetic. They think I didn't hear. Why, she kept saying——"

Nora roused herself.

"It isn't fair. And you've no right to repeat what people say when they're not themselves. It isn't etiquette," she said sharply.

"Oh, very well," huffily. "But I don't see why you should defend her," she ventured.

Nora stared at her.

"Why not?" she said haughtily.

"Oh, nothing," the other hastened to exclaim cringingly.

Nora took on her duties again quietly. She went about her work with baffling calm. But nevertheless the viperish tongue had done its work, and left its festering mark behind. She was certain now. She had been miserable all the evening, had wondered if he too felt it as badly, had checked herself indeed several times for wishing that he had. A wave of the old tenderness had risen in her as she came up the staircase. She was hoping that, on finding her not there, he had postponed his round. To find that he had evidently not missed her, had even taken the opportunity of her absence to enjoy himself more freely, was therefore bitterness itself.

"It is all over," she thought. "I might have expected it from what I've heard of him before. What a poor fool I've been."

CHAPTER XIV

THE EFFECTS OF ANCIENT HISTORY, AND SOME UNEXPECTED HAPPENINGS

A FEW mornings afterwards Pip telephoned to remind Fitzgerald the Hibernian Academy opened on that day, and that they had arranged to see the pictures together.

The afternoon saw him therefore, catalogue in hand, mingling with the crowd of art students talking the jargon of their craft, earnest young ladies from the high schools bent on improving their minds, stray critics recognisable by their pessimistic attitudes, and specimens of the general public looking rather lost amid the acres of canvas spread for their chromatic education.

He had an intense desire to go direct to the picture; but an odd reluctance held him, and he surrendered his mind to Pip's mercurial guidance, unconscious of the fact that he in his turn was regulating his activities in accordance with those of a somewhat portly lady in front of them, armed with a lorgnette, and accompanied by an attractive youthful replica of herself who had captured for the time his wandering eye.

When they had conscientiously looked at all the pictures in the first two rooms the elder lady suddenly glanced at her watch.

"Oh, my dear, we'll have to be going," she said.

"Oh, must we, mamma? I'm enjoying them so much," the younger exclaimed disappointedly, conscious all the while of Pip's unobtrusively admiring presence.

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“Well, we’ve seen the ‘Shannons,’ and the ‘Orpens,’ but I hear there’s a ‘La Touche,’ and we must just look at that before we go. I used to know him slightly when I was a girl.”

Pip had already seen the picture in the studio; and so he now smiled at Dermot. He, too, had heard the remark, and waking up from his lethargy—a lethargy that rather puzzled Pip—began also to follow them, this time deliberately. It would be interesting, he thought, to hear their criticism; and he was longing for some excuse to get his make-believe of general interest over.

There were three or four people standing in front of the picture. One elderly gentleman had formed his catalogue into a cylinder, and was thus gazing at it.

“It’s a masterpiece,” said the old gentleman.

Fitzgerald watched the girl. The look of affected interest had fled from her eyes. The theme had touched the growing amorphous stirrings of budding womanhood in her nature—delicious, frightening, multi-coloured feelings of which she had as yet not grasped the import. Her eyes shone. The colour came to her face. Her bosom heaved. Her lips parted in unconscious, seductive, smiling curves; and she turned eagerly to her mother.

“Isn’t it just too splendid!” she said; and Fitzgerald, recognising the limitations of her vocabulary, felt that even the artist would have accepted the comment as adequate.

The elder lady raised the lorgnette to her eyes, and gazed at the face of the woman in the picture.

“Why, it’s Mary Butler he’s used as his inspiration,” she exclaimed. “How very touching, after all these years. Well, I am glad we stopped to see it. They were desperately in love with one another—those two; but he was very poor, they had some quarrel, and she married a very

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rich man named Townsend. They say La Touche never quite got over it. And to think that he has reproduced her face after twenty-five years—just as she was. It's a romance."

"How perfectly, sadly sweet," said the young lady wistfully. "What happened to her, mamma?"

"Oh, she died, poor thing, leaving a little baby girl. Then the father moved to England. I think I've heard he's dead too. The girl, if she's alive, must be a very wealthy woman; and if she's like her mother, a very beautiful one too."

Fitzgerald and Pip, standing behind, heard every word. They glanced at one another, and quietly slipped away. From their knowledge they were able to piece the whole true story together.

"That's a rum go," commented Pip characteristically.

Fitzgerald was silent for a moment. Then he said—"If you don't mind, old chap, I think I'll clear off. I can't talk about it now; but we're rather in a hole, Nora and I. This complicates things."

Quietly he left the building, deep in thought.

"So that was why La Touche was so interested in Nora," he murmured to himself. "That explained her sitting for him, the curious friendship between them, his jealous action when I first came upon him looking at the head."

For some time his mind dwelt upon it; then his thoughts jumped abruptly to the final remark of the unknown speaker: "The girl, if she is alive, must be a very wealthy woman." It set him wondering. He began to remember things.

When he had advanced his precarious future, as an argument against testing his fate, La Touche had made

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light of it. Had he done so from a fuller knowledge, or merely from the contempt for gold inherent in the artistic temperament?

Scraps of conversation, also, now came back to him; remarks by other nurses on how much she must spend on dress, and how impossible it was to do it on the meagre salary she earned. At the time he had merely smiled. Man-like he had not been able to appreciate the costly simplicity of her taste. He had felt that it was perfect of its kind, and accepted the fact without further mental comment.

As a sequel to these thoughts a vague discomfort began to take possession of him. He felt compelled to reconsider his position from the foundations. The misunderstanding between them commenced to assume a new importance with the advent of the fresh facts brought to his knowledge. It ceased to have the appearance of a lovers' quarrel, and started to take on the colour of a dangerous impasse.

The fact that he was still only a house-surgeon, with all his future before him, and that she was a nurse in his own hospital, had made it seem the most natural thing in the world that nothing definite should have been settled between them; for it is a universally recognised rule in all hospitals that no open engagement can exist between a resident and a nurse—one or other must leave. Tacitly they had acknowledged this law—or rather the necessity for evading it had not arisen; for the open avowal of his feelings had been so much in the nature of a relief from tension that the thought of more definite arrangements had never become urgent in his mind.

Reconsidering the question now, he almost wished that it had: since it was one thing to ask a woman, who had definitely chosen the life of a nurse as a career by which

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she might attain her independence, to change it for that of the wife of a struggling surgeon, but something totally different to make the same proposal to one who had left the great world, and assumed the nursing costume somewhat in the nature of an adventure—certainly not with the intention of living by it—some one who might at any moment tire of the adventure, throw off the disguise, and reassume the position in the great world to which she was entitled.

When the other nurses named her “the Duchess,” they had been nearer the truth than any of them would have been likely to imagine. Indeed, it was almost beyond the range of probability that she should have persevered in the life, save from necessity; for, although it is true that many women, caught by the glamour of the calling, have time and again essayed the task, yet, outside the religious bodies, few have ever been able to carry their glowing resolutions to full fruition; and those few have, in addition, practically never been dowered with the gift of beauty. A month—two months—three months of hard, laborious days, of frequent menial labours, of constant reprimand, kills for most of them the illusion. Their novel-engendered visions of soothing the wrinkled brow of care with fair linen compresses, damped in eau-de-cologne, what time with cool, white fingers turning the leaves, they gently read the patient to sleep, become rudely disturbed when they find themselves relegated to polishing taps, emptying slops, doing the work of a housemaid generally—when they discover they are hardly allowed to more than approach a patient, until they have proved themselves fit to be trusted to take a temperature with comparative accuracy, and a pulse without miscounting.

Thus it comes about that, though many are called, few are chosen, and those few coincide with remarkable

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accuracy with those who find it necessary to earn their living by the calling they have adopted.

Fitzgerald had seen these enthusiastic amateurs come and go with monotonous frequency, for at one time most of the hospitals, always greedy for gold, had taken premium nurses—lady probationers—until they discovered they were as a class unsuitable. It had never occurred to him, therefore, that any one could have stood the necessary three or four years' training required to gain a certificate save as a necessity; and, accordingly, he had accepted it as an axiom that Nora, too, was largely dependent on her salary for her support. The suggestion that this was not so came, therefore, on him almost as a physical shock. He felt somehow as though he had been deceived. It is true that in his sober mind he was conscious that this was an injustice. She had never made any pretence of necessity, or the reverse. The question had never been raised. He had assumed that she knew his circumstances, just as he thought that he knew hers. He had assumed that she knew he wanted to marry her, and that she would have to wait till he had made a home for her. Looking back now, in the light of the new suggestion, he was astonished at the number of things he had taken for granted.

A stabbing thought came to him: perhaps she did not want to marry him at all, perhaps she was only accepting his declaration as another characteristic episode in her masquerade. Every nurse is supposed to have at least one *affaire* during her hospital life. It is one of the semi-serious, wholly delightful compensations in the recognised unofficial syllabus of education; and it is perfectly understood that in most cases it comes to nothing.

Of course, he knew all this. He had been through more than one such episode, each tinged with just

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sufficiency of truth to make it seem at times not all pure comedy, each shadowed, none the less, with a foreknowledge of the inevitable end.

On the other hand, a certain air of stateliness had protected her from the usual run of such adventures; no one had had the courage to attempt to quicken into life her statuesque aloofness. A certain fine metal in her had refused to resonate with baser alloys; a puritanic fastidiousness had kept her from responding readily to emotional atmospheres.

All of this he had divined; but a knowledge that her hospital life was merely transitory now began to make him wonder if she had at length tired of the attitude, decided to investigate the possibilities before she quitted this stage of her adventure, and picked him as by chance the best available protagonist to give the necessary air of verisimilitude to the *affaire*.

His heart turned at the subtle cruelty of the thought. He remembered something Connellan had once said to him—

“I tell you she isn't a statue. It's an absolute mistake to think that woman is not capable of emotion. She's just full of it, only she has never permitted herself to give it vent. If she once made up her mind to feel what it was like, she could make almost any man love her; but the man who wants to make her love him in return will have to storm her. It's only ugly, cynical devils like me, who seem to know these things, but cannot use the knowledge. You needn't smile. I admit I'm half in love with her myself, but it's no good, and I don't want to be broken. Any one who tries to tackle her will have to run that risk if he's unsuccessful, for there's a vein of steel in her. You might possibly succeed—dash you; but if she took it into her head to play with you—I wonder if you have got it

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in you. You're all right with the lesser craft, but can you handle a liner? Good Lord! I wish I had your body and my brains—I'd risk it gladly to-morrow."

It was the memory of this outburst that had guided him subconsciously when time and circumstances combined to give him the courage of the moment. The emotional uprush then had been largely the result of the summation of a series of stimuli; and the effect of its satisfaction manifested itself, not as a further rise, nor even as a continuance of the level of exaltation, but rather a descent to the subnormal expressed by a curious shyness in her presence.

Deliberately he had placed her on a pedestal; and his attitude of mind towards her became like that of a devotee, who, in a moment of supreme feeling, had laid violent hands on the goddess, and was now appalled at his own act of sacrilege.

Unconsciously something in the detachment of her nature abetted the illusion. Most women maintain a certain aloofness in their attitude towards men; but many of them, once they have surrendered to a lover's arms, lose this restraint, take the initiative, and become insistent in their demands.

Save in the emotional period, lasting through the first few days, this was not so with Nora. Instead, she seemed to withdraw within herself as if afraid of the storm she had experienced. He had in her presence, in consequence, a sensation of striving after some half-seen ideal that acted as a most effectual check on the facile wooing, of more earthly origin, to which he had been so fatally accustomed, making him feel that to treat her in such a way would be in the nature of a desecration. Consequently he did not allow his natural effervescence to overflow in her presence; and more than once she had unexpectedly come upon him

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in a light-hearted, laughing tête-à-tête, to which her advent brought a restraint that caused a dull aching in her mind—an aching which his later chivalrous aloofness, when they were alone, did not tend to alleviate. Thus unconsciously he was starving the heart of the woman in his preoccupation with the goddess that he saw in her.

It is a dual attitude of mind few women seem to understand, to which many men are accustomed. Certain women satisfy the higher finer instincts in such men. They hold them in such reverence that they cannot stoop to sully their pure souls by asking them to minister to the lower needs in them; and thus one often finds that natures such as these get hopelessly entangled in the meshes of the lesser loves, giving vent to natural impulses they would be incapable of expressing in the presence of the greater things.

That evening, after his visit to the Academy, a restless longing to see her drove him early to her ward. The knowledge he had gained troubled him intensely; and an illogical feeling that he wanted to see if she looked different assailed him.

She recognised his short, impetuous footsteps coming along the corridor—they were absolutely characteristic of his individuality; and her heart gave a leap at the sound of them that filled her with a scornful shame of herself. Therefore, when he came to the kitchen she was prepared.

“Good evening,” she said, standing at professional attention with the fixed face of a nurse in the presence of her superior officer. “I will let him see that though he has ceased to care I shall not reproach him. I would rather die than let him know how he has tortured me,” was her thought.

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The cold precision of her tone, the chilly deference of her attitude, froze his impressionable nature to the core.

"I was right, after all," he thought bitterly. "She's just been playing me like a trout; and now she's landed me she has lost all interest. The game is over; but Lord, the fish-hook sticking in my gills is painful."

How they got through the ordeal of the "round" neither of them afterwards ever knew. To Fitzgerald it was like a ghastly nightmare, from which, strive as he might, he felt he could not waken.

"Heavens! how she must have laughed," he thought with a dark flush of shame when he had left the ward, and was once more alone. "To think of the poor fool talking of his love, his poverty, his fond ambitions, the length of time she'd have to wait for him. And she, all the while, making up her mind to ring down the curtain on the farce, only waiting till she had squeezed the last drop of ludicrous enjoyment out of it."

He laughed a twisted laugh as he deliberately turned the screw upon his lacerated heart-strings, viewing with a queer inversion of mind the dénouement from her position of hypothetical amusement.

"Lord! what a comedy it must have been for her," he thought. "She will be almost sorry that it's over; but how she must have smiled over the appearance of the rather battered puppet. There's just one consolation—I think she'll keep it to herself; and so, luckily, only Pip and La Touche, and maybe Conn, will ever know about it."

Half-an-hour later, when he had finished his round, and schooled himself to calmness, he went in to see Moira without waiting for the sister.

She looked up in surprise. "You are early." Then

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her eyes saw something of the ravages fate had worked upon him. "What's the matter?" she said.

"Nothing. I've got a head; I'm a little world-weary; and so I've come in, not to amuse you, but to bore you with my dulness," he answered, smiling at her.

Her kind eyes smiled back at him; and she slipped her hands into his, as she sat up in bed wrapped in a fleecy dressing-gown of pale Madonna blue.

"Sit down on the bed," she ordered. "Poor dear old boy, you do look rather washed out," she added soothingly.

Somehow he felt extraordinarily grateful to her. Her kindness was as balm to his torn soul. The contrast in her greeting with his late experience was so overwhelming.

"Thank you. You always were too good to me, little girl," he answered emotionally, biting his lower lip at the same time to suppress the tremor in his voice. Then he turned one of the pink little palms in his hand, and almost involuntarily raised it to his lips. Something in the action seemed to break down a barrier in her.

"Don't," she said in a strangled voice, suddenly pulling her hand away. "Oh! how can you?"

As he stared at her, she suddenly covered her face with her hands; her shoulders heaved, and she burst into an unexpected flood of sobbing tears.

There is nothing so heartrending to a man as the tears of a woman that he cares for. A great wave of pitying tenderness seized upon Fitzgerald. He forgot his own sorrow. Almost unconsciously his arms closed over the frail little shoulders, and he drew her towards him, feebly resisting.

"What is it, dear little girl?" he said, pillowing her head on his shoulders, and lifting her chin between the covering hands.

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Then she looked at him, her eyes sick with love; and he knew.

"Is it?" he said, drawing her closer.

Under his gaze her eyelids closed. For a moment she lay passive in his arms, then she began to struggle to be free.

"Oh, I am so ashamed. What must you think of me. Let me go, Dermot, please," she panted, with a catch in her voice.

But now the pent-up feelings, following the crisis he had just gone through, began to overwhelm him. If he could not have the one love he would have the other. Almost brutally he kissed the tender quivering mouth, tightening his grasp on the feebly struggling figure. And then, at the touch of his lips, suddenly she ceased to struggle.

"I don't care now," she gasped recklessly. "I don't care who knows it, I'm yours, body and soul. Only be good to me, Dermot," she pleaded, "for I just hate myself."

There was a shocked voice at the door—

"Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald! And I trusted you so."

He turned to find the white face of the night-sister staring with painful, incredulous, shocked eyes at him. Behind her stood Nora, deadly white and still.

In a flash the whole fell set of consequences rushed through his mind; with the corners of his eyes he saw the blanched, frightened face of Moira looking at him desperately; and then a swiftness of decision quicker almost than the thought made him say, unnaturally calm—

"I want you to congratulate me, sister. Nurse Otway has just promised to be my wife."

CHAPTER XV

SHUFFLING THE CARDS AGAIN. THE NEW DEAL, AND THE ANGER OF CONNELLAN

HE went to his rooms in a turmoil of feeling, his main sensation being almost of relief. By one clean stroke he had cut the meshes that embound him, cleared the uncertainty, set himself a definite course.

The pleasure of the unexpected well of love he had discovered, the warmth that had been thus instilled into his starved heart, combined with the sustaining effect of the height of generous self-sacrifice to which he had arisen in the crisis, all helped to stimulate a feverish glow of satisfaction in his mind, deluding him into the impression that all was well with him and with the world.

Restlessly he turned upon his pillow. Sleep had fled from him. He heard the hours toll slowly in the clock-tower over his head; and gradually, as the quarters dragged, the wave of emotional well-being began to ebb; a greyness of reaction slowly took possession of him; and he sank into the opposite extreme of melancholy despair, until at length, worn out, he fell asleep.

In the morning he had regained possession of himself, the necessity of facing the curious eyes of the hospital acting on him as a stimulus. His overweening pride, too, came to the rescue—the feeling that he would not, for anything, have any one know the combination of circumstances leading up to his avowal. In addition, another factor came to his relief, probably the most effective of

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them all. This was the chivalrous impulse to shield the sensitive soul of the woman he had chosen from any knowledge of the real depths of his devotion; for the commonest right thinking compelled him to maintain a proper attitude before her eyes, even more than before those of the hospital at large. Consequently he faced the music smiling, when, on coming down to breakfast, he found it was already known all over their little world.

Several of the residents congratulated him with bantering condolences, as is the manner of bachelors when one of their number assumes the yoke. Connellan alone had any inkling of the truth, and so before the others he said nothing. Afterwards, in the sitting-room, he murmured—

“So you decided for the comfortable wood fire in the chalet, rather than the sunrise on the mountain-tops.”

Fitzgerald looked at him steadily.

“You always were a sentimental ass, Conn, in spite of all your cynicism,” he said.

Connellan nodded absently, unperturbed.

“Yes; perhaps you’re right. After all, she is a dear little thing,” he said quietly.

At the tone Fitzgerald turned suddenly and grasped his hand.

“Thank you, old chap,” he said, with a slight break in his voice. Then he hurried from the room. And thus Connellan knew.

On his “round” several of the sisters congratulated him. There was a faint suspicion of surprise in their manner. It conveyed an impression, of which he was acutely sensitive, that they expected him to have done better, did not quite believe in its spontaneity, rather wondered how he had been inveigled into it.

Etiquette compelled him to interview the matron. Here the air of surprise was somewhat masked by one of dis-

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approbation. Coming so soon after the recent tragedy, she was distinctly annoyed. Intuitively he grasped the points of discipline that worried her; and so he faced her with head erect and steady eyes.

"Of course, matron, I'm rather sorry it had to come out just now. These things are always awkward, and I quite appreciate that it is particularly so at this time. But, as you know, she's got her certificate; she will be leaving in a few days to convalesce; and my own time is almost up, too."

The matron relaxed slightly.

"At any rate, Mr. Fitzgerald, you have been quite open about it. I confess I do not like such happenings. They disturb my nurses——"

"Yes, I know," he interrupted eagerly. "If you like, I won't see her until she goes for good."

"Perhaps that would be better," she answered slowly; and then, relenting, "but, after all, it is rather hard on you both, and I very much appreciate your courtesy in coming to me, as well as your goodness over—you know. I think, considering everything, if you restrict yourself to half-an-hour—she's going in a couple of days, you say."

"Thank you very much, matron," he answered gratefully.

In the ward she was waiting for him with feverish eyes.

"Great Scott, child! Lie down! What d'ye mean by running your temperature up two degrees like this?" he said, his quick eyes catching the jump on the chart.

She stretched out her small hands eagerly to him.

"Och, Dermot, I've been wearyin' for ye. They've all been in congratulating me, and I haven't known whether to laugh or to cry," she said unevenly.

He was relieved to find it infinitely easier than he

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expected, something in the sight of her making him feel so emotionally protective.

"What is it, dear little girl?" he said, sitting down beside her.

She sidled closer to him, and his arm slipped round her shoulders.

"Now let's have it all out," he said quietly. "It's by special permission of 'Ma' (the matron), I may tell you," he added, with a smile.

Suddenly she pushed herself from him.

"No. Just keep away for a minute, till I've finished. I can't think rightly with you so close to me."

She paused for a moment to collect her thoughts.

"It was very sweet and very chivalrous of you saying what you said last night, Dermot; but I cannot hold you to it—I feel you just had to say it for my sake. You were a perfect dear, and I just loved you for it, and I'm—oh—ever so grateful; but I can't have it."

He made a movement of protest, but she checked him.

"Let me finish, for I don't want you to misunderstand."

He watched her quietly as she jerked out the sentences, twisting her fingers one with another, keeping her eyes sedulously away from him. Had she tried deliberately she could not have chosen a more certain method of binding him more closely to her. Repressing all feeling from his voice, he said quietly—

"What would you suggest?"

She glanced at him timidly for a moment.

"I? Oh, let's keep it up till I'm gone. No one need know it's only make-believe. I've got my certificate, and I shan't come back. I can easily write to some one, later, and say we've broken it off," she explained hurriedly. Then she added hastily, dreading to hear what he might say: "The only one who'll suffer will be poor old

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'Marmaduke.' I feel very guilty about him; for, of course, it will be all off now; but I hardly knew what it meant then; it was four years ago, and I'm afraid I've never loved him as I ought."

"What about me?" Fitzgerald answered quietly. "Didn't it occur to you that I might want my little chum?"

He turned the small face, obstinately averted, towards him.

"Just look at me, sweetheart."

The brown eyes blinked at him for a moment, and under his fingers the pale cheeks took on the blush of dawn.

"Were you making fun of me last night?"

She moved the imprisoned face in negation. He could feel her throat swallowing; but she refused to open her eyes.

"Well, then, don't be giving me any more of your nonsense, or I'll kiss you," he said, with mock sternness.

"D'ye mean it?" she breathed, her eyes burning into his.

"Yes, sure," he answered.

* * * * *

Three days later he saw her off at Westland Row. As the guard began banging the doors, in the unnecessarily aggressive way railway officials have, she leant out of the window.

"Are you still sure you want me?" she said.

"Quite sure," he answered steadily.

In the days that followed he found, to his surprise, that he missed her immensely. Somehow, without her, the hospital seemed dead. For months he had been accustomed to go to her whenever time began to drag his wings, confident of a bright and smiling welcome. Now, when she was gone, he was able to appreciate how much she had been to him.

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Of Nora he saw almost nothing. By some manœuvre she had managed to get herself transferred to day-duty on the medical side; the chances of their meeting were thus remote, and any such there were they both carefully avoided.

Two things fretted him: one was the coldness of his "chief," Sir John, when he heard of the engagement; the other was the attitude of Pip, who refused point-blank to recognise it at all, appearing to think Nora had been shamefully treated. Loyalty on the part of Fitzgerald to the woman of his avowed choice closed all avenues of explanation between them. He knew Pip and Nora still met frequently outside; but he could ask no questions about her. Accordingly he withdrew gradually more and more into a little world of his own, plunging in his leisure hours with feverish energy into laboratory work on some malignant tumours he had been curious about.

Gradually he grew paler, thinner, much more quiet. The other residents, busy with their own concerns, noticed little, except that it was borne in on them that he had become very dull. Only Connellan, his chum, grew more and more anxious.

"Our time will be up in three weeks. What about re-applying for the next six months?" he said one day.

"I shan't re-apply," answered Fitzgerald heavily.

"What are you going to do, then?" he asked.

"I dunno."

"Good Lord! What's come over him?" thought Connellan.

It was a telegram woke him up. It read—

"Nurse down with fever. Send another; and for God's sake get me a 'locum.' Number of cases spreading.

"JOYCE."

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It came in the morning just before his "chief" was due; and he went direct to the matron.

"It must be a volunteer. It's 'typhus,'" he said.

The matron nodded.

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry for Nurse Marr; but every nurse must be continually risking her life. There'll be no difficulty in getting a volunteer. Any of my nurses will take it on. What about a 'locum'?"

A sudden thought came to him.

"I don't know. I'll see what I can do. Perhaps——"

His mind, now fully awake, began to work rapidly. There was a man coming round that morning who wanted to get on the resident staff. What was his name?—Corley.

"Just the man," he thought, "if the 'chief' doesn't mind."

He found him in the mess-room, and put the question to him. Corley was enthusiastically willing; Sir John, when approached, was somewhat coldly complacent; in an hour he had it all fixed up, and immediately afterwards he began packing to accompany the nurse by the afternoon train.

"You're a d——d fool!" said Connellan wrathfully. "You're not going. Ten to one, if you do, you'll catch the beastly thing. You know you just take everything. What the —— put this mad scheme into your head I can't think. It's a physician's job, anyway; and you're just sacrificing every ambition you ever had of getting on here."

"Oh, chuck it, Conn! I'm sick to death of this rotten hospital. Besides, the poor devil needs help so badly, and I rather want to see 'typhus.' Might discover the 'bug,' perhaps—who knows? I'll take some things down, at any rate," he said wearily.

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For half-an-hour they wrangled over it; and then Connellan gave up.

"You might as well shoot yourself," he said bitterly.

"Don't bother me; I'm busy," answered Fitzgerald shortly.

In the afternoon he was gone; and Connellan roamed savagely round the hospital, making unfortunate nurses feel bewildered by his carping criticism, snapping at every one who crossed him, venting his acute distress on every side, till the other residents began to retaliate in self-defence.

"You're like a bear with a sore head, Conn," said Thompson.

"My diagnosis is 'green spots on the liver'—a fatal malady," drawled Harbison.

"How's your temper-ature?" inquired Macintyre anxiously.

"Why worry when you can be buried for two pounds ten?" murmured little Reilly.

"Pathological and graveyard humour always makes me sick," retorted Connellan, banging from the mess-room.

In the childrens' ward he found Nora alone. She was a little thinner, perhaps, a little drawn at the eyes. But the beauty of her seemed to have gained in consequence: she was less statuesque, her eyes seemed to have developed a deeper violet, she looked more human, more fascinating, more adorable. It struck him as an insult now as he stared at her vindictively, blaming her for everything, feeling that she ought to be withered, crushed-looking, instead of purer, sweeter, more ethereal.

In the fortnight or so she had been in the ward Fitzgerald's name had never been mentioned between them. She appeared as unconscious of him as if he had never existed.

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It was a great surprise to her, therefore, when Connellan suddenly blurted out—

“Fitzgerald’s gone.”

She had already heard of it in the nurses’ home; and so she was able to murmur casually—

“Yes, so I’ve heard.”

The immobility of her face, the indifferent tone of her voice, irritated him beyond endurance.

“I suppose you know who’s fault it is—who’s to blame—why he’s just chucking away his whole career?” he said vindictively.

“No,” she answered coldly; “and I’m not particularly interested.”

“Well, I am; and with your permission I’ll tell you,” he retorted, forgetting everything else in his anger.

A child whimpered in the corner. “Excuse me a moment, while I get ‘7’s’ bottle,” she said evenly.

The pause gave him time to cool. She could have stopped him then. But, in spite of her disclaimer, in spite of the coldness of her exterior, her heart was beating furiously. She was aching for news; and no matter how brutally unjust she felt Connellan’s attitude to be, she was determined to stand it, hoping to get some glimmerings of the truth.

Silently he watched her set the bottle skilfully to the puckered mouth. Then she straightened up, faced him proudly, and said—

“Now I’m ready.”

His attitude of mind had softened by now, however, and he began almost apologetically—

“I’ve known Dermot Fitzgerald ever since he was a junior ‘jib.’ At Trinity, and in hospital, we’ve been more than friends; and if any man can know any other man, I know him. He’s the straightest, finest chum any man, or

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any woman, for that matter, would wish to have. When I say, then, that he's in love with you, I want you to feel that I know what I'm talking about. Mind you, I don't say he has not been interested in other women. I suppose every man has; but I know he never 'loved' one till he came across you."

She drew a long breath, but did not speak; and he went on, growing more and more earnest—

"He didn't want to love you. He didn't want to love any one—but the feeling was too strong for him. I watched him, and I know. He said very little about it. A man never does in such a case, for the deeper things in one's life are kept even from one's best friends."

He looked at her apologetically as he continued—

"I don't want to pry into your secrets, but I couldn't help noticing at first that he was happy; and I judged—well, that things were going all right for him. Then came the ghastly business of Hickey; and after that there was a change. It puzzled me. I could see no reason for it. Perhaps you know; but it's none of my affair—I'm only looking at results. I knew, of course, that he was friendly with Nurse Otway." (She winced slightly at the name, but kept her eyes on him—still silent.) "But the engagement came on me like a thunderclap. I couldn't believe it. I knew he never intended it. I knew it was all wrong. I knew he didn't love her."

"Why?" she blurted out.

"I can't tell you why—I just knew. He tried to bluff me, but I knew. I haven't lived with him so long without knowing his ways."

He paused for a moment, but she had a wonderful gift of silence, and she let him continue.

"For a time he seemed all right. Then he started to go to pieces. Now he's a wreck. I can hardly believe

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it's the same old Dermot that I knew. All his ambition's gone. He's just chucked up the sponge in the first round. He's gone off to this God-forsaken place in Connaught. I couldn't stop him. Nobody could. I don't ask you what have you done to him; but I do ask you, can you do anything to pull him up, now you know what I've been telling you?" he pleaded.

"I can do nothing," she answered coldly, all the old torturing doubt returning to her with redoubled force, in spite of everything that he had said; for there was nothing concrete, nothing she could hold on to in anything he had told her, nothing definite to put against the memory of her eyes, and the solid fact of his engagement.

He checked at the icy chillness of her tone, and stared at her with sudden hostile eyes, roused to a new strange bitterness. Torn by distress for the comrade who seemed to be making such a hopeless muddle of his life, accusing her in his mind of being the cause, a violent blind anger rose in him, made him forget for the moment he was talking to a woman, caused him to vent his mangled feelings on her in a wild, vindictive torrent of unrestrained emotion.

"Good women like you," he sneered bitterly, "breed three-quarters of the trouble of the great round world. Just because you're what you are, the warm-hearted, impulsive Fitzgeralds of this world get smitten with the still white purity of you; and again, as likely as not, because you're built like that and want your opposite, one of them carries you off your feet, for the time being, with the quick-beating heart of him, so different from your own. But even when the glow is on you, you do not understand; you do not make allowances for the defects of the very virtues that attracted you; you do not see that such a man is just a great big, overgrown, delightful baby that you've

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got to play with, love and scold, cuddle and laugh at, again and again. If you could do that you'd hold his heart for ever. But you never can, because it is not in you. You always try to check his natural expansiveness. You get jealous of his friends. You try to bind him to yourself alone. You want all his thoughts. Because you're self-centred yourself, you try to mould him in your image, forgetting, if you could, that thereby all that attracted you in him would be dead. Nevertheless, you always try; and in the attempt, as likely as not, you murder his immortal soul. Women like you should never marry. You're only fit to be nuns."

The wild, stinging words lashed furiously at her. She wanted to scream aloud at the horrible injustice of it, wanted to stop him, wanted him to know how brutally he was torturing her. But the very depths of her emotion seemed to make her all the more incapable of rising to the effort. Feeling that her control had almost reached its limit, she closed her eyes wearily to shut out the sight of his accusing lips.

Suddenly he paused, exhausted, and she opened them again and gazed vacantly at him.

"Have you quite finished?" she said dully, numbed by the strain she had so silently endured. "Because, if so," she added pitifully, "I should like to go on with my work."

To his distorted mental ear it sounded like the very height of mockery.

He threw up his hands theatrically.

"You're not a woman. You're just a beautiful white statue. I wish to God that he had never seen you. I was a fool to think you had a heart, that you could possibly help. You've killed a soul. I wish you joy of it," he exclaimed bitterly.

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Then, turning hurriedly, he left the ward abruptly.

For a moment after he had gone she stood still by the fireplace, leaning dizzily on the mantelpiece, possessed by an utter hopeless weariness. Then, as a feeble whimper came across the ward, she roused herself. It was the marasmic baby in Cot No. 2 requiring attention.

CHAPTER XVI

GAUGERS, DENTISTS, THE FEVER-HOUSE, AND THE LAST REQUEST OF SHEILA

IN the dark of even the train drew slowly into the little terminal station, dimly lit by flickering oil lamps; and Fitzgerald, a few other passengers and the nurse, whose name he had discovered was Chambers, alighted.

Promptly he set the solitary porter to gather their luggage, and then looked round to see if any one had come to meet them. Apparently there was no one; and slightly chilled, he now directed the porter to put the things on one of the jaunting-cars he could see waiting outside the station. The man hesitated, a fine rain was falling, and Fitzgerald looked impatiently at him.

“Did you hear? I want a car,” he said.

“Beg pardon, sorr, but would ye mind axin’ for it yerself?”

Fitzgerald marched out of the station more and more irritated. Four men with long whips, red faces, and the characteristic shabby sporting look of the Irish jarvey were waiting outside. None of them made any movement towards him.

“I want a car,” he said.

Then the driver nearest him seemed to wake up.

“We’re engaged already, sorr,” he said.

Fitzgerald looked round puzzled. All the other passengers had gone, and he was at a loss.

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Suddenly the furthest-off driver stepped forward into the light, exclaiming—

“Yes, sure it must be. D’ye mind me, sorr?”

Fitzgerald shook his head. He was becoming more and more puzzled.

“Maybe ye mind this, then,” the man said with a laugh, raising his chin, and showing a scar stretching from ear to ear. “I was in number three bed in ‘wan.’”

Fitzgerald’s brow cleared somewhat.

“Yes, of course I remember you now. You’re Heggarty.”

“Yes, sorr; and it’s proud I’ll be to drive ye.”

The other men were listening intently. One of them now said—

“Och, sure, it’s the dochter from Dublin, boys—that’s comin’ to Dr. Joyce,” and then suddenly they were all smiles.

By this time the porter had arrived with the luggage, followed by the nurse; and soon Heggarty was driving them along the wet dark road to the town.

“What was the matter, Heggarty?” inquired Fitzgerald, still puzzled.

Heggarty roared with laughter.

“Sure, sorr, we took ye for a ‘gauger’ at first. Word cum to the bhoys that wan of them was comin’ by this train; an’ sorra a driver in Westbar would be after drivin’ such truck. But we wanted to see what his faetures was like, and you were the only stranger off the train.”

“Do I look like a ‘gauger,’ nurse?” laughed Fitzgerald.

“Not a little bit,” she answered promptly.

The car rattled swayingly over the rutted cobbles of the narrow winding street, between rain-battered, low-roofed houses on either side, many of them thatched. Two or

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three small, dim-lit, narrow shop-windows cast faint haloes on the pavement, vaguely outlining an occasional shawl-wrapped woman hurrying homeward; but the main impression produced on Fitzgerald's mind was that every second light appeared to be that of the windows of a public-house, of which there seemed to be an unusual number, even for a small Irish country town. He commented on the fact to Heggarty.

"Yis, sorr. It's always rainin' here, but it's quare what a mighty 'dry' place it is all the same," answered Heggarty with a chuckle, turning off into a side street at the same time, and drawing up at a door.

"This will be Dr. Joyce's," he said, getting down and rapping the knocker vigorously.

Fitzgerald stepped stiffly off the car, and turned to help the nurse down as the door opened widely, and a stream of comfortable light fell on them.

"It's the docthor and the nurse from Dublin I'm afther bringin' ye, Mrs. Gogarty," said Heggarty, to the smiling matronly figure that had opened the door.

"Come in. Niver mind the luggage. Ye must be disthroyed entirely with yer journey an' the wet; and ye'll be famishin' for yer supper," she said, bustling them into a cosy sitting-room where a bright fire burnt merrily. "Bridget, put the wather on the tea," she called to some one in the background.

"Well, it's fine to feel we've got here," said Fitzgerald.

"The doctor was put out he couldn't be meeting ye himself. A 'red ticket' came in, bad scran to it, an' he had to go four weary miles to Magheraboy, an' him there this very mornin' already. But it's a sight for sore eyes ye'll be to him when he does be home again," she rattled on.

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Heggarty was bringing in the luggage, and he joined in the conversation with the familiarity so characteristic of Irish life.

"It's the luck o' God ye got them here at all, at all, Mrs. Gogarty; for the bhoys took the doctor here for a 'gauger,' an' divil the wan would drive him."

"The 'omadhuns,'" she snorted. "What next? Not to know a gentleman from a gauger."

The entrance of Bridget with the tea switched her energy into another channel. She loaded them with food with the old-fashioned pressure that still lingers as a tradition from the early Victorian days. The nurse, however, was anxious to get on to the fever hospital; so the meal was hurried through, and after Heggarty had been excavated with some little delay from the kitchen, she was ready to depart.

"You might send me a message back by Heggarty how nurse is, if you wouldn't mind," said Fitzgerald, as she was leaving.

He watched her drive off in the darkness, and then, returning to the sitting-room, settled down to the luxury of a pipe, feeling more at peace with the world than he had done for weeks. Mrs. Gogarty bustled in and out clearing the table.

"The doctor does be a long time," she commented.

Something in her voice made him say—

"Is any one waiting to see him?"

"Just wan or two," she admitted; then adding perfunctorily, "but they don't signify."

"I'll see them," he said promptly.

"It's a shame to be botherin' ye; but I don't know when he'll be back," she confessed.

There were two people in the dispensary—a thin, hectic-looking girl with a rasping cough, and a man who

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looked like a small farmer, clad in rough tweeds, with his face tied up in a handkerchief.

It was obvious at a glance what was the matter with the girl.

She came for her "soothing mixture," she explained; and he found the prescription without difficulty in the "day-book," filled it up, and sent her off. Then he turned to the man.

"I want to have a tooth drawn, doctor," he said.

"Let me look," said Fitzgerald, putting him in a chair under the light.

It was a right upper molar, and he searched for the appropriate forceps, finding them eventually with an old stump still between the blades, an interesting sidelight on the doctor's ideas of asepsis. After hastily purifying them, he stepped to the man's side.

"Open your mouth," he said.

"You'll not be hurtin' me, doctor, will ye?"

"Oh no," he said soothingly.

Steadying the man's head with his arm, he rapidly inserted the forceps, gave a quick, dexterous up and out jerk, and the tooth was free before the patient had time to move, or more than start a strangled yell.

"Rinse your mouth out," said Fitzgerald quickly, pushing a glass of warm water at him. The man did so, hypnotised for a moment. Then he exclaimed incredulously: "It's not out—is it?"

"Yes, of course it is."

"Well I'm —— How much, doctor?"

"Half-a-crown," said Fitzgerald, guessing at the fee.

The man looked at him with apparent amazement.

"Half-a-crown? Why, the ould doctor pulled me all roun' the dispensary for half-an-hour with me last, and then only charged me a shillun'," he said.

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"Och. That was because he needed exercise, and so had to let you off cheap," explained Fitzgerald glibly.

The patient's face broke into a broad grin.

"Ye have me there, docthor. Sure, I thought ye were an Englishman at first by yer way of speakin'. Ye're well worth the money," he said, adding as an afterthought: "Only let me have him till I stamp on him, the cruel divil."

Fitzgerald handed him the offending molar; and then, quite solemnly, he jumped upon it on the floor, picked it up and put it in his pocket, paid the fee and left.

Presently the rattle of a car stopping, and the sound of heavy footsteps told him Dr. Joyce had returned. He came into the dispensary, and after removing a streaming mackintosh, driving-gloves, an overcoat and a rain-sodden tall felt hat, appeared as a large, red-faced figure of a man, with bushy eyebrows, small, twinkling grey eyes, and a long, fair beard. Coming forward, he grasped Fitzgerald's hand in a great shoulder-of-mutton fist.

"It's delighted to see you I am this perishin' night," he said in a deep, booming voice. "And I take it mighty kind of ye to come and help me, for I'm fairly off my feet. Four more cases this evenin', father, mother and two children, in a cabin not fit for hens to roost in away down at the 'point.'"

He glanced round at the dispensary. "Ye've cleared them off, I see. Well, that's kind of ye."

Fitzgerald smiled.

"I've just screwed a tooth and half-a-crown at the same time out of a gentleman of the name of Mr. Mat Sheehy," he said, handing over the coin.

Dr. Joyce roared with laughter.

"The divil ye did! Well, it's a priest you ought to be, not a 'sawbones,' Dr. Fitzgerald. It's a rich man I'd be

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if half the people who owed me money took it into their heads to pay."

"Your supper's spoilin', sorr," came the reproachful voice of Mrs. Gogarty from the doorway.

"All right, Mrs. Gogarty," he called over his shoulder. Then he lowered his voice confidentially. "She's a jewel of seven stars, that woman, but she has one failin'. She thinks I'd be starved entirely if she didn't keep on remindin' me to eat."

"It's a grand fault," laughed Fitzgerald.

"Is it? You just wait. She'll be gettin' on to you in a day or so as well. Then you'll know."

"The meat's gettin' cold, sorr," came the inexorable voice.

"All right. I'm coming," he exclaimed hastily.

As they turned to leave the dispensary, however, there came a knock at the door. Dr. Joyce groaned.

"If that's a fresh call, I'll not be able to face her for a week," he said resignedly. "Come in."

The usually whimsical face of Heggarty appeared solemnly at the door.

"Beg pardon, sorr, but the new nurse says the ould wan does be powerful bad; an' could ye come."

Dr. Joyce reached for his mackintosh without a word.

"No," said Fitzgerald hastily. "Let me go. You have your supper. I can manage; and if I need you I'll let you know."

"Och, I might as well go with ye."

"Why? What's the good? Just give me an idea of her case."

"Well, if ye will. For a fine, upstandin', strappin' woman, I never saw any one go under so quick. She doesn't seem to care somehow. She was mighty bad this mornin'."

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“Is she having stimulants—brandy or anything?”

Dr. Joyce shook his head.

“No, just milk. But you can try it if ye like,” handing over his own flask. “It’s my belief if a patient’s goin’ to get well from ‘typhus,’ the divil himself can’t stop him; but if he’s goin’ to die, all the medicine in the world won’t save him.”

Fitzgerald nodded gravely at this council of despair, but made no comment. Instead, he got his overcoat, and turned to Heggarty. Silently they climbed the cobbled street, till they reached the top of the hill, and a large, bare grey building appeared in the gloom of the hurrying stars.

“That’s the ‘workhouse,’” said Heggarty, breaking the silence.

They skirted the building, got over a stone fence, waded through two muddy cabbage fields, and then came across another tumble-down stone wall, beyond which, some fifty yards away, a long, low, two-storeyed, slated building of undressed stone, absolutely bare of all adornment or surroundings, now became manifest in the gloom.

“That’s the ‘fever-house’; an’, axin’ yer pardon, sorr, I’d rather not go nearer again this night. They do say the second time is catchin’,” said Heggarty.

“All right, Heggarty. I can manage now. Thank you very much,” he answered, slipping a coin into his hand, and immediately plunging onwards over the clinging mud that intervened between him and the building.

Presently, as he approached nearer, he stumbled on the remnants of a path, and heard the crunch of cinders under his feet.

At the sound of his footsteps there came a glimmer of a light about the centre of the building, a door opened, and a figure like that of one of the witches in Macbeth

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appeared, holding a hurricane lamp on a level with her shawl-covered head.

Fitzgerald stared at the apparition till it spoke.

"If ye plase, sorr, nurse says will ye go straight upstairs," she quavered in the shaky voice of extreme old age.

Rapidly he mounted the rickety stairs, bare even of a handrail, and guided by the light of an open doorway and the low sound of voices, found the nurse's sickroom. It was a plain, bare, whitewashed place, carpetless, save for a strip next the iron bedstead in the corner, furnished with a chest of drawers, a cheap looking-glass, a tin basin and jug, and one rush-bottomed chair. A lighted reflector oil-lamp stood on the edge of the chest of drawers. Nurse Chambers was leaning over the patient; but at the sound of his footsteps she turned her head.

Quietly he joined her.

"I'm sorry to bring you up, but she seemed so bad that I couldn't leave her. Every minute or so she will insist on getting up to look after the patients. She doesn't know me," she whispered.

He nodded. "Temperature?" he queried in a low voice.

"105.4. Pulse 120. Respirations 46," she replied.

He leant over the bed, looking down on the flushed face, wide-open eyes, and dusky, mottled chest which she would keep uncovering.

"D'ye know me?" he said quietly, feeling at the same time for her wrist.

"Course I do. You're the undertaker, come to measure me for me coffin—but what's this woman doing here? I want to get up and get little Tommy Burke his milk, but she won't let me," she answered querulously.

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Then she moved as if to rise again, but the nurse gently restrained her.

"It's all right, nurse, Old Biddy's given it to him already."

For a moment she stared at her, and then, in the inconsequential way of semi-delirium, suddenly became quiescent.

"Then I can go to sleep," she said, and turned on her side.

Both the watchers stepped back. The tension was over for the moment.

"I've brought some brandy for you; but I'm not sure that she'll need it just yet—her pulse is quite good, and it might increase the delirium. I think I'd better give her a hypodermic for the night," he said.

"Yes, sir, I wish you would, for as she is now I can't leave her for a moment; and yet there are twenty-six other patients, and only old Biddy," she said.

"Good Lord! What a job to ask any one woman to do!" he exclaimed. "I'll have to see to this. Look here," he added, "I'll stay with her for an hour till the morphia works. You get along."

"Thank you very much, sir," she said gratefully.

Left by himself, he sat silently at the bedside, thinking. All was quiet save for the insistent ticking of the cheap American alarm-clock, suggestive of the hurrying sands of time hastening remorselessly to the inevitable end. Presently, after a lull, the wind began to rise, and the sound of driven rain tapping with soft, wet fingers on the window-panes made the casements rattle as if in querulous attempts to enter.

Slowly the patient turned on her back again, and stared with wide, unseeing eyes at the ceiling above.

He got up softly, and leant over her.

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"So you've come," she said quite sanely.

"Yes. You know me now?"

"Why, sure, of course I do. It's very kind of ye, but ye can't be helpin' me now. I died a month ago," she murmured quietly. "Who's doin' my work?" she added with a faint show of interest.

"Nurse Chambers."

"I'm glad o' that," she said contentedly. "I was afraid they mightn't get one of us, and there'd be some one who wouldn't be lookin' afther them properly. They're such nice things, an' so awfully grateful for so little, poor souls."

Apparently she had not even thought of herself.

"But we want you to get well," he said.

"Do ye, now? Do you really?" she said with pitiful surprised gratitude. "But ye know—don't ye? I feel ye know, somehow."

He paused hesitatingly. "Yes, I know; but I think—nobody else does; and I could——"

She smiled at him gratefully.

"And ye don't be despisin' me utterly?"

He shook his head in negation.

"Thank ye so much. You always were good to me. I suppose it's because we're from the same place. I feel I'll be off my head agane in a minute, and so I want ye to promise me somethin', quick."

"Yes. What is it?" he said soothingly.

She raised herself on one elbow in the bed.

"I don't want to be buried here," she said, her teeth chattering. "It's so cold, and wet, and so far away. Send me back to Knockeeny, will ye? I'd like to be buried with him—if they'd let me. They would—if you said so; for after all, for us you're 'The Fitzgerald.' Promise," she entreated urgently.

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"But——" he began feebly.

"Promise." Her wild eyes stared at him.

"All right."

"On the word of 'The Fitzgerald,'" she prompted.

"On the word of 'The Fitzgerald,'" he echoed solemnly.

She dropped back on the bed, exhausted but satisfied.

"Now I can die in peace," she said gratefully.

At two o'clock in the morning she was sleeping heavily, under the influence of the narcotic, and so he was able to leave.

In the darkness before the dawn, therefore, he stumbled his way through the forsaken streets back to Dr. Joyce's house.

A faint glimmer showed through the fanlight, and turning the handle of the street door, as he had been directed, he went quietly into the hall. An open note lay waiting for him under the turned-down light:

"Sorry. Could not come up to you. Called out on a case. See you at breakfast.

"JOYCE."

Mechanically he went into the dining-room and turned up the light. A bottle of whisky, a syphon of soda, a used glass and a clean one stood on the table. Idly he lifted the bottle. It was half empty; and he remembered it had been full when he went out.

"Lord, he does know how to punish it," he thought, smiling sleepily. "I don't think I want any. I'll be able to get off without it."

CHAPTER XVII

THE SAYINGS OF MARY JOSEPHINE. POLICEMEN, PRIESTS, AND THE PASSING OF SHEILA

IN the morning, when he came down to breakfast, he found the doctor had already finished, and was now seeing patients in the dispensary.

"Why didn't you call me earlier, Mrs. Gogarty?" he said.

"An' why should I?" she answered. "Sure it's sleep and good meat ye want, if yer goin' to live in Westbar; for indeed, axin' yer pardon for being so bold, Dr. Fitzgerald, it's far too thin ye are for my way of thinkin'," she said, bustling round with his breakfast.

"Great Scott! She's begun already," he thought. Aloud he said, "Well, I'm going to do my best to be a credit to you, Mrs. Gogarty, before I go back to Dublin."

She smiled delightedly at him. He had already won her heart.

As he ate he could hear the doctor's deep voice, quite distinctly, across the passage.

"Yes, ma'am. I can give ye a bottle for it. It'll maybe do ye good; but I wouldn't take it myself," he heard him say to one good lady; and smiled at the honest naïveté of the remark. Then in another minute—

"Well, Terence. Have ye been fighting again?"

"No, docthor. It's a bad eye I'm afther gettin'," the patient answered in an injured tone of innocence.

"Let me have a look. Yes, it's a mighty bad eye, sure

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enough, Terry. It'll take a power of money to cure that eye."

"Will it, docthor? Will it really? How much d'ye think?" he inquired anxiously.

"It'll take two pounds to cure that eye, Terry."

"Och, murdher, doctor! Couldn't ye do it for less?" he exclaimed.

"Well, it might be cured for thirty shillings, Terry—if ye paid quick—an' ye ought to be able to after that fine run of 'potheen' ye got through last week——"

"Och! Whist, whist, docthor! For the love of God—for the love of the saints—will ye whist, or the 'polis' will be afther hearin'——?" he entreated.

"All right, Terry. Only ye might as well send a drop on here, too. There's a young doctor from Dublin, stoppin' with me, might like a taste of the real thing."

"Sure, sure, docthor. Ye'll have it, and the thirty shillin's, and welcome," he said.

There was a short silence, and then—

"Do I be puttin' the stuff on me eye, or dhrinkin' it?" he inquired.

There came a roar from the doctor.

"It's a lotion, man. Put it on. Ye're always thinkin' of something to swallow. I never met yer equal—never."

"All right, docthor. Aisy does it. I was only axin' for to be sure, like."

That seemed to have finished the patients for the morning, because presently the doctor joined Fitzgerald.

"How did ye find the poor thing last night?" he said on entering.

"Badly. She won't last long, I'm thinking. Fact is, she doesn't want to get well; and there's no fighting that," answered Fitzgerald. "There are reasons I needn't go into for it, and maybe it's just as well," he added.

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"Hm! I thought so. She's an R.C., isn't she? I'd better let Father Dempsey know, then, as I'm on my round. Now about the work. I think, if ye don't mind, I'll give you charge of the fever hospital and the dispensary patients in the town. Some of my better patients are just a shade scared at me maybe carryin' infection——"

"That will suit me excellently," answered Fitzgerald. "Just you say what you want done, and I'll see that it is done."

"That's all right, then," the other answered heartily. "I've got a long round, and I must be off; but you have a look at the morning paper, and stroll up to the hospital at your leisure. You'll get the lie of the town; and I'll make a list for you after luncheon of the people I want you to see for me. It's an enormous help you'll be to me."

"Right," answered Fitzgerald. "Oh, by the way—what about Nurse Marr's relations? You see, I know her people."

"I wired them yesterday, but none of them can come," answered Dr. Joyce promptly.

"No; I didn't expect any of them could, for they're all poor people; but they'll be very grateful, none the less, because they'll feel we haven't neglected them. Thank you very much," said Fitzgerald. "And now about getting a 'special' for her. It's too big a job for Nurse Chambers alone," he added.

Dr. Joyce shook his head.

"I know. But they're the very divil and all, these guardians here. Ye see, they're only sort of peasants in a way, and as close-fisted as they're made. Twenty pounds is a big fortune in their eyes. Mind you, I'm with ye; and if ye can get the master of the workhouse, and the clerk of the guardians, O'Reilly, to see it, I'll be mighty

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glad. Anyway, call in at the workhouse and try them. I wish ye luck."

Fitzgerald found things much as Dr. Joyce had hinted. The master was complacent in the easy-going Irish way, as long as he was certain no responsibility would be thrust upon himself.

"The clerk's in the board-room. Ye'd better speak to him yerself," he said diplomatically. "I'd be long sorry to think there's ennything we might have done we didn't do, for it's a fine young wumman she is, entirely."

The clerk, however, was not so impressed with her physical charms. He had four daughters of his own, and was probably beyond that stage. It was the "rates" he was chiefly concerned about; and so they wrangled over the question of expense for half-an-hour.

"Well, it comes to this," said Fitzgerald finally. "If you don't do it, I'm hanged if you'll ever be able to get another nurse. Two of ours died here last epidemic; and from what I've seen I think it's just been from overwork. It's a d——d scandal, and I'll have to put the L.G.B. on you."

That settled it. The clerk knew for certain reasons of his own he dare not face an inquiry; and so, with a very bad grace, permission was given, and the master authorised to telegraph to Dublin.

"I doubt if we'll be able to get one even as it is," was Fitzgerald's final shot. "I shouldn't blame any of them if they refused."

In the meanwhile, up at the hospital Nurse Chambers was feeling the depression of her surroundings weigh heavily upon her; for it was evident to her trained eye that her colleague was rapidly sinking. Every time she came into the little room she seemed to find her lower and

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lower in the bed. It is true she swallowed mechanically when she was fed, still staring upwards, semi-comatose, but it was with the utmost difficulty she could make her speak, though her lips moved continuously in a muttering, incoherent undertone.

Occasionally her eyes would drop to the counterpane, then her hands would come feebly out from underneath the bed-clothes, and she would pick vaguely at the texture.

Nurse Chambers shook her head at the sign.

“That’s bad. I do wish I hadn’t to leave her so much; but what can I do—I must see after the others?” she thought, as she turned to go down the stairs.

In the women’s ward, filled mainly with children, she found her morning’s work fully cut out for her; since all of them had to be washed and tidied, feeds given, the floor between the straw pallets cleared of litter, the grates tidied, and the turf fires made up before she could even start to take a temperature. All the patients slept on straw mattresses on the floor—there were no bedsteads—and she found the continual stooping very tiresome to the back.

Most of the children were convalescing, however, and their continual chatter helped considerably to lighten the general dreariness.

When she entered she had been conscious that two small figures had just scurried under the bedclothes. She decided, however, to take no notice; and so, presently, their “possum-like” rigidity relaxed, they both uncovered their heads and began to watch her movements, their shrewd little eyes summing her up with the uncanny accuracy characteristic of children.

“How is the poor nurse beyant?” said one woman in the corner quietly.

“Very sadly indeed, Mrs. Byrne.”

The woman’s eye clouded over.

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“Och, the poor thing! An’ her that good to ivry wan of us.” Then she brightened up. “But maybe she’ll take a turrrn for the betther,” she added, with characteristic Irish optimism.

“Maybe,” said Nurse Chambers, without conviction; and at the tone Mrs. Byrne again became despondent.

“Sure, an’ if she doesn’t, it’s a power of jewels she’ll be afther havin’ in her crown,” murmured Mrs. Casey in the next bed; and this thought somehow seemed to comfort the two mothers. The children in the meanwhile had been actively discussing the propriety of offering up the Rosary “with special intention” on the nurse’s behalf; but here two absolutely divergent minds forced the discussion into vigorous antagonism.

“An’ is it you, Thomas Ignatius, would be afther leadin’ whin iverybody knows yer father’s the biggest poacher in Connacht?” came the shrill voice of Mary Josephine O’Malley, aged thirteen.

“Niver moind me faather,” retorted Thomas Ignatius Burke. “Am I not ‘mass-boy,’ an’ who’d know betther nor me how to lead it? Besides, sure yer only a girl.”

“Poacher!” retorted Mary Josephine.

“Whose uncle was catched by the ‘polis’ for runnin’ a still?” inquired Thomas Ignatius malignantly.

“Mary Josephine’s,” piped several small voices.

Mary Josephine seized her pillow viciously; and the nurse thought it was high time to intervene.

“Now, children, will ye be quiet? If I hear as much as a snort from one of you for the next ten minutes I’ll bandage your mouths,” she said severely.

This terrible threat had the desired effect, and order was restored, though the subject of dispute still remained unsettled. Each little imp, however, lay quiet in bed; and in the peace that followed Nurse Chambers, with a

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final look round, prepared to go into the men's ward opposite.

The moment her back was turned, however, there came a shout from Thomas Ignatius.

"Nurse, nurse!" he yelled, as if she had been a mile away; and when she turned he pointed an accusing finger across the ward. "It's Mary Josephine," he said. "She's afther stickin' her feet beyont the end of the bed, forninst me; an' she twiddled her toes at me—she did so."

Of course, long before this the offending members had been withdrawn; but the state of the previously neatly folded-in ends of the bedclothes showed that the indictment was only too true.

Nevertheless, it was a face of wholly injured innocence she turned upon the nurse.

"Sure, an' it wouldn't have hurt me at all, at all," she protested. "For wasn't it our Laurence Pat that had the faever last year, an' him ravin' for death? An' all he done in the wurld was to take wan big runnin' lepp an' out on to the flure wid him—an' Father Daly there, an' all. An' sorra a wan could stirr him till he was tired of the flure; and then he went back to the beddeen as quiet as ye plase."

All this was poured out with a shrill rapidity of utterance that left her breathless at the close. Nurse Chambers suppressed a smile with difficulty.

"And did he die?" she queried solemnly, looking for a text.

"He did not—then. He's a militiaman," answered Mary Josephine triumphantly.

In spite of herself the nurse had to laugh, and Mary Josephine knew thereby that she had successfully diverted attention from her misdeeds. Curling herself contentedly in bed, she shot a glance of triumph at Thomas Ignatius.

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"There's some wan of them polismen's been afther screechin' for ye this while back," she said lazily, watching cunningly, with half-closed lids, to see the nurse depart, thus leaving her free to resume the wordy warfare with her opponent.

The policemen referred to were patients in the men's ward, members of the Royal Irish Constabulary stationed in the infected area who had themselves been stricken with the disease.

Four of them were convalescent now. They were, therefore, very tired of the tiny ward, very hungry for a more plentiful supply of solid food than they were having, and very eager for the moment when they would be pronounced fit to leave; for the days seemed interminably long, cooped up as they were with nothing to do, nothing to see, and nothing to read except a few old newspapers.

That morning was a red-letter day for them, however, because a copy of the *Weekly Irish Times* had arrived, and in its "Service Column" they were able to follow the "transfers" and "promotions," the changes that were occurring while they were thus shut off from the world they knew.

The sergeant, as the senior officer, held the precious paper.

"Read it out—read it all out, sergeant, for the love of God!" exclaimed Corporal Brady, "for it's all the divar-sion we're like to get this blessed day."

"Constable James Doyle—Tipperary to Achill," announced the sergeant in response.

"Well, now, did ye ever? That's a sore slap in the eye for Doyle, an' him coortin' Bridget Power, the pub-lican's daughter, this last six months," commented Con- stable Nolan. "An' Achill, of all the 'back of beyont' places, too. What's nixt, sergeant?"

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“Corporal Armstrong to be acting-sergeant,” he read, and then, his feelings overcoming him, banged the paper down on the floor in disgust.

“Aisy, aisy. Don’t be hurtin’ the paper,” exclaimed Corporal Brady in alarm. “What’s the matter with Armstrong?”

“Matther!” exclaimed the sergeant in continued annoyance. “There’ll be no houldin’ the man now; for indeed his head was swelled to the size of a Guinness’s barrel already. It’s a district-inspector he’ll be thinkin’ he is be now.”

“What was that girl’s name, he was afther?” queried Constable Jones.

Corporal Brady laughed.

“Which wan? I know of three for sure.”

“Och, I was thinkin’ of that fine lump of a red-haired wumman—A can’t mind her name—her that giv Muldoon the go-by.”

“Och, that wan. He’d niver look at her now; for, between you an’ me an’ the wall, it’s a bit long in the tooth she does be gettin’. Ye’d be a long time lookin’ at a lamb, now, before ye’d think of her,” commented Brady, amid general laughter.

At this moment, however, the nurse entered; the laughter stopped instantly, and each man stiffened to “attention” on his mattress.

“Mornin’ again, nurse,” said the sergeant, saluting.

She nodded with mock severity.

“I thought it must be a lot of old women, by the noise,” she said; and they all looked uncomfortable.

Suddenly she smiled, relenting at their shamefaced looks.

“Never mind. It must be a weary time for you all,” she said; and they relaxed again.

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She had brought their ration of beef-tea, and had just finished distributing it, when the sound of approaching voices made her look out of the window.

"It's Dr. Fitzgerald, the new doctor, and the priest, coming to see Nurse Marr," she said to the men in bed. "I'll come in to you again when they've gone. If you want anything while I'm away, shout for old Biddy."

"That means bad news of the poor sowl upstairs," commented the sergeant when she had gone. "Maybe we did be makin' a bit more noise with our jokes an' what not than was just kindly."

"Maybe we did, for sure," echoed Constable Jones.

"It's meself would be long sorry to think so, for I do be feeling it was me sthartered yez off wid me nonsense," said Corporal Brady contritely.

Meanwhile the nurse led the two men silently upstairs. The priest stood quietly back, his clean-shaven red face solemn with the dignity of his high calling, while Fitzgerald examined the patient. Quietly he turned the pages of his breviary as the doctor whispered questions to the nurse, and at the same time made observations on the patient's condition.

After a few minutes, however, the examination was finished, and, nodding solemnly, Fitzgerald turned quietly to the priest.

Father Dempsey looked up from the pages he was silently re-reading.

"Well, doctor, what do you think?" he said.

"I'm afraid, father, I can do very little more. As I told you on the way up, I think that I must leave her in your hands," he answered painfully.

The kindly face of the old priest looked very grieved.

"Then you think there's no hope, doctor?"

"None in the help of man, father."

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"We must put her into God's keeping, then," the other murmured gently.

In the evening he paid his third visit, finding her in much the same condition. The extra nurse had not yet come; but in the interval he had stimulated the master of the workhouse, and between them they had managed to find a young, recently discharged woman patient who was fairly intelligent. This woman, with the dubious aid of old Bidy, was now carrying on the work of the hospital, in a makeshift sort of way, while Nurse Chambers enjoyed a well-earned rest, ordered to bed, much against her will, by Fitzgerald when he found her almost dropping with fatigue from want of sleep.

Towards midnight he began to feel restless.

"I think I'll go up again to the hospital, sir, if you don't mind," he said to Dr. Joyce, who was sitting at the fire enjoying his first pipe for the day. "I want to see if the other nurse has come by now, or if they couldn't get one, after all, for us."

The doctor finished a large glass of whisky, and pushed the decanter towards Fitzgerald.

"No, thank you, sir; I never drink on duty. We young fellows haven't got your heads," he murmured.

"Maybe yer right," the other answered, helping himself again liberally, and draining the glass with a rapidity of practise rather startling to Fitzgerald.

"I'll come with you," he added, putting back the decanter slowly. "Not that I can suggest anything, but just for company, like."

Mrs. Gogarty, hearing their voices in the hall, put a reproachful head out of the kitchen door.

"Is it goin' out again yez are?" she said.

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"Only to the hospital, Mrs. Gogarty," answered Fitzgerald apologetically.

Apparently she had been anticipating them, for immediately she produced a wrapped-up parcel.

"Well, then, you've got to take these san'wiches wid ye; and tell that nurse there, wid my compliments, that she's to make yez coffee. I know yer ways. Ye'll not be back agane till the peep of dawn, and it's desthroyed ye'd be if I wasn't for iver lookin' afther ye."

"Is she still alive? Has the nurse come?" Fitzgerald asked, as Nurse Chambers opened the door for them. She nodded "Yes" to both questions, and the two men started up the creaking stairs immediately.

When Fitzgerald came into the room he gave an involuntary gasp: Nora was bending over the patient. Even in the dim light he recognised her beautiful lines at once. Indeed, when he thought of it, it seemed to him he would have felt her presence in Cimmerian darkness itself; and a wonder came to him that he had never for a moment anticipated the extreme likelihood of her being sent—knowing her friendship for Nurse Marr, her high courage in the face of danger, the fact that she was available for just such emergencies as these, and the probability of there being some reluctance to volunteer amongst the other nurses in the home after the misfortunes of the last twelve months.

At any other time he would have shrunk from her as from the touch of a red-hot searing-iron; but now, under the shadow of the wings of the Angel of Death, he found that he was able to meet her with steady pulse and calm, unswerving eyes: for such is the power of the great calling to which they both were dedicated that even the primeval instincts can, by its influence, be forced for the

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time into the outer circle of consciousness, leaving the mind free to exercise itself, untrammelled by the feet of clay in the composition of us all.

Silently she rose on their entry, facing them.

"Dr. Joyce—Nurse Townsend," he said quietly; and the great bearded, red-faced man and the tall, beautiful, pale woman bowed sedately to one another in the flickering light.

For half-an-hour the two men sat watching beside the bed, and then the priest came quietly into the room.

Dr. Joyce and Fitzgerald rose. The last solemn rites of the dying were about to be administered, and a feeling that the eyes of an alien faith had better not be present drove them both to the little room adjacent at the top of the stairs.

"I think, sir, if I were you, I'd go home," said Fitzgerald. "Neither of us can do any good, but I feel I'd like to stop, if you don't mind, in case she rallies at the end, and wants to give me any message."

The older man was already half asleep. He had been out all day. It was possible he might be called again before the morning.

"You're sure you do not mind?" he said.

"Quite sure."

Nurse Chambers met him as he was returning from the door.

"Are you staying the night?" she said softly.

"Yes. There's just a chance of her regaining consciousness," he said.

"Well, then," she answered, "I'm going to pay you back. You've just got to go and lie down on the sofa in the little room, and we'll call you when we want you."

"Oh, I'm all right," he protested.

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Nevertheless, she insisted; and so, an hour later, when Nora went past to the kitchen for some more warm milk, glancing in she saw him lying asleep on the old battered sofa, covered with American cloth so full of holes that the horsehair padding underneath kept pushing out inquisitive coils all over its surface. As he lay, one arm hung over the edge of the couch, his head was twisted uncomfortably on the hard, bolster-like cushion, and his face shone pale, worn, ghastly in the crude lamplight.

A wave of protective tenderness made her catch her breath as she gazed at him. She felt as if she would have given anything to be able to pillow that loved, uncomfortable head in the arms that ached for him; and the thought that another woman alone possessed the right was as the nadir of bitterness to her soul.

For a moment she watched his quiet breathing with tumultuous heart. Then a thought came to her. Very quietly she glided into the nurse's room opposite and got her travelling-rug. Tiptoeing back, she watched him cautiously for a moment, till satisfied he was sound asleep; and then, with her heart in her mouth, she slipped in and covered him gently with the rug, fleeing precipitously when he made a slight stirring movement at the weight of it.

A faint rustle at the bottom of the stairs made her turn. Nurse Chambers was coming up to join her.

"I see you've covered him up," she said in passing.

"Yes," assented Nora casually.

The grey light of dawn was stealing through the windows, making the feeble light of the lamp look, if possible, even more pale, when they noticed the change in her.

"Hadn't we better call him?" said Nurse Chambers.

"Yes," answered Nora. "You go."

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At her touch, with the celerity of practice, he was instantly awake. Silently he joined them; and, as he did so, the priest rose from his knees on the other side of the bed. Fitzgerald bent quietly over her.

"Do you know me, nurse?" he whispered; and at the sound of the familiar accent of home her eyes opened wide at him. Then suddenly, with an energy that took them all by surprise, she sat up and flung her arms towards him, her eyes filled with a glowing, radiant light.

"Michael—my love—my love—I'm coming!" she cried. It was the last flicker. She fell back heavily into Nora's arms. All was over.

Very reverently they drew the limp hands in to the side of the body. The priest leant over and made the sign of the cross upon her breast.

"In manus tuas, Domine," he murmured solemnly.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FEAR OF PLAGUE, HOSPITALS, AND THE "WAKENESS" OF DR. JOYCE

NEXT morning Fitzgerald started in a fine rain early for the hospital. As he passed the workhouse, approaching it, he saw in front of him a shambling youth, in cap and corduroys, labouring with a basket and a large can of milk.

The youth stopped at the broken gate in the fence, twenty yards or so from the hospital, and put down his burdens in the mud, picking up a similar basket and can, both empty, that had been placed there evidently overnight. "Stores!" he called in a high, singing note that penetrated to the hospital; and then turning, he rapidly retreated with the empty can and basket, giving Fitzgerald a wide berth as, with startled gaze showing the whites of his averted eyes, he passed him on the way.

"Poor devil! He's as frightened as if we all had the plague," thought Dermot.

Presently the door of the hospital opened, and he saw Nurse Chambers' somewhat rotund figure emerge and come down the rough cinder track, an open umbrella in one hand, raising her skirts from the mud with the other, and displaying thereby a pair of good stout ankles.

"Hold on, nurse," he called out, as he watched her drop the skirts and seize hold of the basket with her disengaged hand.

Looking out from underneath the umbrella she saw him, and waited.

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“Is that the way the food always comes?” he inquired abruptly, seizing the stores.

“Yes, morning and evening. They’re frightened to come nearer us than the gate.”

“And have you always to come out to fetch them?”

“Oh yes! Old Biddy’s not safe. She’s too feeble.”

“Hm,” he snorted.

In the kitchen he put down his burden.

“I think we’ll have to have some alterations in this hospital, now that I’m in charge. Just let’s go into a few things,” he said. “Diet?”

“Nothing but bread and milk—except a little meat for convalescents,” she answered.

He looked at her, astonished. “Sure?”

“Oh yes. They used to send beef and jam, and things like that, to Nurse Marr; but the meat was tough, and so she made it into beef-tea for the patients, and gave the jam to the children—they were so eager for a change from the eternal milk—poor things.”

“Good Lord!” he exclaimed. “And now she’s dead. What about medicines?”

“We’ve got brandy, since you ordered it to be ‘stocked’; but nothing else.”

That brought him up short.

“I’m afraid that’s my fault. I should have seen to it yesterday,” he said apologetically, feeling he was criticising his present senior in his mind, and aware of a similar train of thought on the part of the nurse.

His eyes travelled round the bare kitchen, with its rows of thick, chipped cups and plates on the rickety dresser.

“Is this all the crockery you’ve got?”

“Yes. I do wish we had a few feeding cups and measuring glasses. It’s so difficult.”

“Well I’m—— I say, nurse, how the —— do you do

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it? How did poor old Marr manage it without complaining?" he exclaimed, with exasperated anger.

"I don't know. I've got to boil all the hot water for everything in one kettle. There's only one tin basin for washing all the patients; the sanitary arrangements are unspeakable; and apparently Nurse Marr washed all the infected linen as well," she said, piling details upon him with a quiet, conscious, cumulative effect, more powerful than anger, that left him inarticulate with rage.

"Good God!" he exclaimed aghast. "Good God!"

The sound of a dull heavy blow on the outer door echoed down the passage into the kitchen; and then they heard the crunch of heavy, rapidly retreating footsteps. For a moment they stared at one another.

"I'll go and see what it is," she said.

As she lifted the latch the door swung unexpectedly in on her, and something heavy rasped past her fingers, making her step back hurriedly as the door flew open, and a long black object slid down with a bump, and lay half over the threshold.

A gasping "Oh!" brought Fitzgerald to her side to find her staring at a coffin. Apparently it had been propped against the door and then hurriedly abandoned. It was its weight that had pushed so unexpectedly against her.

"It must be for nurse," she said, with a catch in her voice, shivering at the callous gruesomeness of it all, and realising vividly, for the first time, that perhaps in a few weeks her own coffin might similarly, unceremoniously, be left in the same position for her successor.

She was not an imaginative woman; but for a moment she was completely unnerved. She swayed slightly; and Dermot, instinctively watching, put a strong, steady, comforting hand on her shoulder. The whole episode struck him like a page from the Journal of Defoe. It

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might have happened on a day in the seventeenth century when the fear of the "Black Death," grim, mysterious, like a visitation from God, creeping steadily, stealthily, over the land with murderous shadow, had turned the hearts of strong and valiant men to water, making cowards of them all.

"It's all right, nurse. We'd better get it in," he said calmly; and the even sound of his voice, and the call upon her for help steadied her at once.

"You go in front up the stairs. I'll take the heavy end behind," he continued.

"Yes," she answered bravely.

Then she stooped hurriedly, and grasped her end of the burden.

The face of the dead woman was calm and peacefully beautiful in death. Her lips were set in the long, last smile that comes to those that are not. A golden crucifix and a wreath of lilies of the valley, snow-white in tender green, lay upon her breast.

For some time doctor and nurse looked silently down upon her, till at length Dermot woke from his reverie.

"In a way, Chambers, it's the best thing could have happened to her," he said slowly.

"Yes, I suppose so," she answered, after a pause.

Then they both became practical again.

"She's going by train to Waterford; and we must get her away as soon as we possibly can," he said. "Luckily I'm 'pro-tem.' medical officer of health, and nobody will think of objecting. It's a grand place, Ireland, for some things."

"Will I call Nurse Townsend?" she said. "I put her to bed because she was on duty all last night, travelling a good part of yesterday, and on duty the night before at 'Kingsbridge.'"

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"Leave her alone," he said hastily. "I'll help you. You don't mind, do you?"

"Mind?" she thought, smiling at him in gratitude. "I'm just beginning to see why people get so keen on you." Aloud she said: "Thank you very much."

Together they placed the heavy body in the cheap, pitch-lined pauper's coffin.

"It does seem such a shame to bury her like this," she said, with a sudden suppressed gulping tendency to weep.

"They'll see her properly confined at the other end," he answered soothingly.

Then he paused; and they both looked at the white, peaceful face.

"I'm afraid I must screw her down now," he said at length, reluctantly, after an interval. The nurse looked at him. She was a plain, unattractive woman. Even isolated she gave little of the feeling of sex; but for the moment her eyes were beautiful.

"Just a minute," she pleaded, dropping on her knees beside the coffin to say a farewell prayer for the soul of the departed, sure of the kindly sympathy of the silent onlooker.

Presently she raised her head, hastily wiping her eyes. "Now," she said, getting up, and watching him steadily as he screwed the black lid down with the blade of a table knife, hiding the quiet face from human view for the last time.

When he had finished he got up, dusting his knees absently, and stared thoughtfully at the coffin.

"We'll have to get it down somehow—we two. There isn't a man in Westbar would dare to come into the hospital. We've got to get it to the gate as well. D'ye think we can manage?"

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"Let's try, anyhow," she answered, backing him up with all a nurse's loyalty.

It took them a quarter of an hour almost to get it to the entrance; but they did it, slowly, painfully, manœuvring it down the twisted staircase, trying not to let the sleeping nurse, or the patients below, guess what was going on. Outside the rain had ceased; but everywhere there was mud.

"We can't drag her coffin through that," he said with shrinking disgust. "I must try and carry it."

"You couldn't possibly," she exclaimed. "Surely some one will come if we send old Bidy. I do wish they hadn't taken that girl away."

"I'm going to try," he said doggedly, lifting up one end on the threshold. "Look here, I'm sure I can get it on my back with your help. You could follow me, holding on, and steadying the end of it; and there's a cairn of stones down by the gate we could lower it on to all right, so as to keep it out of the mud till the hearse comes to take it to the station."

"I think it's a perfect scandal," she exclaimed, yielding, however, her allegiance to the scheme.

Together, then, they propped the huge, unwieldy rough deal coffin upright, and he essayed to get his shoulders under it to raise it. There were no handles to catch hold of, and it must have weighed at least fourteen stone.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then lift," he said, making an attempt to rise from his stooped position. The weight on his back seemed mountainous. His arms gripped convulsively. He felt as if his chest would burst. Nevertheless he managed to get on his feet and stagger slowly towards the gate, the

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coffin swaying perilously in spite of her steadying hands behind.

Twice he slipped and nearly came down; but each time she managed to steady him sufficiently to allow him to recover his balance. It seemed miles to his straining, unaccustomed muscles; though probably any one accustomed to carrying loads would have made light of it. Eventually, however, it was done; the gate reached; and the burden cautiously lowered on to the friendly cairn without further mishap.

Nurse Chambers sat down beside it, gasping convulsively.

Fitzgerald straightened himself with a long sigh of relief.

"Now," he said grimly, "I'm going to put the 'fear of God' into that clerk of the guardians. Things have got to be put right. We can't afford any more sacrifices to the demon of rates and taxes."

"But why wasn't all this seen to long ago? Why didn't Doctor——" she said, and stopped, feeling she was on delicate ground.

The suppressed criticism checked him for a moment. Then—

"I don't know; but it's got to be altered," he said, recovering rapidly. "Let's do the round."

Half-an-hour later his work for the morning was finished; and after washing his hands and changing out of the ward coat, kept in the hospital for him, he found his way to the master's office. By this time, however, his anger had lost some of its edge; for the nurse's remark had set him thinking, and a feeling that any violent criticism of the hospital's routine would reflect back directly on its medical officer grew on him, acting as a drag on his proposed freedom of speech. Slowly, also, he was becom-

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ing conscious of some hidden reason, something beyond mere careless procrastination, behind the state of things he had been gradually discovering.

He found the master in a chastened mood. The death of the nurse and some remarks of Father Dempsey had troubled him. He looked at Fitzgerald in a conciliatory manner. After a few minutes' conversation about the removal of the body, and some caustic remarks on the courage of poor-law undertakers, Dermot said—

“I want to make some fresh requisitions about the ‘stores,’ and also the nurses’ food. At present the diet is all right for acute cases; but typhus is not typhoid. When a patient gets over the ‘crisis’ he’s got to be fed up. There’s nothing the matter with his inside. He wants fish, chicken, beef, mutton, tea, sugar, jam, rice-pudding, eggs—things to build him up. We’ve got four police convalescents. You’re drawing half-a-crown a day for them; and they’ve got to get value for it, or the inspector will hear of it. The other convalescents are paupers; but they’ve got to be fed just the same.”

To his surprise the master was unexpectedly complacent. “I see,” he said. “Well, if you order it, doctor, it’ll be done, for sure!”

Fitzgerald nodded, rather taken aback. “That’s all right, then. Now about the nurses’ food. They’re entitled, by Local Government Board regulations, to first-class officers’ rations. They’re not getting them. You know that as well as I. See that they do, or there’ll be trouble, especially if I find they’ve been drawn but not issued.”

The master started slightly. A new suspicion darted through his mind. How did he know the regulations so well? And how had he guessed what was happening over the nurses’ rations? He began to feel very uneasy.

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"Yes, that'll be done, sorr," he said, rather frightened. Again Fitzgerald nodded.

"Finally, I'm not going to have my nurses tramping through mud to get these 'stores.' It's ridiculous, this extreme fear of infection. If the present person won't deliver them properly, get some one who will. The goods must be delivered at the door," he stipulated.

Again the master acquiesced.

"Another thing. If any more patients die, you'll have to take the body from the door yourselves. It's no work for a woman, and it certainly is not the duty of a medical officer. Just look at my knuckles," he said, indignantly displaying his lacerated hands.

The master stared at them. "D'ye tell me, now," he said helplessly.

"About the hospital equipment——" continued Fitzgerald.

"That'll be the clerk's business," interrupted the master, sighing with bureaucratic relief, glad at any rate to be able to shift this additional responsibility on to another.

"I know. But he's not in his office. I intended to talk to him like a Dutch uncle, but he's not there, so I want you to make a note for him of what we need. It's the most Hogarthian place I've ever seen—that hospital."

"Very well, sorr," said the master reluctantly. He had never heard of Hogarth; but he came to the conclusion he must have been some one dreadful in his time.

"First of all, I won't have the nurses washing all the patients' infected linen. The stuff's got to be taken away, boiled in some antiseptic, and returned ready for use again. It's no part of a nurse's business to be a laundrymaid. They've got quite enough to do attending the patients; and I'm not going to have another catch the 'fever' and die from overwork. There are one or two other things

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I have made a note of here. See that Mr. O'Reilly gets them when he comes back."

The master was abject by now. He would have promised anything; and the humour of it seized upon Fitzgerald. Suddenly he smiled and said—

"That's all, I think, Mr. Blake; and I've only got now to thank you for your willingness to help. I'm sure you'll do all you can to aid us in stamping out this epidemic. It is not easy for any of us; and we have got to do our best to support one another loyally—commissariat, you know, is almost as important in war as ammunition. I know the difficulties of your position. What with guardians who think the hospital should be run on nothing a year, and doctors who want all sorts of impossible things, you're between the devil and the deep sea." He laughed suddenly. "Never mind. Take no notice of the guardians this time."

The master laughed with him, somewhat relieved; but after he had gone he sat cogitating; and as a result of his conclusions he approached the clerk mysteriously that afternoon.

"It's my belief, Mr. O'Reilly, that he's an L.G.B. inspector in disguise. You can see in his eye he's used to gettin' things done; an' I'm hearin' it's an almighty big swell he is in Dublin entirely. What does he be wantin' comin' down to a little place like this fur? We'd better be lookin' slippy, or it's the divil an' all of a murtherin' bother we'll be afther gettin' into; fur he knows the rigulations inside out an' back agane, an' it isn't the ould docthor we have to be handlin'."

"He's a damned interferin' puppy," snapped the clerk.

"A dare say. But there's wan or two things he hinted at makes me unaisy like; an'" —lowering his voice—
"there's conthtracts you an' me wouldn't be overly

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anxious to have examined, I'm afther thinkin'," he said nervously.

O'Reilly glanced at him stealthily. "I see," he said. "Let's look at what he wants."

Meanwhile, Dermot was proceeding on his visits in the town, considerably troubled, conscious of a Pyrrhic victory.

The things he had asked for had been the absolute minimum, if the hospital was to be run on anything approaching modern standards. He had got them without any apparent great difficulty. What troubled him was why his "chief" had not himself insisted on their being supplied long before.

The master had made no comment or comparison; for Irishmen, living together in a country where opinions tend to be very sharply divided, develop an instinctive cautiously courteous habit of treading delicately when talking to one another. Nevertheless, he knew the thought must have been at the back of the master's mind; and it was this kept constantly recurring to him as he went from cottage to cottage.

Pausing to look at his watch, down a lane close to some outlying cottages in one of which dwelt the last patient on his list, he heard two women mention his name in loud-voiced gossip. Instinctively he paused.

"An' is it the new docthor yer after havin' for Mary Elizabeth, Mrs. Kenny? What's come over the ould wan? Is it his 'wakeness' agane?"

"No. I hear he does be doin' his work just the same, Mrs. Blake."

"Well, then, I'm surprised at ye trustin' her to the new wan; for ould Dr. Joyce, whin he's sober, 's the finest docthor in the counthry."

Every word of this conversation came clear to Dermot's ears, illuminating his mind as with a lightning flash.

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“Good Lord,” he muttered. “So that’s it.”

Almost without thinking he glided back quietly for twenty yards, and then returned noisily. The gossip had ceased; but the two women were still on their doorsteps. Mrs. Blake, her fat red arms iridescent with soapsuds, looked at him curiously as he passed. Mrs. Kenny, when she saw him, disappeared into the house; and a little fretful wail greeting his ears as he passed through the open doorway informed him she was bringing the patient down from those mysterious regions above where the poor seem to be able to store away such large families. Presently she descended the rickety stairs into the warm kitchen, carrying the little patient in her arms, wrapped up in a shawl.

“Well, an’ how is she, Mrs. Kenny?” he said.

“Betther, glory be, and thank ye kindly, sorr,” she answered, sitting down by the peat fire, and beginning to unwind the bundle on her expansive lap.

“I think it’s the measles she does be sick’nin’ for. There’s a bit of a rash,” she said comfortably.

“Let me look,” he said quickly.

Slowly she uncovered the little chest, and the suspicion that had flashed through his mind was verified. His face lengthened.

“No, it’s not measles, Mrs. Kenny.”

“What, then, docthor?” the mother asked, suddenly anxious at his solemn tone.

“I’m afraid it’s the ‘fever,’” he said slowly.

“Och, murdher. Don’t be tellin’ me that, docthor, jewel. Sure it couldn’t be,” she wailed, impulsively hugging the child to her bosom.

Of course he was quite certain; but nevertheless he felt it would be necessary to augment the weight of his opinion by that of the doctor whom they knew and trusted.

“I’m afraid it is, Mrs. Kenny; but I’ll ask Dr. Joyce to

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come and see her in the afternoon, if you like; and leave it to him to say."

She was absurdly grateful for the reprieve.

"God bless ye, docthor," she said. "Sure it's kind of ye; an' the docthor'd niver have the heart to take her from me into the 'faever house'—that could place where they do be sayin' it's sure and sartin death to put yer fut insoide."

"Oh no, Mrs. Kenny. It's not nearly as bad as that," he protested. "We've got two splendid nurses now; and nearly all the patients are getting well."

On the way home to lunch he threshed the matter out carefully for himself. It had only needed a sentence to clear the cloud from his groping intelligence; for unconsciously he had been gradually approaching the same solution unaided; and the doctor's "wakeness" as Mrs. Blake, with the large-minded tolerance of the Irish peasant, called it, was quite sufficient to his mind to account for all the slackness he had noticed in the hospital. Knowing that his position, owing to his failing, must be one of sufferance only, he saw how the old man's hands had been tied; how, dulled by familiarity he had come gradually to acquiesce in abuses that would have stirred his trained mind to the depths had he come fresh to them, untrammelled by the sense of his own shortcomings; and the pity that comes of full understanding took the place in Dermot's mind of the uncertain irritability he had begun to feel towards him, which up to now, however, he had successfully managed to conceal.

Dr. Joyce arrived home from his morning round a little late. He came into the room with his usual impetuous haste; and the kindly smile he gave him made Fitzgerald feel almost a traitor in his thoughts of him.

"There's another p'lice case coming in to you to-night,"

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he burst out. "Bad scran to it, I thought we'd finished with them."

"I'm afraid I've found another for myself," said Fitzgerald. "It's in the town, too, worse luck."

"Where, in the name of God."

Fitzgerald told him. "I'd like you to go and see it this afternoon, if you would, sir. I'm afraid there'll be trouble with the mother—else. Of course, she's a 'contact' too; and I'll want you to put the 'fear of God' into her about going out, till the incubation period is over, and we know if she's going to have it herself as well."

"Leave her to me. I'll fix her," said Dr. Joyce briskly.

The two new cases were admitted in the afternoon; and so, towards nightfall, he went up to have a look at them, knowing Nurse Chambers would still be on duty. He was afraid to put the visit off till after dinner, remembering he would then have to face the perilous agony of finding himself alone with Nora; and realising that his love for her was still so intense that the slightest accident might force it into utterance, in spite of all the chains of honour binding him to the woman whose love-letters crinkled at that very moment in his right breast pocket.

The Kenny child, he found, had been given into the motherly care of Mrs. Casey, and was now asleep beside her mattress in its cot. Satisfied about her, he went into the men's ward. He glanced at the card over the new patient's head. "Pat Fannin," it read.

The man was mumbling rapidly to himself, and took no notice of him.

"What's your name?" he said, to test his consciousness; for one's name, being the first thing deeply ingrained in memory, is the last a delirious patient forgets.

Slowly the bloodshot eyes turned and stared unwinkingly at him.

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“What do you know about illicit distillation?” he replied in a loud, cracked, quavering voice, laughing at the same time idiotically, and tossing his arms.

Corporal Brady, in the next bed, crossed himself religiously.

“The poor fella’s daft,” he said; and then, in reply to Dermot’s puzzled look he added: “Sure, it’s a recruit he is, sorr; an’ it’s wan of the questions in the police book he does be learnin’ for his constable’s exam.”

“I see,” said Fitzgerald.

He turned to Nurse Chambers quietly as they left the ward.

“He’s pretty bad, nurse; and he may get worse during the night. Tell Nurse Townsend to keep a special eye on him.”

“Very well, sir. I’ll put it in the day report,” she answered.

It was eight o’clock when the doctor got back from his second round; Mrs. Gogarty was out for the evening; and in consequence they had been left, with many injunctions to keep the dinner hot, to the tender mercies of Bridget.

When he did get back, however, he was in hilarious spirits. Producing a large black porter bottle mysteriously from the “well” of the jaunting car, he showed it to Fitzgerald.

“It’s a drop of the ‘crayther,’ the real ‘poteen,’ he explained. “Have you ever tasted it?”

“No.”

“Well, then, it’s an experience. We’ll sample it after dinner, and I’ll warrant you’ll never have tasted anything like it before, barrin’ you haven’t been to Virginia, and had a dose of the genuine ‘corpse-reviver.’”

He laughed boisterously; and Fitzgerald laughed with him, watching him closely, seeing that he had already had

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enough for most men, and probably more than was good for him; yet at the same time debarred, as his guest as well as his subordinate, from suggesting anything of the sort to him.

They drew their chairs to the fire after dinner; and Fitzgerald began to smoke while the doctor uncorked the precious bottle.

"You have to drink it neat," he said, pouring a generous measure into Dermot's glass, in spite of his protest that he might not like it, and consequently it would be wasted on him.

"Never mind. There's plenty more where this came from," he answered a little thickly, showing him how to toss it off.

Dermot took a cautious sip. The raw, fiery liquid, loaded with "fusel oil," seemed to run blistering down his throat, and felt as if it would burn a hole in his stomach. He coughed spasmodically, and at the sound the doctor laughed uproariously.

"Finish it," he cried. "No 'heel-taps.' You young fellows are no good now. Lord, in my student days——"

He burst into a flood of reminiscences; and under cover of them Dermot emptied most of his glass into the rose-bowl on the table beside him. Then he finished the rest; and set his empty tumbler down.

The doctor's roving eye caught it. "Not so bad," he said. "Have some more."

Fitzgerald laughed.

"I think I'd better make up those bottles of medicine I ordered first, before I trust my head to any more," he said, hoping to divert him into remembering his own compounding also. Apparently it was going to be successful, for the doctor rose with him. But at that moment a ring came to the door; one of his friends, a large

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Protestant farmer, Mr. Lecky, was announced; and the obvious necessity of introducing him to the newly arrived bottle settled the question. Fitzgerald left the two cronies talking "horses" together; and proceeded to the dispensary, where he found two or three belated patients stolidly awaiting them—patients whom he had forgotten, in his preoccupation, who had been announced just after dinner.

It took him the greater part of an hour to attend to them and finish his dispensing. When he returned to the sitting-room he found the two friends in heated controversy.

"I tell ye I mind a horse as well as if it was yesterdhay, doctor," exclaimed Lecky.

"I dons ch ki-care," hiccoughed the doctor, screwing his eyes spasmodically. "A'm shi-sure yer—yer wrong. A wooshn't believsh ye if ye shi-shi-showed it me—in—print. Ash Fishgeral'. Have 'nother dhrink."

His hand wandered with hospitable uncertainty towards the bottle; but Lecky had had enough by now to make him quarrelsome.

"A don't dhrink with a man that calls me a liar," he answered truculently. He glanced round as Fitzgerald came into the room.

"Yes, yer right. We'll leave it to the young doctor. He'll be sure to know."

"Havesh dhrink, Fishgeral'," said the doctor, blinking like an owl.

"Presently, sir, presently," said Dermot soothingly. "What's the dispute about?"

Lecky winked at him with drunken facetiousness, nodding at the doctor.

"Joyce, here, is afther tryin' to make me believe it was 'Pride of Kilkenny' won the 'cup' at Punchestown three years ago."

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“Qui-ri,” assented the doctor, solemnly spilling his whisky down the front of his waistcoat, and then letting the glass slide out of his nerveless hand on to the floor, where Dermot picked it up, replacing it again beyond his reach on the table. “Qui-ri, Fishgeral’,” repeated the doctor.

“Well, leave it to him,” said Lecky heatedly. “What do you say?” he added, looking at him.

Dermot thought rapidly, and then replied, hoping to end the dispute—

“‘Orpiment,’ I think. ‘Pride of Kilkenny’ won the year before.”

A burst of triumphant laughter came from Lecky. He smacked his big red hand on his knee.

“There, what did I tell ye, doctor, only ye wouldn’t have it,” he exclaimed.

“Qui-ri,” said the doctor, his eyes closing, his head falling forward.

“Hadn’t you better go to bed, sir?” suggested Dermot, feeling bitterly ashamed before the layman’s eyes.

The doctor straightened up with an effort, and opened his eyes solemnly. “Gosh finish dishpenshin’,” he said.

“Oh, never mind that. I’ll make up your bottles. You must be very tired.”

“Qui-ri,” murmured the doctor, smiling fatuously.

Dermot measured Lecky with his eye. The man had had very little of the fiery spirit, and appeared to be only noisily drunk. He thought he probably could stand all right; might, indeed, be able to help to get his ‘chief’ upstairs; and so he said: “Give me a hand, Mr. Lecky, and we’ll get him to his room.”

Having gained his point, Lecky had suddenly become good-natured again.

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"Lemme see if me legs are as good as me memory, doctor," he answered grinning humorously, and getting up cautiously.

"Yes, I'm all right," he asserted, with satisfaction, having tested his equilibrium.

"Qui-ri," echoed the doctor, raising his head for a moment, and immediately falling asleep again.

"Come on, then," said Dermot shortly.

Together they half helped, half carried the big, heavy man up the stairs. He was almost helpless by now; and allowed them to put him to bed, unresisting.

When they had done so, Lecky gazed at him lying comatose between the sheets, and shook his head solemnly.

"Whisky and soda—whisky and soda—that's what done it—hic—doctor. Take my advice an' niver mix yer dhrinks—hic—always take yer whisky neat. It's the soda—hic—does the harm—bubbly stuff—hic—flies to yer head, like," he said.

"Soda with a strong Irish accent," thought Dermot, as he conducted the guest downstairs after this weighty pronouncement, wondering all the while how he could decently get rid of him.

It was another ring at the door solved the problem. He opened it to find an anxious, pale-faced man, in much-worn corduroys, standing on the step.

"Is the docthor in?" he inquired breathlessly.

"No, the doctor's ill, and not able to see any one."

The man's face lengthened pitifully.

"Och, murdher. Whativer will I do?" he exclaimed, distractedly wringing his hands. "Herself's took mortal bad, before her time an' all. Whativer will I do?"

"I'm a doctor. Where do you live? Perhaps I can look after her for you," said Dermot.

Immediately the man's face lit up ecstatically.

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“Och, the blessin’s of the saints be on ye for yer kindness. Me name’s Rafferty. The ould doctor’d know; and I lives at Gortmore. It’s five miles from here; an’ I wouldn’t’ve been afther botherin’ ye this perishin’ night, only the wise wumman says she’ll die without help.”

Meanwhile Lecky had been listening; and he now took his hat and coat off the peg. With a delicacy Dermot hardly gave him credit for, he came forward.

“I’ll be goin’, doctor. I see yer busy.”

“Won’t you have another drink before you go?” said Fitzgerald hospitably.

“No, thank ye kindly. But it’s a long, cold dhrove ye’ve got before ye; an’ ye’d be better of a drop yerself.”

Fitzgerald smiled him out with relief.

“I find I work better without,” he said.

“Well, well. It takes all sorts to make a world,” the other answered charitably, the national tendency to say the polite thing struggling successfully with the awful suspicion that, after all, his would-be host was little better than one of these modern degenerates—a teetotaller.

For a moment Dermot watched him depart, walking with exaggerated straightness down the street towards Sweeney’s Hotel, in whose bar he intended to finish the night. Then he turned to the anxious waiting figure.

“Help me to put the horse in, and I’ll drive you back,” he said.

CHAPTER XIX

THE NIGHT ADVENTURE OF NORA, AND THE RECRUDESCENCE OF THE MADNESS OF FITZGERALD

It was close upon midnight, and Nora sat alone in the kitchen in the deep-breathing quiet of the night—a quiet that seemed to be made, if possible, more intense by the loud, monotonous, insistent ticking of the alarm-clock on the mantelpiece.

She had just returned from a ward-round; all the patients, including the new arrivals, were asleep; and she now began languidly to prepare her midnight meal, her grey thoughts wandering widely as she mechanically poked the peat fire underneath the kettle that seemed so slow in boiling. When the call came she had responded eagerly; but now reaction, after the first stimulus of her advent, had taken possession of her soul; and she felt utterly weary, lonely, despondent.

Why had she come, she wondered drearily, although she knew the answer but too well. It was true she would have risen to a like emergency for any one else; but she was sufficiently honest with herself to admit that the thought that she was doing it for him had given a subtle warmth of colour to the whole undertaking; and she would have been bitterly disappointed had the opportunity that had arisen been offered and accepted by any other nurse rather than herself.

Openly she confessed to her aching soul that all her old reliance was gone. She had ceased to be self-centred. The flame of an all-absorbing passion had melted the

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marble pose that had been her studied attitude in the past. She felt afraid to trust even those principles of honour that had seemed firm fixed, immovable, deep-rooted in the subsoil of her very nature. Dim impulses that frightened her, whose very existence she had been unconscious of before, stirred in the depths of her. She was utterly ashamed—and yet—that was what frightened her—she did not care. She wanted to see him, talk to him, feel his eyes, tingle with the accidental touch of his hands, win him back, if possible, to herself.

That he was deliberately avoiding her she knew. Already she found herself getting jealous of Nurse Chambers—plain old Chambers, whom nobody considered. The strain of being near, and yet not near, was getting more than she could bear. That very evening, when she was supposed to be asleep, she had found herself listening to the sound of his voice through the inch-opened door of her room, wondering what he was saying, hoping he would have to come back later; almost unable, afterwards, to conceal her chagrin when she found he did not intend to do so.

The kettle she had forgotten now took the opportunity of boiling over. She shifted it mechanically, and proceeded to take down the battered teapot and one of the thick, chipped delf cups from the dresser.

Suddenly in the ticking silence a slight noise in the men's ward woke the nursing instinct in her. She put down the teapot silently, thinking she had heard a call, wondering if her ears had played her false. And then, "Nurse, nurse!" the strangled, urgent summons came again—this time distinct, unmistakable. Rapidly she seized the lighted candle and hurried down the passage.

A vision of two struggling figures, an open window and a disordered, empty bed smote her eyes. The new patient,

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in his long calico nightshirt, was half out of the window, one bare, hairy leg, to which Corporal Brady was clinging, exposed inside.

They were struggling dumbly; but suddenly, on her entrance, the patient gave a wild, unearthly yell.

"The white witch!" he cried, kicking furiously, knocking over the feeble convalescent with the maniacal fury of the stroke.

Nora dropped the candle and rushed at him, grasping the coarse calico with both her hands, tugging him backwards. The window was only about a yard above the ground, and the patient, in his delirium, feeling the restraint, swung round on his bare feet and drove his fist at her, striking her in his violent mania full in the mouth, causing her momentarily to release her grasp.

It was only a second, but before she could recover he gave another wild yell of triumph, shook his fist and disappeared in the fitful moonlight, running rapidly.

"I couldn't hold him, nurse. He was too strong for me," gasped Brady apologetically.

By now she had recovered. "Call Nurse Chambers," she said hurriedly. "I must follow. It'll be the death of him if he gets away."

Rapidly she seized a blanket and a pair of slippers, rushed to the door, and hastened after him into the night.

By the light of the moon she caught a glimpse of a dim white figure silhouetted for a moment against the sky, as, waving his arms, he leapt on the top of a stone fence and then jumped quickly into the gloom beyond.

Breathlessly she hurried after, oblivious of everything save the necessity of overtaking him. But he was running with the strength of ten men, and when she reached the fence he was nowhere to be seen. A wave of despair seized hold of her. She gazed round helplessly. Then

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another wild laugh gave her the direction, and she climbed over and hurried on doggedly. At the end of the field another of those low stone walls, loosely put together, that are used in many parts of Ireland instead of hedges confronted her.

Climbing over it made it give way under her. She slipped forward, coming down heavily. But she was up again in a moment, grim determination carrying her on. Her second wind had come by now and presently she saw he had stopped, and was dancing wildly, waving his arms, in the middle of a potato-field. As she hurried towards him, however, he saw her, shrieked again, and ran on, vaulting over another fence into the road, and turning abruptly to the left.

The barbed wire of the fence tore her hands, caught in her skirts, seized the blanket with fiendish, inanimate perversity, as if viciously determined to thwart her. Nevertheless she struggled through, but the time wasted pressed heavily upon her. She gazed round blankly. He was nowhere in sight; and again despair swept down on her. "I'll have to give it up," she gasped.

It was at that moment the sound of horse-hoofs penetrated her consciousness; she looked up and saw the lights of an approaching vehicle. "Help! help!" she cried, rushing out into the road.

The lights of a high dog-cart flashed in her eyes; there was a startled call, the sound of a horse being pulled up abruptly, and for the first time she was conscious of Fitzgerald staring down at her—the unexpected appearance of her, her pale, marred, anxious face, her heaving chest, her torn, dishevelled bearing, filling him with unutterable astonishment.

"Good God, Nora!" he ejaculated, the name slipping out, in his amazement, unknown to him.

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"Quick!" she gasped. "The patient—Fannin—escaped—ran your way."

In a moment he had grasped it, and he was down like lightning.

"Here, hold the horse!"—tossing her the reins. "You stay here! Gimme the blanket! He must have been frightened off the road when he saw me coming."

It was no time for ceremonies. He seized the blanket, gave a quick look round, and, following his intuition, rushed across the road, cutting diagonally into the field beyond, just as Nora, with a great sigh of relief, collapsed limply on a heap of broken stones in a recess by the roadside, feeling that he would successfully finish the pursuit she had so doggedly maintained.

Keeping his eyes wide awake, he presently saw his quarry; but at the same time the maniac noticed him. Dermot, however, was the fresher of the two. Cunningly he began to head his man off, deciding not to come to grips till he was exhausted and his maniacal fury spent. Accordingly, as he ran, he kept his man continually on the inner side, driving him in a circle, with the result that, unconsciously, he was being headed nearer and nearer the hospital, till finally he ran him down in the middle of a turnip-field behind the building. By now a fresh delusion had seized upon the patient; and he squatted with his arms projecting stiffly from his sides, allowing Fitzgerald to approach quite close to him. His teeth were chattering like castanets, in the shivering rigor that had overtaken him. His eyes flashed wild, dilated, in the moonlight.

"What's the matter?" said Fitzgerald soothingly.

"Whisht, whisht! I'm afther disguisin' meself as a scarecrow," panted Fannin.

"Why? What for?"

"Sure, to kape off the white witch that's been

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folläin' me, an' the divils, an' the little leprachauns," he gasped.

"Och, well, then, we'd better go home, inside the house, to be rid of them," said Dermot. "It's mighty cold, and ye'd be the better of a drink. Come on."

Fannin got up cautiously.

"Ye'll not let them catch hould of me?" he pleaded, laying a trembling hand on Fitzgerald's shoulder.

"No; I'll take care of you," answered Dermot soothingly, wrapping the blanket round him, and taking him by the arm.

To his relief, Fannin allowed himself to be led, unresisting. His delirium was gone; he reeled exhaustedly; and so it was, when he was half leading, half carrying him, Nurse Chambers saw the two figures approaching.

Rapidly they had him back in bed, his torn feet washed and bandaged, hot bottles around him, and a stiff dose of brandy administered. It took but a few minutes, and both Dermot and the nurse were so absorbed, temporarily, that it was only after an interval she had time to feel curious about his opportune arrival and the non-appearance of Nurse Townsend.

Then, "Where's Townsend?" she said; and all the excited patients, sitting up in bed, craned their necks to hear the answer.

"Good Lord! I'd almost forgotten her. She's minding my horse by the roadside. I was coming back from a night-call when, by the luck of God, I saw her following him."

"By Jimminy, sorr, axin' yer pardon, but that's the jewel of a woman! She's got the pluck of two men," burst out Brady enthusiastically.

"Yis, sure," echoed several of the others.

By this time, however, Fitzgerald was already out of

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the room; for at the mention of her name the exhausted state in which he had left her came back vividly to his mind again; and, relieved from the immediate tension, he was hurrying, in a tumult of feeling, to find her, across the intervening fields and crumbling stone walls, obsessed by the sensation that every moment's delay, till he could get to her and relieve her mind, was as a lifetime.

Meanwhile Nora, seated by the roadside, gradually became conscious of the great physical strain she had just gone through. Her limbs ached as if they had been beaten. It seemed as though her thumping heart would never, never slow down again. Her mouth throbbled from the blow she had received. There was blood upon her lips. Her cap was gone. Her arms felt as if they had been pulled out from the sockets. She feared that if she attempted to rise she might fall down.

A tug at the reins, looped loosely round her arm, woke her, however, to the fact that the horse was becoming restive. To complete her discomfort, a fine rain began to fall.

"I'd better get on the car, and wrap a rug round me," she thought, making a determined effort to get up. On attempting to stand, however, she found her left shoe was gone, and her ankle ached excruciatingly. Nevertheless, setting her teeth, she slowly limped the short distance between her and the dog-cart.

Her head swam as she groped blindly for the high step of the car, pulling herself up by the dashboard in the fitful darkness; and then the horse, feeling her weight on the step, and sensing his stable near, started with a jerk before she had time to get in. For a moment she felt herself swaying, a feeling that she could not stop herself paralysing her. Then she knew she was falling; she felt her body sweeping backwards, and her eyes closed wearily. There

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was a heavy bump; her head struck the rough wall of the "recess" containing the broken stones; stars floated before her eyes, and she lost consciousness.

The horse trotted on quietly towards home in the silence of the night; and the pale moon, peeping out from the edge of a hurrying cloud, momentarily fell on the dim, huddled figure lying motionless by the roadside.

It had been a day of stress for Fitzgerald. In the morning there had been the episodes of the coffin, and his ultimatum to the Poor Law authorities—both of which had taken more out of him than he was aware of at the time. On the top of that came his experience with the doctor in the evening. Then he had been summoned to this midnight case, and it had proved exceedingly worrying; for, single-handed, he had had to give the chloroform and use the instruments. Coming back he had been startled by the apparitions of Nora and the patient; and now, returning to look for her, he felt that the limits of control had been reached—he could stand no more.

It was in this frame of mind he found himself debouching on the highway, in a direction nearer the town than he had left her.

The sound of a trotting horse came along the road to him, and he wondered dully who could be out at such an early hour of the morning. The lights of the approaching car loomed nearer, and he raised his head to look. A peculiar click of the off hind shoe striking in the trot sounded vaguely familiar; and then suddenly he knew.

For a moment an icy numbness round his heart seemed to paralyse him. Then he woke to instant action.

"Wo-a! Steady, Prince," he called; and the horse slackened at his voice.

It was the work of an instant to catch him, seize the

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reins, climb in, and turn him rapidly. For the moment he was mad with fear. He lashed cruelly at the horse's head, and the car plunged, rocking furiously, along the deserted road.

"Oh, my God, my God!" he kept groaning mechanically, his eyes projecting as he strained to see the tragedy his mind anticipated.

Even then it was the horse saw the dim object first, and in his fright he shied wildly. But Fitzgerald's arms were as steel. He pulled him back in one long, staggering slide, almost in the length of the cart; and then, heedless of all else, jumped out, allowing him to race on, or stop, as the fancy seized him.

In a moment he had the limp body in his arms, his whole being rushing to her, the soul of the lover dominating everything.

"Nora, darlin', heart of all the world, speak to me," he cried aloud in his agony. "God! why did I leave you alone? Sweetheart, sweetheart!" he groaned, clasping her closely to him.

But the dear eyes remained closed; the white, battered lips did not move in answer to his anguished call.

For a moment he stared round wildly. Fifty yards ahead the horse, tired with his long night's work, had stopped diagonally across the road, and was looking back at him; but save for that there was no living object in sight, no one to whom he could call in his extremity.

And then, suddenly, his sanity came back, and with it the memory of his calling. He tore his mackintosh off, spread it on the ground, and laid her on it. Swiftly he insinuated a skilful hand inside the bodice, under the soft, warm breast. The heart was beating slowly, steadily; and a great gasping sigh of relief at the thrill of it shook his frame as he withdrew his fingers.

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"God, I thank Thee," he said reverently.

Quickly now he ran his testing fingers over the quiet limbs. No bones appeared to be broken. He groped in his pocket, found a box of vestas, struck one, pulled up each eyelid in turn, and held the light to the pupils, growing more and more calm as he proceeded.

"Only 'concussion,' I think," he said aloud, as if to a class of listening students.

In the relief of the reaction he almost laughed aloud, a great wave of overwhelming love, of gratitude to her for being alive, sweeping over him. His eyes caught the pitiful, shoeless foot, and a painful lump came in his throat, making him swallow rapidly.

"God! How I love you—every inch of you," he murmured brokenly.

Then he became practical again.

"Got to get her home," he thought.

Immediately he got up from beside her, and moved slowly and cautiously towards the horse, securing him, to his great relief, without difficulty. Slowly he led him up to her, patting the trembling animal on the shoulder, talking soothingly to him all the time.

"Steady, Prince. Steady, old man. You have a very precious burden to carry to-night, and you've got to act up to your name. Steady now. It's something more precious than all the gold that ever came from all the Indies you've got to carry. Steady, old fellow, steady. It's a proud horse you ought to be, if you only knew it. Steady now."

Soothed by the quiet voice, "Prince" stood perfectly still; and, satisfied that he would now remain so, Dermot, raising her gently in his arms, wrapped in the mackintosh, climbed carefully on to the car, holding his precious burden closely in his arms, loosening one hand only for a moment

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to steady himself as he rose. The rain had ceased, the clouds cleared off; and now the moon and the pale stars shone on a silvery world. With her dark head pillowed on his shoulder, and his right arm round her, he shook the reins in his left.

"Go on, old chap. Steady does it. Not too fast," he said; and the horse, seeming to know what he meant, moved quietly on.

At intervals, filled with a curious quiet gladness, he glanced down at the white face almost hidden in its wrappings. Come what might, he thought, he had held her in his arms again; and nothing, not even death itself, could cheat him of the memory of it. For the moment he was absolutely content.

Presently he felt a long shudder run through her body, her knees drew up slightly, and she turned in his arms.

"She's coming round," he thought, looking down and seeing only the tip of her ear and a long wave of raven hair between the wrappings.

When he looked again her eyes were staring wide at him. A puzzled frown puckered her brows.

"Where—am—I?" she said, with the slow, monotonous intonation of incomplete cerebration.

"Quite safe, dear, quite safe," he answered softly.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"I've—had—such—a horrible—dream—horrible—Der-mot," she said in the same slow, unaccentuated tones, her lips quivering.

"Never mind, sweetheart. It's all over now," he answered soothingly.

"I—dreamt—that——" She closed her eyes for a moment in confusion of thought, and then opened them again. "That—you—didn't—love—me—any longer. That——"

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"It was only a dream, dear," he whispered painfully. "It isn't true," he added chokingly.

"Isn't—it? I'm—so—glad, so—glad," she said feebly.

"Don't worry about it, dear. Go to sleep," he said, the awful mocking pain of it all sweeping over him in waves that almost overwhelmed his powers of control again.

Her eyes closed slowly for a moment, and then opened again.

"You're—quite—sure—it was—only—a—dream?"

"Quite, quite sure," he answered instantly, feeling the ghastly mockery of the bitterness of his assurance rising to his lips, cursing himself for the horrible wrenching pain the comfortable lying words brought to his own heart.

"Then—I'll—go—to—sleep. I—am—so—tired," she said, curling her face into his shoulder, drowsily content.

They were passing the grey, echoing, sightless, windowed mass of the workhouse now; and he turned the horse at the corner, and guided him as far as the wretched road would permit, coming to a standstill close to the hospital. Very cautiously he lifted her down, finding she had sunk into a semi-comatose sleep again.

Evidently some one was on the look-out, for, at the same moment, the door of the hospital opened, and the anxious face of Nurse Chambers appeared, partially illuminated by the lamp she held above her head, regardless of the clear moonlight that was now flooding the sleeping world around.

"Have you got her? Whatever is the matter?" she called out anxiously, as she came hastening down the cinder track.

"Yes, I've got her safe. She's had some sort of an accident. Been a little stunned. She's come round all right, though."

"Oh, thank God. I got so horribly frightened when I

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saw no signs of you. I thought something dreadful had happened. Can I help you to carry her? ”

“No, no,” he said hastily, jealously. “I’ll carry her up myself. Hitch the reins over the gate-post. ‘Prince’ will stand all right then. He’s used to that.”

In the morning the doctor met him rather shamefacedly.

“I dunno what was in that stuff last night, Fitzgerald. It never served me such a trick before,” he said, with the self-deception characteristic of the type.

Fitzgerald stared blankly at him for a moment. He had been so steeped in the glamour of the later events that the episode had almost faded from his memory.

“Probably the fusel oil, sir,” he said, recovering his memory.

Even after this reminder the affair was still of such secondary importance that he totally forgot to mention the case he had been called to in the night; and it was only the doctor’s astonished query, “Whatever were you doing out?” when he was recounting, with reservations, the facts of Fannin’s escape, that at length brought it back to him. Then he told him.

The doctor stared at him, open-mouthed. Quietly he turned his head away, for the fact that he had been incapable of doing the duty he had undertaken had caught him on the raw. For a moment he stared gloomily out of the window. Then he burst out—

“Drink—it’s the curse of the West,” he said. “You’ve heard the saying that priests, politicians, pawnbrokers and publicans are the four great plagues of Ireland. In a way it’s true. The priest, God bless him—there isn’t a finer fellow in the world according to his lights—waxes fat, builds chapels like cathedrals, wrung from the hard-earned

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hoardings of the poor, and fills the nunneries with the women who ought to be the mothers of the nation—all for the glory of God and Holy Church. In a way I don't blame him, for he's absolutely disinterested; but the politician who foments discontent for his own ends, and kills enterprise by raising rosy hopes impossible to realise, I do blame; and I just hate and despise the pawnbroker, almost always the money-lender as well, who preys on the easy good-nature of the race, and has the country meshed in the shackles of debt. It's little wonder, then, that the publican, who offers, at any rate, momentary relief from the misery of it all, is in such demand."

He turned fiercely on Fitzgerald.

"Never you be tempted to settle in a small place where you're the only doctor, where the only educated men you have to talk to are the parson and the priest, and you can't afford to be too friendly with either. You can stand it all right at first; but presently the hard, laborious days, the broken nights, get upon your nerves. Then you take to whisky occasionally to tide you over an emergency. After a bit you take it oftener; and then, before you know, it has you, and you're never sure—like me—never sure. For always you have the horrible dread on you that, some day, when you're not yourself, you'll make a mistake, somebody'll die, and then there'll be nothing left for you but to follow after them."

Fitzgerald stood quietly by the fire, careful not to look at him, feeling as if guilty of an unpardonable eaves-dropping.

Suddenly the doctor laughed.

"I beg your pardon, Fitzgerald," he said. "It takes me like that at times; but I've no right to bother you with my blue devils." He turned to him impulsively. "You've put me under a debt of gratitude I'll never

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forget. I hope I'll be able to pay you back some day."

"It's all right, sir—all right," murmured Dermot deferentially, embarrassed by the fervour of his emotional mood.

The clock in the hall began to strike the hour of ten, and the sound brought the doctor to himself.

"By Jove! I've got to be off," he said almost in his usual tones. "I'd better take the mare, I think, after 'Prince's' adventures last night."

As soon as he had gone Dermot started for the hospital.

"How is she?" he said anxiously, as soon as the nurse appeared at the door to let him in.

"She's all right. She wants to get up," Nurse Chambers answered cheerfully.

"Then we'll do the round before we see her," he answered, relieved, turning as he spoke into the men's ward, and making straight for Fannin.

To his surprise the patient, now quite quiet, seemed none the worse for his exciting experiences. His temperature, even, was lower; and though he went carefully over his lungs he could find nothing amiss.

"He must have the constitution of an elephant," he said.

"He can kick like wan, anyhow, doctor," remarked Brady, smiling ruefully. "Will ye just be afther seein' if me ribs is stove in, before ye go, sorr? It's frightened I am to drink me milk this mornin', for fear I do be leakin', like," he added, with a laugh that stopped abruptly as his side began to ache.

"Never mind about the leak, Brady. I've ordered you all beef-steak, potatoes and onions for your dinner to-day," responded Dermot, with a smile.

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"Hooray, bhoys! D'ye hear that? More power to ye, docthor. Sure, it's not another word I'll be afther utterin' this blessed day, for me teeth do be just achin' for somethin' to bite on."

"Beef-steak and onions," murmured the sergeant ecstatically. Then a look of doubt came into his eyes. "D'ye mean it, docthor?"

"Sure," answered Dermot.

"'Tention!" rasped the sergeant; and all the men became stiff in bed, automatically.

"Salute!"

The hands came up mechanically to the foreheads; and then, grasping the meaning, they all laughed—Fitzgerald with them.

"Thank you very much. You make me feel like the Lord-Lieutenant himself," he said.

When they got up to Nora's room she turned at the sound of the opening door, and with typical nursing instinct immediately exclaimed—

"How is he? Is he going to get pneumonia?"

"No signs of it. Seems to have flourished on it, if you ask me," answered Fitzgerald cheerfully.

"I'm so glad," she exclaimed with relief, "because I did feel so guilty in not stopping him—in leaving him to himself for a moment."

"Oh, rot! You can't be emulating Boyle Roche's bird all the time," he retorted. "How are you yourself?"

"Me! I'm all right! Only Chambers will insist on treating me as an interesting case. Can I get up?" she said.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at her. The slight outer cut on the lip had been drawn together by a black disc of court plaster that looked like a "patch"

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for a masquerade ball on her white skin. He tested the pupils, and found they reacted normally.

"How are the hands?" he said.

"Oh, nothing," she answered, pulling the bandages off.

He nodded. "Let's look at the ankle, then."

Gently he manipulated the joint with his skilful, delicate fingers.

"Well?" she said.

"I think you're going to live," he answered solemnly; and the two women laughed.

The whole note of the interview had been pitched, so far, in a carefully normal key; but a shrill call, obviously from Mary Josephine, drew Nurse Chambers away at that moment, and immediately a shy, tremulous restraint fell on them. There was a silence. Mutually they avoided each other's eyes.

Suddenly Dermot turned resolutely towards her.

"How much do you remember of last night—after your accident, I mean?" he said, waiting breathlessly for the answer on which so much depended.

Slowly a deep flush suffused her face and neck. For a moment she turned her eyes away, and then she faced him resolutely, incapable of subterfuge.

"Nearly all," she breathed. "I remember shortly after you lifted me on the car." She hesitated for a moment, then added deliberately, "I remember—everything you said."

He stared at her till her eyes dropped.

"I beg your pardon, N——" he said apologetically, keeping his voice even with an intense effort, the restlessness of his hands alone betraying his inward feelings. "We've got to thresh it out, then," he said jerkily, with a hard, metallic hoarseness in his voice, getting up suddenly

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from the edge of the bed, and pulling the single rickety chair towards him with nervous fingers.

"Yes," she murmured hurriedly.

Drawing a pink fleecy shawl over her head and shoulders, she sat up, facing him, her glorious raven hair tumbling in long, misty waves to her waist, the faint black rings of fatigue under her eyes making them loom large, mysterious, mystically wonderful.

Before, in the happy days when he first knew her, always on each occasion when he saw her, he seemed to be discovering a thousand fresh delights. To his enchanted vision her smile, the changing colour of her eyes under emotion, the glint of her hair in the firelight, her every subtle little movement charged with grace, made new and ever-added joys for future recollections. Now, at the sight of her again, it all came back to his parched soul, starved persistently, with all the accumulated force of hungry deprivation. His eyes glowed at her.

"God! How beautiful you are! It's more than I can bear," he gasped, moving swiftly with outstretched arms towards her. "Oh, my dear, my dear! I'm just aching for the touch of you—aching to feel your loved heart beating against mine again."

In spite of herself she thrilled roseate at the primitive call of it; the doubts that had been torturing her, the fears that he had only answered as he did in the stress of the night to soothe her, falling like broken shackles from her soul.

Impulsively her arms went out to meet him, feeling for the moment that nothing—nothing else in the wide, wide world—mattered, except that she loved him, that she wanted his strong arms round her, wanted to rest her weary head on his shoulder, to feel his lips on her tortured mouth again, to drift with him into a sunlit summer sea,

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safe from the thunderous breakers beating on the outer reef behind them.

For a moment her eyes closed; and then there came a check, the higher nature in her, temporarily in abeyance, pressed down by the fatigue her body had gone through and the stress of her emotion, rose again to the surface, struggled against her weary acquiescence, and conquered. She opened her eyes, looked at him, and caught the onrush of his blindly seeking arms with a gentle downward pressure that brought them on the counterpane.

"No, Dermot, no," she said brokenly.

He stared at her as if waking from a dream, but her eyes held him; and, with the power she always seemed to be able to exercise over him, his sudden madness melted under the strength of her resistant will.

"Forgive me, dear. I had no right," he said huskily, sinking on his knees beside the bed, his arms outstretched over the counterpane, his face for the moment buried in its folds.

Very gently she pushed her fingers through his ruffled hair.

"We've got to learn to forget, dear," she said caressingly.

He raised his head at that. "Yes, sweetheart, I know," he gasped. "I thought perhaps you wouldn't remember last night. I—didn't want you to remember—it would have been easier——"

His voice trailed off slowly and more slowly. Suddenly he broke down.

"Sweetheart, sweetheart, what are we to do?" he cried hopelessly.

With her quick mind she followed the rapid transitions of his mood; and now her scored hands came round his neck consolingly. She had regained possession of her soul,

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and was no longer afraid to touch him. Somehow she felt stronger, deeper, older than he was—and yet more loving, because of the weakness that appealed to her in him.

Something of the comfort of her hands must have been conveyed to him; for he was able to get up and sit on the chair close to her again, comparatively calm.

“Tell me as much as is fair—to her,” she said gently.

He looked at her dreamily.

“It seemed, somehow, as if it was bound to happen from the first. I never was, and never could have been, good enough for you.”

She made a protesting movement, but he took no notice.

“Every day I used to say to myself, ‘Perhaps she’s found me out’; and every day the wonder that you hadn’t met me with a fresh surprise. Even when you were more than good to me the feeling never quite died out. Then came the horrible Hickey affair. I daren’t go near you much, because I was always afraid we might be surprised; and I would have died rather than have the slightest spot upon your name. I stayed away deliberately at first. Then you seemed to grow cold to me, and I stayed away more and more because it hurt so awfully, and I knew I wasn’t good enough.”

She stared at him with wide, reproachful, wondering eyes.

“I thought that you were getting tired of me,” she said.

“Did you?” he said wearily. “Well, there it was. It might have come all right; but just then, by sheer accident, I heard about all that money of yours——”

Her hand twitched out of his grasp.

“Oh,” she said, crimsoning guiltily, and adding hastily, “I am so sorry. But how could I help it? I simply could not tell you, somehow.”

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"No, of course not. It was just fate," he continued in the same monotonous tone. "But all the same it raised another barrier. I remembered how I'd talked about making a home for you; and the memory of your secret smiles somehow seemed to mock me. I thought you were just playing with me, and I was so ashamed I——"

Her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Dermot, how could you? I never——" she cried reproachfully.

"I'm wiser now—when it is too late," he murmured dully. Suddenly she laughed hysterically, gripping hold of his hand again.

"Too late!" she exclaimed; and then, regaining possession of herself almost as quickly, "Yes, too late," she added.

"She's broken her other engagement for this. I've got to marry her," he said.

"Yes, you've got to marry her," she assented dully.

Suddenly a memory of the love-light in the other woman's eyes came to him, stirring his latent chivalry to life again.

"I've got never to let her know," he said, his voice taking on a deeper, fuller sound.

Quickly she rose to it.

"Yes, dear. You wouldn't be the man I love if you didn't," she murmured thrillingly.

Then he got up. He looked at her proudly.

"But I want you to remember," he said deeply, his face flushing dark red with his emotion, "I want you to remember you are the only woman I ever have or ever shall love."

They stared deeply into each other's eyes.

"Good-bye," he said abruptly.

In the silence that followed they heard the sound of Nurse Chambers's footsteps coming up the creaking stairs.

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To them both it seemed like the heavy stamping of the gravedigger Fate on the earth over the body of their tortured love, buried alive, still quivering.

Her eyes sought his in one last long look.

“Good-bye,” she answered.

CHAPTER XX

THE FINAL INTRUSION OF PIP. WHAT HAPPENED

A FORTNIGHT passed slowly; he went about his work quietly, efficiently; but by some queer obsession it always seemed as if what happened was occurring to some one else. His body performed its duties automatically. His brain worked technically as perfectly as before. Only emotionally he was dead. At times he had the curious feeling that he was standing outside himself; and could watch, with an odd, impersonal interest, the other Fitzgerald dressing, eating, going on his rounds, giving orders, smiling, making up prescriptions, wondering all the while how the fellow could do it so seemingly perfectly, since all the time, of course, he knew that he was really dead.

Luckily he was extremely busy. People had begun to ask for "the young docthor." Discharged patients from the hospital sang his praises enthusiastically. All sorts of distorted rumours were flying about. Wildly exaggerated details of an Homeric struggle in which he fought a madman for two whole hours in the dead of night, beat him, carried him back triumphantly on his back to the hospital, and then finally cured him, were current gossip in the town.

Old Biddy Malone, whom everybody knew had been crippled for two years with an ulcer on her leg, that had steadily progressed against the mild resistance of zinc ointment, had been almost cured in a week by some gluey stuff he had bandaged on to "disperse" it. Reappearing

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with her basket of candy and apples, she tramped around spreading his fame from door to door. It was "the wonderful docthor he was entirely"; and the halt, the lame and the blind flocked to him, wistfully hoping for a miracle. Dr. Joyce laughed at him good-naturedly one day, when he diffidently deprecated this sudden popularity.

"Go on, me bhoy! Cure them all, if ye can. The more the merrier," he said jovially.

Only Mrs. Gogarty shook her head dolefully over him; for his appetite, in spite of all her endeavours to tempt it, steadily declined; and, to her dismay, she saw that he was getting appreciably thinner.

"I'm fair moidered to know what to do wid him," she confessed to the rosy-cheeked Bridget one day.

"Maybe it's pinin' for his ladylove he does be," answered Bridget, who had noticed the letter in a woman's handwriting that came to him by the Dublin post each day.

"G'on wid ye," said Mrs. Gogarty angrily. "Yer head does be that full of bhoys, ye can think of nothin' else. If I catch that lazy spalpeen, Pat Heggarty, in this kitchen agane, it's afther dustin' his shouldhers I'll be for him—so mind ye."

Bridget tossed her head, but wisely maintained a discreet silence.

"Pat Heggarty, indade," she thought. "Maybe it's betther nor him I'll be afther gettin' whin I've saved me passage to Ameriky. But he does be mighty comical at times; and what's a poor girl to do for divarsion at all, at all?"

Fitzgerald came back that night from a late visit to a new case at the hospital looking very tired. He was seeing Nora as little as possible, for the mutual repression they

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exercised exhausted his vitality to an extraordinary extent.

"You're looking rather washed out, Fitz," said the doctor, looking up from his chair by the fire.

"I've got a brute of a head, sir. Had it for three days now. Won't go off," he answered, shivering slightly, and putting his hands to the fire.

"Looks as if you had a temperature," said the doctor shrewdly.

"Oh, I'm all right, sir."

"H'm. Just sit down there; and stick this thermometer in your mouth."

Fitzgerald, smiling wearily, sat down as directed, and, to humour him, did as he requested.

The doctor took it casually from him after an interval and held it to the light. Then he got up with unexpected rapidity and held it closer.

"Good God! You're 104.5," he said, turning quickly, just in time to see Fitzgerald sliding quietly on to the floor in a dead faint.

In feverish haste he tore the buttons of his waistcoat apart, pulled open the shirt, and looked at the exposed thorax.

"Great snakes! He's got it!" he exclaimed, staring at the mottled chest.

He rang the bell furiously.

"Mrs. Gogarty, Mrs. Gogarty!" he called urgently.

The round, red face of his housekeeper appeared anxiously at the door.

"What in the name of God——" she exclaimed. Then her eye caught the still, prostrate figure; and she glanced inquiringly, surprisedly, at the sideboard.

"Get two hot bottles, quick. It's the 'fever,'" he exclaimed hurriedly.

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"God save us! The poor lamb," she cried, in distressed compunction at the thought that had flashed through her mind. Quickly the huge, powerful man raised him in his arms, carried him up the stairs as if he had been a baby, and put him to bed with all the tenderness of a woman. Like every one else, he had grown extremely fond of his young assistant; and throughout the night he sat beside him, grimly, patiently, automatically replacing and replacing the clothes as he tossed and tossed, turning from side to side, incoherently muttering in the height of his feverish delirium.

In the morning Nurse Chambers burst in impetuously on her sleeping comrade.

"I say, Towny, wake up. Something awful's happened."

Nora sat bolt upright, instantly awake. She stared at the red-rimmed eyes.

"What?" she gasped.

"Fitz has got the 'fever.'"

Somehow, before she heard, she seemed to know what was coming. A deadly faintness battled for the moment with her consciousness. A nausea of fear seized on her, and then passed, leaving her limp, effortless. For a moment she was dumb. Then she slipped vaguely out of bed.

"I must go to him. He wants me," she said tonelessly, moving towards the door.

Nurse Chambers stared at her, round-eyed; then seized her by the arm.

"Here, wake up. You're half asleep."

"He wants me," repeated Nora dully.

The other nurse looked puzzled. "She doesn't know what she's talkin' about," she thought; then she burst out—

"Dr. Joyce's telegraphed to the hospital. Connellan's

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coming down with a 'special'; and Otway'll arrive by a later train."

"Otway," Nora muttered. The name struck through the cloud over her consciousness. A rapid flush of shame overspread her neck and face. She got back quickly into bed. The bitter thought that she had no possible right to betray emotion came like a whip-lash to her memory. She looked at Nurse Chambers in sudden fear. Had she given herself away? But the nurse's face showed only bovine blankness; and she drew a sigh of relief.

"Tell me," she said, with suppressed feverishness.

"Dr. Joyce has just been. He's frightfully cut up," she answered eagerly. "The rash came out last night. He must have been going about his work for some days with the 'fever' on him. I've thought he wasn't looking well for a week at least. Course you haven't seen him much, or you'd have noticed it too."

"No," said Nora dully.

Nurse Chambers was in her element. She was sorry for Fitzgerald—very sorry. She had cried when she heard it first, for she liked him; but none the less she enjoyed the excitement of it all.

"Odd," she continued. "Dr. Joyce didn't seem to know about Otway. Funny Fitz never mentioning her. I wonder is he as fond of her as she thinks. It's queer."

"Will she never go?" thought Nora in her agony.

But apparently Nurse Chambers had no intention of going. She stared at Nora, and laughed.

"Funny thing. Dr. Joyce seemed to think he was keen on you, somehow. Don't know how he got the notion."

"Not from Fitzgerald," said Nora quickly.

Nurse Chambers laughed again; and Nora began to feel as if she hated her.

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"No, certainly not. Nor from you. Never saw anybody as starchy as you, considering how good he was to you over Fannin. The doctor wanted to put you on instead of the 'special'; but I told him you couldn't endure residents, and that he was engaged to Otway."

A fierce vindictiveness seized upon Nora at the thought of how she had been deprived of the joy of it. She could have torn the unconscious author of her deprivation limb from limb. But the dread of betraying herself was paramount in her thoughts. She daren't even speak for a moment. Then she said: "Is he very bad?"

Nurse Chambers sobered down.

"Yes. They say it's a very acute case. Wonder where they'll put them all?" she rattled on.

Under the bedclothes Nora dug her nails into her flesh in an agony of self-repression. She longed desperately for her visitor to go. She felt that she could barely contain herself longer, that she must scream if the babbling talk went on.

A call from below brought the welcome relief. She waited feverishly for the door to close.

Instantly she was alone she was out of bed again, a tragic white figure on her knees, praying desperately.

"Father in Heaven, spare him," she sobbed. "Take my life for his, if it be Thy will. I offer it freely. Spare him, O Lord, spare him. He has done nothing but good in the world; and I love him so. Lord, let the punishment fall on me. Thou gavest Thine own beloved Son to save the world. Thou saidst, 'Better love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.' Take my life, O Lord. Let the hand of Thy wrath fall on me. Only spare him, good Lord; for I love him better than life itself. Spare him, for Jesus Christ, His sake."

Toward midnight Connellan left the coffee-room of

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Sweeney's Hotel, where he was staying, callously abandoning the only other guest, a solitary "commercial gent" who had fastened eagerly upon him at supper, entertaining him with doleful accounts of the state of trade in the west, interlarded with veiled inquiries as to what "line" he was in himself—inquiries he had taken a twisted pleasure in avoiding.

The doctor was sitting up, waiting for him.

"What do you think of him, sir? You've got such a large experience of these cases," said Connellan quietly.

The older man smiled, pleased at the deference of the tone. Unconsciously he spread himself.

"It's a very severe attack, Dr. Connellan," he replied. "I think so, because the incubation period is so short; the rash seems to have come out on the third day, and the fever is so high. It's very like that nurse's case who died."

Connellan shivered slightly; but he did not ask the usual futile questions, knowing such things were in the lap of Fate. Instead he murmured—

"Can I go up again?"

"Oh yes. He's quiet now. I've given him some opium."

Moira rose silently from the bedside as he came into the room; and together they stood quietly looking down on the figure in the bed sleeping a troubled sleep in the dim shaded light.

Occasionally his head would move, and his lips pucker in words, but no sounds came. Connellan's fingers slipped to the dry burning wrist, covered with its dull mottled rash, and he counted the pulse mechanically. Then he glanced at the three-hourly chart. It registered 104° F.

"Did he know you?" he said softly.

Her eyes filled with tears. "Oh yes. He smiled, dear

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old fellow; and seemed so glad to see me," she answered in a broken voice.

"He's awfully bad; and there isn't a single drug in the Pharmacopœia will touch him. It's all in the nursing. You've got to save him, 'Otter,'" he said urgently.

"Don't I know? Sure, there isn't a single thing on earth I wouldn't do for him, Conn. You know that," she said, with pitiful earnestness.

"I know, little girl. I wish to God he'd never come here. I wish he'd never seen——" He paused, remembering who was listening. "Never mind. We've got to peg on, and never give up hope."

Towards morning he woke restlessly; and she was beside him in an instant. The suffused eyes stared vacantly at her for a moment. Then a look of beatific happiness came to them.

"Nora, dar——" The look faded in a brief confusion, then cleared. "Is it you, Moira?" he said feebly.

A pain, like the sharp stroke of a dagger in the heart, shot through her; but with the supreme desire to help overriding all other things physical, she was able to say—

"Yes, dear. Do you want anything?"

"I'm so thirsty—so thirsty." His voice trailed off; and he was half asleep again. "—shadow of a great rock in a weary land," he murmured

A great wave of relief came to her. "He's wandering," she said to herself, grasping eagerly at the comfort of the thought.

"It was just an accident; but how it did hurt."

Then, very tenderly, she held the feeding-cup to the parched lips.

All through the watches of the night Nora had been

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planning how she might best hear of his progress; for not to know for herself would have been agony; and to have to listen to the news as conveyed by the good-natured but garrulous Nurse Chambers was more than she could bear. Every morning, before she went to bed, she had been accustomed to go for a walk. It was the regular "Kingsbridge" rule, devised to make its nurses get a certain definite amount of outside air; and she thought if she inquired at the house on her way it would seem only natural.

The doctor, however, was out when she arrived; but Bridget re-directed her to Sweeney's Hotel for more definite information.

In answer to her ring, the "boots," with his coat off, came to the door. Yes, Dr. Connellan was in. No, she preferred to wait outside.

The "commercial gent," whose battered leather sample-cases littered the vestibule, appeared at that moment. Frequent conversations with barmaids had given him a high opinion of his fascinations; and, when he saw her, a self-complacent smile rippled over his rotund countenance; he twisted the waved ends of his stubby moustache, and pulled down a fancy waistcoat which comfortable living had made rather inclined to glide upwards.

"Good-morning," he said.

Nora stared coldly at, and then past him, without a word.

Somewhat deflated, the "commercial gent" retired into the hall again.

"Damn," he muttered, as at that moment Connellan appeared, coming down the staircase from his room.

When he saw her his face hardened.

"Good-morning," he said coldly. "I'd almost forgotten you were here."

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Then he turned in step with her along the street, the "commercial gent" staring after them enviously.

"Some fellows have all the luck," he muttered.

Meanwhile Nora was saying impulsively—

"Tell me how he is! I couldn't wait till some one had been to the hospital."

"He's about as bad as he can be; and it's all your fault for driving him here," he answered brutally, venting his tortured anxiety on her mercilessly.

She answered nothing; but her mouth twisted painfully, her hand went involuntarily to her heart, and she looked at him with the eyes of a wounded animal.

"I'm so sorry," she said feebly.

"Sorry doesn't help," he answered coldly.

She roused herself.

"Is there anything I can do—anything?" she exclaimed earnestly.

"I asked you that same question—not a month ago, when he came down here; and I give you the answer you gave me then—nothing," he said bitterly.

They were in the open country by now; and suddenly she turned to him.

"Conn," she said, using the diminutive for the first time, her voice growing strangely lyrical, "you're his friend; and I don't care if you know. It was all a pitiful mistake, and my heart's just breaking."

He stared at her, suddenly contrite. He had never seen the whiteness of her marble calm thus broken before; and the effect on him was all the more intense.

"Forgive me," he said humbly, taking her arm gently and drawing it to his side.

The firm friendly pressure was a balm to her lonely tortured soul. She felt that she had acquired a friend,

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some one in whom she could confide, and thereby ease the agony she had before to suffer dumbly.

"Tell me," he said gently. "Does he know?"

"Oh yes, he knows. We both found it out when it was too late. He loves me still; and I, Conn—it's an awful thing to say—but I could just bow down and worship him."

He stared at her.

"You poor souls. What will you do?"

"What can we?—nothing," she exclaimed tragically. "He's bound in the chains of honour. There's no way out. And it's all useless, Conn. He's going to die—I know it."

By midday the news had spread all over the little town; and the impulsive, warm-hearted people who had grown so fond of him, even in the short time he had been with them, were loud in their lamentations.

Old Bidy Malone tramped straight to the doctor's house, and insisted on seeing Mrs. Gogarty. She emptied all her stock-in-trade on the kitchen table.

"Will ye be afther takin' thim for him, Mrs. Gogarty? It's all I've got—me 'honey-ball apples, good ripe apples, blabs a' honey,'" she said, repeating her hawker's cry, the rheumy tears in her eyes. "Maybe, if he was to ate wan or two, be the blessin' of the saints it might give him the turnn."

Even Mrs. Gogarty's sharp tongue was silenced for the nonce. She took half-a-dozen or so of the proffered apples to please the old woman.

"Thank ye kindly, Mrs. Malone. I'll tell him who they're from," she said emotionally.

At the hospital Connellan was conscious of a small, inquisitive face that studied him intently. It was Mary

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Josephine, now allowed to be up and dressed. Apparently her impressions of him were favourable; for, as he was about to leave, she approached him stealthily.

“Will ye be seein’ our docthor soon?” she said in a whisper.

“Yes, Mary Josephine.”

“Well, then, will ye ax him to wear these?” she said, slipping a thin little hand into his, and leaving a string with two small nickel medals of the “Sacred Heart” in his palm.

“They’re ‘special blessed,’ and they’ll do him a power of good,” she explained. “It doesn’t matther him bein’ a Prodesan. Sure, he can’t help that,” she added.

“Thank you very much, Mary Josephine,” said Connellan, deeply touched, for he knew she had parted with her most cherished possessions for her friend.

Throughout the long afternoon next day Dermot lay perfectly conscious of everything around him—indeed, all his senses seemed to have become hyperacute. Strange, powerful scents came to his nostrils. He heard continual sounds of drumming in his ears; and the rustling movements of quiet little Nurse Tabitoe became exaggerated into noises like an earthquake. When his eyes lit upon small objects in the room they seemed to stand out sharply, with iridescent edges, as if magnified under a lens. At times curious prismatic colours would play over the surface of things; and occasionally objects on the dressing-table would gradually grow smaller and smaller, or larger and larger, sometimes even appearing to become double.

His mind, too, was extraordinarily active. Thoughts chased one another through his brain with breathless overlapping speed. When he tried to express them, however,

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he found the words would not come, though certain of them seem to act as signal centres, and he found himself repeating sentences in which they occurred, completely conscious of the incongruity of it all. Occasionally for a moment he mistook the nurse for some one else; but he took whatever she gave him with docility.

It was difficult, however, to keep the bedclothes on him. He would keep throwing them down, always with the same remark—

“It’s so wide, it’s so wide,” spreading out his arms as the nurse came to wrap him up again, puzzling her to understand what he could mean.

In the evening, soon after Moira came on duty, he repeated the remark.

“What’s so wide, dear?” she said gently.

He stared at her.

“The heat, of course,” he muttered; and then, apparently satisfied, ceased to say it any more.

Towards morning he became delirious again. Somehow the idea came to him that he was wanted, and he would insist on getting up, in spite of her restraining hands.

“Yes—yes—I’ll come—the doctor’s not very well—let me get up, Mrs. Gogarty—she’ll be dead if I don’t go,” he muttered.

Very gently she held him back.

“Conn’s doing the work. It’s all right,” she said soothingly.

His mind went off at a tangent.

“Conn—That you, Conn?—I tell you he’s not dead—Hickey dead—it’s all my fault, Conn—oh, my God—dead. No, nurse—they won’t come for the coffin—we’ll have to carry it ourselves—no, we won’t call Nora—Nora—darling—oh, thank God you’re not dead—we must never let her know, sweetheart—she’s such a dear—never

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let her know—until I'm dead. It would kill her if she knew——”

Suddenly a scrap of a poem that he had been reading before his illness came to his lips; and the hoarse voice quoted it—

“ Yet each man kills the thing he loves ;
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word.
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword.”

Endlessly he muttered on, tossing from side to side, growing more and more incoherent; and the heart of the woman sitting quietly by his bed was racked in an agony of love and doubt and a slowly creeping fearful knowledge of the thing she dreaded most in all the world.

All along, from the very first, she had known in her heart of hearts he did not love her as she hungered to be loved; but nevertheless he seemed to care for her more than any one else; and so she secretly hugged the greater hope that one day her all-absorbing passion would kindle a flame in him in resonance with the sweep of her own chromatic emotions.

That their engagement had been the outcome of chivalry rather than of love she fully recognised. There were details leading up to it which she passed over hurriedly, even to herself—details she fervently hoped he would never even suspect. She salved her conscience over them largely in the light of the greater hope.

When he left the hospital so suddenly she had been troubled.

Later, when she heard that Nora had volunteered for duty near him, she had been uneasily curious, especially as he scarcely mentioned her in his letters. But she had never doubted his honour; and when the news of his falling

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a victim to the disease he had been fighting came to her, with a mind accustomed to such perils as part of the everyday risk, she had rushed, almost glad-heartedly, to his side in her eager desire, now satisfied, to be near him, to serve him.

A month before she had been actively jealous of Nora; but the feeling had died down, partly owing to his anxious care of her during her illness, partly to her knowledge of the difficulty of raising his emotions beyond the level of the laughter of the lesser loves; but chiefly owing to the pulsing joy of her own engagement.

Of course, she knew there had been something between them; but she did not know how all-absorbing that "something" had become.

Now the disjointed mutterings of his clouded brain threw a flood of disconcerting cruel light, impossible to ignore, on the workings of his inner mind; the very foundations of the hope she had been building upon melted away; the justification for her engagement, and, *pari passu*, for the methods that had brought it about, vanished; and in the secret tribunal of her soul she felt condemned, dishonoured.

Following this came a storm of jealous rage at the cause of her defeat. She writhed impotently as she thought of the siren beauty that had wrecked the galley of her golden hopes. It seemed to her so monstrously, so cruelly unfair. She felt convinced that Nora had followed him deliberately, malignantly intent on doing all the mischief that she could; and in her heart she hated her.

A certain savage joy, however, upheld her. The woman had overreached herself; the finger of fate had intervened; and he was here—here under her care—here to be watched over, loved, saved—and by her. She clenched her hands fiercely, determined she should pull him through, win him

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back, rescue him from the cold arms of this Calypso. He was hers, helpless, dependent. Let the other try her best.

Deliberately she moved to the bed and leant over him. His eyes were staring dully at the ceiling over his head, his lips moving rapidly in silent, mouthing, disconnected syllables.

“Darling, you shall love me best. I want you so,” she whispered passionately; and, at the sound of her voice, his head rolled over towards her, and he smiled. She accepted it as an omen.

Gradually the slow, weary hours dragged on till the grey fingers of dawn began to push aside the darkness, filtering through the blinds, bringing the light of the new-born day; and then, at the turn of the morning, he fell asleep; the tension of trying to piece together his incoherent ramblings was over; and she closed her weary eyes for a moment, leaning her forehead on the edge of the counterpane underneath which her hand clasped one of his between the sheets, contrary to all the regulations of her training.

At breakfast the kindly doctor ordered her out for a walk; and thus, returning, it chanced she came upon Connellan walking back for the second time with Nora to the hospital.

A swift, fierce jealousy seized and wracked her soul at the sight.

“I wonder what she’s spying about—trying to worm out of him?” she thought.

Then an unholy delight followed.

“At any rate she isn’t nursing him,” she added in her mind triumphantly.

Connellan took off his hat as they met; but the two

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women passed with still white faces, as if they had never seen one another before.

“Good God!” he thought.

On what appeared to be the tenth day of his illness, a week after he had been put to bed, Moira came down to breakfast utterly worn out.

Even to her eyes, clinging to every hope, it seemed that he was sinking. She had done everything her skill, her training, her love had made humanly possible; but nevertheless she could not blink the fact that somehow, in some vague way, her presence had a disturbing effect on him, even when almost unconscious. Painfully she had combated the conviction, driving it from her mind; but in spite of all her efforts to dislodge it it would return again, and yet again. She felt he wanted something, and the thought haunted her vaguely, insidiously, persistently, rousing a nauseating fear in her, making her dread horribly the impulse to probe within her own mind for the solution she dimly felt might suddenly jump into her consciousness. After breakfast the old doctor and Connellan held another consultation. Together they stood looking at him. He was wasted nearly to a skeleton. The bones looked as if they were almost through the thin glazed skin. The temperature had never been below 103° F.; his limbs twitched tremulously at the slightest touch; and the nocturnal delirium was now present in the day as well.

The two men went carefully over his chest, rolling him gently from side to side. There was dulness at both “bases” behind; and the older man shook his head gravely, hopelessly, at the sign.

“I have never known them recover when the lungs begin to go,” he said slowly. “He can’t last the two days to the ‘crisis.’”

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Then an odd thing happened. The apparently unconscious figure turned a pair of sunken eyes at him.

"Eh?" he said; and they both stepped back as if they had been shot.

Fitzgerald laughed weakly; his thin right arm came out; and he tried to catch an imaginary butterfly hovering over the bed. Connellan left the room abruptly, feeling as if he would choke. Below the doctor joined him.

"I'd better send for Pip, his cousin. He's his only living relative," he said, recovering.

Nora met him, as was now her daily custom. Her eyes scanned his countenance anxiously from afar; but he met her gaze despairingly.

"Well," she said hopelessly.

"Joyce says it's no good; I've wired for Pip," he answered dully.

She sat down weakly on the stone ditch by the roadside.

"Oh, Conn, can't I see him? It's so cruel of you all," she wailed.

"I'm afraid," he answered. "His life's just hanging by a thread."

"Will you promise me, then, that you'll send for me in time?" she entreated.

He thought for a moment.

"Yes, I'll do that," he answered slowly. "I'd take you now, only I haven't given him up yet—not quite."

Suddenly her face became stolid.

"If he dies I won't survive him," she said quite calmly. He turned on her abruptly.

"You what?"

"Yes, I will," she said doggedly. "He'd be so lonely without me."

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He shook her roughly by the shoulder.

"Here! you're crazy! What are you talking about?" he shouted.

"I mean it," she said. "I know just how to do it; and you'll bury me with him."

"I won't—I won't—I won't," he cried excitedly.

"Oh yes, you will," she answered calmly, staring fixedly at him.

"You just come back to hospital. You're not safe," he said roughly, pulling her up.

She followed him obediently without a word.

When he returned to his hotel a new annoyance met him. Apparently it had got about the town that all hope had been abandoned. The "boots" stopped him on the doorstep.

"Two gentlemen, diputation from the guardians, to see ye in the coffee-room, sorr," he said importantly.

The visitors looked at him hesitatingly. Then the elder of the two spoke.

"We thought, doctor, that seein' you're the young doctor's friend, we'd like ye to know that we're raisin' a subscription—him bein' so well liked, an' Father Dempsey bein' willin', though he's a Prodestan."

Connellan put a confused hand to his forehead.

"A subscription," he said vaguely. "What for?"

"Why, for a tombstone in the cemetery, like," the spokesman answered.

A blind fury came upon him. It was too much. He felt he wanted to strangle the speaker. His hands came up gropingly.

"Damn you," he burst out. "He's not dead yet."

The two men gazed speechless at him.

He sat down weakly and stared at their pained, surprised faces; and then his anger melted as suddenly as it had

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come. After all, they meant well; it was a kindly thought; and it was his own nerves were at fault.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said brokenly. "I can't tell you how touched I am; but it came on me with rather a shock; and I hope you will forgive me."

Then he left them abruptly; and the two disturbed visitors gazed at one another.

"I'm thinkin' maybe he was right; and we were a bit hasty," said the spokesman.

"Well, it's an ould sayin' that yer niver dead till yer dead," replied the other vaguely. "We'd better wait a day or two."

Late that night Pip arrived. He sat beside Moira at the bedside, refusing to turn in for the night.

"You go," he said to Connellan. "You're fagged. I'm pretty fresh. I'll call you if you're wanted."

"I'll come in again at midnight, then," said Connellan reluctantly.

Pip nodded gravely, and resumed his chair. Quietly he sat beside her, making her acquaintance, summing her up, trying to gauge her thoughts. He listened to his cousin's aimless babbling, turning his keen fresh mind on to the problem, gradually piecing the intricate parts together, and slowly coming to a conclusion he had thought out tentatively on the long journey down.

Presently he stirred, turning to her.

"Of course I'm not a doctor, but I have an idea," he said. She turned eagerly to him, showing the desperate clinging as to straws which must have possessed her soul since she stopped for a moment to consider such a remark from a layman.

"Yes," she breathed, the confident young eyes stimulating her even in this hour of despair.

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“Would you mind bending over him and calling him?” he said. Quietly she got up, and did as he requested.

“Dermot, dear one, can you hear me? It’s Moira, your own Moira,” she whispered, putting her whole soul into the appeal, momentarily oblivious of the subtle eyes that watched her. But the sunken figure, that had been so still for the last hour, did not hear; there was no movement of the tired eyelids; she might as well have been calling to the dead; and she turned a face of absolute despair to him again.

“It’s no good,” she said brokenly. “He’s quite unconscious.”

“I know. It was a test. You want him to live?” he said abruptly, very quietly.

“Yes, oh yes. I’d do anything—anything,” she whispered hoarsely, a faint flicker of hope coming again to her eyes.

“They’ve given him up?”

The light died down again. “Yes,” hopelessly.

“Do you love him better than yourself?” he inquired, with the same quiet, relentless persistence.

She turned fiercely at the suggestion of doubt in his tone.

“You know I do. Why do you ask?” she almost cried aloud.

“You know he does not love you?” the cruel, quiet voice queried, probing her innermost secret.

She stared at him speechless, a dull red flaming to her cheeks and ebbing again, leaving her deadly pale.

“Do you, or do you not?” came the cruel voice again. “I have a reason for asking—a vital reason.”

Suddenly she broke down, sobbing quietly as if her very heart would break.

“I know he doesn’t.”

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For the first time a throb of emotion came into his even voice.

"There's just one chance; but you must take it or leave it; for only you can take it. If you love him—as you say—you will. If not——"

He paused dramatically; and she looked at him with wide, dilated eyes.

"Quick!" she panted. "Try me. I'd give my life for him."

"Then go and fetch her," he said abruptly.

For a moment she stared at him, her hands on her heart. He met the gaze steadily.

"I mean it," he said. "It's just a chance."

Slowly she stood erect, her eyes turning passionately to the quiet figure in the bed, lying unconscious of it all. Hastily she made a movement as if to throw herself on her knees beside him—then checked. This was the thought that had been creeping into her quivering soul for the last three days—renunciation. To her fevered eyes the figure in the bed seemed to be waiting, very still, with awful quietness, for her decision.

Then something hard seemed to break in her. For a moment her body bent quivering; and then she stood erect again, and looked at him, a wonderful sweet light—the light of ultimate sacrifice—in her eyes.

Very wistfully she turned to Pip, tensely watching her.

"I'm going," she said simply.

Impulsively he rushed at her.

"By God, you're a great woman!" he cried throatily.

"I'm sorry I ever doubted you. Forgive me."

The quick, urgent midnight knocking at the hospital door brought Nora, pale-faced, choking, to open it. It was the last call, she thought.

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She fell back at the sight of her unexpected visitor; and Moira rushed breathlessly in.

"What—what do you want?" gasped Nora.

"I want you to come to him," cried Moira brokenly. "I've given him up to you again. He never loved me; and I knew it. Ever since we became engaged I knew it. I got him by a trick. I knew the sister was coming in; and I made him kiss me. Then he had to say we were engaged. He was just splendid about it afterwards—but I knew all the time he didn't love me," she cried breathlessly.

Nora stared at her speechless, and she ran on—

"I just hated you; but Fate has been too strong for me. He's dying; and I didn't know what to do until to-night. It was Pip Fitzgerald showed me how. He says there's just a chance if you will come. Oh, do hurry! Say you'll come," she pleaded wildly.

Still Nora was silent; and now a great new fear struck cold to Moira's heart. It was an extraordinary situation; one woman pleading to another to save the life of the man they both loved; and in the height of her self-sacrifice Moira grew rapidly more and more afraid. Time seemed to be running with such lightning speed. She felt that he might die at any moment; and then her sacrifice would come too late.

Slowly the situation grew on Nora. From the first awful despair, through the sudden confusion of the startling request her mind wandered, gradually clearing as she listened to the passionate pleading of her former rival.

"Oh, won't you come? Don't you love him any longer?" wailed Moira.

Then she seemed to waken from her lethargy.

"You give him back to me?" she gasped wonderingly.

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"Yes. Oh, will you hurry, before it is too late?" she answered desperately.

"I'm coming," gasped Nora. "Oh, you are good. I have so longed to see him."

Almost before the words were out of her mouth Moira had rushed into the kitchen. "Here! your things," she gasped feverishly, rushing back. "Don't wait. I'll call Chambers, and follow you. Oh, do hurry!" Rapidly as Nora got on her bonnet and cloak she was not fast enough for Moira. "Hurry—oh, do hurry!" she kept crying, almost pushing her out bodily with her impatient hands.

As Nora entered the room, Pip stepped quietly back into the shadow; but if the whole world had been looking on she would have been oblivious of everything in the rush of her great love.

With straining heart she leant over the wasted, death-like figure. For a moment, he lay so still, a deadly fear swept over her.

Then, "Dermot, Dermot, dear love," she called, putting the whole intensity of her overflowing soul into the fateful summons. She waited breathlessly; and behind her Pip, in the darkness, felt the tension of the situation almost unbearable. There was no response. A note of fear crept into her voice.

"Dermot, dear, it's your own Nora come back to you."

Slowly the sunken lids opened, and the eyes stared at her.

"It's Nora, your own Nora," she repeated slowly, distinctly.

A look of recognition seemed to come to the wasted countenance. His lips moved; and her straining ears caught the faint, feeble, answering whisper—

"Nora, darling."

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Then the tired eyelids closed again; and her professional mind wakened. Quietly she felt for the feeble, thready pulse. It was just perceptible; but something unexpected at the same time caught her attention; and she was turning to the anxious figure of Pip, when the sound of footsteps and some one coming hastily into the room made her pause. It was Connellan.

His eyes swept over the whole scene. Quickly he rushed to the bedside, giving one rapid look at the patient.

"Good God! Nora, you've killed him," he cried aghast. The eyelids opened again; a faint smile came over the wasted countenance.

"I'm not dead yet, Conn," he said very feebly, but quite distinctly and rationally.

Then Nora remembered what she had noticed.

"His wrist is quite moist," she said.

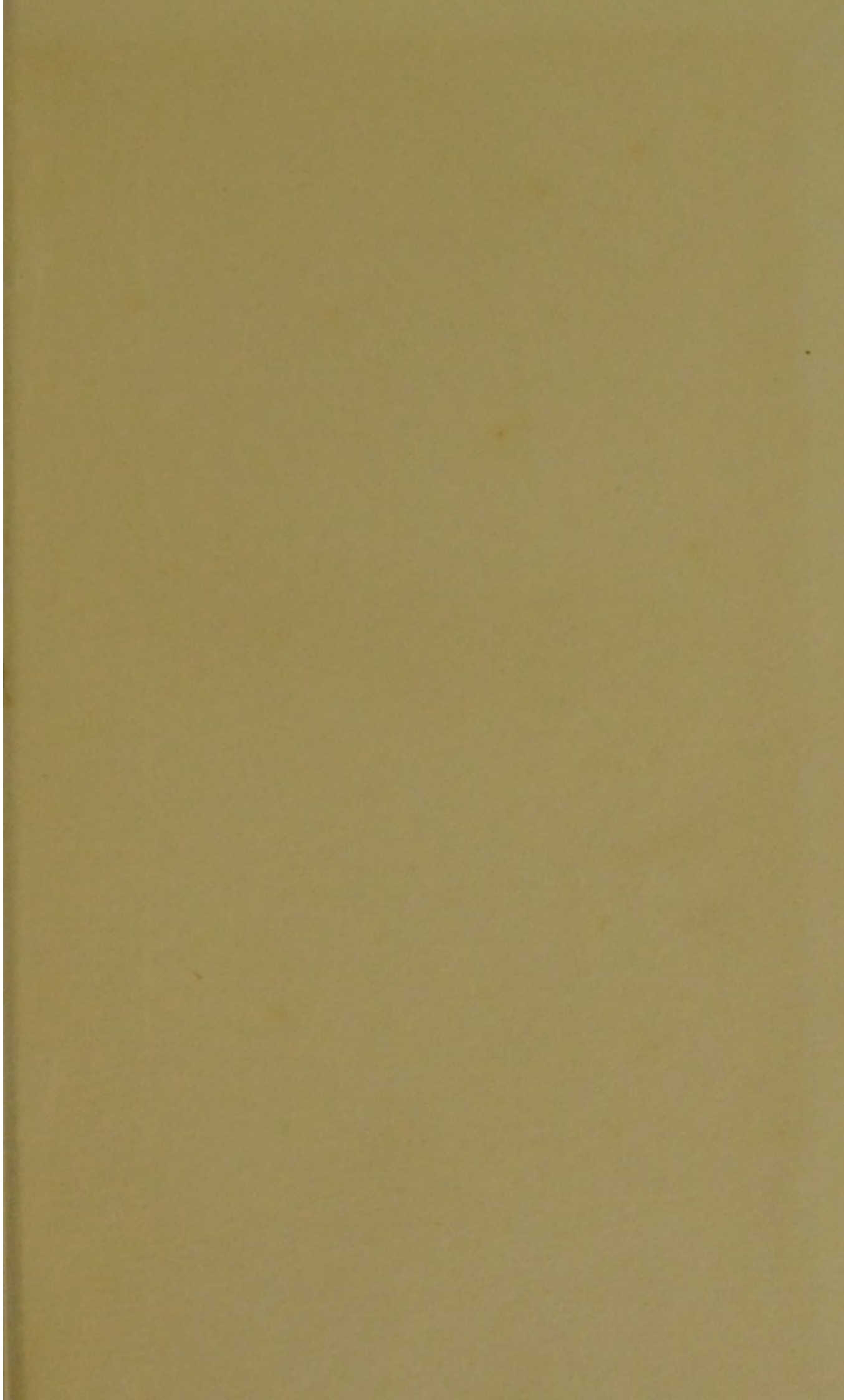
Connellan pushed her brusquely aside and felt it. Then his eyes brightened suddenly. He placed a fifteen-second thermometer in the near axilla, and could scarce contain his feverish impatience as he counted the slowly ticking half-minute that would make certain of its accuracy. Rapidly he drew it out.

"99! Hooray!" he cried exultantly. "It's the 'crisis.' We were all wrong about the dates. This must be the twelfth day."

Over in the dark corner a woman, who had crept in after him unnoticed, sobbed quietly, but with an infinite joy. Her sacrifice had been accepted. She was at peace.

THE END

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