THE SCRATCH PACK

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CHAPTER I

"If there even appeared to be the faintest reason for his not going into something," said Gheena severely. Then she put her hand on the collar of the nondescript cur named Crabbit, an animal which was not precisely an Irish terrier and not quite a retriever, had some distant connections in the house of spaniels, and other relations too varied to trace, the result of this liberally scattered ancestry being endowed with a silky-red coat, and liquid, truthful eyes which expressed his powers of affection, but not the original sin behind his broad forehead.

"You will get a cold in your nose and snuffle at dinner if you go into the water again, Crabbit. No, sir! If there could be the faintest reason for it," went on Gheena Freyne. "If he was like Dick Kennedy, who has no one to help him, or half blind like Professor Brown, or couldn't walk——" She stopped, flushing, and took up her knitting.

"Like me—yes, Gheena." The words came lightly, but a little half stifled twisted sigh slipped from Darby Dillon's lips. Darby had been a light-hearted, long-limbed soldier in days of peace. If you saw him sitting down or in the saddle, and came up at his right side, he was apparently long limbed and good-looking still: a lean well-built man of about thirty-five, but at the left side Darby's shoulder stooped; he shuffled with one limb stiff and useless, generally with a crutch under his shoulder.

A crashing fall playing polo on hard Egyptian ground had left him maimed and crippled.

"I—did.... I wasn't. He's gone again," said Gheena philosophically.

A streak of red had tumbled over the brow of the low cliff, and a resounding splash marked the fact that Crabbit was once more in hot pursuit of seagulls, the

hope to seize one unawares being embedded deeply in him.

"He is off to that rock where they all sit on. Mother gets quite worried when he snuffles under her chair and thinks it is bits or perhaps he is going mad. Why do some people"—Gheena whistled impotently—"never get a grip of life, Darby? Mummie can't ever think about Crabbit without asking Dearest if it isn't right—Aren't the dog's nose noises suspicious? Darby—I—I never meant to refer to anyone."

Darby said cheerily that he knew it, and that one got used to a lost leg, even if it meant other losses—here his eyes clouded—and that a fellow who could sit on a saddle need never grumble.

They sat silent then, looking across the sea; the great endless water carpet was grey under a grey sky, always moving with froth of spray on its lips when it touched the shore, here and there a line of white breaking over some hidden rock, its steely heaving distance merging to the moving sky. Far off the smudge of smoke marked the track of a liner standing out, and two fishing boats, red-sailed, were creeping into harbour. The sea-birds cried their curiously eerie notes, a little stretch of golden sand sandwiched between the rocks was fringed with pipers skimming on their infinitesimal legs, and here and there a breathless and outraged gull eyeing Crabbit irritably.

The peace of late autumn was on the world; smoke curled up lazily from the little stone chimneys; children were gathering seaweed and carrying it up to dry. Red war seemed impossible as the two looked out across the heaving, dimpling sea.

The cliffs, covered with short, sweet grass, ran at Duncahir to the V of a small deep harbour, shaded by high hills at the back, shadowing it chilly. Beyond the shadow of the hills stretched a tangle of jutting rocks hollowed by innumerable caves, out to where the Atlantic beat and surged on the higher cliffs outside, and, skipping, trod its brave way to and fro to distant ports.

The mouth of the inlet was wide, and generally rough with the swell and rush of cross currents.

In the soft salty air fuchsias flourished, their blazing bells in every sheltered nook, and planted in hedges for shelter.

In a hollow near the mouth of the harbour, battered trees protesting against their position as mere protection from roaring gales, Castle Freyne stood, tall and rambling, with all kinds of semi-tropical flowers growing in the garden, and its rows of blind windows staring reproachfully among open-eyed glassed fellows.

The village of Duncahir hung upon the very edge of the cliffs with an air of supreme pride because it did not topple over, so close were the houses built to where the land broke off and the sudden rent all fuchsia-edged.

The Freynes had once owned all the mountain and bog and flat lands along

the east side of the harbour, and had now disposed of it with cheer; this sentiment lessened when it appeared that the tenants of the estate still expected to have defunct calves replaced, help given with carts and horses and all the old benefits which a patient landlady had conferred on them.

Matilda Freyne, Gheena's mother, had acquiesced with every decision made for her in life save one—her own name. She had detested it in her childhood, turned it to Matty and Mat and Tilda during her girlhood, and then dared anyone worthy of the name of friend to call her by any of these abbreviations, as they were worse than the original.

She had seriously thought of becoming Genevieve when confirmed, but having some vague idea that a change of name was irrefutably coupled with immersion, and her hair being straight by nature, she refrained, holding a grievance for years afterwards against the clergyman because he had not fully explained a subject which she here consulted him.

On her wedding day the "I Matilda" was spoken so faintly that an agitated mother held out strong smelling-salts and quite upset the ceremony. It took the Bishop, a nervous man, five minutes to recover, because he had been bending over to whisper reassurance to the faint-voiced bride at the moment.

In the vestry Matilda viciously upset the ink-bottle over the registry book, thus obliterating every signature except her own.

When her first child was born and proved to be a girl, Mrs. Freyne decided that at least she should not be burdened with one hideous name. Her child's was to be Irish and the name of a flower. Very weak-minded people have occasional outbursts of complete obstinacy, and when Major Freyne, who was very deaf, insisted on the family name of Annette or Caroline, Matilda, his wife, merely sent for the gardener and asked for information about Irish flowers.

When Hallinan scratched his head and seemed to think of nothing but Push och Bui and Cruve tharrig, Mrs. Freyne was still determined, but undecided. She held the baby herself at the font, had a flash of inspiration five minutes beforehand, and pronounced its name firmly—Carrigeen.

It was sufficiently like Caroline to escape her husband's notice, and when the astounded Mr. Hallinan, who was too well acquainted with the word, said "Eh, what?" Matilda Freyne repeated it hurriedly and firmly.

When it was pointed out to her—and, in fact, she remembered that Carrigeen was a certain edible seaweed—Mrs. Freyne said gloomily that at least it was not Matilda, and bent before the blast of marital wrath, with what Major Freyne called heatedly the aggravation of a sally bough.

When Carrigeen could no longer be Baby or Doatie she certainly could not be Carrig or Een, and it was the nurse who settled the matter by calling her Miss Gheena, with an "h" introduced.

Major Freyne was taken early to his fathers, and his wife being quite unable to decide anything for herself, drifted into matrimony with a somewhat peppery cousin, who resented Gheena's ultimate inheritance of Castle Freyne at her marriage and the prospect of the dower house, Girtnamurragh, for himself.

Gheena was slight, with very bright brown hair, seldom burdened with a hat; a skin browned to a very soft tan, grey-blue eyes, a crooked smile and a determined will.

"Crabbit very nearly got a gull, Darby; he is snapping at jelly-fish now and coming in. And why you men don't say something!"

Darby Dillon observed patiently that if an American citizen chose to come to Duncahir for his health, they really had no right to criticize.

Gheena returned severely that she did not believe that Basil Stafford had any right either to America or ill-health, and got up.

The sun was setting, and through a rift in the pack of clouds came bars of amber and gold, turning Innisfail island to a dome of misty purple, and Leeshane to a low hump of mauve.

"If Mom did not cry and talk of her heart I'd go out myself," said Gheena, dropping three stitches in her excitement, her needles clicking and flashing feverishly.

"And if I went, no one here would knit. I caught that hateful Maria Casey doing fancy work yesterday, and Annette Freyne making a mitten which might do for a sandbag. There is even no hope of hunting. Hill has gone now. I tell you, Darby, I believe—I really believe that he's—that Stafford man—a——"

"It was hot enough to take a swim this morning," said Basil Stafford easily. "You might have come out, Miss Freyne, when I was doing aquatic feats."

Gheena knitted faster still. She looked up, frowning, at a nondescript and active young man, with pleasant eyes and a somewhat grim mouth, who was standing close to them.

"Coming like—like—a man in rubber shoes! You might be out after spies," said Gheena sarcastically.

"It was after Carrigeen at low tide," said the young man gravely, showing a basket of white seaweed, to prove that the remark was not personal. "The news is none too cheery," he added gravely, looking down at a telegraph-form.

Gheena pulled at the flimsy slip, to read something concerning cows, sheep, pigs and several numbers, and to grunt suspiciously.

"The newspaper office sends them to me in code," said Basil softly. "I get so much more for my money that way." He translated a long message, and Gheena's lips drooped until her eyes grew angry.

With the energy and skill of the amateur strategist, she immediately explained how completely everything had been muddled.

"How, if the English had done one thing and another and France and Russia the rest, the whole of the German army would be scrambling away back to Berlin to get into the Kaiser's coal cellars."

"Just rush and dash," declaimed Gheena loftily, "not this retreating and losing."

Basil Stafford remarked, "And perhaps of men," rather slyly; to which Gheena answered, "Yes," with a glance of fiery meaning, and he grinned—softly.

Picking up the khaki sock—Gheena often dropped it—Basil inquired gravely whether the holes were for the easily clipping in of suspenders, and really wilted this time before the look which flashed over the piece of knitting.

"There is quite a party here to-night," said Dillon, looking along the cliff. "Here is Mrs. Weston now."

Gheena, staring unhappily, suddenly remembered that she had promised to go to Mrs. Weston's and fetch her up to tea and: "It was all Crabbit's fault," said Gheena placidly. "I don't know why people are staying on here this year like this. Mrs. Weston hasn't even the excuse of drainage works."

Mrs. Weston, who was slim and upright and nice-looking, came tripping in, heels palpably too high, along the cliffs. She was quite ostensibly but neatly painted, and made no pretence as to the expense of her chestnut wig. She was a capable young woman, who now talked of taking a house at Duncahir because her people in Australia had joined the army and she was quite alone.

The district inspector, a stout and self-opinionated youth, had shown marked symptoms of admiration, these coupled with discreet desire to know if she was one of those widows whose husbands left provisos in their wills.

Mr. Keefe joined the group at the moment. He was also asked to tea, and Darby nodded.

Violet Weston held out an eager hand for the telegram and clamoured for news. Personally, she was one of the optimists who regarded the retreat as mere strategy to lure the Germans on, and who considered that the war would end in Berlin with the Kaiser on exhibition in a neat brass cage.

Stafford read the message aloud, keeping it himself.

"You see, you wouldn't understand it," said Gheena, eyeing her knitting. "He has them sent to him in some code or other."

Stafford tore up the wire into very small pieces and coloured faintly.

Mrs. Weston, walking on, was as fine as an optimist as Gheena had been as a strategist.

She reviewed the revealed facts of the Germans having been found starving, their foolish mistakes, and of that dreadful man, the Kaiser.

"The scald to him and his likes," said a voice bitterly.

The old kennel huntsman, Barty, limped out from behind a hedge of crim-

son fuchsias, his face set dolorously.

"The scald to all Kaysers," said Barty, "with Mrs. Day down to say, an' thruth in it, that seven geese were whipt lasht night, and that ould Larry Hassit, that was never too dacent, swearin' he'll pisin if the foxes isn't kilt. If there's no huntin' now there'll never be huntin' again, Misther Darby," said Barty lugubriously. "I declare to God the poor craythers of hounds an' I out, do be throwin' an eye across the finces an' then an eye up to me, an' they are but axin' the question aloud why they wouldn't be let off to hunt. Signs bye, the nice run I had afther two of the puppies last Thursday, and what harm but it was a hare an' I lambastin' them, Sammy must let the resht out of hand, and where did they make but up into Grange Gorse just across the road and frightened Mrs. Harby's bawn of cows hither an' over, an' she milkin' them at the time."

Gheena dropped her knitting, and wished to know if someone could not hunt the hounds. "Why not, Darby? And——" She could whip in, they might try.

Harold Keefe thought that if he was not too busy, that a joint mastership might be possible—say, Freyne and Dillon and himself; he looked important.

Darby leant over to Barty, because he knew the old man always had a hunting-horn in his pocket. This he extracted and handed politely to Keefe, with a wintry smile.

Mr. Keefe's cheeks assumed the proportions of cherubs as he endeavoured to wrest sound from the piece of fashioned metal. Having produced a faint squeak, he said irritably that of course anyone could learn to blow on the thing; and, anyhow, they might have whistles, as more respectful to the absent master's memory.

"God save ye—whistles!" Barty blew a clear shrill hoot on the horn—the quick toot of the "gone away"—and it set Gheena's pulses dancing, and brought a flush to Darby's cheeks as he limped along, holding his crutch deftly beneath his half useless arm.

"Forrard away! Away!" the shrill screech echoed out across the sea.

"But supposing—oh, the sock! thank you, Mr. Stafford—that we got leave to keep a bobbing back—if it is bobbery, it's just the same, Darby—and rout out the coverts and kill foxes. Now both the Slatterys have enlisted, so Michael Maher told me he would not run his 'baygles' this year, and there are lots of them."

Darby broke in to say thoughtfully that there were, and lots of varieties among them also.

"You could gather them up and keep them at Dillonsview, Barty, in the old yard, and everyone would love to come out, if Captain Lindlay would give us leave. He might even lend us Patience and Pollen to keep."

Barty murmured "God help us!—lend ye!" impolitely.

It is at all times difficult to discuss anything when one stands up. There

was a large rock jutting out of the short grass, and the three men sat down upon it, because the idea was worth thinking of.

Darby waved his crutch, Keefe and Barty chattered. The absent might be glad to have his wild country hunted over in some form. Subscriptions would roll in, everyone wanted to hunt—and it was really quite possible now that the war might last for the winter months.

"A bit of a note to the Captain," said Barty.

"It's quite absurd, but it might be done," said Darby.

"And you agree as to joint mastership and the whistles," said Harold Keefe.

"And I'll whip in," said Gheena, "as we could not get a temporary master and the huntsman left unexpectedly, and Lindlay is shy about a strange man."

"But—you don't really think they won't be completely beaten before the winter is over," chipped in Violet Weston. "Is it really worth while? They can't prosper, those dreadful treaty-breakers, can they? But, of course, hunting would be nice."

Mr. Keefe said that he knew of a horse, one the Government hadn't snapped, and to be bought for the value—if Mrs. Weston was for the chase.

That neat-looking lady said she was, indeed; but in Kleeawuvia there were no side saddles, and would people here object to her riding like a man?

Mr. Keefe replied that Lady Rosie O'Brien rode astride, and that ought to be enough for anyone. Here he tried to get up, to find himself enveloped in the grey warp and woof of Gheena's sock, a portion of the wool having unwittingly got round Darby's crutch, so that at every wave he had unwrought much labour.

Gheena, winding wrathfully, declared that if she had not just got on nicely in the plain part she would not have minded; but to re-do half a sock—here she hauled a loop tight about Mr. Keefe's plump neck, and made him gurgle voiceless wonder at the strength of wool.

When his pink flush had deepened to vermilion, he broke the strangling strand and gulped reproach at the unsympathetic but annoyed Gheena.

They had decided they would be too late for tea, and were walking on again, when with a hurricane of little squeaks Mrs. Weston discovered that she had dropped a topaz and diamond brooch of some value.

One which dear Francis had given to her, and the clasp had always been fairly good. The prospect of her tea faded as she looked across to where they had been sitting.

Basil Stafford felt the sad right at his youth when he offered to go back and look for the jewel.

"No. If Mr. Keefe will come, I know his eyes would find anything." A flashing glance almost dispelled the sinking desire for tea and plum cake which Mr. Keefe felt acutely.

"We won't be long," said Violet Weston, scuttling away on her high heels.

Mr. Keefe left with her and returned for a box of matches.

"I'll catch her easy," he said, with a blend of gloom and complacency in his voice. "The fine mover she'd be if it wasn't for those silly shoes she puts on because her feet are a bit out-size."

"All that planning for that fellow," observed Darby, looking after the hurrying pair.

CHAPTER II

It was considerably past five when Gheena Freyne coo-eed loudly towards the drawing-room window and followed the Australian call with a shriek for tea. Mrs. Freyne, promptly appearing on the door-step, observed placidly that she had not waited, and didn't they all think she was right?

Matilda Freyne was stoutly comely, possessed with a mild attractiveness which would never leave her. A quantity of shining red-gold hair, which declined to get grey, was puffed in old-fashioned style above her placid forehead. She had mild blue eyes and a charming voice.

"One never knows when Gheena goes to the sea what she may get into," continued Gheena's mother, holding out a plump hand. "Now wasn't I right, Darby, not to wait?"

When Darby said "You were, Matilda," the word brought a look of dislike which forty-six years of possession had not toned down.

"But they will boil a new kettle, and the hot cakes may not be quite cold," said their hostess cheerfully. "Even if they are, as they were, rather underdone, it will not much matter. And where is Mrs. Weston?"

Darby observed that the widow lady had gone looking for a topaz with Mr. Keefe and would be back presently. Mrs. Freyne, with a placid and unmoving finger on the bell, said she thought that was quite useless, because Dearest George had told her long ago that there were none on the Duncahir beaches. The only thing she had ever got there was that disappointing stone with the imitation silver in it; so perhaps they had better send the pantry boy to tell the others to come.

Basil Stafford stood at the window looking out. The trees had been cut away in front of the house to show a glimpse of the sea and the opposite cliffs.

Fuchsia hedges sheltered the empty flower-beds from the blast, and beyond the other fuchsia hedges sheltered the two smooth green tennis courts, where watchful Gheena pounced on every weed.

It was all still and peaceful in the falling autumn dusk, the golden light of the dipping sun still flashing below the curtain of clouds, a boat stealing home to harbour.

The hot cakes proved to have lost even warmth, but to have preserved their memory of their too early exit from the oven. Yet three young people ate them with fearless risk of indigestion.

Several very large cakes of heavy calibre stood on the wide tea-table. Mrs. Freyne had not as yet commenced the small economies of war time and given up raisins, cherries and icing.

The discussion concerning the possibility of the scratch pack of hounds rose and fell over the tea-table, spurred on by comments from old Barty, who was taking his tea just outside the front windows, nibbling cherry cake and enumerating the danger of not killing foxes.

"What I want to know is how many of them we are likely to kill," said Darby thoughtfully, "with those old harriers and our amateur hunting?"

Barty said: "What harrum so long as they'd see ye makin' endeavours?" And added, after a pause: "An' in spite of ye, Misther Darby, they might get away and pull down a sad one that wouldn't be too crabbit, or that was full of hins. Ye'd never know."

Darby coughed thoughtfully.

Mrs. Freyne, who still hunted, and went wherever her pilots led her, enjoying each hunt completely without a thought of what hounds were doing, was enthusiastic. She disliked riding without an object, and her dresses appeared to be shrinking.

"Of course, if Dearest George thought——"

Gheena saw Mrs. Weston's blue sailor hat in the distance, pointed to it, and asked where Dearest had got to.

Gheena had been a completely self-willed girl of eight when her mother had married again, and would probably have called him Papa or Daddy without thought, if her mother had not consulted her anxiously as to her convictions on second-hand fathers.

Once the idea of wronging the kindly deaf man, who had called her his Baby Seaweed, was placed in her head, Gheena started round her stepfather with suspiciously resentful eyes, and called him nothing until her mother's "Dearest George" made her mutinously say Dearest also, naughtily, feeling resentful surprise because it was accepted as a charming idea.

"We got it," said Keefe, mopping his pink forehead, "but I tell you we had

to look."

Basil Stafford asked where with a faint grin.

"On the edge of the cliff," said Keefe. "I'll take it stewed or roast, Mrs. Freyne, so long as it's wet. Where Mrs. Weston tried herself twice; but she sent me down the third time."

"And Mr. Keefe's sharp eyes saw it shining," said Mrs. Weston happily, patting a small ornament in her blouse. "I knew he could help if anyone could. If it's absolutely no trouble, Mrs. Freyne, I am afraid of very strong tea; it's nervy. And we walked so fast! Mr. Keefe flies. I'm tired."

"And I after her all the——" began Keefe blankly, and then stopped to drink.... Why put aside admiration even if undeserved.

At this point a motor came to the door and George Freyne bustled in.

He was an undersized man, with bushy eyebrows, cheeks which Gheena always said looked like pink pork-pies, and a dome-shaped bald head.

Anyone whom he failed to dominate he disagreed with; and as Mat the old groom used to remark: "The Masther begridged even if the fox to go the way he'd like himself."

He had been out on some mysterious business, which embraced visits to the coastguards, a cryptic and reluctant silence, and a look of impatience.

Sitting down to tea, he discussed the war with Mrs. Weston, becoming deeply pessimistic when she piped out her contempt of Germany, and then having left her floundering in a red sea of doubt and despair, would immediately explain how it all could be ended in a month, provided such-and-such plans were carried out, and if instead of Lord Kitchener and General French there were a few men unencased in red tape and not stale from custom of mimic warfare—a fresh brain in fact, such as he himself might bring, to plot and hew and smash until it was over.

The two played see-saw over the cold, slim cakes, until Mrs. Weston asked Dearest George what he might think of this wild idea of Gheena's, of gathering up hounds to eat foxes, because the farmers seemed worried about losing a few chickens.

"So unpatriotic of them, grumbling, with the hay at four pounds a ton," she said blandly.

It was, in fact, this way of putting it which made Dearest George immediately favour the prospect.

He said sharply that he could not see why, if it was at all feasible, Gheena should make silly objections.

Gheena opened her mouth—and shut it—wisely.

"The claims are positively pouring in," said George Freyne irritably. "There were three women and James Macavee here to-day, all with tales of dead geese

and hens."

"And even if the common herds was all they had to be pratin' over," put in Barty. "But here's one chattin' of Orpinntons, an' the next of Leggyhorns, an' another that paid tuppence apiece for eggs of the slim-mouthed Rocks, the lord liftenant an' lady havin' them all sot up an' above themselves with some schame for fancy breeds. An' the name alone bein' all that's right," added Barty, "seein' that a depot for maybe Speckledy Sussexes 'll be but twenty yards away from some woman that just keeps what she gits, an' the two flocks rootin' out in the one place. When 'twas claims for hins it could be put up with; but when it's claims for the schamers out of Dublin, then I tell you it's money."

"Barty came over about it," said Mrs. Freyne. "Did you, Barty, to ask Mr. Freyne his opinion?"

"I did not, ma'am," said Barty placidly, "nor think of such nonsense. It would be bether for ye to take the cup, Miss, an' Crabbit nosin' around it; but if we could gather even thim objecs of dogs, an' to show the red coats an' all, it might be the way it would make them think we was kapin' up the counthry, an' good in nonsense."

Gheena, now greatly excited, said that she would go the very next day to see about the hounds. Darby had old kennels at his place.

When Dearest George intimated curtly that he must take the car next day, as he had to drive to the coastguard station at the far side of the harbour, Gheena replied that she could walk. "The nearest Dayly was quite close, and even if the farthest were farther on——"

Darby said "Yes," and picked up the knitting thoughtfully.

"Well, it was, that was all. And you can come, Darby, and meet me at the cross roads below Macinerny's Public House, and drive me the rest of the way."

Violet Weston, smoking a cigarette, wanted to know if there was any real fear of anything happening, as there was so much fuss about coastguards.

"Our ships will never let anything happen," she said stoutly.

"Henry Ashleigh is gone," burst out George Freyne, "to drive a motor. I forgot to tell you. I'd go myself, but I'm too useful here."

"You haven't applied for anything yet, have you?" Gheena turned with crushing directness to Basil.

"Well, you see, I'm in the pay of the Government, and only the Government can let me go," he said quietly. "If the drainage works were shut up, all those men who bought the farms on the understanding that they would be drained for them would be cheated."

To this Miss Freyne observed freezingly that she would have thought an older man could have looked after drains, and drummed on the tea-table, laying down her knitting.

Barty raised his battered hunting cap to say good-night. As he turned he shaded his keen old eyes, and looked out at the ship of rocks just visible in the grey dusk.

"I never seen such a man as the ould Professor for beltin' around the cliffs," remarked Barty, "crackin' thim rocks with a hammer that can only be irritaytin' thim, an' off back with picks and bits that he is gropin' over till two in the mornin's, behind his specs. A tax on ile 'd be the bad one for him," said Barty slowly.

A little withered thing, he went off briskly, one leg slightly shorter than the other, one arm a little stiff. His collar-bones had grown almost weary of being mended; one thumb was bent in, and a little finger crooked, as if perpetually poised to hover politely over food. But Barty was hale and active still, and thought mournfully how much he would have liked to come out to hunt hounds again himself, a post which his broken leg and subsequent ill-health had taken from him.

He skirted the clipped laurels, passed under the vast arch, put up as a gateway in almost all old yards, and peered into the kitchen to ask the big peppery Anne, the cook, "If firin' was short, that the cakes wasn't baked above."

"Didn't I put them on for Miss Gheena, and mustn't the Missus have them out for herself?" said Anne good-humouredly. "Terrible times, Barty! To be lookin' above in the air for thim Zepherills they do talk about, and Donellan the coastguard havin' chat about the underground ships bein' about beside the coast watchin' us, till they've a chance to swhoop."

Barty then gave some lurid details as to the life on Bretham Island, where the officers dined in the cellars, sitting on the ammunition, "they were so afraid of it being struck."

"If I was to be flyin'," Anne observed, as she deposited a large leaf of pastry on a gigantic pie.

Barty said "Yes" politely. Anne weighed fourteen stone.

"I'd fly," said Anne darkly, as she opened the oven door, "where—where flyin' 'd be of use," she added. "Not hither an' over just to say there was a man here an' a gun there, but off to Berlin. An' if I didn't drop what 'd hate him up on the Kayser my name isn't Anne Dwyer. Th' ould vilyin. Isn't Paddy Hanratley's life lost be his devilment, in that retrate from Mongs? He is on to-day's paper."

Barty abstracted the *Irish Times* from the dresser and read the news greedily. He raised his head to tell the cook, now surrounded by a halo of several attentive maids, that the land was sown with spies.

"Two holy nuns taken in Cork," said Barty. "I had it for a fact from me aunt's cousin be marriage, her nephew being husband to the landlady's dather. An' the two of thim takin' lodgin's, sayin' they was out for charity, an' God

save us, didn't the little gerril carry in hot wather one mornin' without knockin', an' out she runs, for their caps was off, an' the two big faces of men above the bedclothes. Masther Darby says they beyant are going to make a shot to invade us, the vilyins, an' spies here is mappin' out the very ripples on the say, an' every turf sod in the land, so as to be ready for them."

"Me Dadda has us towlt," began Maria the between-maid, "I am slicin' the pyates, Mrs. Dwyer, ma'am, for the fryin'. Me Dadda has it they'll come frindly with no waypons on them; not another penny, then, need we pay for the land we has bought, an' the hay barns, nor nothin'."

"The Germans bein' such gran' men they can live without money," said Barty dryly. "God send ye're Dadda sinse, Maria Harty, an' something to do besides clanin' his boots markin' time on Sundays with the Volunteers."

Then Phil the groom coming in, observed: "That he'd seen a German Frollin that was maid to some at the hotel. An' bottled plums she clapped into a stew that she had leave to make. An' quare soorts of sossidges they'd get over the wather, black as the coals, Anne, an' solid."

Barty folded up the paper, sighing as he did so; then he leant forward.

"What is that ould Professor knocking chips out of the rocks for?" he whispered darkly.

Anne the cook sat down heavily, and prayed to the heavens above her to see her safe from harm, with all their talk.

"Makin' channels for submarines, he might be, with his hammer," she whispered fearfully. "Oh, good evenin' to ye, Barty. Good evenin'. There could be no good behind his black specs," went on Anne fearfully. "God betune us an' harrum; no good at all. An' there is the pie burnin', an' all the fault of that ould Kayser," she added, as she rolled with a wail to the oven to announce that the grannut ornymints she even drew out were black as a Germin's heart, and to scold everyone quite impartially and without resentment for the occurrence, they putting professors into her head.

Upstairs Mrs. Freyne was consulting Dearest as to whether the Army was really retreating, or whether it was only reported so as to deceive the Germans and bring forward recruits.

Dearest adjusted his glasses to explain pompously that going backwards was not advancing, and to illustrate with the flower-vases until one fell off never to stand upright again, and Gheena went to dress hurriedly.

Her big room looked out to the sea. It was high up, and she could see, when it was light, the restless waters beyond the point as well as the calmer stretch shown by the gap in the trees.

Leaning out, the soft dampness of the autumn air welcome after the stuffy heat of the drawing-room, Gheena thought she saw a flicker of light far away

just where the cliffs were honeycombed by endless caves.

"I don't believe—in—any drains," said Gheena to the night very severely. "And I should certainly go to be a nurse if it was not for the knitting club."

Gheena's room possessed the advantage of a side door reached by a narrow flight of stairs just beneath it. Dearest showing signs of irritation at trails made by damp bathing dresses and Crabbit's paws on the polished hall, Gheena had taken over this door for herself and ran from it, in the morning generally, clad in nothing but her bathing dress, to return dripping under a light mackintosh, with Crabbit barking at her bare heels.

She bathed, too, sometimes on hot summer nights; delighting in the dripping flames which fell from her finger, and the blue fire streaks as she struck out. These night baths, when her mother reposed in a room which gave oblations to hygiene with a slightly opened window, behind which thick curtains were carefully drawn, were only known to the housemaid and the cook, who considered them outrageous, but said nothing.

"I should like to bathe to-night. Crabbit, you're snuffling. You couldn't come. And we might, after dinner, Crabbit, though it is October, after we are baked downstairs."

Dearest George disliking draughts, the library curtains were always closely drawn on still nights, and the shutters closed when a wind blew; also, there was always a fire. He sat there now, thinking; the problem of Gheena troubled George Freyne deeply. His objection to the Dower House, which lurked in a gloom of trees on the very edge of the cliff, increased hourly. A stealthy backwater came fawning to the end of the garden, casting up chill salt airs from its slowly moving waters, yet sea-like enough to expose an unsightly stretch of shingle and rock at low tide, and to sap in a mean, secretive way at the protecting wall of the garden, picking away constant gaps. Castle Freyne became Gheena's, when she married, and a nephew of George Freyne's, who combined meekness of mind, strong conceit with plump cheeks and an Irish accent, had been decided upon as Gheena's future spouse.

In fact, failing Gheena, he was the next heir following a life tenancy by Matilda Freyne, so it was only right.

This Lancelot Freyne had been considered too delicate to go to school, and had strayed to manhood in his home, tyrannized over by his too fond mother. Now having dutifully ridden to hounds, gone out shooting, and applied his mind to the courtship ordered by his mother, Lancelot had upset all calculations by immediately getting a commission from the Militia and going off to train in a camp in England.

Castle Freyne was quite large enough for everyone, but Gheena, as owner, might show a still more marked desire for open windows, unguarded by curtains

or shutters, and also for various innovations which made a comfort-loving soul shiver apprehensively. In any case, it would be hers when she was twenty-five.

Gheena, coming down to dinner in white, was exceedingly good to look at, and with strangers at Dunaleen Camp Mr. Freyne grew anxious.

The night fell in a mist of grey stillness, broken by a taint whimper of little waves weeping as they broke upon the rocks.

Gheena put on a black cloak, wrapped her head in a Lusky veil and slipped away to the shore. It was cold to bathe, but she scarcely knew what she was going out to look for. Some patrol ships, coastguards tramping—anything to show her that war raged somewhere, despite the grey peace upon Ireland. Her mother had already begun to re-read the papers and ask for explanations, until her husband fell asleep; then she would fall asleep herself, until ten o'clock, when she invariably awoke with great vigour, and hoped Dearest George would not lose his figure for his bad habit of sleeping in his chair, and then read a novel until eleven, when she put out all the lamps, drank hot milk, and went to bed.

Crabbit scuttled into the undergrowth, crashing through it with little short yelps, as he scented rabbits. Gheena stepped on to where the low cliffs jutted to oppose the sea. The waters whispered, fretting, lapping, sucking through the rocks; lifted on the coming tide the fringe of brown seaweed rustled faintly as it awoke to the life of the sea. A sleeping row of sea-birds on a peak of brown rock, a blur of white just visible.

Gheena had put on tennis shoes; she moved soundlessly, sure-footed, across the still uncovered rocks, stooped at the edge of the tide, where it lapped deep and cool, to put her hands in, and see the blue drip run off her fingers back to the gleaming tide.

At this point, Crabbit, having mislaid her, uttered a yell of anguish, and hurled himself noisily across the rocks, his unerring nose down.

This onrush was stopped by something solid, which melted and slipped with sudden outcry into a fairly deep pool.

As the something rose and groped, it said aloud several things of extreme pungency, and wished to know what the—well—earthly dickens sea-serpents or wild goats were out on the rocks for at midnight, knocking people down for.

The voice bearing a distinct resemblance to Mr. Basil Stafford's, Gheena observed aloud, calmly, that it was neither a sea-serpent nor a goat.

"But only Crabbit tracking me, with you in his way." And then she wished to know why he did not come out at once.

Mr. Stafford said something rather indistinctly, and then more clearly, that it seemed to be the damn sea-urchins' pool; and everywhere he put his hands down to catch a rock, he had, so far, caught prickles and couldn't get out.

The sound of a finger noisily sucked was followed by the smell of hot metal

and the flash of a dark lantern, blinding in the gloom. By its rays Basil Stafford swished through the knee-deep water and stepped out on to dry rocks.

"He took me just under the knees, like an avalanche, that dog," he said irritably. "I just jumped in time to get in on my feet. I've sand shoes on, too. What on earth," he said, "are you doing down here in the dark by this hang pool?"

"Looking for submarines," said Gheena dreamily.

Stafford thought dryly that the sea-urchins' pool would certainly be a good base, and that perhaps there might be a Dreadnought in the bathing creek. He shook his head and by the light of the lantern extracted prickles from his fingers.

"Anne Dwyer says they all fester," observed Gheena, watching with interest, "and you're breaking half of them. Here!"

She took the big brown hand in hers, extracting gently but deftly; Mr. Stafford insisting, as she said she could see no more, that he felt two of the worst just in below his first and second fingers, and the light of the lantern proving quite inadequate to illuminate them.

"And as I said, why Crabbit should have been on the rocks," said Stafford—"further down, on the fat place—and why he chose that pool."

"There isn't any fat place," said Gheena. "And why"—she raised her eyes—"why were you out?" she asked emphatically.

"It's right in the muscle, and I shall never use those fingers again. I—well—I saw—queer lights," said Stafford, after a pause. "Chaps here might start—er—smuggling again. And—oh, good Lord!" Crabbit barked at the sharp yell of anguish.

"I was only just using the pin of my brooch to burrow, as you were so sure there was a prickle there." Gheena re-pinned her brooch with hurt dignity. "Smuggle tobacco! One doesn't think of that kind of smuggling nowadays," she said bitingly. "It's smuggling German emperors and admirals and 'U' boats."

The lantern had suddenly been extinguished, and the noise of sucking, mingled with grunts of pain, came from the gloom beside her. A sound of footsteps coming cautiously could be heard on the strip of shingle at high-water mark.

"The coastguards," said Stafford. "Er—I say, hadn't you better?—they won't see us if you sit down. It's late."

Gheena replied that the last yell might even have produced the patrol ship from the point; and as she had known Matthew O'Hara and Tim Linsham all her life, she really did not see why they should not see her now, especially when they could not in that light.

So they sped lightly back across the rocks, unheard until Crabbit growled with emphasis.

Someone said "Shucks," in tones of distant alarm.

Stafford flashed the light again upon the spectacled, wondering face of Pro-

fessor Machaffy of Bee-bar-oo, somewhere in New South Wales, who again said "Shucks," before he became a shadow in the gloom.

"I take a little walk almost every night," said the Professor mildly, "before I go in to sort specimens. It fills the lungs with ozone. And you! You also take a little walk." There was a distinct quiver of understanding laughter in his good-natured old voice.

"On fine nights the unseen world is very beautiful, because as a lost love, you remember all its perfections," went on the Professor. "The darkness is Zimmerian," he added blandly.

"Never quite lost the German accent, Professor?" said Basil easily. There was a pause; the Professor, judging by the shower of shingle, appeared to have kicked some of it.

"After several years' study—there," he said slowly. "It is difficult, Mr. Stafford. I'm learning, as in war they study closely," he added. "We have no such scientists in England. I bid you good-night. It is time for me to get in."

They could hear him chuckle again as he shuffled off.

One by one the lights at Castle Freyne were blinking out; Matilda Freyne was going to bed.

"And you?" said Stafford, a little anxiously to Gheena.

"I—oh!" Gheena explained her side entrance.

Mr. Stafford said if that was so, he had just found a new and vicious prickle in the palm of his hand. She could feel it—there was no need of light.

He sat down in the short, sweet grass and Gheena sat beside him, her nimble, deft fingers pressing at the spot he guided them to.

The lap and whisper of the coming tide was clear in the grey stillness.

"Crabbit—Crabbit, you are breathing hard, just in my ear," said Gheena. "Go away. I can't get the thing. Sit still, Mr. Stafford."

Stafford leant back a little to listen to the aggressive snuffle of Crabbit at his right side and some distance away.

CHAPTER III

"There is three of them here inside, Miss," said Mary Casey, looking round. "Doatee, Beauty, an' Colleen. Colleen had three pups, but he has them reared this long ways' back, an' one is gone to Marty, me cousin, for the sheeps. Indeed, then,

I am sure an' certain, Miss, that neyther Matt nor Jim would oppose any wish ye have for the dogs, an' I'd be glad to be out of feedin' them myself. Matt is in Bedford, Miss, and Jim in Aldershot presently, an' ye can be afther writin' to them both."

Gheena asked a little feebly for the other hounds.

Young Andrew Casey, aged twelve, issued from behind a curtain of shyness to observe that these three were the besht dogs in the lot. "Colleen can enthrap a cat as well as a hare," he said proudly. "And Beauty there, when he do catch a rot, 'd bring it in to his pups an' not ate it himself."

Mrs. Casey told her son not to be gabbin' before the genthry, so Andrew withdrew again behind the haystacks, a watchful eye on his favourites.

"There is two pairs at Danny's, Miss."

"And one is not a hound at all," chimed in the now irresistible Andrew, "but a torrier. He is Dandy's pup."

Dandy, busily engaged in chasing fleas, raised a yellow head when her name was mentioned.

"Hould ye're whisht, Andy, the child is demented for them dogs, Miss. He'd ax no bether than be afther them. An' don't be mindin' him, Miss Gheena, for the torrier Doatie's pup as well, with a gran' huntin' nose on him."

Doatie, a pied hound with bandy legs, wagged a pleased tail, and threw his tongue to show his breeding.

Gheena had not found Darby waiting for her, so had taken a short cut to the Caseys', found its apparently straight way barred a boggy trench, and had had to climb up a steep hill, where slates and small quagmires lived cheek by jowl in united friendship. To step squelchily from one and slip with a sharp slaty grate into another had proved tiring. Also, Gheena, inspired by Violet Weston's blue suede shoes, had put on a pair with bright buckles, which she looked at proudly until she missed her way, and then remembered remorsefully the slighted brogues in her room at Castle Freyne. The charm of comparing her feet with the widow's had now completely evaporated.

Marty Casey's, where two more pairs of the pack could be seen, was pointed out to her, a thin trail of smoke marking its chimney.

"The road to it does be leadin' around," said Mrs. Casey; "but across the hills it is not a mile only. Would ye say the dirty piece 'd be good walkin' to-day, Andy?"

"I would not," said Andrew, appearing suddenly, holding Beauty by her forelegs. "I went down a foot in it meself yestherday," he added briefly; "an' I light, not like yerself."

"There's sphots, even if ye go discreet, that is onaisy, but I do go that way meself."

Gheena chose the road with decision. She wrote down the regiments of Jim and Matt and sighed drearily.

Several hounds were billeted in small cottages in the neighbourhood, and she meant to try to see them all. But the conciliation of the Caseys being necessary before any others could be looked at, she shook hands and tramped away.

Andrew, trotting beside her, asked wistfully if she was sot on the dogs.

"Beauty do be sleepin' with me," he said shyly. "I lets him in anonst an' me Mama aslheep."

Gheena, seeing something glimmer behind bright eyelashes, promised Andy that if they hunted, she would lend him Ratty, her Welsh pony, for every meet. This was a small mouse-coloured animal, which attacked large banks as if they were a ladder, but always got to the other side without mishap, and which could go all day. Walls were not often seen, and timber he either went over or under, in both cases generally dislodging his rider. He had a mouth of iron and the self-will of Lucifer, coupled with complete determination to get after hounds, but he was absolutely safe and neither kicked nor bucked.

"Every nice day if we hunt, then, Andy," said Gheena. "And—and you wouldn't like to see all the foxes dead and none to go after when the poor huntsmen come back from the war."

The light of desire in Andy's eyes showed that he would now put up with even the loss of Beauty as a bedfellow. He knew Ratty well.

A doubt concerning a "ridin' throuser" being solved by the promise of a pair of his very own, Andy's eyes sparkled wildly, and to show his gratitude he offered guidance by the short cut, explaining that he had not even an eye sthuck to his feet when he crossed in it yestherday, the two dogs an' Dandy bein' close on a hare; so it might be right if crossed careful.

Gheena chose the road. She had often jogged up it out hunting; now it seemed to wind interminably, and the surface to grate away under each step she took.

High banks, with blackberry vines and honeysuckle sprawling over them, kept away the wind. Gheena toiled up a steep glen and thought out what she would say to Darby. In the glen the clinging friendship of the blackberry and honeysuckle gave way to bare red banks spangled with slabs of drab slate, which caught and gave back the heat of the sun, little oozing trickles of moisture being quite insufficient to cool them.

The glen ended at cross roads. Gheena stood still there. She was extremely hot, her feet ached in the buckled shoes, and she eyed the winding brown ribbon of road turning towards the left towards Marty Casey's house with bitter dislike.

It was a road advancing without apparent method, turning up to the right, then finding that scenery dull, and running off to the left again, climbing steep

hills which it apparently might have avoided, and avoiding others which would have shortened its way by miles, its surface, two ruts and gravelly stones, and its edges inhospitable ditches of boggy water.

It was only the prospect of telling Darby of his slackness which made Gheena draw a long breath and look toward the road with gloomy determination. Perhaps Marty Casey had a trap or a cart which he could drive her back to the town in.

The tuff-tuff of a motor made her look round hopefully; a long grey nose glided round the sharp corner where the roads branched to the right, and Basil Stafford put down his foot-brake with a jar.

"I was out at Cloony Point, and I thought that I might find you and Dillon seeing the hounds," he said.

Gheena greeted him ill-humouredly. His grey tweed suit was so completely unlike khaki, and she was in the mood to be jarred.

She wished to know irrelevantly, "Why roads could not go straight to places? Up and down, and round about," said Gheena, with a note of hysterical over-fatigue in her voice, "and everywhere, as if they were playing 'Round the Mulberry Bush' instead of going to Marty Casey's. You make drains. Why don't they go straight?"

Stafford thought apologetically that perhaps it was because there were several places to go to. In the still soft air little trails of blue-brown smoke showed where houses stood.

When Gheena merely snorted, unconvinced, he also explained that in places road-builders found boggy spots or solid rock, and it was more expedient to go round these obstacles to avoid expense.

"People with sense," said Gheena witheringly, "make flat roads. I only thought you might have known. Of course, drains are so simple."

Here Mr. Stafford very humbly offered her a lift, and asked about the hounds.

"Crooked-legged, splay-footed beagles," said Gheena "and Dandys and sheep-dogs. But we could ride after them," she said, brightening up; "they would hunt."

"A Dandy Dinmont," said Stafford absently, "wouldn't hunt far."

Gheena replied icily that she had never mentioned Dandy Dinmonts. Even the Dunkillen people did not hunt over Scotch terriers, and there was no wit in being absurd.

"I—you mentioned Dandies." Stafford's cheeks were a little red. "Shall I drive you on?"

"I can walk," said Gheena coldly. To drive with Basil Stafford would be to tacitly condone his shortcomings.

"Oh, very well. I'm sorry." A sly start sent the grey car throbbing into life; she began to back for the turn home.

Gheena was very tired; she grew white, and the stately hills seemed to gain in size; before her stretched the interminable badly laid-out mountain road.

"And you'd much better drive," said Stafford, humbly again. "It's quite a long way—if you want to see those hounds. It's important."

Gheena got in slowly.

"Or—er—see Dandies," he added as he put in the clutch.

"Dandy was the mother," said Gheena impatiently, "Dandy the terrier. And the pup is some kind of hound one side. I said Dandy, not Dandies."

Stafford stopped the car suddenly. He was sorry to disturb her, but he had forgotten to put in petrol.

Far below them lay the sea, dimpling and flashing in the sunlight, greeny dark by the cliffs, grey blue in the long neck of the harbour, a great carpet of diamond points outside. Leeshane rose its long grey hump from the flash; Innisfail was vaguely purple. Here and there on the great splashing water-way a red sail glinted, or a smudge of smoke hung darkly as some steamer thrashed its uneasy way to harbour.

Gheena sat on the step of the car, looking out. Just behind these hills and across the harbour they hunted. It was hilly and boggy; there were woods and lakes, but patches of grass gave them short glimpses of gallops, and when one got used to it there was joy in the scramble: in hounds hunting over the heathery hills and the ever-constant fear of losing them when they vanished into a glen, or one of the thick little pine woods which were set as dark emeralds in the grey hill-sides. Joy in the perfection of those bursts over grass fields with low banks to jump. And quite far inland, if their fox was kind enough to avoid a chain of lakes and a big bog, there was quite a stretch of good country. It was fox-hunting with its hopes and fears, its joys and sorrows, its mystery of uncertainty. The little field down there was as keen watching hounds run as though they rode in far-famed Leicestershire, and crossed the fox-hunting paradise in Limerick.

Peace hung over the land; the withering heather gave tinge of purple still; the sun caught the slate beds on the hills, making them gleam dull red and brown, and below there was the wonder of the sea.

"One cannot realize it—here," almost whispered Gheena. "Dust and the pound of feet, and the rattle of guns, and men out to kill each other in this quiet world."

"France was as quiet as this—two months ago," Basil said quietly. "Rows of poplars, long white roads, sluggish rivers, great patches of yellowing corn, grapes growing purple. I've been at a big camp," he said, "and seen and heard the rattle and the tramp and the men's faces come out of the cloud of yellow dust—kindly,

merry faces, all so keen for war—and now all fighting...."

"For us," said Gheena very deliberately—"fighting."

"For—us," he said after a pause, looking straight at her. It was Gheena who flushed; except when speared on by patriotism, she was naturally polite and averse to hurting people's feelings.

Something in the flash in Stafford's eye made her look away for quite a long time at the nearest smudge of smoke.

An answering flash hidden from him rose in her own eyes. One could serve one's country by other ways than the knitting of stockings. When she turned, she had smoothed accusation from her expression and even smiled.

"It is almost impossible to realize," she said dreamily, and with a clarified innocence of having meant anything by that emphasized "is."

Basil Stafford eyed her suspiciously, until a sudden smile made him quite good-looking. He took out a pair of glasses.

"That's a liner," he said. "See the far-off steamer, and those are two tramps with food for us. What if the Germans fulfil the threat they are whispering of already and cut off our supplies? It would be reality then, Miss Freyne, over here."

"We could burn turf and eat chickens," said Gheena briefly, "and catch fish. We need never starve here. And is that petrol in yet? I told Darby Malachi's public house, and I waited there and left a message."

"You said McInerny's," said Stafford, screwing down the tank. "Not Malachi's."

"McInerny's—no. Ask Darby."

Gheena found people who contradicted her extremely tiresome. She flashed an awe-inspiring glance at her pilot and repeated "Malachi's" angrily. Lancelot never dared to contradict her; he might disagree vaguely, but he only did it in his mind and not aloud; or to his mother afterwards, who would say, sighing, that heiresses were always wrong-minded; but that, after all, once there was money nothing mattered, and that it was only in small houses with one sitting-room that quarrelling was really objectionable. Lancelot had been duly instructed that he was to marry his cousin Gheena.

"Well, if I said McInerny's I meant Malachi's, and Darby might know the other would be quite out of my way, unless I went to fetch the letters, and it was too early for that," said Gheena, unruffled. "Is—there—any news to-day?"

Basil stopped the car to pull out a telegram, one crisply short.

"We are retreating. They are close to Paris," he said quietly. "The roses in the papers are red roses out yonder, Miss Freyne. No break in our line. Retreating in perfect order. Kaiser's time-table wrong. Germans fed on beet. The nonsense of it all absorbed with boiled eggs at breakfast. Eggs put up by the war too."

"This car," said Gheena, offended at the mating of war news and boiled eggs,

"came up Lishna Hill quite quickly. Did she do it on second?"

"Well, no—on top," said Stafford apologetically. "No load, you see."

"She must be a very powerful car," said Gheena suspiciously. "A twenty, is she?"

"Well, yes," said Stafford meekly, suppressing the extra twenty-five. "Yes, I—was given her, you see, by the——"

He stopped short at the word to swing in a narrow gate, while Gheena, leaning back, wondered darkly why a humble inspector or overseer of drainage works should own so powerful a two-seater. Her active mind was so full of conjectures that she awoke with a start to their stoppage in a small field fenced by banks topped with slates, and was greeted by a small woman with ill-tempered eyes.

The prospects of getting rid of four useless hounds appeared to appeal to her instantly.

"There bein' no one to hunt afther them now, an' blow Jim's bugle, and yellow male up to the height of Hiven."

The four hounds, now produced, lounged out for inspection from happy slumber on roasting slates, stretching themselves and yawning.

Daisy, Bridgie, Grandjer and Greatness were of much the same breed as the four first seen. Daisy was a dog hound, names being irrelevant, with some strain of foxhound in him; the others were not particular as to ancestry, but they could all hunt. Grandjer was black and tan, with a docked tail, because, old Casey explained, Jim thought from the colour of him that he was likely to be a torrier.

This was clearly young Dandy.

This Mrs. Casey proffered tea. It was laid in the best parlour, a room of leaden atmosphere, with a great deal of fancy-work about. The grate, instead of cascades of sooty paper, was genteelly hidden by a painted fire-screen, covered with crimson daffodils with purple leaves, and a stork, greatly disturbed at his surroundings, flapping over them. This, they were informed, was the work of Anastasia Casey above at the convent.

Tea was welcome, but oppressed by fashion; appearing on a japanned tray, with slices of baker's bread cut neatly, and pats of butter to apply to it.

Gheena yearned for soda cake, hot—she had seen one in the kitchen—but ate the crumbling papery-crusted slices with resignation, while Mrs. Casey hoped it wasn't too stale entirely, and discussed the war as something one saw in the papers.

"There was talk of Tom Guinane's goin'," she said, pouring out more tea. "Would ye have a neg with it, Miss Gheena, or a taste of jam? The appetite's lavin' ye—but he said he couldn't lave the boat. I would not thrust them Guinanes, anyways," added Mrs. Casey. "There's too much politics in them, spachin' an'

chattin' instead of working steady, an' then laying the blame on the King if there isn't the price of a pint in ye're pocket; that's the soort them Guinanes are, Miss."

Gheena nodded. Tom Guinane was a Sinn Feiner, blackly opposed, it would sometimes appear, to everything except all land for nothing, taxes paid by England, free carriage of all fish. These, when he was really brought to bay, were the limits he advanced.

"They are a bad lot out there on Lishannon," said Gheena thoughtfully.

"And in a bad place for a bad lot," put in Basil, "On the point."

Darby Dillon's crutch banged open the door, and he came in, wanting to know why he was left for several hours—in fact, until he drove up and saw Gheena's mother—waiting, in the wrong place.

"If I said McInerny's I meant Malachi's," repeated Gheena impenitently. "And you must have known, Darby, I wasn't likely to want to walk across the shingle to McInerny's in these shoes."

"Not having been there to put them on," said Darby placidly, and avoiding Basil's eye; "but, of course, I might have known, after the fair Violet's yesterday. I'll have hot cake, Mary; I saw some outside."

"If I hadn't been afraid of offending her," said Gheena, thinking regretfully of two dry slices swallowed languidly.

"You were talking of Lishannon and the lot there," said Darby. "There was a chap round last year lodging there, and I'd say a lot of someone's money stayed behind him. There's queer talk down there in the dusk, I tell you."

"What could them foreigners do here an' they not havin' the English to back them?" said Mrs. Casey contemptuously. "Father Dan gave out from the althar that there was no fear of any Germans here, and he should know, for he was at a mission in China for three years."

"So he'd know all about heathens," said Darby gravely.

"He does so," said Mrs. Casey.

"I hears that young widdy below does be takin' Tom Guinane an' looking for mackerels," she said, "an' payin' him five shillin' a day, and none to tell her the robbery. That Tom is the broth of a rogue. Will I lave in the dogs to the back of yere stheam carriage, Misther Darby?"

"You will not," said Darby firmly, "unless Miss Gheena comes to hold them in."

"They might all be aisy but Grandjer. An' a cat couldn't show its whiskers on the road but he'd lep out an' up as if it 'twas an air balloon," Mrs. Casey said thoughtfully. "Bether to throttle them up and let one of the boys carry them to the great house."

Basil Stafford hastily interfered to say that they did not want the hounds dead, and was told sharply by Darby that throttlin' was merely an expression

signifying roping up.

"If Mrs. De Burgho Keane wasn't coming to tea to-morrow," said Gheena, walking stiffly, with footsore feet, "I'd go to look at the kennels, Darby. There are about ten other things called hounds about, and they could be collected late when they heard from the Master."

"If he vetoes it," said Darby, "thinking we'll spoil his foxes by making them run too slow, we'll hunt something, Gheena, if it's only a herring. Crabbit is outside thinking of fighting with Grandjer."

Crabbit was disputing the entrance to a rat-hole, every hair on his red body bristling, with Grandjer unabashed, gurgling out defiance beside him.

Crabbit, removing himself with reluctance, got into the long, low two-seater and brooded in the wrongs of life. Gheena limped to Darby's car.

"I saw Mrs. Weston with Keefe out on the coast road," said Basil, "and the Ford appeared to be stuck. They were at her for half an hour."

"And—you never helped her?" Gheena swung round.

"Oh, well, I saw them from Dunleep Hill, you see," he said apologetically. "I was just looking down at the road, and saw. One watches the sea these days," he added, hesitating a little.

"What she sees in that pink peony, Keefe?" said Darby. "A smart little woman."

Basil said "Taking" absently. "I'm dining there to-night," he went on, "to hold cards. Not to play Bridge, because only two of us know how, and if we get against the other two, they upset us so much we invariably lose, and if we cut them they upset us still more, and I get to bed with my brain very like a piano in a damp climate. The old Professor makes the fourth."

"To-night, then, I make a fifth," said Gheena. "Crabbit and I are walking over at nine. What! It's not safe out so late alone, Mr. Stafford? Do crabs and jelly-fish attack one, or coastguards looking out for nothing on earth?"

Darby's small car bounced down the hill with the energy, over ruts, due to her short wheel base. She took hills with a grunt of effort, and was unpleasantly opposed to the gliding of Stafford's two-seater.

Mrs. Weston, seated on a bench outside her cottage, with very brilliant orange suede shoes liberally displayed, ran across to stop them, and to inquire eagerly about the hounds. She had already written about a saddle, and that kindly Mr. Keefe was looking out for a horse for her. Darby said mildly that it would be well if she looked out herself, and smiled softly. Harold Keefe had already gone in for some horse-coping.

In the matter of horses, it was evident that Violet Weston was distressingly feminine. She chattered about light-weights and the easiness of finding hunters for a lady as if Queen Victoria still reigned.

"Mr. Keefe advises a side-saddle," she said, "as he's afraid Mrs. De Burgho Keane doesn't like innovations. But neither do I, so I am going to risk riding my own way."

There was something very taking in Violet Weston's bright eyes and slightly squeaky voice.

Darby said so as they drove on.

"Only they seem to be a decade behind the times in Australia," he said, as he swung in the wide iron gates where two stone animals snarled indefinitely at either side.

Darby found George Freyne on the steps, examining the butcher's book by the failing light, and raving at the cost of war. Matilda, his wife, was sitting down—she never stood up for long—and blandly suggesting that it did not matter, as one could eat chickens and game, and herrings would be coming in, that is. Didn't Dearest George think so?

"And lobsters, if Gheena would get Phil to set out the baskets." Dearest produced a pencil, with which he commenced to write down suggestions for economies.

Less cakes for tea; there were baskets of eggs used up every week; less bacon for breakfast; a rigid allowance in the kitchen.

"Didn't you sell your bullocks for more than you expected?" Darby asked, as he put a warm cloak over the Darracq's bonnet. "And if Reedy pays you more, you must pay Reedy more, mustn't you?"

This philosophy proving distasteful, Darby took out nis crutch and shuffled nimbly up the steps.

Gheena had stopped to talk to a fair-haired boy who, when you looked closer, appeared to have been a man for years.

The young man, Phil said, was coughing slightly.

"But she'd ate all before her," said Phil cheerily. "What's that, Ma'am? I'm to set out lobster pots, mate bein' up."

"Them Guinanes do be goin' on at me when I sets out the pots," he whispered to Gheena. "Bitther as horse-chestnuts. But if ye give me a couple of shillin's, Miss Gheena, I'll buy two lobsters from them, an' no one wiser."

This part of the régime of war economy having been disposed of satisfactorily, the news was talked of, picture papers, their illustrations almost aquiver with contempt for Germany, looked at, and the situation discussed heatedly.

"Some people, or people who know, tell me that there is a regular nest of spies all along the coast, ready for months," said Darby, as he ate portions of the sirloin of beef which his host carved with manifest care. "Bases for submarines, with oil for them, and even wireless installations. Those little houses out there on the cliff could use those nicely, couldn't they?"

Gheena was very thoughtful when she set out to Seaview, the intensely obvious name of so many seaside lodges. She was going across the beach, so Darby did not offer to go with her. He stood leaning on his crutch, watching her disappear into the shadows, and his sigh as he turned to go in and play picquet was tinged with impatience. It is hard to stand still in life while others walk easily.

One side showed scant trace of injury, the other so twisted and crippled. The doctor who had patched him together had told him that in time the crushed limbs might grow stronger, a broader hope of activity came to him. But the leg dragged heavily now as he hobbled up the shallow steps.

Gheena begged Crabbit to let rabbits sleep, and swung down on to the beach; she could see the lights of a ship at the quay, one which came in a few times a year with supplies for the villagers. Someone was pushing a boat off; she heard the scrape on the shingle.

Crabbit resented the intrusion on his foreshore, and a man's voice, sounding uneasily, told him to go home. A stone whizzed, its impact changing the red dog's note to one of such swift anger that Gheena could see someone leaping for sanctuary into the boat.

"It is Miss Gheena. Call him off, Miss; he'll ate us."

The moon chose this moment to illuminate the shore, and to show one man just scuffling over the side of the boat, and a second ensconcing himself behind some barrels.

"If you hadn't thrown rocks at him, Tom Guinane," said Gheena angrily, "he wouldn't get cross."

Tom Guinane, visibly nervous, swore by the God above him that it was but a handful of shingle that wouldn't crush a sherrimp, an' only thrun funnin', he not bein' sure whose dog it was.

Crabbit came to heel, master of the situation, with one white tooth bared for inspection, and Gheena watched the loading of the boat.

"Bits of flour an' things," Guinane told her, "for the shop outside, an' cruel dear now, Miss, thanks to the war. Not havin' much time in the light since I went to Mrs. Weston, I must do me work be night."

He spoke ill-humouredly, with a perpetual note of being wronged by life.

The boat was pushed off, passing from inertness to life as she swam in the shallow water. Gheena could see an array of barrels standing on a rock, waiting to be loaded. She climbed the cliff path to Seaview with the ease of good wind and practice, to find the three waiting for her at the card-table, and Mrs. Weston's old Swiss nurse just going out to meet her.

"We thought the gate to the sea path might have been locked," said Violet Weston. "Old Berthe loves keys and safety. She entreats me unceasingly to go to

Switzerland as the only safe and proper place during the war."

Berthe, who wore ample skirts and rather represented a feminine barrel crowned with a black cap, came in with syphons and decanters. She returned with sandwiches clumsily cut, bade them *Bon nuit* in a villainously Swiss accent, and hobbled out.

"Mrs. De Burgho Keane wanted to know if she could be a German in disguise," giggled Violet, "because the old thing of course talks both languages. And Berthe has no sympathy with fighting. Poor old soul! she has some relations hard at it in France—two, I think."

Mr. Harold Keefe was mildly in love—sufficiently so as to occasionally forget to make declarations as he stared at Mrs. Weston, but not sufficiently to forget common-sense and to try to obtain all suitable information concerning Paul Weston, deceased, his circumstances in life, and his last testament. Gheena knitted when she was dummy, and talked incessantly of the Bobbery pack without.

Horses must now be made fit, no one had bothered so far. Mumsie's saddle was not even newly stuffed, and Dearest's two horses were on hay and bran.

Mrs. Weston decided to put hers on straw and looked surprised because Stafford and Gheena laughed immoderately, and Keefe choked politely.

"With all this talk of horses," said the Professor patiently, "I wait to play."

When it was decided that he had not gone three diamonds over Basil's three clubs, because when pressed he offered to show that of diamonds he had but one, the game proceeded, some umbrage being taken to Gheena the Professor's partner, leading the ace of diamonds and then another.

"But she might have, in any case," said Violet Weston easily. "Mr. Keefe, what shade is my new horse?"

Keefe, who was standing out, said: "Bay, blood bay, with black points."

"Then it's Casey's with the foreleg, I suppose. We're down two," said Basil.

"It is not," said Keefe, with deepening complexion.

"Slattery's, then. It had such a cold, the remount man wouldn't look at it. They're are the only two bays."

"I will double them," said the Professor viciously, and was almost put out, holding five spades, to find that he had not heard correctly.

Basil Stafford offered to see Gheena home.

It was nearly full-tide; the harbour gleamed under the moonlight, with the shadows black as ink.

The ceaseless voices of the sea whispered through the calm—the distant creak of a boat at anchor, the lap and suck of the tide, the cry of sleepless birds.

Oars plashed, leaving a trail of phosphorescent light, low voices echoed.

"The Guinanes come back for a second load," said Gheena. "Good night. I'll go up from the bathing pool."

She heard his footsteps as he went away, not back to the village, but down along the beach. She saw him light a cigarette for a moment, and then disappear into the black shadows of the cliff.

The hall door at Castle Freyne was still open, a yellow gash of light in the darkened house. Darby Dillon leant on his crutch, waiting for her.

Gheena grew hilarious as she discussed the Bridge and the two bays and the Professor's still too well-preserved German accent.

"Stafford saw you home?"

"Yes—he—he has gone off along the cliffs," said Gheena. "Darby, what kind of a man do you think Basil Stafford is?"

"A decent kind of young fellow—with straight limbs," said Darby slowly.

CHAPTER IV

When Captain Lindlay had written from the front in pencil, to say he didn't mind how they killed foxes as long as they kept the people in good humour and the committee agreed, and that they could take lessons from old Barty as to blowing the horn, a committee of four, with a feminine president, formed itself, to get to work as soon as possible.

George Freyne saw financial difficulties, because covert keepers would desire to be paid for a find by Grandjer just as if the Dunkillen hounds had all thrown their tongues in unison; but the absent Master had foreseen and anticipated this, so that Darby was able to talk quite firmly of finance.

"Unless one of those terriers gets into a flock of sheep," he said thoughtfully. "They are coming over to-morrow, Gheena, and old Barty is to teach a man how to boil for them; and I am quite sure that Andy Casey will stay to help." Here he winked at Andy who had come down to get orders.

"We'll hunt with ten couple of fox-hounds' relations and I can toot the 'Gone away.'" Here Mr. Keefe, taking out a hunting-horn, made note hideous and forlorn, but still a sound, and unclasped his pink cheeks from the mouth-piece with a gasp of triumph.

Darby remarked he looked rather like one of the Mons angels when he was at it, and he hoped the pack wouldn't think it was anyone dead in the parish; but, after all, one must learn. Here he brayed out "Gone away" shrilly and clearly, and tried to blow them out with minor success.

Mr. Keefe then commenced to practise again until Mrs. Freyne came in mildly, to ask Dearest George if it was possible that a German band had been wrecked in the harbour; and George Freyne, having shrieked, fingers in ears, for silence, surreptitiously picked up one of the hunting-horns and tried himself.

When Gheena took Darby's she smiled, for old Barty had taught her long ago, and she rang out notes worthy of the absent Master.

"I shall carry one myself," said Gheena proudly. "Dearest, Crabbit will howl if you make that noise again."

To which Dearest retorted hotly that he supposed she had made queer noises herself on the beastly trumpet when she began to learn.

"Four of 'em, with copper wanted for shells, too," said Darby thoughtfully. "Will you be the first whip, then, Gheena? and I'll be the second; any number you like. And George can be Master and Keefe the other."

"If I do it in public, I'll make it a whistle," said Freyne hurriedly. "And Keefe had better, too, judging by the wheezes he made."

"We could raise the horns up and blow the whistles inside them," said Keefe thoughtfully. "But, then, if these two blow horns, how are the dogs to know any order at all?"

"They never did know it," said Darby mildly. "Little Andy will beat them with a whip when they run sheep or pigs, and they have forgotten more about hunting than we ever knew."

"But to take them out of covert," said Keefe, "when it's blank."

"I suppose they'll come when they know it is," said Darby thoughtfully. "You see, they never drew any of ours. What's that, Andy? They often did unbeknownt. I daresay. And as to getting them out—what do you say?"

"If there was a fox inside or any of his pups, they'd root them out," said Andy firmly. "Beauty 'd make 'em lep, I'm tellin' you, an' if the foxes got to the din, me Dada 'd go in with a few rocks; we'd gother an' hunt the dogs away back to us outside."

Darby considered the advisability of the Master, even of a bobbery pack, collecting donations of rocks from his field, and thought it was better to wait until occasion arose to think about it.

George Freyne had got the Stores' list open, and was longing dubiously at lists of whistles. Incidentally, he wondered if Lindlay was one of those jealous fellows who would object to another Master in his absence; and added, after a pause, that he'd heard once of some chap who had his neck broken in a hunting cap. Some Lord Something, so perhaps Darby had better be Master.

He was too much occupied by whistles to hear Darby say that ropes appeared equally dangerous at times, as he directed Mrs. Freyne, who had just oozed in and wondered if it was late, to write to the Stores for the loudest whis-

tle they had.

"With two Masters," said Darby, "I wonder whom the hounds will obey?"

"The sorra the sowl but me Dada," comforted young Andy from the window. "Only Beauty 'd follow meself to destruction, the craythur. He came to mass onst an' rose a bawl, an' Father Pat prayin'! An' not a move out of him till me Dada rocked him with Mrs. Maguire's prayer-book."

"Mrs. De Burgho Keane is late; don't you think so, Dearest?" said Mrs. Freyne, shutting up her letter to the Stores. As it appeared in George Freyne's opinion that Mrs. De Burgho Keane was always too early, Matilda Freyne merely looked out, and said perhaps it was not four-thirty yet.

Just then a motor sounded outside, and a deep voice could be heard giving directions to a chauffeur.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane—to forget the De Burgho was to receive a glance which Darby said struck you like a horse's kick—was immeasurably large, and covered with a great deal of drapery, which made the largeness a mystery. Her coats or mantles, generally edged with beads, floated about her; her veils obliterated the outline of her neck; when skirts were hobbled, she had covered them with dust-coats, and her evening dresses were generally flowing. From this haze of dark-hued costume appeared a commanding countenance, high-nosed and keen-eyed, and framed by a toupée which advertised itself as one, without guile.

She wrapped Mrs. Freyne in her large arms, and looked round for Gheena, who had disappeared out the window.

"When she's busy with a tea-cup, she can't kiss you. I'm going until then," said Gheena from somewhere outside, to Darby.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane was a pessimist who regretted everything. Her glances towards the sea seemed to search it for the flotilla of the invaders which she knew must come; she said no precautions were being taken, they were left open-coasted and alone.

"To hear her talk," said Darby in the corner, "one would say the whole British Fleet ought to patrol the coast of Dunkillen."

"We are not taking it to heart," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane as she floated ponderously to rest. "No one seems to mind. Economy is not being borne in upon the nation. Mrs. Harrison's cakes, when I called there, were just as rich as before August."

Darby looked thoughtfully at the array which the old butler was just putting on the tea-table; there were five, and Anne was rather proud of them all. They had done lightsome with her, she had told the kitchen-maid.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane's glance passed from the cakes to the butler, and she grew fiercely red, ejaculating "Naylour!" angrily.

The butler replied, "Good evening, Ma'am," politely, but nervously.

"Hot cakes? Oh, thank you, Matilda; I should hate to grow stout, but as I walked to the garden to-day I may venture. And good evening, Gheena dear! How nicely browned you are, even so late in the year!"

With the faint nervousness with which everyone addressed Mrs. Keane, Gheena touched her cheeks, and said it was bathing all summer.

"The news," said Mrs. Keane ponderously, "is bad. It is always bad. Why do we not sweep Belgium clear? Why?"

Darby, whose eye she caught, replied that he couldn't say, and offered a sultana cake humbly.

"Why not give it back to them instead of bringing the poor things over here?" said Mrs. De Burgho Keane gloomily. "So expensive, too! I am taking three gardeners, and I am told they have never even learnt English. One can hardly imagine it nowadays. I am looking things in the face," she went on emphatically. "It's no use putting futurity behind your back and hoping it will stay there."

Darby put down his tea-cup and rubbed his head softly.

"So I make it keep itself in the future where it should be. I had all the servants up and I've put my foot on their many eggs firmly, and stopped their jam on Fridays, and weeded out those——"

"Those who could go to the war?" flashed Gheena, the patriot, ceasing to be nervous. "Hanly, of course?"

"Your tea is always so good," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane, ignoring Gheena. "Thank you, Matilda. Do you weigh it out daily? I told old Naylour he would have to do without James, the pantry boy, and do Eustace's valeting as well, as Carty had enlisted; and when he said it was too much for him, I made James butler. I saw old Naylour here," added the lady haughtily.

"He was too old to go to strangers, and we thought we could do with him," said Gheena quietly.

"You remember I asked you, Dearest George," put in Mrs. Freyne, an anxious eye on her visitor. "I asked you twice, and you—what are you saying, Dearest, now?"

Dearest was saying "Damn!" a little too audibly, and looking at the door.

"Yes, Dearest George said that he was quite tired of carving," said Mrs. Freyne, "and Naylour is splendid at it. George had just upset some gravy on his lap the evening I asked him, and I think that helped him to decide. Crabbit will snuffle just when Dearest George is getting to the jointy part of the ducks, and it's so upsetting; very like an earthquake or a serious illness under the table."

"It was I who took him," said Gheena briefly. "He is a dear."

"Then I sent away the cook; she was quite old, too," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane, forgetting Naylour gracefully, "and the present one only needs a scullery

maid, and I've put down one housemaid; and told the gardener he must do without old Magee, he only pottered lately. I have thoroughly faced futurity," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane; "even my cakes are only caraway seeds now."

"If they didn't get stuck in one's teeth," said Darby absently, "they make you think of Kümmel, and that's pleasant. Crabbit, you've had three pieces of sultana cake."

Crabbit laid a witchingly innocent head on Darby's knee, his big liquid eyes looking up sweetly.

"And I got rid of two of Eliza's dogs," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane pleasantly—"those two useless terrier brutes, with a touch of spaniel in them, Gheena."

"Eliza's dogs, what she loved!" Gheena was on her feet, her eyes flaming. "The dogs! You—you——"

"I told the men to do it," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane placidly, "in the lake—quite humanely."

What Gheena might have said was checked by a whisper from the old butler.

"They are both below at me house," he breathed over the tea-cups. "Little Miss Lizzie 'd break the heart in her, the craythur, over them."

Gheena's flush faded slowly. Mrs. Keane was just asking Darby if he did not think of doing something out there. Drive a car even, he could do that.

"I should be more in the way than a help," said Darby after a pause. He seemed to find it hard to answer. "There will be enough cripples going home without a ready-made one going out," he added with a twisted smile.

"What do you think Evangeline De Burgho Keane was born into the world for?" Gheena asked fiercely, watching the lady go towards the garden, from which she would return followed by a youth bearing a bundle of cuttings and plants, and possibly fruit.

"To make us see how nice other people are," said Darby equally. "Keefe, she's calling you now, she's turned back."

Mr. Keefe emerged from behind a newly-lighted pipe to answer humbly.

"I do trust you are looking after your part of it, Mr. Keefe, and not allowing the police to do nothing on bicycles all over the country when there's a war in Europe. Their place should be on the cliffs watching for spies and submarines."

"I've applied for a commission," said Keefe briefly and irrelevantly, "and the coastguards are trebled. These are on the look-out for men on Leeshane and Innisfail, and there is the patrol boat. My part's inland, Mrs. De Burgho Keane, until I get out to fight."

Mrs. Keane—his tone offended her—said that she feared Mrs. Weston would miss him; but no doubt when they took him off to learn drill they would

send some old and experienced man to a place of importance.

"It's like slipping down a cliff covered with furze bushes," said Darby, "everything raking you the wrong way, painfully. Gheena, come and see the horses. Cheer up, Keefe."

He began to move so easily that he looked at his twisted limb, and a thrill of hope moved him. Would it ever regain some strength—allow him even to walk without the crutch he detested? He let it—the leg—drag and saw its inert helplessness, and still thought it did not drag so much or fall so uselessly.

The fine day was passing to a chill evening; the sea looked as though all the gun metal of the world had been ground fine and spread over its heavy waters. It gleamed metallically, caught here and there by rays from a sun half hidden by storm clouds. Autumn turned to sterner mood, weary of flawless skies and brilliant sunshine.

The yard at Castle Freyne was a huge place, sunny and sheltered, with rows of stables sunk darkly into its walls. They were roomy places, with square holes in the ceiling to drop hay and straw through; cold in winter, but horses throve hardily in them, if satin coats were unknown. Gheena had established innovations, such as the removal of hay-racks, water supplied constantly, and oat-crushers—all things which caused the fat old coachman to say loftily that her Dada's hunthers and his father's before him, God rest their sowls! wint out with none of that nonsinse, and follyed the dogs as good as thim Miss Gheena worrited over.

Hanly was nearly seventy, and Hanly's father, who was ninety-four, and absorbed sunshine and firelight according to the seasons nearly all day, seated smoking in an arm-chair, could remember when hunting was hunting.

"'Twasn't at airly dinner-hour ye'd be at the meet, but out at six o'clock till 'twas too dark thin, an' so on up till nine, an' none of ye're trapsin' here an' trapsin' there; but wouldn't one good breedy fox often run till they had their stomachs full of it, an' they'd kill him an' be home by twelve or one, an' in to a fine honest male of pounds of beef and geese and turkeys an' lashens of drink."

Old Mat could not be shaken by any tales of improved breeding of foxhounds.

"Don't you go out to hunt and not to race?" he would pipe. "An' how can ye be watchin' hounds if ivery moment ye think ye're horse 'll give out an' ye be left behind?"

There was no wire those days, according to Mat, and no claims for fowl eaten by foxes, and no doing up of horses when be rights the big house should be shut for the night.

"A gran' dinner at five an' the shutters shut, an' a bed to sleep in that wasn't all twisted iron, full of air-holes, but close and cosy, with curtains around ye."

Matty could pipe out tales of great hunts in those bygone days—hunts lasting for three or four hours after one fox—and tell of Sergeant, the great black weight-carrier, and of Napoleon and Molly, his own two.

Gheena had three horses of her own—two active compact six-year-olds, just the stamp to gallop as well as scramble, and known as Whitebird and Redbird, and a leggy roan mare, which she had purchased herself in the spring, and which she was not at all sure about, called Bluebird.

Dearest George's horses, paid for by his wife, were large and sedate and extremely valuable. A stout strong cob, with legs of iron, carried Matilda in the very hilly country, and a showy whistling bay on other days.

"I brought over that bay to-day," said Keefe, after he had given the unstinted praise due to other people's horses, and yawned twice outside the boxes; there was nothing to be bought here. "The one I wanted for Mrs. Weston. It had a cold when the remount man was round."

"I knew it was Slattery's," said Darby.

Mr. Keefe grunted irritably.

"I've got it here anyhow," he said. "And I told her I would have, so I hoped she'd come over to see it this afternoon quietly. It's standing in that box."

"Pull it out, Phil," commanded Darby; "Mr. Keefe's bay."

Phil pulled out a narrow, very tall bay with black legs and a well-set-on tail, but showing old marks of brushing in front; it had slightly contracted feet and a whistler's jowl. Notwithstanding these faults, the bay could gallop and jump when he was fresh, but two hours' work saw the end of him; and, tired, he clicked his shoes forging, brushed, and stumbled on the roads, and if asked to go on fencing, finished that up by a variety of crumbling falls. Fattened up, he was taking and showy.

"Of all the—I knew him well," said Darby, just as Mrs. Weston tottered through the archway.

"Naylour told me you were all here," she said, "except Mrs De Burgho Keane, whom he didn't seem to count. So I just came along, sans something, as they say in France, don't they? Mr. Keefe said he would have the hunter horse here for me to see."

Mrs Weston was pleasantly fresh in a bright mauve tam-o'-shanter, a white dress, and shoes to match her hat.

"He's just out on view," said Darby; "and don't slip get just behind him or you might lose him and think him was a clothes-line."

Mrs. Weston stepped forward, gave a quick bird-like glance, and began: "Of all the——" Then she stopped suddenly and looked again.

"He is a very nice horse, isn't he?" she said brightly.

"There isn't gap in the country you couldn't slip through on that fellow,"

remarked Darby, ignoring Keefe's furious eyes. "And you ought to keep him always tail foremost, Mrs. Weston; his is so pretty."

Violet Weston thought it was a love of a tail, very happily. He was not at all like the horses they rode in Australia, she added, much finer-looking; and she thought he might be very nice to run after hounds on.

"Slattery did it often," said Darby tersely to himself and hobbling off.

Keefe, relieved by his absence, now explained the difficulty of getting any horses just at present. People who had very good hunters hid them away for fear they would be commandeered, and all the sixty and seventy-pound screws were sold.

"The most lamentable sight ever I seen," observed Phil, taking the bay for a little stroll down the yard and back again. "The teeth dhragged out of the youngsters to make them the right age, an' ould sthagers taken that ye'd offered oats to feed 'em on it, sthone blind I seen them bought, an' sore with spavins, an' broken-winded. Old car horses ripped out of the shafts an' soult for chargers. Runaways, stoopers, sthaggerers, the sorra a charnst a man would have to run away at all with the craythurs sint out for them," concluded Phil sorrowfully.

"He—has his—forelegs a little near together, hasn't he?" inquired Violet Weston dubiously.

"The way he can't throw dust up betune them," said Phil softly, something very like a wink trembling on his left eyelid.

Mrs. Weston held up a mauve suede shoe to Phil; next moment she was in the saddle, with a white skirt very much rucked up, and a good deal of mauve silk stockings to be seen. She trotted the bay horse out of the gate and put him into a gallop in the field outside.

When everyone had rushed out to see her fall off, they saw that she was quite at home in a man's saddle, and if she did not ride over well, yet knew how to stay on.

Returning with the bay all out, Mrs. Weston had only just time to avoid Mrs. De Burgho Keane, who fled aside with a scream and then halted to stare icily at the mauve legs.

"I couldn't hold on sideways," said Violet Weston apologetically; "and, of course, I'd wear boots. He won't be very dear, will he, Mr. Keefe, because I want a new fur coat as well?"

Mr. Keefe said sixty pounds with a faint quiver in his voice. "And a dozen of gloves for luck," he said gallantly.

"I'd rather have a bridle," said Mrs. Weston pleasantly. "And there is only a kind of shed which Tom Guinane says he must put a door to; but I expect the horse will do nicely."

The old saw of Romford's, "I'm too much of a gentleman," rang in Keefe's

head.

"If we really are going to have hunting, and you say horses are so hard to find," went on Mrs. Weston pleasantly.

Keefe thought ruefully of the string of horses which would be trotted towards the front gate of Seaview directly Violet Weston made her intention of hunting known. Prompt decision would alone save him from loss on his gamble, for he had bought the narrow bay.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane looking on, now declared that if, as her husband informed her, foxes must be killed, they ought to be shot, and not make the country a laughing stock by running about after the Caseys' foot pack. The earths could be closed and the animals dislodged with terriers and good shots stationed. "Now you are able to shoot still, Darby?"

Darby said "Yes," with the same twisted smile.

"And the foxes killed, the skins could be sold for the Blue Cross Fund," said the lady decidedly.

She held the public ear as she put forward the absolute wickedness of spending money upon hunters when every penny was, and would be, wanted for the war.

"If everyone gave up keeping everything, it seems to me that a lot of people would starve," said Darby gravely. "Out-of-place servants who cannot join the army are rather at a discount this year. If we all did nothing always, we should make a lot of riches and create a lot of poverty."

"If you are sure she will get over the fences," said Violet Weston, "I will buy him. And can I call it Britannia or Commander-in-Chief?"

Darby mildly suggested Equator, because it was a line, and was coldly turned away from.

Harold Keefe drew a breath of sheer relief.

"I'll have the cob with the curbs for myself now," he thought blissfully, "out of the profit."

"You are going to take it without a vet.?" said Gheena. "Are you? You warrant it, Mr. Keefe?"

Mr. Keefe's pained expression rested on the Commander-in-Chief's hocks, and he said warmly that he'd warrant it fit to hunt, for it never went lame on them.

"Oh, leave it between them, Gheena," murmured Darby wearily. "They can put it in the settlements."

Mr. Keefe, with an outburst of unwilling honesty, now drew gloomy attention to the curb.

"He has a curb," he said darkly. "It never stopped him."

"But—I thought it was a very severe bridle," said the widow vaguely, "and

was two bits; and it is only wearing one at present."

"If it was a gag on his hocks it would do her," gulped Darby, when he had recovered a little and emerged from the stable he had fled into. "He wears his curb behind, Mrs. Weston, not in his mouth."

Mrs. Weston said, "What absolute nonsense!" quite huffily and patted the Commander's white nose.

"I hate a horse with a white nose, he always looks like a sheep," said Darby. "And, hello, Mrs. Delaney! How many hens has the fox eaten now?"

A little withered old woman had come into the yard, a basket in her hands.

"It is not hens I am afther, Masther Darby, but the lind of a handful of flour from Anne to save me walkin' onto the village, the Guinanes being quite run out."

But they were taking it home last night from the ship, said Gheena quickly.

"They didn't brin' it to the shop, then, Miss Gheena, an they up an' toult me they could not have it until to-morrow."

Gheena nodded carelessly.

In a flutter of dark draperies Mrs. De Burgho Keane moved to her motor-car, a luxurious Limousine.

"And you must be particular with Naylour, Matilda dear," she said. "I noticed that to-day, after years of impressing Madam upon him he had fallen back upon Ma'am. You will find him a difficult old creature," she added acidly, for just then she recalled the paucity of Naylour's wages and his great use in the house.

A malignant eye peering from behind the kitchen door revealed that old Naylour was listening.

The big car lolloped off heavily, and the butler advanced into the yard; Mrs. Freyne had gone in.

"I wondther who'll juggle the decanthers of port-wine now for her," he said bitterly. "Fine red sthuff from Macdinough's for the ladies an' the clergy, and the cellar wine for themselves an' th' experts. An' champagne the same way, with me heart broke in me, huntin' Jamesey for fear he'd make a mistake. An' in she'd wheel directly the dinner was over an' the gentlemin cleared out, makin measure in her heart's eye on the decanthers befour she'd lock them up. The gentleman had no maneness in him, poor gentleman, but herself. God save us!"

"I don't know why she ever comes here," said Gheena pettishly. "Isn't she horrid, Mr. Keefe?"

"She has the face of a fat rat on her," said Keefe briefly.

CHAPTER V

"How the dickens did your Dada call them up?" said Darby, eyeing the ten couple of fox-hounds' relations as they rushed joyously round his park, declining to come near anyone.

"He had a nise of his own," said Andy cautiously, "and his bugle. Maybe if ye sounded ye'res, yer honor."

Heads were thrown up at the note, to go down again, apparently regarding the sound as something of no moment to them.

"Me Dada's bugle had a grating screech on it," said Andy. "Grandjer! Grandjer! Grandjer is after a rabbit. Beauty, ye spalpeen! Beauty agragh?"

The crooked-legged old matron came to the call, wagging her long tan stern abjectly.

Darby said cheerily that it was a good thing to have one obedient. He watched Gheena galloping her grey recklessly as she endeavoured to put hounds back to him.

"D'ye hear that! Isn't Grandjer terrible swhift?" Andy's admiring note was called for by the dying scream of the rabbit as Grandjer broke it up and ate it.

"What I intended to do," said Darby, lifting his hat to cool his head, "was to take these brutes round by Leshaun and back the mountain road. It is not a bit of use taking them out if they won't follow us anywhere. Good man, Phil!"

An accurately aimed lash was driving Spinster and Doatie out of the woods.

A little more noise and violent whip-work brought the whole of the pack into view; they sat down, greeted each other as complete friends, but looked with distrust at Darby on his black mare. Their master had always been on foot.

"If ye were to borry me Dada's bugle," said Andy hopefully. "It is hangin' up at home."

"Chance the road, Phil," said Darby. "We must get to Cullane on Monday somehow."

Darby's old house stood well back from the sea, a long, rambling house, which had been pulled down by someone who objected to its original hideousness, and rebuilt with gables and wide windows. A flagged terrace, guarded with stone railings and stone urns, which in summer overflowed with scarlet gerani-

ums, had been laid out at one side; and the usual basement, where the kitchen blinked up behind a dark alley, was made darker still by another railing of cut stone. The inevitable fuchsia hedges guarded the flower-beds, a tangle now of withering dahlias and Michaelmas daisies.

A fine old place, well kept up, and no one alive knew what battles the young owner had fought with himself there when he came back to it crippled. Battles fought for endurance, when the joys of being up again and able to shuffle in the sunshine had worn off. The very trees which he used to climb, the sunk fences which he jumped so lightly over, the ladders leading to the lofts, mocked Darby.

To get down to the trout stream meant a long weary struggle, or the bitterness of sitting in his bath-chair drawn by old Ned the donkey.

When hope of amending culminated in being able to ride, Darby knew that his days of swift life were done for ever. He snatched something from the wreck; he could shuffle on his crutch. He could shoot as straight as ever, fish from a boat or where the banks were flat.

When he ceased to rebel, he knitted up as many ravelled strands as he could, and twisted and crippled, faced his lease of life.

England called now; he could not go to her, not back to his old regiment which was fighting somewhere in France. Riding at Darby's right side, he looked straight and whole, a lean, good-looking man, with a kindly ravaged face. Coming to the other, one saw an arm tied up, a leg palpably cork, stiff and useless, an almost useless hand, and a scar, vanishing now, on the cheek-bone.

He could ride still, and shuffle back to the saddle without much difficulty after a fall, easy things to meet with in the close country, with its trappy fences and its occasional big bog drains or awkward pieces of gaps fenced by stabs of bog dale.

Black Maria sidled and snorted at the pack, which trolled along obediently enough now, believing they must really be going out hunting. Stafford said he would come to help and get them to know him. And Mr. Keefe could not come because they wanted him somewhere.

"They seem to want everyone somewhere now," said Gheena gloomily. "There are the Guinanes out fishing, and it's horribly rough."

The Guinanes' boat was bobbing actively on the back of vicious leaden waves, bobbing down almost out of sight, and the two men had their backs in it as they pulled.

"Just by Shanockheela, where there's that nasty current—they can't catch anything to-day."

"They have a new boat got for sailing," commented Andy. "An' me Mama does be thinkin' Mrs. Weston gave it to them, for they couldn't have the money nor half of it themselves."

"It is McGreery's boat that he left an' he to list," put in Phil; "thirty pound they should pay. She is above at the Quay now."

"They seem to be rowing out," said Darby, staring, "and there's a real big sea at the point. Oh, it's to meet that fishing-smack that's standing in."

They stood watching the dipping and rising of the little boat, and the pitching of the red-sailed smack, which beat in against the wind, lurching past the rowing boat.

"They've had enough," said Gheena; "they're putting the lines in. Good gracious! they'll be swamped."

The sea out there for a small boat was cruelly wild, but the men put up a rag of sail and ran down to the coast before the strong wind into the shelter of the harbour.

"There is some clather behind us," said Andy, pulling up Ratty just as Darby commented upon the bravery of fishermen. "A sight of horses, I'm thinkin'."

There were four, all ridden at a break-neck trot, with Mrs. Weston's Commander-in-Chief, very fresh and jaunty, leading the procession.

She wore a multitude of curls showing round the edge of her bowler hat, which curls, she confided to Gheena, she simply could not tuck away, and she looked fresh and young as she rode loose-reined, with the sea breeze blowing off her powder.

"For two miles," gasped George Freyne, "I've talked about tendons, and she went faster and faster."

"But if I hadn't gone so very fast, I'd simply have had to go rather fast for longer," said Mrs. Weston equably. "You were so late coming for me."

"The cutting of drains," said Basil gravely, "and the guarding of coasts. Freyne here is worn out at Home Defence, and even I had to take messages to-day right round to Clona Kratty."

"I'll be giving you all orders soon," said Keefe, mopping his pink face. "As we're all friends here. They may come and invade us." This deep note of tragedy in his voice caused the two boys to say, "Laws Almighty, d'ye say so, the haythens!" and Gheena to clutch so nervously at the grey's mouth that he reared in astonishment.

"In Heaven's name, Keefe," said George Freyne, "when are we to go to sleep in safety?"

"That's what they'll tell you," breathed Mr. Keefe mysteriously. "When they come."

"One would think you'd been talking to them," said Gheena suspiciously. "And as we have no guns and no troops, I don't see why they shouldn't."

"If we drive to the very top of the hills," said Violet Weston, hopefully hysterical, "and built eyries there, they're dreadfully short-winded and might never

bother to run up after us."

"You wait until they shelled you," said Darby, "in your eyrie. Gheena looks as though she contemplated entrenching on the lawn."

"Are they beyant in the little boat?" piped Andy dolorously. "Are they, Mr. Keefe, was thim Germins?"

"Who told you, Keefe?" George Freyne showed symptoms of acute strain. "Who—is it right? Are they coming? Are they?"

"Don't get so enated," said Keefe calmly, "I can't tell you now. When they come, you know. What are you talking about, Dillon? It won't be any use when you're crucified bodies! Don't be absurd!" Staring at a ring of white faces and hands dropped limply on their horses' necks, Mr. Keefe grew irritable. "When the orders come," he said sharply, "they'll be really nearly a reality."

"To have lost all that fright for nothing," said Darby tersely. "Orders!"

"Then why in the name of Goodness did you say it was Germans?" blared Freyne furiously; "considering I have got a weak heart. You did say the Germans were coming. I say you did, sir."

"As plainly as the hills," said Mrs. Weston reproachfully. "Oh, what a fright!"

"Unless they showed playing Wagner on the road, it could not have been plainer," said Gheena huffily, "making us all fuss like that, and trying to look as if we weren't, and Phil——"

"Phil appears to have gone home to tell your mother," said George Freyne, answering.

"She won't mind a bit until you come to advise her about it, so that doesn't matter," returned Gheena. "Yes, he's gone."

"He said he was off to the Missus," said Andy, "an' ye none of ye heard him go."

"Three times I repeated: When my *orders* come!" wailed Keefe. "And I should not have said even that, but I was just trying to break it easily to you all that there will be orders as to invasion, if there is an invasion; and when they come..."

"If you say it again, Keefe, I shall set Grandjer at your horse," said Darby loftily.

Mr. Freyne then got off his horse, and suggested learning the hounds' names, which they had come out for instead of talking nonsense. Andy knew them all. But, as in a kaleidoscope, tan and pied bodies and flapping ears and wistful eyes seemed to shift and melt before the would-be learner.

"That is Doatie, with the sphot above his tail. Call him. That is Sergeant ye called, an' his biggest sphot is on his eye."

"Didn't you call the first one a he," said Freyne heatedly, "and that other—

and both?"

"Well, he—Doatie—do have pups surely," said Andy patiently; "but he has a sphot on his tail annyways, an' that is Sergeant."

Grandjer, yellow tan and tailless, was unmistakable. So was Sweetheart, who had lost an ear, and the enormous Home Ruler. The two small black hounds called respectively the Divil and the Tailor could only be mistaken for each other. They were, Andy told them, "Holy terrors to hunt, but apt to be yowlin' if a fence was very high, bein' baygles entirely."

The pack sat or rolled, greatly interested in the increasing reiteration of its names.

Beauty, being polite, thumped her tail without pause; it was really hardly worth while stopping. All the more obliging hounds shifted and oozed from side to side as they were called, and the lesson terminated at length by Darby suggesting that dinner-time would be upon them and they had better go on.

It was too late to wander into the mountains. Darby took a road which wound up to a little group of houses, and then back again to the coast, with the pack lumbering along quite placidly and the four whippers-in all repeating names behind them.

All save Gheena. Sundry visits to the meets of the foot dogs had made her familiar with most of the pack.

The Commander-in-Chief, somewhat exhausted by his burst, was now forging noisily, clicking his flat feet together fiercely, and varying this by an occasional stumble.

"Did you really think Mr. Keefe meant the Germans were coming?" Gheena found Basil Stafford riding beside her.

"And if he had meant it," he said, with a thrill in his voice. "It's a big sea to guard, Miss Freyne. Lord, if he had meant it! Spiked helmets marching along this road—oh, with their owners, if you like it, and everything seized! Promise me if they ever do come you'll run away inland," he said. "They won't go off the railway lines."

"How could they come?" Gheena looked out to sea. "You don't think they mean to try?"

"I know"—he checked himself—"I know—that it may be possible for them to try."

"I shall ride away Whitebird and lead Redbird, and lead Bluebird, and take all the dogs," said Gheena firmly.

Save for the chasing of a blameless cat, the pack got home in chastened mood, greatly depressed by an aimless promenade. George Freyne's car was at Darby's gate, and a suggestion of bed at Castle Freyne was well received.

"Keefe can lead Gheena's horse, he won't want to hurry, and Stafford can

take mine, Darby, and we'll drive. Matilda may have been worried by Phil about Keefe's nonsense."

A tyre bursting delayed the motor, and the horses could cross a short way through the park, so that as they drove up the avenue they saw Stafford appearing with Gheena's grey jogging amicably beside him.

"Hello, there! Hello, you! I say, Freyne!" he called out, amazed to see the motor swerve.

"Dearest, the sunk fence!" shrilled Gheena.

For the car was suddenly left to itself as Dearest George cleared something from his face, and again, with light-hearted gaiety, the Sunbeam immediately dived off the gravel at the sunk fence.

"Hello, I say!" Gheena leaped from the car wildly.

"A bee," said Freyne, beating at the air hard, "a bee! Bees, my God!"

He switched the power off and leaped for the shelter of the laurels.

"He's mad," said Gheena. "But it is bees! All the bees!" Her dive into the undergrowth was even swifter than her stepfather's. She was followed by Darby going with long bounds off his crutch, and then by the chauffeur. A swarm of furious insects buzzed outside.

"Bees!" George Freyne wiped his forehead. "The bees have risen. I am badly stung on my nose."

"They've swarmed on the doorstep," suggested Gheena. "Look! they are in a cloud. I thought you were crazy at first, Dearest, but you're right. And the car has not gone over."

"Bees," said Darby, "don't swarm in October."

"The two hives is beyant on the steps," remarked Dayly the chauffeur, as he nursed a stung cheek drearily. "I sees them."

Basil Stafford, skirting the sunk fence, believed that they had all gone away and called out loudly. His fevered imagination even sprung to the chance of Germans having really come and being in full occupation of Castle Freyne.

"Hello—what!" He struck an insect from his nose. The bees saw new worlds to conquer. He beat his ears. It is lamentable to add that young England's manhood sprang yelling from the saddle, leaped the sunk fence, and was into the laurels on to Dearest George's body.

"Bees!" howled Stafford. "Swarms!"

"In October," wailed Freyne, dabbing his swelling nose and nursing a trampled-on leg.

"And both the horses have gone off their heads," said Gheena. "They have simply flown away. You will go at once to catch them, Dayly."

"I would be afeard, Miss," said the chauffeur simply. "They are terrible sot agin horses any times, them bays."

At this point the dining-room window was opened very cautiously.

"The first of them," quavered Phil's voice dramatically, "It was thruth. They are lurkin' in the bushes. I hears them."

Gheena said, "Listen."

Then there was a pause in conversation filled by prayer.

"It is the Masther's cyar," declaimed Anne the cook. "I'd know her in Heaven."

"They took her off him," gulped Mary Kate, the kitchenmaid, who was in the throes of Ave Marias. "He is kilt, the craythur. See the empty sate."

"An' there is some lurking outside," breathed Phil. "I can hear them in the shrubs. I tell ye wasn't it the great plan entirely to kape us safe? The poor ould Masther, the craythur."

His master's head, veiled by a flapping laurel leaf, suddenly issued from the thicket, and the voice which issued from behind it did not seem to be discussing Germans.

"God above us, did they do ye a harrum, sir?" wailed Anne from the window, putting out her kindly face for a second. "An' ye too, Bayly? God be praised for ye're lives."

"The two eyes out of me head," replied Dayly—Dearest was incoherent—"and the Masther's nose the size of two, an' Misther Stafford picked in the ear."

"The haythens!" said the voice, now again behind the blind. "The Turks an' infidels. I hear Dayly. Could the polis——" She prayed loudly.

"Prayer won't mind ye, Mary Kate," counselled Phil, sobbing. "I hear Miss Gheena bawlin'."

At this point Gheena grew hysterical. George Freyne's words became clear as he ordered Phil, as a something, something, something idiot, to get away the bees, to get help and take the dam brutes away.

The angry bees were racing up and down the avenue between the laurels and safety.

"I carried them around," said Phil soberly, out of the window, "thinkin' they'd destroy the robbers if they comes up, so I up and clapped the two carriage rugs around them, an' they neshtin' within, an' I wouldn't say we can ever get them back till it is dark entirely, sir, they bein' a trifle irritated in themselves an' all out."

The prospect of crouching in the laurels until after dark, or the alternative of squeezing through the barbed wire palings or of taking the open surrounded by a cloud of bees was now with the refugees.

The remarks which sped from the bitter smelling shade of the laurels were venomous as the disturbed honey-makers.

"Someone is talkin'," said the sober voice behind the Venetian blind. "Howld

ye're whist, Mary Anne, till we listen. Would ye dhraw the Germins on us? Do not stir the blind on ye're life or they'll be in. The bees Mary Anne, not the——"

At this point Mrs. Freyne opened the hall door. It was dim behind her, and she was not perceived by the questing enemy.

"Matilda," wailed her husband, "get them away!"

"Oh, you, Dearest!" replied his wife placidly. "Dear me! I see the car nearly over the sunk fence, and I thought I heard George, but I cannot do anything until he comes—can I, Professor?—about the Germans."

A deeper note grunted from the hall. Mrs. Freyne chased a bee from her face.

"Matilda," yelped George Freyne, "send someone!"

"There are no Germans, only bees," called Dayly loudly. "An' we are all picked and bit sorryful, Ma'am."

"Bees!" Mrs. Freyne saw the hives. "Professor, someone has put two hives at the door, and Dearest George is in the bushes. Dearest, what am I to do?"

George put forth a swollen face to deliver orders, to cry for men and bee dresses. To pray that veiled rescuers should be sent to them and gauze veils—anything to escape the bees.

Mrs. Freyne, obliged to ask advice, hurried to the Professor. A stifled yell and a crash told that the enemy had gone inside, and the hall door was slammed, promises of aid being presently shrilled from the upper windows.

"We are getting transparent things, Dearest. You are sure there is no danger? My net skirt, do you think? Oh, dear!"

The enraged bees sighted new worlds to conquer as they sped out at Violet Weston and Mr. Keefe, who were riding quietly across the lawn, the result being—four gaitered legs described some circles and curves, and two people dived wildly from their saddles and ran.

"If you ask Dearest George what to do," advised Mrs. Freyne from the upper window—"he is under the laurels—he'll tell you."

Mrs. Weston crashed to covert with a shriek, followed by Mr. Keefe swearing fluently, and plucking bees from his collar; these he stamped on, but they had stung him first.

A variety of advising onlookers began to collect cautiously on the avenue, all advising at the same time.

Dayly suddenly put his coat over his head and sped blindly to comparative safety.

"An' I thinkin' it the grandest plan," said Phil, speaking now from the bushes at the other side of the drive. "Bullets they is used to, says I, an' they might resint; but innocent bees, they could blame none for, says I, an' the two maids bawlin' and prayin' within."

"There is James runnin', afther they have him kilt," wailed the housemaid wildly. "Oh, the Turks! An' the Missus cool an' aisy at the windy above." Another wild shriek echoed despairingly, followed by sobs for mercy, and Mary Kate hid her face.

Now just as James took flight, Mrs. De Burgho Keane's large car hummed to the gate, and was pulled sharply up to avoid Dayly.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane was pinched and anxious looking. Phil had dropped word as he scurried for home.

The sight of the flying figure, the murmurs from the bushes, upset her completely.

Even as Dayly escaped, Smith, her own chauffeur, suddenly let the car slap into the bushes as he beat frantically at the air. Mrs. De Burgho Keane suggested "Mines!" at the pitch of her voice, reasoning out that some hidden force must have upset the discreet Englishman. Muffled figures rushed across the drive.

"If they would take five pounds and the ham to let me go," she pattered unevenly, searching in her purse. And she got half out of the car as Dearest George, his head muffled in an old net skirt of his wife's, came tearing blindly out of the laurels, flapping at a cloud of bees. They were in the net, entangled, these furious little beings of wrath tinged and buzzed in his ears. He struck the car, and with a sob clutched Smith the chauffeur, burrowing down under the wheel for covert.

"My God! they are after you!" said Mrs. Keane heavily. "They have hurt you! Oh, the horror—of reality!"

The amazing spectacle of George Freyne veiled in net thrilled her with horror.

"Half killed me, the devils! Start the car, Smith; back her! Get her away! Get us out of this! Half killed me! One eye gone, my nose ruined! Start her, will you?"

Smith jogged the self-starter, and put in the reverse with a yell. He had just been stung. Mrs. De Burgho Keane on the avenue leaped for safety as the maddened chauffeur passed her without heed.

"Put your long veil down," yelled George Freyne; "you'll be all right if you do."

A variety of muffled figures now issued from the bushes. Gheena entirely covered by art-muslin curtains, Stafford with a butterfly net over his head and the handle wagging behind, the rescuers insecurely draped, and the gardener in a correct bee dress and armed with a syringe and a bell.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane had sat down flat on the avenue, and she was quite close to a collapse. Stafford stopped to help her. She was clasping her floating lace veil across her face and she endeavoured to speak with a German accent.

She leant back against nothing and nearly overbalanced.

Darby Dillon had driven his car over and had pulled up to watch in rare amazement the flight of Dearest George; the spinning away of the Limousine from its rightful owner, and her subsequent collapse.

Rocking helplessly at the wheel, he saw the Professor spin out Dervish-wise into the open, with a black ninon skirt roped round his neck and spreading out cape-wise over his shoulders.

"The party," said Stafford, from the butterfly net, "is now complete." He wagged the handle at Darby.

"You are not going to lift it!" muttered Mrs. Keane heavily. "Not going to look at me! I am really not so beautiful at all, Herr German. Mines! So quickly! They upset Smith—Schmidt, a name homelike to Boches. I—if five pounds, and a ham—it's all I've with me—to let me go."

Stafford's laughter rent him for a time, then he said: "Oh, come along!" quite kindly, and poked sufficiently behind the lacy shoulders to lift her up.

"Mr. Stafford, how did you escape?" The stout lady got up and stood unsteadily.

"They won't follow us into the house, but hurry," said Stafford, choking. "Hurry, while the gardener bells them."

For Carty, loftily secure in veil and gloves, commenced to peal the bell.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane heard and gave up with a stifled cry of the Tocsin, then slid into Stafford's arm, her head on his shoulder, the Professor supporting her the other side. She was not quite unconscious, but absolutely dazed, submitting without realizing it to the support of the nearest wheelbarrow which was half full of weeds. Darby drove swiftly across the lawn to the yard gate, thus avoiding the bees.

When they had all assembled in the drawing-room, picked off the remaining bees and stood uneasily, starting at every sound, Mrs. De Burgho Keane woke up. Someone had drenched her in toilet vinegar and left her to recover.

Mrs. Freyne consulted Dearest George as to remedies for bee stings before, a little hurt at his reply, she fetched the blue-bags and onions, of which the room reeked healthily.

George Freyne had apparently lost one eye; the other glared from the shelter of a swollen nose in an outraged frenzy of pain. Stafford rubbed his neck delicately and Gheena shook a finger regretfully.

Old Naylour, quite unshaken, had brought in comforting tea.

"Do you think, Dearest George, that tea would upset Mrs. Keane?" asked Matilda Freyne thoughtfully. "She is opening her eyes." To which George Freyne remarked unsympathletically that anyone was damn lucky who had eyes to open, and Mrs. Keane sat up appalled by such callousness.

"They hurt you," she said faintly, "hurt you all. I succumbed. And they? They spared us. I said Schmidt to placate them."

"They are nearly all in now," said Stafford, looking out. "The bell did it and the dark."

Mrs. Keane muttered something incoherently; the words related to the Tocsin and the French.

"And the mines which upset Smith," she said. "Poor Smith! What an experience!"

When the facts of the case and Phil's strategy were fully explained to her, Mrs. De Burgho Keane felt a sense of loss. If they were not Germans, then everyone had behaved as though they were—well, she sniffed up the scent of onions.

"Bees alone," she said awfully, "do not cause men to rush and scream and hurl themselves from dark corners and take my car, and my man Smith, and——"

"He got it on the cheek and the hand," said Stafford gloomily. "Some of your half-dead 'uns, Freyne, in your bridal veil."

"The skirt which the cook did get me," said the Professor, "is torn sorely, but it kept out much pain."

Mrs. Violet Weston, stung on the neck, said gruffly that it was all absurd. Mr. Keefe, whose cheeks were engaged in swallowing his snub nose, decided that he would not be able to do duty anywhere for a week or more.

A chorus of voices sounded outside advising and declaiming. Presently Mrs. De Burgho Keane, shaken and offended, made her way to her car attended by her gloomy one-eyed host.

"And Phil"—she turned round—"what will you do to Phil, or what has been done to him?"

George Freyne muttered the words, "Hang Phil!" viciously but indistinctly.

To this day Mrs. De Burgho Keane believes that the truth was concealed from her, and that an invading army of Germans are either buried in the park or took sail again for Germany, finding Ireland useless to them.

"Bees!" she said haughtily to those whom she confided in, "the bees were a blind for other excesses."

CHAPTER VI

"Wasn't it all a great upset entirely, Miss Gheena," said Phil sympathetically.

"Mary Kate isn't the bether of it yet, an' the Masther's lost eye blinks, an' all."

Gheena remarked gravely that she thought the defence of Ireland ought to be entrusted to Phil.

"Bein' full sure themselves was comin'," continued Phil ruefully, "an' the Missus alone in the Great House with that Professor that's up to no good. Sure I thought it was the great thought, an' when I heard the nise in the bushes, I wasn't full sure they was come on us, an' I right entirely to brin' the bees out."

Darby burst into sudden laughter, memory of those thronged moments reaching him.

"When Dearest went off backwards in the car, and she sat down," gulped Darby, "and the Professor danced out in the black tea-gown tied over his head."

"If ye had it dhrawn out on one of thim twiddly picthers, wouldn't it be the great sight?" said Phil. "But when they were afther sayin' the Germans was comin', was I right to believe them, Mister Darby? Wouldn't it be the price of them haythens to be picked be honest bees? But the Masther is that peevish about it," ruminated Phil, "an' at me noon and night. If he was one of us afther a fair or a dance, he wouldn't be thinkin' long of a closed eye."

Darby grinned again, and looked up to see Gheena cast off her coat and stand in close-fitting stockingette.

"It is much too cold for a bathe," he said paternally.

Gheena kicked off her shoes, and remarked that cold water was always warmer when it wasn't really warm, as she poised for a dive.

The sea poured in just there into a deep narrow pool, hedged over about twenty yards down by a narrow belt of rocks. Beyond that was another pool, a small one, and there the sea seemed to dive under a ledge, called the Bridge, where it gurgled and sucked and muttered restlessly, until it showed again in a basin of great depth, washed into at low tide by the waves and covered at high.

Gheena poised, balanced, disappeared. The water surged and parted, throwing up protesting sprays and rippled as she shot up. Then she was gone again out of sight.

"Always she does be doin' that same," said Phil, "undther the rock no less, like a merrymaid."

Darby ran to the Bridge. A shadow showed in the green depths swimming easily under water; next moment Gheena's merry face shot up.

"I call it my diving-bell." She trod water easily.

"It's hang dangerous going under like that; if there was a devil-fish down there."

"Or a shark," suggested Gheena, holding on to the seaweed-hung ledge.

"There does be cobblers, anyways," put in Phil, "an' I seen a lobsther out of that hole onst."

"I say I call it my diving-bell," Gheena laughed. "I can get out to the Basin now, Darby. That took me ages. I used to go half way and get frightened. And I'm waiting to find a way into the pool of Cons Cave; there must be a passage, and it's close to this."

"You go out to the Basin!" Darby stood on the rocks, his face white and drawn. He could hobble, he could ride, but if Gheena choked down there he could not dive in to help her. He was twisted, crippled, useless. She would drown before his eyes.

"I wish you wouldn't, Gheena. If you got cramp out here, if you hit the rocks..."

"It was girls at the Coliseum," said Gheena absently "they did things under water and I had to learn."

"There is Mister Stafford now," said Phil.

Stafford's face appeared above a ledge of rock; he clambered over and came towards the pool.

"You'll get to know these rocks," said Darby thoughtfully.

"All systems of drainage, even that of the tide, being interesting to me," Stafford laughed. "And, Miss Freyne, bathing in October!"

Gheena merely replying it was better than in November, climbed out and dived skilfully; she came up to take a big breath, disappearing again.

"She will rise outside now," said Phil, fingering the rope which Matilda Freyne insisted on being carried by him.

A minute, almost two, Darby scraped and shuffled along the rocks, his teeth set, Stafford slipping past him easily.

"Is it this pool, Phil?" Stafford peered down beyond the Bridge.

"It is," said Phil, gathering sea-grass placidly.

Something alive had vanished under that wall of rock, down into the sucking cold depths, something at the mercy of the sea; the men bent over, both tense from fear.

"Phil, for God's sake! Does she do it often? Phil, come here!"

"She does so, sir, too often. I am gatherin' say-grass for the Misthress, sir, and won't she be plazed if there isn't enough."

"Say-grass, you Phil?" The green water stirred. Cobbles scurried madly away. Gheena's face parted the water.

"Po-oh!" She drew a long breath. "Po-oh! I got on slowly to-day somehow." She ran back, swam up the long pool and hurried off to dress.

"That submarine business," said Darby gloomily, looking down into the still pool.

Stafford looked up sharply.

"I don't like it," said Darby. "The slightest accident in that hole under the

rock and——"

His mouth twisted.

"She just takes her own way in everything," he went on. "Matilda will ask the angels' advice about her wings in Heaven; she never gave an order in her life, and Dearest George is so obsessed by his authority that the girl never takes any notice of him. She has no business to bathe at all in October, it's too cold; and what she meant by learning to hold her breath."

Basil Stafford jumped lightly over the narrow pool landing with a slight slip and stagger.

"It's ... a fine thing to have one's limbs," said Darby gently. "A very fine thing, Stafford, to be fit and able to move as a man should."

Stafford said nothing—it was the only thing to say. The unmarred side of Darby's face was turned towards him, lean, fine in its lines, with cleanly-cut features—the face of a man who had power to feel and to enjoy life.

"I'll be only one of many after this war," grunted Darby after a pause; "but, Lord, if I could have lost myself for my country, out there!"

Basil Stafford sighed uneasily, flushing a little.

"We are going to have five-o'clock tea out here at four," announced Gheena, appearing suddenly. "Mama has got callers—the Bradys from the Rectory, with a right-minded cousin, and the O'Haras from Crom Rectory,—and they are all going to knit." She flicked out her own knitting as she spoke. "So Phil is making a fire. He always lets it go out."

Phil was coughing patiently, his face hidden in a pungent reek of turf smoke.

"I am afther blowin' it up, Miss Gheena, till there isn't a puff in me two cheeks," he explained; "but someone was at our little cranny of turf, and this same is moist on us."

To boil a kettle with bunches of heather requires constant scurryings to and fro, outbreaks of fiery flame being varied by smouldering ashes. Mocking songs from the kettle, followed by glum silences which it refused to break.

Basil Stafford, his eyes full of tears, thought almost regretfully of the tea-party at Castle Freyne, and it was Darby at last who hauled a now stormily bubbling kettle from a roaring blaze, and was then heartily abused because he had forgotten to heat the tea-pot.

Immediately the tea was made the turf glowed to a fiery red and the smoke was no more.

Basil Stafford drank smoked strong tea in silence. His glasses lay beside him, and more than once he looked through them out at the silver-grey sea.

"Uncle Richard says they suspect bases here"—Gheena looked along the low cliffs—"for the submarines; people supplying them with petrol. No one would;

they couldn't."

"Money," said Stafford, "tempts some people greatly. The Germans pay well, I am told," he added a little hurriedly.

"Tom Knox got his commission yesterday." Gheena waved her tea-cup. "He is all khaki and importance. How anyone who could go can stay!" She looked fierily at Stafford.

"Some people cannot help themselves," he said apologetically.

Gheena said icily that they could do something, drive a car, replace other men; then she stopped abruptly, seeing Darby's drawn face.

"The Professor," said Darby, "is making studies of rocks as usual. What amusement he can find hammering out little pieces of stones I cannot say."

"And he do be lookin' at thim half the night through," put in Phil. "Ye can see his shaddy if he pulls down the blind—he forgets most times—pokin' an' peepin', with big books in front of himself."

The Professor saw the group and waved a telegram.

"Your man was very busy, Stafford; he had forgotten some supplies, so I offered to bring this." He held it out, beaming softly.

Basil opened it, reading with slow ease. Then he looked round at the distant wireless station and grunted sharply.

"Of course," he said to himself. "It does make it..."

Gheena had snatched the wire, reading out a meaningless jumble of letters and short words.

"And the news?" she asked softly.

"Oh, the war news. Everything much as usual. Great hopes and little else," he answered coolly. "When they strew the papers with roses they seem to forget the thorns or the stems, Miss Freyne."

Having been haughtily told he was a pessimist, Basil Stafford read his wire again to himself.

"Mrs. Weston offered to do post-boy, too," said the Professor. "I met her, but I wouldn't allow it. She was at your house borrowing note-paper. Hers was out. She has gone to see Mrs. Freyne now."

Basil Stafford said "Oh!" very thoughtfully.

The party at Castle Freyne was gathered in an airless room when they got back, heated by a large fire of wood and turf, the blend of tea and conversation strong in the close atmosphere. The women were knitting and the men discussing the mistakes of the war, humbly listened to by their spouses. The Bradys' right-minded cousin—her name was O'Toole—stabbed wool which grated harshly on the needles, and occasionally commented shrewdly.

Gheena let a breath of soft fresh air into the room as she threw up a window, and the visitors shivered politely.

"Going to nurse, or motor drive, or release a man?" asked the right-minded cousin almost as she shook hands. "I'm on five committees in Dublin."

Gheena said meekly that she was waiting to act as interpreter when the South Coast was invaded, and Mr. O'Hara carefully explained that nearly all Teutons spoke English fluently, so that that idea was absurd.

Gheena snubbed, closed half the window, and sighed patiently.

"Are you joining?" said Miss O'Toole to Stafford.

Mr. Stafford eyed her rancorously, merely remarking that his time was occupied by business.

A fumble at Miss O'Toole's pocket revealed the probable presence of a box of white feathers.

"Dearest George thinks the Germans are making all kinds of mistakes," said Matilda Freyne placidly. "Losing such lots of men, you know, and making themselves so unpopular and digging so much. He thinks they will all get rheumatism and have to go to Harrogate."

Darby suggested Marienbad and Homburg slyly. He thought the German army invalided might congest Harrogate. Matilda looked at Dearest George, feeling uncertain until she consulted him. George Freyne got up and shut the window sharply. Then he remarked to Stafford that he was glad the wireless station was now properly guarded. Anyone might have reached it before.

"When I saw you over there yesterday, Stafford, I said to you——"

Gheena listened with such elaborate carelessness that it was impossible to avoid nothing what she was doing.

"And, by the way, how did you get in?" added George Freyne fussily.

"I had some business there. Hanly charged my battery for me, too. Yes, I knew the guard. I thought they'd put on men soon."

Mrs. Weston, knitting rapidly, began to talk about the hunting in rapturous tones. It was actually going to commence next day, and she hoped her bay horse would be as good as he looked, the darling.

"If he only gets as far as his looks go," said Darby absently.

Miss O'Toole was questioning Basil Stafford ruthlessly—as to his age, birthplace and nationality. These items she wrote down in a small note-book, where, she said pointedly, she kept a register of fit men. Then quite suddenly she asked a question in laboured German.

"Hanoverian or Platt?" asked Stafford amiably. "I should like to know which you'd understand best before I answer. When I was at Berlin I practised both."

Then the mocking look died out of his face, which reddened slowly.

Gheena escaped from the heat to the doorstep. It was one of those autumn nights which are as oppressive as June with none of its lightness. The air was

murkily hot, and a fog was stealing into the hollows; through the grey haze one could hear the sea boom at the end of the park.

Everyone began to put up their knitting. The O'Haras' wagonette, poised haughtily high over a dejected grey cob, came round to the door, the weary beast walking with the bitter certainty of seven miles to go and a feed of hay at its end.

Miss O'Toole, trailing her ball of wool, came stealthily towards Gheena.

"I should ... watch him," she breathed fiercely. "Wireless here, and a coast for submarines, and—what is he doing?"

Gheena said "Drains" a little faintly.

Miss O'Toole compared drains to trenches with a sort of disdain.

"Young—strong—active. Blurts out he's been to Berlin and blushes over it. It's a place to watch," gulped Miss O'Toole dramatically.

Several exclamations, coupled with seven stumbles, heralded the approach of Basil Stafford, who had spun a cocoon of wool about his legs, and was cursing volubly in discreet undertone. His endeavour to get unwound involving him more securely still, he demanded tartly why Miss O'Toole played Fair Rosamund on the doorsteps; and, of course, if she could take it off in a second he would not cut the stuff, but——

Miss O'Toole, coursing round him agilely with dives and dashes at his gaiters, managed, as she loosed Stafford, to meet and involve the master of the house in the tangle.

Basil Stafford said "Silkworms," and advised George to stand quite still.

"Under, over. That's his bit. I never saw anyone dive so neatly on dry land."

A whistle sounded clearly on the cliffs, shrill and sweet. Basil suddenly used force, so that the wool fell from him in frayed pieces, and slipped to the door, followed by bitter reproaches from Miss O'Toole. In her opinion, at least two soldiers had been deprived of mittens.

It was unkind of Dearest George to say huffily that they were jolly lucky, for the drawing-room door opened to show him standing, wondering with the agile danger swoop round him, and winding feverishly. Gheena was outside.

The suspicious eyes of two blameless clergymen and their spouses fell heavily upon George Freyne, Mrs. Weston's cheerful voice wishing to know if it was a new game of "Now we go round the Mulberry Bush," or Kis...? and here her host's glance stopped her, and trying to help, she involved herself in the tangle.

"How you became so entangled," said Mrs. Brady icily, "in my niece's wool, Mr. Freyne?"

"It was Stafford," roared Dearest.

The eight suspicious eyes looked round for Mr. Stafford and four noses sniffed simultaneously.

"Break the stuff!" foamed Freyne. "Get me a knife! No, the other leg, not

the right, the left."

"Take Dearest George's advice," counselled Matilda; "he is sure to know his own legs. There! you were wrong. Just lift that foot, George, and the other at the same time. And, dear me, George!" George's answer being curt.

"Not being a Zeppelin," said Darby thoughtfully. "Round his arm now, Miss O'Toole, and his neck. Put your arm round it, and you too, Mrs. Weston. It's the last strand."

Mrs. O'Hara, who had listened for quite an hour on the previous day to accounts of the perfections of Miss O'Toole from Dublin, now decided in awful tones that the pony could not stand for another moment, and said "Good-bye" heavily.

"I am not evil-minded," said the clergyman's wife, "but I thought better of Mr. Freyne, and that painted Mrs. Weston."

"Even if the girl were pretty!" said her husband. "Go on, James, home. One could understand." Here he coughed hoarsely.

Gheena, who had run down from the sea, came back slowly; through the still mist she could hear voices on the water—men rowing back to the little village on the point.

Crabbit barked suspiciously at something unseen on land, ran it to earth, and came back with Basil Stafford.

"What did you think? Who whistled to you?" said Gheena abruptly.

"War makes the world jumpy," he said coolly. "Might have been an advance patrol of Boches, y'know, coming up to supper."

The day of the first meet of the scratch pack dawned in a grey mist, with the sea whimpering under a shroud of white. At seven, when everyone in Darby's yard was busy polishing and hissing, the mist cleared to a clammy greyness, hot and still. Little Andy, extremely resembling an active mosquito leaping from place to place, regretting as he reached each, that he was not at the other.

He tore to the kennels, advising old Barty, calling on Beauty lovingly, prophesying that she would folly none but himself. Telling Grandjer not to be frettin' for his tail, because the front of him would soon show them what he was; pouring out tales of Daisy and Greatness and their prowess.

Barty, his new leathers covered by overalls, observed bitterly that to be goin' out with such a pack was like what a man'd dhrame of afther he atin' too much.

"Like a dhrame when ye'd be at a hunt an' all off, an' the horse undher ye sthandin' sthock sthill," he ruminated sourly, "an' hounds leggin' it over the besht of ye're counthry, or maybe a check an' ye knowin' the line, an' the horn ye'd put to ye're mouth is a concertina, an' two strange masthers out laffin' at ye. Save us! I am terrible for dhramin'. Andy McInerny, terrible! The least taste extry at

night and I'll be at it. One was the worst of all, that there was a great lawn meet at Dom Dhurres, an' I with the grey horse outside waitin', an the crowd an' all, an' not a ridin' trouser or a boot on me, and no way to git thim. Sometimes I'd see the sphur tacked to me bare heel, an' the shame of it'd be through me; but I never axed even for a horse's hood."

"When I dhrames I dhrames plisint," remarked Andy simply. "I med believe onst I had Mr. Freyne's best horse whipt off, an' he himself dead in a ditch, cosy and quiet an away I bolted, an' Miss Gheena watchin'."

"Plisint!" said Darby softly. He had come up behind the two.

"An' off I whipt before hounds an' all, till Misther Freyne run up, shouting and leppin', but I travelled on. Ye're not goin' to send them out empty, Misther Barty, are ye, the craythers?"

"In the name of God, youngster, would ye feed hounds on huntin' day, ye omadawn?"

"It was thinkin' of kapin' the payce mid us, me Dada 'd say," murmured little Andy. "What they kills, Mr. Darby can pay for aisy. They're apt to catch bins, an' they hungered. It was the widow Hefferty's turkeys onst an we never sent thim dogs out empty agin."

At this stage Barty threatened reprisals if Andy did not instantly run away to mind his own bizness; so Andy hovered for a space, repeating that even the least taste of food would quieten the dogs, and then scampered back to the yards.

Darby's active, well-bred bay was being polished until he shone as a horse-chestnut fresh from the husk. The sedate grey, which was Barty's mount, poked a lean head from his loose box, and knew it was hunting again. A liver chestnut, destined to carry Carty, the newly-broke-in second whip, was doing what his rider called rings around his box, induced by the sight of the whip which Carty had only just learnt to crack, and which, so far, had generally hit his horse by mistake.

The chestnut preserved a too lively recollection of how often the thong had found him out in tender places.

"Have ye e'er a polish put on the Rat?" was what Andy demanded, as he seized a clean bridle, and zealously rubbed the bits in sand.

"Let ye put a polish on him yerself, ye pinkeen." Mike, the head groom, raised a heated face.

"He'd clout me with his hindmost legs," remarked Andy soberly, "unless I had a one to howld him."

"Me gran' bits that was clane an' all." Mike left the bridle for Andy, looked at it, and hinted darkly that it was not the Rat but Andy who would have a polish put on his hide if he did not leave his bethers to themselves. Next moment, as Andy trailed tearfully back to the kennels, old Mike stumped growling to the

Rat's stable, directing that the pony should be cleaned properly, so that Miss Gheena wouldn't be at them at the meet.

The Rat was a long-tailed, powerful little beast, with the second thighs of a big horse, no shoulder, and a lean, vicious head. If he had been sixteen hands, he would have carried sixteen stone with ease.

He bit and kicked in the stable and ran away out of it; but few more wonderful hunters had been foaled, and his inches made his evil efforts to hunt futile. They had tried him in harness, to the extreme detriment of two pony carts, and with additions to chips for lighting the fires. If they stopped him kicking, he lay down and slumbered stolidly, but Gheena would not part with him.

"The head of that child will open and let out his brains, the sthate he is in," said Mike, looking after Andy. "If he has flithered up to the kennels onst to-day he has done it twinty times, an' the eyes lightin' out of his head. Will ye have Colleen out second, sir?"

This to Darby, who came limping and crippling across the yard.

"A second horse." Darby glared back at the kennels, and suggested that possibly half a horse might be sufficient with the pack which he had gathered together.

"For the huntin' they'll do it might be," said Mike, grinning; "but it is the huntin' ye'll do yerself afther them, Misther Darby, when, maybe, they'll make home on ye, and, sure enough, bein' used to Matt McInerny's bugle, they'll not come to yer own. An' the teasin' they may be afther givin' ye. Will I send Colleen to Drumeneer, sir, at one o'clock, an' Sportsman for Barty? That grey isn't half fit."

Darby went to his breakfast and came out again before he was finished, disturbed by the pursuit of Grandjer and Daisy round the house. Grandjer was, in fact, hot on the line of the stable cat, which took cover just in time, crackling like a live wireless installation from the depths of a holly tree.

"If ye had to quieten them with a taste of mate," panted Andy, when he had entreated Grandjer to give over and come huntin'. "If Barty had to be said by me. 'Ware cats, ye thievin' rogue."

"Where is Barty?" Darby inquired, limping out with his hunting whip.

"It is Greatness an' Doatie he is afther," observed Andy absently, "that got into the chicken yard. We have the resht secured in the coach-house. Would ye flick a clout at Daisy, sir, where he is nosin' in the bushes? There wasn't the thickness of a hair between Grandjer an the ould cat's tail when she treed," confided Andy proudly. "Grandjer is hard to bate, I tell ye. If he had to take afther Dandy, wouldn't he have been the grand terrier afther rots?" he finished regretfully.

Grandjer, leaving the animated Marconi in the tree with sorrow, growled

out that it was a pleasure deferred as he yielded to persuasion and trolled towards the yard.

"An' he'll trail a fox as good as a cat," said Andy still more proudly. "We should be off now to be in time."

Barty climbed to the grey's back, age slipping from his withered monkey-like little form as his knees gripped the saddle. In a new pink coat, his little twisted face all aglow under its peaked cap, Darby awoke to a second youth. He could still ride. He was a huntsman once again, with the right to swear respectfully at his superiors and fluently at offending equals. His old hands took up the reins until the grey bent his neck proudly to the light touch, and slipped away with his strong halt exaggerated by his light-hearted pride.

Carty landing with difficulty on to the suspicious chestnut, said "C'o-op thee" knowingly and cracked his whip.

A certain number of hounds pattered out docilely, but Beauty, Grandjer and Daisy sat down and waited for little Andy.

When the lash-stung chestnut had done two maddened circles round the yard and upset Carty on to a barrow full of sand, men on foot used blandishments and threats to induce the three to join the pack.

A small eager face peeped rapturously round a half-open door, for the three were adepts at dodging blows and very few got home.

"They are looking for Andy," suggested Darby.

"Tell that shrimpeen Andy if he does not hurry along I'll tear the nose from his face," yelled Barty at length, his dignity as huntsman spent.

"Didn't ye tell me not to move on until ye were moved on yerself?" shrilled a reproachful voice. "An' I'll be late, says I, an' the price of ye, says you, an' now the gaither on me leg is not even hooked up yet."

Discomfited Barty said several things to himself; aloud, he told Andy that if himself and his pony did not come on the minnit, they might remain inside, an' them three wastrels of dogs with them.

This threat brought forth the Rat and Andy with a rush, the little wicked-eyed pony tearing along with his jaws set and only stopping when he saw hounds, the three renegades falling in happily.

"Didn't I say ye could not go without me?" said Andy. "And if anyone does go without me it will be the Rot," he added a little anxiously, as that animal reared abruptly and then dropped and kicked.

Barty, distinctly raffled, started again, the body of the crooked-legged miscellaneous pack at his heels, with Andy and Carty behind, and behind them the three rebels, now strolling along placidly.

Far off the sea could be seen, grey-blue under a grey-blue haze; before them the hills bumped and twisted, with the narrow-slated banks dividing the fields;

here and there brown chasms from which turf had been cut, and the coppery gleam of a stream, and further off some fair pastures with the slates on the banks replaced by growth of gorse and fern. Something had to hold the crumbling treacherous soil together. It took an active horse and a quick jumper to slip over those banks without a fall or scramble, unless they adopted the safer plan of some of the heavy-weights, who stood on them until the fence crumbled into a brown mould of safety.

Darby watched the final start with resignation and a grin. He foresaw complications before him, but at least they were trying to keep things together for the peppery brave little man who was out fighting for his country, and they were not trying to ruin a really good pack.

"We'll pull down a few foxes if we have to get lassoes," said Darby cheerily, going to put on his hunting cap.

The good side of his face was reflected in the glass. He was young and strong despite his injuries; the cheer of a day's hunting was in his blood, and for a moment a flash of hope lit his lurid young eyes. A flash he so seldom saw, or allowed himself to see, that almost with a snarl he turned so that the scarred cheek was reflected and buried the gay hope almost as soon as it was born.

"You fool!" said Darby severely. "You rotten fool! To think!"

"Chicken or egg sandwich, sir?" the antiquated butler inquired in the hall.

"Egg; and provision the car with the chickens. I may appease the pack with them," said Darby grimly.

What a fine old place it was as he looked out across the wide park, the big old trees flaunting in autumn glory, the sea just visible! He might have been running down those steps lightly, with hopes which had not to be smothered at birth and his heart. He might have loved the old place doubly, because he could offer it as a home to a girl whom he cared for; instead of—his hand touched his useless leg; he leant on his stick. "But, hang it, if it were so, I should have been in France and probably crippled for good," said Darby, trying to put care away.

It was on mornings such as these, when he could enjoy part of life, that Care clung closer. He could ride, but must call whole men to open gates or catch his horse for him. He could feel the rush of the wind on his face and the horse between his knees, see hounds hunt, look for his turns and his luck as other men did; but at the finish, when men jumped from their tired horses, he must climb down laboriously, feel the glow dying as he limped to his car or into some house to have tea.

He met the post-boy on the avenue and found a short letter from the Master.

"Keep it going if you can. We're having poor hunting here; but back the old country to kill its fox in the end, for all the croppers they'll take on the way."

Darby drove fast along the narrow bumpy roads, drawing a distinct breath

of relief when he saw Barty and the hounds demurely still upon a hill and quite a crowd of people waiting.

There was a lack of smartness about the assemblage. Mrs. O'Gorman from the Bank had only half clipped her stout roan. She said that it seemed wrong to turn out a horse just the same as one would in peace times. There were no new habits and half the familiar faces were gone. Mr. Hefferty, the local dealer, who generally had a string out—at least four horses, shaven and tidied and gingered until their tails stood out as banners, and every semblance of a good point was emphasized—now had only one, a light whity grey with big feet, an animal which would have to be dyed if it ever went on active service.

Someone who had seen a paper was immediately surrounded. How was it? What was the news? Good or bad?

These were the days when people hoped that war could not go on, that it would end suddenly and dramatically because it was too huge to endure; when everyone forgot that its very hugeness would keep it going until money and men failed.

Old Captain Moore, who was fiercely anxious to do something, was even explaining to people at what point our troops would enter Berlin. He had been there twice on a Cook's tour, and he meant to go for another directly there was peace. He had even written about his ticket. Mr. O'Gorman was concerned as to the choice of prisons for the Kaiser and personally blamed that excitable Emperor for the feverish price of oats.

"Spoiling even what's left to us over here!" he said. "Hope they'll give him black bread when they shut him up."

A thousand places for victory were discussed and argued over. Everything was hopeful and nothing ominous of defeat or even of check. Antwerp, after all, was only part of unfortunate Belgium, and its fall made the air clearer.

The communiqués were things to be hung over, relied on, and devoured. People believed then that every word from Berlin was an invention.

Then the small field turned its thoughts from war and looked at the hounds.

"Any more adventures, Barty?" Darby asked softly.

"There is one thing, sir." Barty returned an indirect reply. "That hunt or no, they'll get a bit to ate another mornin'. We only tore them off the back of Carty's mother's pig, an' they had three chickens gone from me own aunt while you'll be clappin' an eyelid."

Matilda Freyne asked Dearest George if he thought it would be wise to get up, and was then lifted to the saddle without making any effort to assist in the proceedings. Once there, she consulted Dearest George as to her straps and the adjustment of her reins, and was placidly happy on her quiet horse.

Gheena had forgotten all wars as she endeavoured to persuade her brown

mare not to buck. It was so good to be out with any kind of hounds again.

George Freyne having taken his new hunting cap out of a hat-box and adjusted it with pride, shouted to Darby to wait for him, and grew irritable when Darby looked reproachfully at his watch.

"If you had a wife to get fixed up and the hang post late on account of the hang war! Hunting horn only just here in a box not even opened. Here you, Phil, are there straps for it and for the case?"

"They are, sir," said Phil briefly.

Dearest George tore feverishly at the nailed box, injured one of his fingers, and having sucked it noisily, mounted his horse, ordering Phil to open the hang thing and fix it on.

By this time the majority of the small field had collected by the Freynes' motor, feeling that George Freyne was to blame for keeping them waiting and looking at him reproachfully. Mr. O'Gorman remarked "Twenty past" just as the lid of the box cracked open.

"And you'd like it to be forty past if you were late yourself, O'Gorman," snapped Dearest George bitterly. "I'll move on without you often enough. How is a joint master to go out with nothing to play on, blow at—er—sound for his hounds, I should like to know?"

Here Darby wanted patiently to know if Phil was digging trenches or only opening a box.

"I'd say it will not fit on aisy," said Phil dubiously, coming round. He held up a brightly new Klaxon and scratched his head with his free hand.

"I—Matilda!" yelled George Freyne hopelessly.

"Dearest George," said Matilda placidly.

"I—told you—a hunting horn—weeks ago! Years ago! There was a delay in sending it."

"You said the very loudest one, Dearest George," said Matilda pleasantly. "All the stores were short owing to the war. I did wonder what you could fix it on to, but as you said a whistle too. Isn't there a whistle in the box, Phil?"

"Move on, Barty," said Darby with decision.

CHAPTER VII

Darby Dillon left his fellow master glaring at the Klaxon horn and rode up to the

hounds. There was no eager greeting to him of quick yaps and wagging sterns, but rather a distinctly critical surveillance, and liquid eyes looking for the men on foot whom the pack knew.

Seen gathered together, the scratch pack were not prepossessing.

Darby grinned softly at the varieties of hound types, at Greatness's crooked legs and Daisy's snub nose, and especially at the crop-tailed Grandjer, so nearly related to a terrier.

A fringe of excited onlookers, previous followers of the foot dogs, gathered close, commenting eagerly.

"That is Spinsther, that ye reared, Marty. D'ye call to mind the day he took the trail down be Conellan's dykes, an' we all at the wrong side?"

Marty rubbed his head and recalled the incident.

"An' when he had his pup, didn't he tear meself too," remarked Marty sourly. "A pair of trouser I had on but eighteen months near pulled off me. He is a savage soort of a dog that Spinsther, an' I to rear him an' all with lashin's of milk an' male."

"An' Beauty, he has the nose. When the thrail was losht down anear the say, an' the other dogs on the back thrail, wasn't it Beauty thrun a yowl of his own?"

"Grandjer was the next," put in little Andy, "or maybe the firsht; but Papa had his mind med up he was only thrailin' old Mrs. Day's cat, Grandjer bein' but a puppy then."

"They do be talkin' of the Hunt Club hounds, but we have one fox an' his pups," said the covert keeper. "Five of them no less, an' thank God ye are out to hunt them."

Darby gathered the pack and waved his hand. The hounds looked up at the passage of the dog-skin glove through the air with mild curiosity. Darby waved it again; he uttered somewhat awkwardly a variety of hunting cries.

"Oh, give them a whack, you two, Barty," he said helplessly. "Thrash them in." Carty raised his whip, a motion immediately followed by a frantic bolt of the chestnut round the field.

"Me Dada 'd get up on the furry banks if he did hunt a covert on the sly," piped Andy; "make a lep in himself till all 'd be afther him. Onst they've a taste of the thrail ye can lave them."

Greatness, Daisy and Home Ruler, an enormous tan bitch with one ear, were sneaking off to draw for themselves; the place might be alive with hares.

Andy whipped two back, and Darby yelled at Carty to follow Home Ruler.

"Get round them, you—idiot!" he roared.

Carty, soliloquizing feverishly that it was the world he would be round if the chestnut carried on them games, or maybe chargin' Germans before he knew

what was what, endeavoured to steer his nervous steed in the direction of Home Ruler's tan hind-quarters.

But it was Gheena who drove the prodigal back to fox-hunting.

The Field having come out, expected, as fox-hunters will, that this motley collection were to be as well ordered and obedient as Tom Lindlay's pack. Observing the difficulties, they decided, very audibly that it was perhaps better to leave a country alone than to botch it in this fashion; and as it would evidently be of very little use to come out riding, better try on foot.

Mr. O'Gorman, who had, almost forgotten what his feet looked like, said "Yes," briskly, "or in a motor-car."

"You'll have to get off and go in, George," said Darby. "I can't go crippling and hobbling up that bank."

"An' if meself comes along with ye," said Andy. "Blow a blasht on ye're bugle, yer honor, now to hearten them."

George Freyne looked heatedly at the empty case, got down with a grunt, and pompously marched toward the bank.

Violet Weston, brightly pretty in a light fawn coat and completely irregular soft tweed hat, pushed the tall bay through the crowd, watching critically. She was followed by Mr. Keefe, who also wore a hunting cap, quite considering that he was one of the Masters as he had helped with the consultations.

George Freyne clambered on to the bank, calling lustily.

"You must go down within." Andy leapt up and disappeared into the gorse, followed by his three faithful hounds. "Ye must go within like me Dada."

"Yerra, push him out! Hurreh in with ye! Gan out of that, Spinsther! Hurreh in along with ye! Nose him up!"

The foot people arrived breathless and rushed to the rescue.

"It is the prickles they are afeard of. Nose him out, Daisy, ye schamer! Blow a blasht on ye're bugle, sir, and over with ye; they'll folly."

George Freyne's new whistle rang shrilly clear, but he stayed on the bank.

"Get into it, Freyne. Here, I'll try my horn," said Keefe.

"If you've a hunting cap on you get in yourself," bellowed Dearest George irritably. "Come along and get in; if you can blow that—do!"

Darby Dillon rocked on his horse as Keefe, stout and pink, outlined in a very tight pink coat, made importantly for the bank, and standing there, brought forth a husky wheeze of sound, followed by an impotent broken squeak.

"Whip them on to us now!" shouted Keefe. "Now! What is the 'Come in' note, Dillon?—which, this or that?"

"He is just like a pink puff-ball," gasped Gheena, wiping her eyes. "Just! Oh, Darby, what is the 'Come in' note?"

"If he expects me to blow in or out now, I can't," gulped Darby. "Blow away

yourself, Keefe; you'll strike it in time."

"If he stopped that poisonous row, they'd come to my whistle," shouted Dearest George, stuttering furiously.

"They have the thrail!" shrilled a small voice wildly.

At that moment Beauty flung a long throaty yowl; Grandjer, dashing to her, echoed and confirmed it with his nondescript yelp. Beauty spoke again emphatically, and now Daisy threw her tongue.

Every hound outside quivered to the sound.

"Hurreh! Hurreh! Hurreh! Folly on there! Nose him out! In with ye all! Get on to it, Parnellite! Schald to ye, Spinsther! Hurreh! Hurreh! Over! Over!"

A mixed pack of hounds and followers dashed towards the cover. There was no hanging back now. Home Ruler's huge body caught Dearest George's legs; his footing was precarious. Spinster followed the charge. Leaping to get clear, George Freyne lost his balance, grabbed at Keefe, and the two went face foremost into the thick gorse, floundering there furiously.

"Well done! Success! Back him up, Colleen! Hurreh on!" shrieked a jealous onlooker.

"Andrew McCarty, if you knocked me in, I will kill you," said George. Freyne as he emerged, a new Venus, from the sea of prickles.

"I did not, but the dogs," returned Andrew contemptuously. "An' shouldn't ye be within? God save us! I'd say the inspector had a wakeness got; he is schriekin' terrible!" Keefe's face, convulsed, appeared above the gorse.

"Just above the boot," howled Keefe, struggling upwards. "A devil of a dog with a black face. I fell on him."

"That was Spinsther," said Andrew McCarty. "It was only agitayted he is to catch the fox. He manes no harm. It was him tore me own trousers; but he had pups the same time."

"To the bone," moaned Keefe, as he floundered to the bank. "An infernal hound, Dillon, has bitten me to the bone."

"All that way," said Darby with interest. "Did he leave the tooth in, Keefe?"

"Lord, they're at him. Yoi! Yoi! Yoi there! Hurreh! Hurreh! Nose him out! Rout him out!" yelled the crowd. "Forrard on! There's tongues for ye."

Ten couples of hounds, most of them throwing the long harrier yowl, Grandjer's shrill tongue audible above the rest. It was music in the still misty day. Hats were crammed down, reins tightened; the small Field surged to the edge of the gorse, peering in.

Two cubs and an old fox doubled and twisted in the thick gorse, the music echoed and deepened.

"Watch them, Barty; see to the gap. I've no breath," said Darby. "Get on your horse, George. You took covert gallantly."

"*If* it was that Andrew McCarty," said Dearest George murderously. "Am I all pricked, Matilda? Am I? Have you looked at my face?" exploded George mildly, removing a handkerchief dotted with blood.

"I was listening to the hounds and thinking how nicely you jumped in, Dearest George," said Matilda mildly. "But when you came out, of course I asked you why you did it. Oh, he's away! You are slightly pricked."

The old fox leapt lightly into view, ran for a few yards, was headed by the rush of the crowd, and disappeared back into covert.

"Hi! You!" Darby swung round. "You set of spoilsports! Think I can't go for you because they're only harriers. If you don't keep away from that gap and stay where you're told, I'll go and hunt hares with 'em."

"Think I didn't see you, O'Loughlin, away for a start! You set of——"

"It is not too bad at all for the sthart," murmured Barty approvingly. "Get over to this end, please, gentlemen," he roared himself. "Keep your eye on the gap, Mr. Keefe."

Harold Keefe bound a blue-and-white check silk handkerchief round his leg and consulted Mrs. Weston as to hydrophobia. He was faintly sulky when she took no notice, her bright blue eyes fixed excitedly on the rustling gorse.

"He is away!" Darby darted along the edge of the gorse. "Away just outside the fence. Blow, sir, blow them out! God save us alive! look at that!"

For at that moment Grandjer, with a stout cub firmly clamped between his jaws, leapt over the bank, and putting the limp little beast down, commenced to worry it.

"Didn't I tell ye Grandjer was the dog?" screamed Andy, flying out. "He is thrackin' that one now since the commincemint, an' never left him."

"We'll have to break this one up, then, I suppose," said Darby. "We must do the right thing."

Grandjer worried and growled and tore. He was screened from view by a big stone and a clump of brambles.

"He will ate it be himself," said Andy. "Do ye go afther the ould fox, sir; none'll know."

Darby looked at Barty, and Barty grinned.

"Be the time someone is bit getting away the fox, the other one'll be at Durra," he whispered. "And why should we lose a hunt acclimatizing this lot to do right, when, with the help of God, the Kayser'll be dead and our own hounds out again next October?"

"But," said Darby, "well, then. Forrard on!"

"He won't ate it all," said Andy. "He'll tiren, an' unless Mr. Keefe bein' bit already wouldn't so much mind another, I'd say whoever went to take it'd get a quare nip."

"Toot" went Darby's horn. "Shrr," George Freyne's whistle. A grating gurgle emanated from Keefe. Slowly hounds dribbled out, but surely, everyone hunting. When he got three couple together, Darby went away, wondering vaguely if he would ever see any of the other which was still conscientiously towling and yowling in covert.

Home Ruler, distantly related to a deer-hound, could travel; she flung herself on the line, with Beauty close behind and Greatness yowling joyously.

Grandjer, finding his fox high and tough, especially as there was no one to dispute it with him, picked up his kill and galloped in pursuit of the charge.

The fox had been gone some time, and scent, the mysterious, was not too good. Home Ruler, dashing light-heartedly in front, threw up her big head suddenly. The remainder of the pack, all hunting zealously, towled into view, coming undisturbed through the horses. Grandjer dropped his cub and galloped down to his companions. It was his sharp yap which rang out as he passed Home Ruler and spoke on the line. Then "Yow-Ow," the long-drawn musical harrier notes, as at a fair pace they pressed on. The going was light on the top of the hill, the banks fair and sound. What matter if Dandy's pup was leading, his docked stump quivering! They were hunting. Slowly but surely they dipped into Durra, a big place in a hollow, and circled round it until it was evident that the unpressed fox had gone back to covert.

"We'll be a long time killing one this way," remarked Darby, watching the pack spread out as they checked.

"And if we do not kill, we are practically of no use." George Freyne would have been supremely happy if his face had not worried him. He knew the line of gaps coming across; he had ridden, as became a Master, in the van, and he was now wondering if blowing his whistle would be a good thing just to remind people of his position.

"The men up at the covert said they were looking for a kill, Darby."

"And we might have had one," said Darby, "if we'd tackled that cub." He looked guiltily at his companions and Barty coughed.

"Beauty has it! Listen to her now! Hurreh on, Beauty! All to Beauty!" yelled little Andy.

The child had lost his cap, his hands were bleeding. The Rat had gone exactly as he chose, but Andy had in these crowded minutes tasted nectar.

That ecstatic jump on to the high bounds bank, the crawl along the top, all but swept off by a branch, the blissful leap straight off the road over a coped wall, with everyone else going in at the gate, the bumping rush through the crowd at the beginning—all these things had gone as wine to young Andy's head.

Might the war go on for ever if it meant his having the Rat to ride on.

Violet Weston, a little ruffled, a brickish red forge showing through the

powder on her cheeks, rode up close to Keefe.

"This horse makes a very curious sound when going up a hill," she said a little coldly, "and he seems to find it hard also to do so; also, he stumbled at the banks."

"You—er—rode him at a very high place," said Keefe a little nervously. "That bounds fence is full of rabbit-holes."

"Well, he is very nice to look out, but I say——" Violet Weston turned to beam at Stafford.

"I was just saying this horse makes such a funny gurgle running up hill," she said, "and I shall be disappointed if he is not really a good hunting animal. After paying sixty pounds, too, for the thing. What is that noise, Mr. Stafford?"

"Intake or out-take?" said Stafford, his eyes glued to the persevering Beauty, who was feathering on to the line, with Grandjer dashing wildly about close to her.

"Oh, intake, certain," said Mrs. Weston grimly; and she added rapidly: "What does that mean? It's a shrill noise."

"He was a whistler, an' he a colt," remarked a voice close by. "An' if you do not aise him up the hills, miss, he will tangle in the banks an' his breath gone from him."

"I told you—there was a slight 'if,'" said Keefe, adjusting his hunting cap peevishly. "I said so not enough to stop him. You can't get sound horses this year for small sums."

"They wouldn't pass him for th' army," murmured the same voice in the background. "Twenty pound Tom Talty said, but it was his ankles, an' not the wind."

"They have got it. Forrard on!" yelled Mr. Keefe enthusiastically. "Forrard away!"

Beauty and Grandjer rushed to the cheer which was followed by the thunderous advance of Darby and a heated request to the third Master to let hounds alone when they were puzzling matters out for themselves.

"One of them threw his tongue," said Keefe snappishly.

"He did when Annette Freyne's mare kicked him. So would you," returned Darby dryly.

"If you're anxious to hunt this for yourself," he went on, his voice raised, "do it. You're all over the place. Get the Field up, somebody. Get them back to the clump of trees."

George Freyne, blowing his whistle, rode backwards and forwards busily, right over the line.

"If the Master was not in France he would be dead with the rage an' he here to-day, annyways," said old Barty bitterly. "His breath 'd never see him out with

what's doin' here this hour past."

"Will I carry on Beauty or Grandjer?" whispered Andy, "beyant anear the sunk fence where he must have gone over? They won't folly himself or yerself," added Andy wisely.

Beauty's nose went down when she was clear of the crowd. With a long-drawn ecstatic yowl she declared that their fox had gone that way. Grandjer dashed over and spoke to it beyond, the whole pack coming towling melodiously to do their part.

They were patient. It often took three or four hours to wear down a hare. There was very seldom anyone to hurry or help them when they checked, and they were used to their own leisurely ways and their own melodious fashion of puzzling things out. They settled down to it again now, stringing out, every hound hunting without faith or reliance on the one in front, Home Ruler bringing up the rear, her great bulk wearing her out speedily.

Mrs. Weston kicked her spurred heels into the tall bay and put him at his scratchy gallop at the sunk fence, which he rose at gallantly some three feet too soon, and then blundered on his head at the far side.

"She can ride," thought Darby approvingly, as he watched the widow pick the horse up, digging her heels in again to reward him for his blunder with a savage thump of her whip.

Hounds carried on across the road and swung left into some low-lying land cut across by small deep ditches. The little Rat, his wicked head either high in the air or stretched out almost touching the earth, hung among the tail hounds, young Andy quite incapable of anything except sticking limpet-like to the low shoulders in front of him. Their fox had evidently been headed on the road, and not being hurried, had loped off to try a gullet in the bog. Finding this stopped, he turned up again for the covert. The ground was squelchy and holding; the edges of the small dykes were of crumbling peaty earth. Horses bucked and scrambled across, labouring in the deep going.

Several wise people were proceeding leisurely along the high ground to the covert, riding an easy line of gaps.

"We will be apt to meet the Croompaun this course," said Barty to Darby, "an' it will be ugly with all the grass above on it."

The Croompaun was a blend of bog drain and stone-faced bank, fencing the end of the bog. It was a nasty jump coming down from the gorse, when a horse could get fairly easily on to the bank, and what Barty called, settle himself before he made his effort to shoot out over the wide bog drain; but going up it took a really bold horse to get on to the bank far enough to avoid an ugly scramble or an extremely probable topple back.

"We are for it and it's half a mile round," said Darby philosophically.

"That bye Andy will be apt to be kilt at it," observed Barty, "on that skelp of a pony."

Splash! The leading hounds sent up sprays of amber-hued water, and then scrambled up the stony, treacherous bank, now overgrown with long, coarse tufts of grass and trails of bramble.

Darby held his breath as the Rat altered the position of his lean, pointed head, putting it straight up, and cocked his lop ears with complete determination. Next moment he hurled his powerful little body high in the air, landed seemingly on a mere tussock, and with the scratch of steel on stone, was safe on the top.

"Good Begonnes!" said old Barty. "Have a care of that Home Ruler, Misther Darby; she is undther your feet."

Darby pulled his horse together in the deep churning ground. A fall to him was an ugly thing, but he had no thought of it as he faced the Croompaun.

His active little horse rose with a grunt of effort, landing safely with his hind legs well under him, just as Barty rolled actively from the grey's back; that animal, relieved of weight, managed to get up somehow. The chestnut settled matters by refusing honestly, ridden, it must be owned, rather half-heartedly by Carty.

The two other black caps pulled up immediately, considerately remembering that Hunt servants must be attended to.

"Hold him at it and I'll whip him for you," said Dearest George, unloosing his thong.

At the sound of the swish the chestnut swerved with the swiftness of an acrobat, and declined to be straightened again.

"It will be quicker, maybe, to go around than to be swhervin' for half an hour," said Carty nervously. "Aisy, sir, he is in dread of a whip."

Gheena and Stafford got over side by side, and the tall bay, completely blown, simply slipped in to cool himself, Violet Weston shooting off with a shriek of wrath.

"I never saw a woman leather a horse so hard," said George Freyne afterwards. "She clouted him up to the place you can land, and never asked a soul to help her."

The few who had got over galloped on over light land, galloped and sometimes trotted, for scent was none too good, and the scratch pack did not mean to hurry themselves.

"Take us a long time to kill a fox at this rate, Barty," said Darby. "Eh?"

"They'll eat him in covert if he has no wish to break out again," said Barty; "an' that same will be no good thing this hour of the year."

"They have the thrail losht," said Andy as the rat stopped.

They had, just where Grandjer had dropped the limp remains of the cub.

He recognized his prey now pouncing at it with a growl. Darby looked at the Field, which had short-cutted, and were just coming into view three fields away. Gheena and Stafford, stopped by wire, were some way behind. And the avoiders of the Croompaun were only looping the hill.

Spurs went in and bridles were shaken as Darby sent a blood-curdling yell of triumph echoing across the still day. It seemed mixed up with "Have it, Grandjer! Have it!" And this was followed by Barty's trained screech and a still "Who-whoop!" from Andy.

The new pack, the foot dogs, had run into their fox handsomely in the open.

"Yoi-i, there! Who-whoop!" Barty was dexterously removing brush marks and pads before he held the carcass above his head in the midst of the slightly interested hounds, Grandjer alone showing what he thought of the matter by snapping at Barty's legs and growling savagely.

"Well done! Bravo! Just what's wanted! How they must have bustled him!"

"Yoi-i, there! Worry! worry! worry! You would never make dacent foxhounds of thim," said Barty disgustedly, "so what the odds!"

"Me Dada schnaps the hares if he is up quick enough," said Andy thoughtfully; "an' whin he is not, there is no one to be nisin', so they are not acclimatized to what ye are bawlin' out."

"The finest thing that could happen. We may congratulate ourselves," gasped Freyne. "Tally ho! Tear him and eat him! Tally ho!"

"Hi, puss, puss! Hurreh! Hurreh!" chorused the arriving foot contingent. "Yerra ate him! Hi, puss!"

"There is one fox pasht in half an hour back," added the covert keeper. "Had ye two in front of ye, sir? Ar'n't they wondthers for what they look like, thim dogs!"

"Dearest George, I took your advice and came across high ground," remarked Mrs. Freyne, ambling up. "We all saw you riding away from the Croompaun. I should have been afraid you had fallen in, but I saw your hunting cap going round so plainly and so sensibly."

George Freyne said nothing rather expressively. It was a little hard on a man who had just been telling his cousin Annette the dangers which she had escaped in the bog, and how hounds had flown down there.

"And, by the way, Annette, I thank you to buy tuppenceworth of red ribbon for that mare's tail," put in Darby. "Home Ruler is quite lame where you kicked her. She was last all the way."

"She is always lasht afther she is first for ten minutes," murmured Andy. "Me Dada says it is the weight of him, and that some of his fambly was mastiffs an' them yally saintly dogs."

The next covert was three miles off, and hounds, now learning something

of their new work, pattered in fair order along a stony road. There was a faint diversion occasioned by Grandjer almost chopping a cat, one which Andy explained he was near to get offin befour, she having dragged her claws down his face onst an' got away from him.

The next covert was a straggling place, a long wood of fir and young larch with a few dubiously rideable paths in it. It was the last place to come to with the new pack, which enjoyed itself completely in its own way: Some hunting rabbits; four couple solemnly towling after a hare, and the rest disappearing in different directions. Barty viewed a fox away, but all their looking and whistling could only produce a dribble of hounds.

The foot people had been left behind; there was no one to drive the pack out in time to do anything. But Greatness presently elected to get on the line of a fox and gather some friends with her, which fox they solemnly hunted round and round, stolidly and carefully, until Beauty marked him in a rabbit burrow and watched Grandjer try to dig him out.

With the aid of the terrier he was bolted and killed.

The thick mist of the morning had crept up again, grey and clammy. It hung with a stillness through which voices echoed hollowly, and great drops began to collect on the branches.

Harold Keefe shivered in the chill, proffering apologies to Mrs. Weston for any fancied shortcomings in the bay horse; Mrs. Weston, with her legs very damp and her boots full of water, receiving them quite graciously.

"Oh, I'm sure you meant him to be a dear horse!" she said good-humouredly. "And perhaps when he's hunted more he'll have more breath and less waist. I couldn't keep the girths tight. What a day for Germans to land!" she added with a shiver, peering into the mist. "What's that, Mr. Stafford? There would be nothing to stop them if they did. You've got the wireless to call for help."

"I fancy—that before they landed that the wireless would be arranged about," he said thoughtfully, tapping his boot. "It wouldn't do to have the power of summoning any of the fleet, would it?"

Gheena Freyne stopped listening to the hounds and edged her horse closer.

"A few men in their pay could account for the small guard on the station. And if the transports once got in the men could do a lot of harm before they went out again or were caught." He had got off his horse and was holding one hand to his side as if something hurt him.

"They'll be all so horribly beaten by Christmas there won't be anyone to come," declared Violet Weston optimistically. "You don't think the old Professor is taking notes of the coast, do you, Mr. Stafford?"

"Not that I——" Stafford stopped. "They're coming past this way again," he

said. "I don't envy Darby all this time."

The fog came down so thickly that Darby gathered the pack and decided to go home. He had at least vindicated his start by killing two foxes and having some fun.

It was more to Andy's shrill pipe than the horn which brought hounds out, a great many of them suspiciously red about the mouth.

"They enjoy a place like that," said Andy happily, "with rabbits galore."

"When they get into it, Barty," said Darby as they jogged homewards, "and keep together and get on a little faster, they might show us some fun, after all."

"They'll show ye what noses can do," said Barty grimly. "But harriers with a taste of tarrier an' God knows what they was whelped, and harriers with a taste of tarrier they'll die. Wasn't that Grandjer digging the fox out, no less?"

They would pass close to Castle Freyne. The cars came up looking for them, and Gheena asked everyone to tea.

"I'll drive you, Gheena," Darby said, his voice muffled in the mist.

He climbed down slowly. On his horse he had been upright and good to look at; now he limped and shuffled towards the car, catching at it to support him.

"And you, Stafford?" he said. "Cantillon there would take your horse back for you."

"Mr. Stafford will probably want to get back to his work as he's been out all day," suggested Gheena frostily.

Basil Stafford observed mildly that it was undoubtedly a nice light evening to direct drainage works on, but he thought that he would wait until next day.

"Gheena"—Darby climbed into his car—"Gheena, the Croompaun was a very big leap for you to-day on that new mare of yours."

"You saw her do it?" she asked.

"I generally see you do things," he answered slowly, a rasp of pain in his voice.

Matilda Freyne had ambled homewards some two hours before. She was watching old Naylour pack up the Klaxon when they got in, and explaining how disappointed Mr. Freyne had been.

"If one could have an attachment to a saddle for that, Naylour," she said, "it would make a far better noise than he ever will with his mouth, wouldn't it? And a whistle is so undignified, is it not? And there you all are! And you are very tired, Dearest. And will you have your bath before your poached eggs, Dearest George, because both are ready?"

Darby said he thought that possibly the bath might be the easier to keep hot if it was still in the taps. He was then waylaid by Gheena at the dining-room door, Crabbit gyrating at her feet, worrying her muddy boots, and twisting

himself into equine knots in his joy.

"Darby, I couldn't ask you. How did they kill that fox in the open like that? Was he sitting down in the fence?"

"He was," said Darby briefly.

"An' he was a cub. An old fox went away."

The corners of Darby's mouth relaxed visibly.

"Well, Grandjer snapped a cub in the morning," he said softly, "and must have carried it along; and when we met it, what Barty said was: 'If we lights down and who-whoops him, sorra the sowl 'll be the wiser, but all well playzed. Thim livin' round the covert extry so. An' Andy 'll kape a sthill tongue.' And Andy said his own Mama wouldn't twist it out of him in purgathory, and it didn't seem to matter what one does with that pack; so—well, it was a great beginning."

"Oh, Darby!" said Gheena faintly.

"I doubt if the best English packs would care for me as a Master; that is, if we write an account of it to the *Field*," whispered Darby. "Will you send one, Gheena?"

"I would not disgrace the County," said Gheena hysterically. "Dearest is telling them all now how he accounted for that fox."

CHAPTER VIII

Gheena Freyne knitted with unskilful rapidity and stared disconsolately at a blurred and bitter afternoon. The sea whined and moaned in the harbour, a liquid carpet of warship tint broken by peevish flakes of white. Gheena could hear it because she had the window wide open, cooling the hot air of the long, rather shabby room, before her stepfather came stamping in to shut it emphatically and mutter ill-humouredly as to violent chills.

There was a constant jar as of ill-fitting machinery in motion between Gheena and George Freyne. His fussy love of authority frothed at Gheena to roll back spent and broken into angry fume, her mother's complete and somewhat elusive submission making it even more difficult to bear.

It was elusive because Mrs. Freyne having duly received Dearest George's advice and commands, perhaps as to dinner, would amble down to the kitchen and then take Anne's advice there to save trouble, causing such faint shocks as pheasants for dinner, which George had ordered to be hung for another week, or

beefsteak when the economy of mutton had been heavily counselled.

"Well, you see, we did send for mutton, Dearest, and Mullcahy—what did he say, Naylour?"

"That the teeth in ye're head 'd be left is all he had in the shop, Ma'am, it was that fresh."

"Exactly, Dearest. And I thought that really at a penny a pound the dentist would soon equalize; so this is only off the sirloin we bought, George dearest."

In the same way Matilda took the latest advice from grooms and chauffeur. Still, it was better than Gheena, who took none at all, but listened with her grey-green eyes glinting, preserved complete silence, and did exactly as she thought best.

"Shut that window, Gheena—storms of rain and wind and a gale blowing in!" Bang went the sash.

"I've admitted some oxygen," said Gheena equably. "You'd better unwind yourself gently, Dearest; you got three strands round your ankles making that rush."

"And the fire roaring up the chimney with coals at their present price. Well, if it is turf and wood, there won't be wood always."

"Take one step backwards—now turn round," said Gheena. "Thank you. Don't break it; think of the soldiers in France."

The unbroken gloom of the day had irritated her. She looked at the grate and remembered—Gheena was too generous to recall it often—that it was her father's money which paid for everything, and that in a few years' time the house would be her own.

"And your insensate habit of sleeping in a gale," grumbled George Freyne, "smashed the Chippendale table at your window last night. I met Maria carrying it down with a leg gone. It is a valuable table."

"Was," suggested Gheena, her needles flashing. "Tom Malone put a deal leg on."

Her stepfather eyed her a little anxiously. The question of Gheena's future worried him. The thought of the Dower House in winter was almost intolerable. When Gheena married, Castle Freyne would belong to her absolutely, and if she chose an unpliable husband, it would certainly mean turning out. The war and its burdens curtailed the savings which Dearest George was amassing and—he had been out to the yard and found two new and unneeded men there, taken by Gheena because they had been dismissed, one by an economizer and one whose master had been killed in the war.

"Instead of economizing, you and your mother are always reckless," he burst out. "Two old men taken on, Dillon and O'Leary, useless old dodderers, eating in the kitchen, with tea and sugar and flour at their present prices. And

oats—I have ordered nothing but black oats for the future, Gheena, for the horses, and I sent away a man who brought white."

"I ordered that," said Gheena, getting up, "and my horses shall not cat black oats, Dearest, even if the heat has upset you."

"The heat?" said George Freyne, glaring at the blurred atmosphere outside.

"And I'm going down to see Hennessy. He is sure to be at tea with Anne," said Gheena, going out. "He got that oats for me."

The hoot of a motor-horn roused Dearest George from sombre chewing of bitter mental cud.

Darby Dillon took his car round to the shelter of the archway and then let himself in.

He came lumping across the polished hall and into the hot drawing-room.

George Freyne stared at him and grunted before he burst into the song of his grievances, which were tea, sugar, oats, and two women without mental balance.

"We had to come home from the meet," said Darby, having duly listened without comment. "Too wild to keep hounds out and no one there but ourselves.—I'm not listening! But I was, George. But a man may do what he likes with his own, mayn't he? And Gheena is an heiress. It will all be hers."

"Except a thousand a year and a cave," burst out George Freyne—"a sea cave on the shore."

"Don't make short cuts to it, then," said Darby gravely.

Gheena, her colour still high, returned, Crabbit at her heels.

"I've sent the car to ask Mrs. Weston to tea," she said. "Dillon can drive, and it will mean Mr. Keefe also, no doubt."

"And Stafford," said Darby. "He's the latest."

Gheena sniffed haughtily.

"Why he stays on here," she burst out—"as if drains mattered. A nice thing if the Germans found them ready just to make their potato grounds good for them."

Darby held his hands to the blaze, as he said quietly that all men knew their own affairs best.

"The man may have something wrong with him," he said. "Heart disease or heaven knows what!"

"A man who rides and shoots," said Gheena contemptuously. "I have my eye——" Then she stopped abruptly.

Dearest George, feeling himself neglected, remarked that he would not have the car sent on futile errands. It was a dear car, and just because it was a wet day, and to send it with a man who might be able to drive, or might be in the bay by noon under water, car and all. He appealed to his wife, who came in

unperturbed by bad weather, her curiously fresh comeliness outlined in girlish blue.

"Of course, Dearest George, it will get wet as it is wet," said Matilda Freyne sympathetically, "the tyres especially; but it is so very wet that it won't be bad, and as old Dillon is there, it may amuse him to wash it, and Gheena said she wanted company."

"I'll buy a small car now I've Dillon," said Gheena shortly, "one for myself. They are back now; the wetting's over."

"These two men were going to have tea with me," giggled Violet Weston as she came in, "so I brought them along. We were just getting the Professor to play Bridge, so I brought him too."

"The last time I came there were the bees," said the Professor amicably, "and the poor lady so much alarmed."

"Any news?" Darby looked at Stafford.

"The usual deadlock in mud and ice." Stafford pulled out a telegram. "I get weary of wires nowadays. Christmas is so near, and some of us dreamt of them having Christmas at home, and some of Christmas in Berlin, and here we are."

Violet Weston, somewhat flauntily dressed in mauve, with expensive white furs and shoes with diamond buckles, peeped at the wire anxiously.

"Why do you have the things in Greek?" she asked.

"One word does for three, you see," he said smiling, as he dropped the flimsy paper into the fire.

"They are talking now of a great submarine blockade," said Darby, "cutting off all our supplies."

"And they say there are supply bases along this very coast," puffed Dearest George. "Matilda, why is tea late?"

"Perhaps if we asked Naylour?" Mrs. Freyne was not disposed to reply to a direct question. "What do you think, Dearest? Perhaps that new bad coal——"

"I beg your pardon," said Naylour at the door, "but there is two coastguards here to have speech with the Masther."

The importance of his country's defence wiped the thoughts of tea from Dearest George's mind; he rushed to the door and Gheena opened the window widely.

"I have to perish you all to change the atmosphere," she said apologetically. "What is it, Professor?"

"It is my handkerchief a silken," said the Professor anxiously. "I had him out in the hall and with a cold in the nose——" He ambled out.

"Gheena," said Violet Weston, "I've something to say to you."

Gheena trailed her wool across the carpet to the far end of the long room.

"Some one said—they saw submarines about," whispered Violet; "one of the

coastguards told me—a periscope just outside the bay. And also that they're all on the watch for supplies going out from here—and that they are afraid of people signalling. Gheena—*what* is that Stafford man doing here—idling?"

"He is not a German," said Gheena stoutly.

"Go on knitting, he's watching us. If a German is brought up altogether in England he has no accent—nothing. He goes out late at night. How do I know? I went into the garden one night to look for a cat I heard mewing there, and he went down the next steps; they do for the Professor's home and mine, you know. I heard him crunching off across the beach beyond the pier."

"We'll watch him," said Gheena through clenched teeth. "I have been watching him myself. Now you can too, and Crabbit and I will find out where the petrol is stored."

"I've spoke to you three times," said Darby to Stafford, "and you've never answered. Now you come out of the catalepsy with a lep."

"Why was tea late, Naylour?" Mrs. Freyne asked. "Oh, dear, here is Mrs. Keane!"

"Naylour," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane, flapping into the room, "was never in time. He used to commence to clean his silver at four o'clock, and when it was half-past the tea-pot would be all pink paste."

"Asking your pardon, Ma'am, but that same was only on days when I had jobs given me," said Naylour firmly, "all the coats to brush and all throusers to press."

"Naylour!" said Mrs. Keane haughtily.

"An' tay is not afther bein' late, Ma'am, but the Masther's watch is on. He sot it on this mornin', thinkin' he'd be huntin', so as to get all out, an' he forgot to sot it back."

"Four kinds of cake!" groaned Mrs. Keane. "I allowance them to a spoon of sugar to each cup now in the kitchen and four cups of tea a day."

"I remember noticing the cake for the concert tea wasn't sweet," said Gheena absently. "We made five pounds, and we'll have another for the Red Cross—with the recruiting song."

"So dreadfully immodest!" said Mrs. Keane. "Just think how the soldiers would hate it, too, if everyone who had sung that song ran to kiss them on platforms on their return. I should insist on its being altered to greet."

"Darby said that wouldn't do for Scotch regiments, because 'greet' was Gaelic for 'cry.'"

"I found him," said the Professor, returning, "but so also had Crabbit."

He held up a large bandanna rent across by sharp teeth. Stafford stared at the pocket-handkerchief thoughtfully, and Crabbit wagged his tail pleasantly.

"War is a dreadful thing!" said Dearest George, rushing back. "Too many

complications. Confound it, Gheena, it's your wool again!" His plunge into space was checked by the Professor's plump shoulder. "Several suspicious characters hanging round the wireless. Two cars puncturing on the road just outside and taking an unreasonable time to repair. Oh, yes, they took their numbers quite cleverly. And people asking the way, and they've seen a submarine outside the bay. English or German? Oh, German, of course, Matilda! What foolish questions you do ask! And they are afraid——"

"Here—my friend, was all this for publication?" said the Professor softly—"all?"

"There's nothing private in a sighted submarine," snapped George Freyne peevishly; "the fishermen saw her from the point. The Guinanes say they did not, although they were out at the time, but they never like to agree with anyone. Mary Talty did and Con Talty."

"What I came to tell you," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane, raising her voice and looking importantly, "was that——"

"You've dropped your hot bun," said Mrs. Freyne absently, "the butterest bit. Please, Crabbit."

"—Was that Lancelot Freyne is wounded," concluded Mrs. Keane irately. "I met his mother and Annette both in tears because the wire did not say how much though it mentioned a foot."

"Just think of Lancelot wounded! Somehow one never realized that he had really gone out," said Mrs. Freyne.

"He was at the base looking after embarkations," said Gheena. "He must have got run over. They did not send him up, I know, because his letters were all Boulogne, and how cleverly he could talk French."

"Still, he's wounded," said Mrs. Keane. "And you might think more of your cousin, Gheena. He will probably come home to recuperate."

"If General French can spare him," said Gheena sweetly. "You see, someone who might be of use will have to replace him now at the base."

Dearest George broke in hotly to remark that Gheena was very heartless talking in that fashion about a gallant boy who had gone to fight for his country, and decided that he would drive over to Cahercalla to find out the news. He thought it over as a fresh blast of rain drove against the window and a boom of wind shook the trees outside.

Stafford, seated in a dark corner, was absently breaking up pieces of plum cake and feeding Crabbit with them. He seemed lost in thought.

"The extravagance—in war-time!" said Mrs. Keane, seeing him. "I am astonished! with plums in it too!"

"To say nothing of its making him sick," said George Freyne. "I think all dogs should be got rid of with food so dear."

Gheena's cheeks lost some of their colour. Her stepfather could do nasty things when he was put out.

"If anything were to happen to Crabbit I'd get married next day to replace him," she said, a note of cold warning in her voice. "To anyone! You might take me, Professor."

The old Professor spilt his fourth cup of tea as the remark reached him; then recovering, he observed that the marriage of a maid to her grandfather was forbidden in the prayer-books, and asked for more tea placidly.

"Well, someone," said Gheena. "Darby, how many wild things did the pack do to-day in the rain?"

"They just clung to the horses' heels," said Darby gruffly, his voice sounding hoarse and strained; "that was all, Gheena. By the time the war is over they will be a model pack. If one could breed a fox-hound with Grandjer's nose!"

"They were two hours and a half hunting that fox on Tuesday," said Gheena, "but they caught him in the end. He looked absolutely blighted with astonishment going up the last field, considering how many times he'd left them behind. Oh, dear! what a Christmas it's going to be—all wool and war!"

"Your chauffeur sent in to say, Ma'am, that if the wind arises any more, he'll scarcely get the big car across the long hill beyant the bache," announced Naylour respectfully, "an' will he come arround before it does?"

"How you can allow Ma'am, Matilda," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane coldly. "I had trained him into Madam so completely."

It was unfortunate that Naylour's "She had so, Madam," remarked completely to himself, should have been audible to Gheena and Darby, who burst into the insane giggles induced by attempts at suppression of open laughter.

"His silver wants cleaning," also said Mrs. Keane. "You should make him do at least what he can do."

"An' what he could not," came murmuring from the open door.

"If you can't get across the hill, come back," said Matilda Freyne, ignoring the comments placidly. "There are plenty of spare rooms and a turkey as well. That's for dinner, of course. Gheena, what is amusing you and Darby?"

"Retrospection," said Darby solemnly; "nothing else."

The bad day gave its wildness to the night, which stormed and raged through a wind-tormented darkness, to grow ashamed before a murky dawn and threatening to hide in the caves of storm, leaving a still world and pallid, washed-out sky, with an apologetic sun wintering in its cloudless expanse. Far out on the point the spray was lashing up silver bright; caught in the sheltered bay the caged waves heaved sullenly.

Gheena came down to breakfast in reflective mood. She was completely at her mother's mercy as to money until she married or came of age, and her

mother's money meant Dearest George's. Vexed by the falling off of his savings, George Freyne had spent a long evening carping at his stepdaughter, and forbidden a fire in her own small sitting-room when she wanted to go there to play cards.

George Freyne objected to Gheena's keeping her three horses, although there was no real hunting. He objected to a three-year-old bay brought in to train. He was, in fact, in the humour to object to everything, and he talked gloomily, of putting down the motor and taking again to the outside car, which languished in the coach-house.

"As that young horse has been brought in, he could be trained to harness," he said unpleasantly; "and Bluebird was bought for a cart; she would do."

Gheena's blue roan mare was a precious possession. Miss Freyne eyed the breakfast table with unalloyed gloom, and helped herself to eggs simply as an everyday duty and not because she wanted one.

"Dearest George said we were to have them poached or plain boiled in future," remarked Mrs. Freyne, coming in. "He said it would save the frying butter, you know."

Gheena rapped a brown shell and remarked she wished that it was in futurity.

"As it's our money——" she began.

"But you could not hint that to a sensitive man, Gheena dear, and an egg is just the same—isn't it, dear? There is always the yolk and the other part, isn't there, Darby?"

Darby had stayed the night.

"And the shell," said Gheena, talking again. "I'll have ham, I'm not hungry, and they're quite hard. I've battered all round without a dinge coming."

She ate ham more cheerily. Dearest was extremely particular as to boiled eggs. At one time he had hung lovingly on a patent boiler, his watch in his hand. But the boiler had the determination of all such affairs, namely, to hand out the egg either quite hard or glutinously raw, and to decline to say which until the shell was cracked, when it would chuckle softly over its blue flame of spirit. It could even spoil two put in at the same time, relying on a current of air to one side the flame to help in this.

Matilda Freyne, after a weary week of being told it was all her fault for not taking the time, took to being late for breakfast, and Mr. Freyne boiled eggs for himself until incidentally the lamp blew up and singed off his moustache. So Anne the cook now endeavoured to plaze th' ould grumbler, as she tersely put it.

Gheena tapped two other egg-shells with complete dissatisfaction, and went to the window to see Mr. Keefe in uniform, trotting up the drive.

"He's rising to the trot," impatiently said Gheena. "Is it the invasion? Crab-

bit has gone out and nearly upset him, and now he can't open the swing gate. Here is Dearest."

"Hard again," announced George Freyne tragically, rapping pathetically. "Why the simple matter of three minutes in boiling water cannot be attended to! Gheena, you must pay for that white oats out of your quarter's allowance, as you ordered it against my wishes."

Gheena flushed painfully. Her quarter's allowance was represented by the unpleasant little line which denotes minus—she had given it all away to various war funds, and the man was coming to be paid for the oats.

Harold Keefe, pink and fussy, marched in in his dark uniform, and agreed to a second breakfast; he had had his first one at seven.

He came with orders which roused them all. In case of invasion, horses were to be removed; motors destroyed or taken away; hay burnt. He read out the notice sonorously and with effect.

"There's really a chance of their landing." George Freyne touched the silver tea-pot anxiously. "We could hide all this in the cellar and cover it with slack, but there's the question of the horses again. How can we possibly get them all away if anything does happen? It makes it quite clear, Gheena, that one of your old ones and the youngster must be got rid of at once. Bluebird would make a charger."

"To be frozen and ill-used and shot at, with his bad leg and his delicate skin!" shot out Gheena peevishly.

But though they laughed at the little man in uniform eating ham with appetite, the orders which he had brought made something real of that terrible war across the seas. Germans might come to Ireland—grey-green uniforms, spiked helmets, fierce dull faces might be seen on the edge of the low cliffs. What scurry and flutter there would be if it ever came to pass!

This little man, never quite at his ease, represented the struggle of a mighty nation, pouring out blood and gold for the cause of freedom.

Gheena recovered from depression to see a vision of the flight of the family, with her mother packing carefully, and a string of horses being led off inland.

"I should certainly destroy all the jam," observed Mrs. Freyne, also waking up; "they are so fond of sweets."

"Our navy," said Mr. Freyne pettishly, "is paid to see to things of this class. They will never reach us. But, of course, one must be prepared—and, talking of it, can your cook boil eggs, Keefe?" he asked gloomily.

Mr. Keefe, starting at the change of subject, thought that anyone could—just water and a saucepan.

"And bullets," said Dearest George. "Talking of invasion made me remember the eggs. Bullets—with a delicate digestion."

Keefe picked up an egg and said absently that he liked them hard, because they slipped into a pocket so handily, and with bread and butter one was never at a loss. But when you get a kind of squashy thing— "Oh, thank you, Mrs. Freyne! I'd love to take these two, I've miles to go!"

The master of the house murmured "Savouries" into his empty tea-cup; the desire to economize was strong upon him just then.

"I shall go out to warn all the men," he said, "and just show them that we are at war."

He strode into the yard, followed by his womenkind. Dillon, a very old man, was polishing the brasses on the car and crooning "Kathleen Mavourneen" as he did so. He had looked the possibility of the Union in the face a day or two before.

"Mr. Keefe has just called to say there is a possibility, a probability of a German invasion," said Dearest George loudly, "and I must give orders accordingly."

"They'll niver swhim the say," observed Dillon without emotion. "Have ye another tin of Brasso handy, Phil? This is out."

"Phil—Hennessy, you are to be ready at a moment's notice to fire the hay and be off inland with all the horses, and——"

Phil scratched his head dubiously.

"An' if they calls in an' ye out, sir, would we do the same?" he inquired cautiously, "or wait to ax the Germin officers?"

"John Guinane says if they come here they'll come paycable," remarked Hennessy, as he laboured at a broken oats crusher. "With no waypons, but frindly. An' he says, too, there'll be no more money to go to the Government. We'll be let off paymint for our land."

"God bless and save us! Is the haythens comin' here?" remarked Anne the fat cook nervously. "An' the coffee near out, Ma'am—but a pound in the house."

Darby leant upon his crutch, laughing silently, and Dearest George tried to take off the hat he had not put on, missed it, and wiped his forehead.

"Nothing would make them realize anything," he stormed, as he sat down on a box—"nothing."

"Father Pat says the ships is patrollin' the say and they'll niver let them over," said Anne more happily. "An' what is it, Phil?"

"It is the box we put a lick of paint on yestherday; makin' it sweet to hold the crushed oats. He won't be best plazed if it isn't dry," whispered Phil. "An' not much drying in yestherday, aither."

Mr. Freyne got up, removing a film of brown paint with him, and without noticing it, continued his oration.

He was interrupted this time by Matilda, asking him if he'd remembered to

write for the salt for the dairy, and left hurriedly, saying more to himself than it was seemly to utter aloud.

"His throuser bein' brown, ye could not see," said Phil anxiously. "God save us! look at the print of himself on it, an' there'll be pure murther whin he claps an eye on his throuser. Hurry in to Naylour, Anne, and tell him to rub on turps whin the Masther changes his clothes."

"Dearest George will be angry," said Gheena thoughtfully; "it is quite sticky."

Mr. Freyne was sorely puzzled later on to find smudges of brown paint on the red leather library chair, and another smudge on the drawing-room sofa, where he had sat down to ruminate over the crass stupidity of the Irish.

When both the housemaids took "their Bible oath" that they were innocent of using fresh paint, there was nothing for it but to harangue his wife and Gheena. When Gheena offered a sporting bet that he had done it himself, he got really angry, and unwisely accused her of impertinence to her elders.

Phil knocked at the library door.

"I'm carrying the horses to the forge, sir, to be looked after against they take the road," he said pleasantly. "An' James is up to know who'll lead the prize bull, for he'll go with no one but himself, an' *he* can't walk five mile. An' where will he go to? he says."

When the locality mentioned by Mr. Freyne was a very hot one, Phil said "Yes, sir," and returned, murmuring that the Germans made the Masther terrible peevish.

"I am going on to Cahercalla, Gheena; you would probably like to come."

Gheena said "No" absently. She was watching a distant figure on the edge of the cliff. It looked like the Professor.

"Then Matilda must."

"Oh, Dearest George," said Matilda weakly, "I thought of taking a little ride; but if you think I'd better—— Of course, they are upset about Lancelot."

A second figure appeared on the cliffs, someone tall and active. Gheena flung the French windows open, omitted to close them, and slipped into the wood which went down to the edge of the sea.

"Gheena gets rougher every day," said Freyne angrily—"every day, and more thoughtless."

Darby, on his stick, hobbled out and went slowly down the lawn, his eyes fixed sadly on the trees that held the girl. How quickly she had slipped out, leapt over the sunk fence and disappeared! It was good to be young and strong and active. The measure of strength which had returned to him could not content him. Always with one side which would drag, always slow and crippled. He would be better, people told him. His crushed limb would improve by degrees,

but he could never know the fullness of life again. He saw Gheena come dodging across the carpet of dead leaves and peep at the fretted, still blue sea. She leant out cautiously, then came into full view, and stood as if listening. Two people were talking just below the verge of the cliff.

"Are you looking for Germans?" said Darby politely.

"Oh, hush, Darby; do hush! You don't know"—Gheena came close to him—"you don't know the kind of things I think," she whispered.

"If there was any use in those blamed bits of rock," said Basil Stafford's voice.

"My friend, is there any use in dead butterflies, in used postage stamps, or an array of foxes' heads and tails? The rocks are my hobby to collect and ascertain the stratum. *Himmel*!" This exclamation was caused by Crabbit rolling a completely unwashed small rock on to the Professor's neck.

"Rabbits," said the Professor, "excavating. In time stuffed. Shall I not have a complete report of every coast in Britain?"

Stafford said "Oh! add a 'c,'" rather dubiously. "You'd be paid a bit for that just now," he added grimly.

"To tell them what was the softest rock to hit against. *Hein*!" The old man chuckled. "And I am well salaried, pensioned; I have no need of money."

"Before I came here I wanted it as I shall never want it again," said Stafford slowly. "An old debt suddenly cropping up, a dying mother with her only chance an operation and a minus balance at the bank, and half pay. But it all came right."

"You found means to get the money—eh?"

"More than I wanted," said Basil. "I got it in a way I hated getting it by, but it's here—and it saved my mother too."

Gheena drew back slowly, her face flushed.

More money than he knew what to do with, and he was playing at making drains on the south coast of Ireland. Gheena decided to go to see Mrs. Weston.

"It was the dog Crabbit what knocked down the stones, and not a rabbit," remarked the Professor, looking up. "Miss Freyne's dog."

"I said, add a 'c.'" Stafford scrambled lightly up the cliff. "I heard voices up there."

Darby, leaning on his stick, was hobbling away with Gheena and keeping pace easily enough with her active feet.

Gheena whisked round suddenly as they came to the little bridge over the sunk fence.

"If a man has been dreadfully hard up and gets enough money suddenly, he must have found some way of getting it," she said excitedly.

Darby referred her impolitely to "Enquire Within" or the Ready Reckoner. He had forgotten even simple addition himself.

What did she overhear down there to make her look like a boiling kettle with the spout corked, he said to himself, his eyes following Gheena with something of Crabbit's wistfully faithful look in them.

CHAPTER IX

"We shall hear something of how the war is really going on now," observed Dearest George excitedly. "Here is a letter from Eva's husband—the one that died, Matilda, years ago."

Naylour started, so that a bevy of eggs leapt from the china hen on to the floor, and Mrs. Freyne said "Gracious, Dearest, was it suspended animation?"—rather absently, as she watched them smash.

"It was the sister who died." George Freyne invariably bellowed at the slightest check to his flow of conversation. "Eva; she married a General. He was one then, rather. How idiotic you can be, Matilda! And he's been appointed inspector of something—remounts—is coming to Cara, and will stay Friday to Monday here—for Christmas, in fact. Great heavens, that old Naylour! He has had a stroke."

"It was the fear what the Masther said put on me," murmured Naylour contritely. "Not bein' sure what they might be able to do in war-time—an' the gran' eggs losht! Scarce a smhell of the fire they got to-day, Anne bein' repentant for overcookin' thim yestherday." He gathered up an uncooked omelette with two silver tablespoons, murmuring repentance.

"No—we will not have any more—in war-time," said George Freyne frigidly. "There is cold ham and toast. They were quite raw in any case. You can tell Anne."

The ham had worn down to the end which testifies to the good feeding of the pig which provided it, and was principally white fat. George Freyne's hungry resentment was not appeased by the appearance of a round and smoking poached egg done for his stepdaughter, accompanied by toasted ham.

"Anne does it on a fork," said Gheena cheerfully. "There was no waste of frying. Here, Crabbit." She put down half a plateful of ham for the red dog.

"And I am starving. Ring that bell, please, Matilda, and order up cold pheasant. Now, having all been sufficiently amusing, General Brownlow will be here on Friday, and I suggest we get Darby to alter the meet to Saturday, so that he can have a hunt. He rides well, or he used to—and so dreadfully fond of it. Eva

died from a fall out hunting."

Darby said "Oh!" thoughtfully. He had not yet gone home, but was staying for Christmas Day. "We'll have to go out Stephen's Day," he said; "but I daresay, if we only draw one covert the extra day, they'll be all right, horses and everything."

"He will tell us news," said George Freyne emphatically, "news which these Comoniques deny us." (I write it according to pronunciation.) "He will have been at the War Office and seen people. And he's rather particular, Darby, and inclined to take things seriously, so we must try to keep the pack together, or nearly. I'll practise hard on the hunting-horn, and Keefe must try to get out, and ... then the horses. He'll want remounts."

"Twenty post-cards," said Darby. "I'll find them in the library, I suppose, George? and someone's sure to be forgotten, even then."

"There is a messenger over from Cahercalla to say that Masther Lancelot will be home to-morry—he has a cart with him," announced Naylour impatiently, "an' his mamma 'd like the loan of the bath-chair."

George Freyne went out fussily.

"Why Lancelot should bring a cart with him," said Mrs. Freyne vaguely. "So little room, I should have thought, on the troopships, unless it was the one which hurt him, as a memento. Gheena says a cart ran over him. Oh, thank you, Gheena darling, poached eggs for me and Darby. I was hungry."

Her pleasure in the forbidden breakfast and its hurried bolting before her husband came back made Mrs. Freyne too busy to hear Darby's murmur of "It was the messenger's cart, not Lancelot's."

"Dearest George gets quite faddy, you know," she apologized, "about everything, and we never spend our income—at least, I don't think so. Gheena, Mrs. Keefe thinks that last year's 'Unto Us' is in the attic here, and ought to do in a war year with fresh holly. She is not sure if the 'Hallelulias!' were used to stuff the cat pin-cushions for the bazaar, or if some of them came back as they were. What do you think, Gheena?"

"A cart-load of them came back," said Gheena, "and everyone can just put on holly-berries and save pounds of trouble."

"It is not in the lofts or the coach-houses; then where is it? for I must know." George Freyne drove Naylour and Maria the housemaid into the room before him. "A bath-chair in perfect order, which Mrs. Freyne's mother used."

"Unless they broke it up for firewood, sir," suggested Naylour, looking anxious.

"I lent it to Andy Cassidy's mother two years ago," said Mrs. Freyne, "and I think she died in it; and I would not have it back; she had something unpleasant, I know. Then I think it got broken. Tell the messenger, Naylour, that Mrs. Keefe has an excellent bath-chair and quite new. Oh, I did not ask you about lending

it, Dearest, because probably you weren't here, or perhaps I thought you might have objected and one wheel was quite bad."

George Freyne carved pheasant furiously.

The days before Christmas were always feverishly occupied at Castle Freyne. Chunks of cow had to be distributed among the work-people, with tea and sugar and flour. Everybody the Freynes ever did anything for had to receive a goose or a turkey or game.

Mrs. Freyne agreed to the necessity for economy with a resolution which melted as wax at the faintest idea of putting it into practice.

"Everything died just as usual," she said placidly to her husband; "and as they were dead, it would be waste not to give them away, especially in war-time, Dearest, would it not?"

Mounds of parcels had been secreted by Gheena and sent to every acquaintance she had in France—cakes, sweets, plum-puddings and mince-pies, tobacco and socks. No man from the village missed having a parcel.

The day's papers merely contained the usual news of the winter deadlock, so there was no excitement to interfere with the long morning in the kitchen and the long stream of presents which went out.

Mrs. Freyne remarked on the unusual scarcity of pheasants, to be informed by stout Anne that the Masther was sellin' them same to Hourigans there in the city.

George Freyne arrived at too frequent intervals to groan before the array of food, until the sound of his steps caused a laden rush to the rabbit-warren of sculleries and larders off the huge kitchen and a general concealment of anything which could be hidden speedily.

"We must slip away most of the parcels when Dearest George has gone to Cahercalla, Gheena, mustn't we? The Master is so dreadfully anxious that we should not be extravagant during the war, you see, Anne. Gentlemen have it constantly before them."

"There is a fire to keep going in the red room from this till Friday," announced Maria, coming down for coal. "The Masther says it is roarin' damp, and there is a telegram to go for Eysters, Phil—when ye are exercisin' the horses."

Phil remarked bleakly that it would be aisier to take ramble on the bicycle than be rubbin' muck off his horses for two hours afther the roads, and departed.

The afternoon was marked by the white fluff of last year's cotton-wool which pervaded carpets and chairs, and which Darby said was worse than snuff. Fresh holly duly dabbed with glass and ground sugar added a stickiness to which the fluff clung lovingly.

They all worked in the servants' hall, a long room in the basement, with a stone floor which chilled through meagre rugs, and took a heavy tea there

flavoured with gum and fluff.

This was all a yearly amusement, generally tempered by piles of new and snowy cotton-wool for the texts.

"But this year we are not neglecting the beauty of the church, and still are saving money for the war," said Mrs. Keefe piously. "I wonder if the fluff will ever go off us again? That 'Unto Us' will look quite beautiful, especially if the sun doesn't shine on the 'Son'; that word is dreadfully yellow. If you put on more berries, Gheena, no one will know what it's meant for."

"And they'll think of German measles, too," said Darby gravely. "Mrs. Weston, you're the worst stitcher I've ever seen."

Violet Weston was clamping holly leaves to a piece of red calico nailed between two painted pieces of wood. They were intended to cover a pencilled text decorously, but instead were straying drunkenly off the lettering and leaping hopelessly up again, until a cypher message was the result.

"They prick so," said Mrs. Weston resentfully. "And we've all got to put them up to-morrow because you're hunting on Saturday. If they only were calico letters, but real holly." She sucked a finger. "That bay horse of mine is a very funny horse," she went on. "He stands still when he's tired, and gulps."

"He was pretty bad last year," said Darby sympathetically. "But you can turn him over for his own riding, you see, and get even that way."

Mrs. Weston dropped a lapful of holly leaves and stared with puzzled eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Keefe didn't know," she said blithely, "and here he is with Mr. Stafford." She looked swiftly at Gheena.

"Stafford drove me over to the Wireless Station," Keefe said importantly. "We thought some news might be in. And now we've come to help. I'll sit here near you, Mrs. Weston."

"I think they're so squashed probably they won't prick," said Mrs. Weston thoughtfully. "Oh, they did"—for Mr. Keefe got up hurriedly. "I'll hold the board if you finish the text. I am all sore."

Violet Weston was aggressively, brightly pretty in her light-coloured frieze skirt and jersey, with vermilion silk stockings framed by ultra-smart shoes. She was painted and thickly powdered, and told everyone her fringe was false; but something in her light-hearted good-humour made her difficult to resist.

Everyone's feet were lumps of ice, everyone's faces had flushed from hot tea and lack of air; sneezes not entirely born of fluff peppered the conversation.

The Vicar at some length put forward a plan of campaign which must end the war in a month. It included the crossing of the Rhine, a march into Berlin, and the permanent imprisonment of the Kaiser on Spike Island.

Mrs. Keefe then thought if there were more like her Albert at the front—he was called after the Prince of Wales—no, of course, the Prince Consort—who used

their brains instead of merely running in and out of ditches, that the awful loss of life would soon end. In fact, Albert had volunteered to go as chaplain, and he might be attended to then.

The black back trail of the war was gone over many times—the great hopes which had fallen so heavily—Antwerp, which men said could hold out for six months.

"Betrayed by spies," said the Vicar bitterly. He went on to remark that man of God as he was, he would himself shoot a spy without compunction.

"After he had said a prayer, of course," temporized his wife soothingly.

The Rev. Albert Keefe did not reply. He came of a fighting race.

"General Brownlow will doubtless be able to tell us why the Germans did not take Paris," said George Freyne, coming in in a motor-coat, "and Lancelot comes to-morrow in the mail on crutches. He is not likely to rejoin. Some bone must come out."

"Fancy if we found a spy here!" giggled Violet Weston. "You just finish that 'towards men,' Mr. Keefe. I won't. How exciting it would be! And you know if it's true that there is a supply base for submarines about, there might easily be someone paying out the money, mightn't there?"

Again she looked at Gheena. Stafford flushed slowly, his lips set together.

Mr. Freyne, who had to have fresh tea—not China—and fresh hot cakes, and who was palpably annoyed because no one took a great deal of interest in Lancelot, his nephew, now remarked acidly that he had run into Mrs. Weston's on his way back to leave in a book which Annette had borrowed from her, and he was astonished to see how untidy her little back garden was. The man Guinane was absolutely useless to her, and he suggested her taking on old Dillon instead.

Violet Weston replied that she loved the boating on calm days, and that Guinane had promised her to grow peas and beans in the spring, and flowers she must grow herself, she supposed; but she liked Guinane.

The texts were piled against the wall; patient house-maids removed fluff, nails and leaves, and everyone thought of hot baths.

"I have asked them all to dinner for Christmas," said Mrs. Freyne presently. "It makes us forget how bad the war is when everyone talks of it, doesn't it, Dearest George?"

"Mr. Keefe will argue with the General," said Dearest George gloomily, "and Annette and Grace and Lancelot must come. But it is your house, my dear love," he added gloomily; "one cannot take back invitations."

General Brownlow was motored from Clonaheen on a blustering night. He proved to be an elderly but active person, with a lean, hatchet face, deeply-set eyes and a repressive manner. He brought his man—a particularly superior-looking person, not a soldier—and hoped they had expected a valet.

Mrs. Freyne thought hopefully that if the man was not rheumatic, a good deal of hot air from the red room must have gone into the little one next to it, and the man could sleep there.

The General looked anxious, but was reassured by a murmur in a language not English and the departure of Hook with the bags.

The expected flood of information was not forthcoming at dinner. The lean man seemed only to have heard the usual rumours, and to be as firmly convinced as everyone that all the right men were in the wrong places, and that the one person to adjust matters had not yet been found. When he did talk, it was of Ireland and the Irish, and he grew absolutely cheerful when he heard of a prospective hunt.

"Met Lindlay," he jerked out. "Yes. Told me he he'd spared no money with the pack here; poor country but great sport. Any experience hunting?" he jerked out at Darby.

"Twenty years ... compressed," said Darby thoughtfully. "Hares, foxes, cats, dogs. May say I've a good deal now, I think, sir."

General Brownlow considered the list mentally. "Yes. India; jackals, dogs ... but cats. You don't mean tigers, Dillon?"

"No, cats," said Darby briefly. "They are ... well ... it's not exactly Lindlay's pack we're hunting here," he added.

"That man is making such a muddle of waiting," whispered Gheena, when her stepfather began to talk again. "He upset one plate of soup, and he's rigid now with the bread-sauce at mother's wrong side. She'll never notice him there."

Just then George Freyne, looking round fussily, remarked "Sauce for the General's partridge" very sharply to Naylour.

"Rooted with it he is," said Naylour in one of his audible asides. "Hurry along, young man, will ye!"

The young man feverishly left Mrs. Freyne's right hand and transferred himself to the General's, Naylour remarking "War ways," firmly removing the tureen and ordering the stranger to shove the bell for the lift.

"As curiously behaved as ever—this old country," said the General testily—"No, I've finished, thank you—this Ireland of yours, George. I spent the week before my wedding here, I remember."

George Freyne replied heatedly in defence of his country, answering his brother-in-law that Ireland was orderly and well regulated. "And if you mean the sauce, it was your man," added Mr. Freyne, in what he believed to be an undertone.

"Oh—er—my man; he's not used to butlering. The most annoying habit of the Irish is their inability to see the gravity of situations."

Darby rubbed his forehead quite slowly with his right hand, as with his left

he set fire to a mince-pie.

"All the same in a hundred years. My poor Eva would say that when—when—well, when she ought not to have—when the month's expenditure was five pounds beyond her allowance, or something valuable died, or the impossible maids she brought from home smashed some of my Worcester. Dear me! She would train to distant meets when we could not possibly afford it. And ... 'I'll be dead such a long time, Tony,' she said to me when I remonstrated."

But a gleam of light and softness shone in the hard old eyes.

"She might box horses anywhere she wished to now," he said, sighing. "And she is not there to do it."

"Then you see, sir, she was right," said Darby gently. "She had her fun, and it did not matter as you pulled out and made money."

General Brownlow glared at Darby fiercely; then the gleam of softness reappeared, and he grunted thoughtfully, to remark after a pause that he'd never thought of it, but, after all, she was. And that he'd write to Tom her boy to say it didn't matter.... Then he lapsed into silence again, with something very like tears in his eyes.

When a telegram came for Stafford he read it with such a disturbed expression that General Brownlow asked softly if it was bad news.

"No. War news and no news." But Stafford's frown was not that of a man who had received a wire about nothing.

"You are not joining anything?" the General asked.

"Not at present, sir. I am tied here."

Stafford tore the telegram up, then walked to the fire and threw the pieces in carefully.

General Brownlow's man was a success in his own circle. Old Naylour reported upon him as a dacent boy, with a twisht of fun in him; this privately to Gheena.

It was a still, muggy night, and as the air in the library grew heavy with smoke, and the possibilities of making tricks at Bridge were carefully considered, Crabbit flung himself with a wild "Bow-wow" against the window panes. Naylour at the moment was putting down a large silver tray laden with syphons and decanters and a jug of boiling water. Gheena promptly let her dog out, letting in a sough of cold raw air, which struck the heavy heated atmosphere almost as with a blow.

Crabbit trailed off, yelping excitedly, followed by her owner with her light dress festooned above her arms and her airy petticoat fluttering round her ankles.

"Unless it is rabbits it is a man," said Naylour decidedly. "That Crabbit has the nose on him."

Someone asked if the dog would bite, and Gheena returned talking affably

to General Brownlow's man, who, it appeared, had gone out for a stroll.

"Being devoted to the sea air, Miss," he said pleasantly, "and longing for a smell of it, cold as it is."

He came apologizing through the open window; his boots were very wet, almost as if he had walked in water.

Next morning, during a breakfast at which all war restrictions were removed, and Anne worked her blissful way with eggs and bacon and sausages, General Brownlow asked if a mount could be provided for his man, who loved a hunt, above all things, and Gheena offered her young horse heartily.

"He bucks a little, but he's a fine lepper," she said, "and his mouth is not quite made. Still, if the man didn't mind that—you see, you're riding Greybird as the best we've got, and we have to mount Mr. Keefe too."

The General's man, who had again been out to see the coast before breakfast, accepted gratefully, saying that any horse would do.

They drove to the meet, old Dillon coming to bring the General's car along, and found no hounds when they reached the fixture, cross-roads tracking through a boggy stretch with a small gorse-covert inset on rising ground just beyond.

Private information of the presence of a somebody from the War Office having trickled through, everyone who had a horse had turned out. The horses had been shaven above as well as below. Mrs. O'Gorman wore her best habit again, with grievous thoughts of how it had shrunk lying by. A glint of coppery sun came shining through a soft mist of clouds, the tang of salt mixing with the scent of peat.

When the Cahercalla Darracq, its tint a brilliant yellow, drove up, its occupiers seemed to consider that the non-arrival of hounds was of minor importance, since they supplied the event of the day.

For it held Lancelot in khaki, his leg extended in front of him upon a variety of cushions and supports, his face a little white, but not thin.

Lancelot Freyne was a long boy with a great deal of loose fat distributed unevenly. It inclined to his shoulders and cheeks, and then bulged out again in his thighs. He was loose-lipped and combined a desire to show his excellent imaginative powers with a meekness due to suppression from his infancy by his mother and elder sister.

The crowd of people round the car were slaves to the throb of his foot. He answered questions concerning the war with vigorous decision, and apparently had seen flocks of prisoners, and droves of guns, and yet was gloomy over it all.

"You see, they really have such a lot of men," said Lancelot, watching his mother hang upon his words, "and they don't mind losing them, and then they have so many guns."

"Was it shrapnel or a bullet, poor Lancelot?" inquired Mrs. O'Gorman, clasping her stout hands.

Lancelot murmured "Field gun" in rather embarrassed tones and a little sulkily.

"A 'Jack Johnson' shell," Mrs. O'Gorman passed back, "and it didn't blow his foot off. You must have had a very strong boot, Lancelot dear."

Here General Brownlow backed away, struggling with a cough which seemed to have got out of control.

"And did you really bring the cart, Lancelot," asked Matilda Freyne, riding up, "as a souvenir? The cart which went on your poor toe, Gheena said."

Lancelot, his interesting pallor swallowed by a wave of fiery red, replied haughtily that no cart had gone over his toe, and glared at Gheena.

That damsel was employed in adjusting the young bay horse's bridle, and offering him to the General's man as one would a spoon to a child with strawberry jam but rhubarb underneath.

"Just saw the bits across, Hook, if he pulls very hard down hill. He won't pull going up. If he kicks, try to jerk his head up. He often rears instead, you know. And don't be afraid if he flies small fences; he won't fall. Just be careful the *first* time he gets his feet on to grass; he sobers down wonderfully when he's gone for a little."

The General's man grinned softly, landed lightly into the saddle, and got the young horse's head up with a determination which gave that high-spirited youngster quite a shock. The bay, christened Redbird—all Gheena's horses were birds, she said—observed that there was little room for him to play in, so settled down decorously to walk up and down with the other horses.

Darby looked feverishly for his hounds. Then he heard them coming.

"Get away on them, ye set of schamers," shrilled Andy's voice. "Get on to bed. Shame on ye, Grandjer an' Daisy, shame!"

"Wild as hawks they was," confided old Barty, who looked hot. "Here, there and elsewhere, an' ready to be at the clouds if they'd run along the bog for them."

Darby considered this possible.

"One cat they cot anonst to her," said Barty. "The chestnut is latherin' all over with the fear of Carty's lash, an' even the Rat is sober from chasin'."

General Brownlow removed a cigarette and said "My God!" to himself twice as he looked at the pack.

Home Ruler always led them, the relationship to a boar-hound never being quite concealed by a fox-hound's stern, with the tailless and aggressive Grandjer just behind.

The General prayed again, lifted his hat a little as if to admit air to his hair and looked at George Freyne.

"You mean to say they hunt," he jerked out. "You bought a hunting cap for this lot, George. And someone else has one, too. Three of you Masters, and, I say, Hook! *Hook!*"

For the General's man, riding up, also looked at the pack, and gave vent to an outburst of hideously clear laughter, which he made worse by putting up his hand to hide, as he rocked and backed away.

"Something I thought of, sir," he gulped at last respectfully. "Er—a tale—they told me."

"Move on, Barty," said Darby shortly; "it's twelve o'clock."

The way into the gorse cover lay past a stretch of bog-land which was thick with hares; then the black caps lined up behind the pack.

Daisy and Greatness broke away, throwing their tongues.

"Whip them off that hare, Barty. Get round them, Carty."

Darby was finding himself as a Master of Hounds; he no longer gave orders dubiously, but with a pointed bitterness of decision.

"It is no use to be larrupin' them for what they were used to," said Barty philosophically, as he rode the aggrieved Greatness off the line with a polo-player's skill.

"Home to bed, Greatness!" shrieked young Andy reproachfully. "Home to bed, ye schamer, ye! There is foxes beyant an' ye're wantin' yere nise on little better than rabbits."

"Lord above us! to be brought out for this," said Brownlow. "For this! Look at them! Hook, look out, man!"

The bay horse got his feet on the grass for the first time. Three mighty bucks carried him well on to the soft ground, where he stretched his head out and began to kick.

Mr. Hook, proving himself a horseman, if no butler, gave the big snaffle bit three jags, which took the youngster's head up, and bringing down his crop on the sleek bay quarters, got the big humped back up straight, and set the great brute going in the deep ground before he knew where he was. The bad example brought forth a series of squeals and light-hearted bounds from more sedate hunters, Gheena's roan compassing three excellent plunges, and Dearest George's old bay kicking his master on to his neck.

"If mine begins," said Matilda nervously.

"Oh, take him into the soft and he'll never lift you," suggested the General absently. "I hope that man won't be hurt. He's valuable. Well over!"

This, as the youngster swept a fair-sized bog trench with a snort of wrath.

Hounds went into covert now without requiring to be personally conducted. They had scarcely vanished when Home Ruler's great bay sounded sonorously, followed by Grandjer's short yap.

"Overture to the Valkyrie," said Brownlow thoughtfully; "full orchestra."

Darby cheered them quickly, his familiar cry being followed to-day by a bellow from his fellow Master George, in which "Forrard!" or "Tally ho!" and "Good boys!" seemed to be blended, but not satisfactorily mixed.

Beauty, in fact, climbed on the bank with an inquiring expression on her pale face.

"For Heaven's sake, George! You'll get their heads up! And Keefe squeaking the 'Gloria' at the other end! Well, if it isn't that, it's something out of tune. He'll go soon. They're rattling him, but be quiet."

Darby leant forward, twisted useless limbs forgotten now. He was on a horse's back, his grip firm there. He could ride as well as men who had never known pain. There was the prospect of a gallop over these small green fields, and of watching his hounds hunt—terriers, harriers, what you will, yet his hounds, and keen for blood.

"Yow—ow—ow!" the long harrier note towled out, soft and musical.

Mr. Freyne, greatly put out, rode away murmuring "Tally ho's!" to himself, so that onlookers should see that he was doing his part.

"There he goes!" An old dog fox, dark in colour and with a white tag to his brush, whisked out over the bank, looked back for a moment, and loped off straight through a patch of bog towards the pasture land.

"The best line. Give 'em time, will you! Easy, O'Gorman.... Steady there! Easy, George! You're the worst of the lot, nesting under your peaked cap, selling your country, man! Steady, will you!"

It took time to get the hounds on to the line, to get them settled down and cup on. Traitor and Sweetie and Spinster were given to hunting solemnly on in covert.

"Forrard! Away! Away! Away!" Barty's screech equalled that of John Peel.

Long and thrilling it rang out, echoed by soprano efforts from little Andy, blissfully waiting for the Rat to run away, and with throaty notes from Carty at the lower side of the gorse.

"Get away on forrard!" sang out George Freyne energetically to the crowd round him. There was only one good track across the bog. This permission sent several people ambling along it, wondering if the hounds would soon join them.

Mr. Keefe's effort—he had to do something for a General—was "Yoicks! Tally ho!" which he kept trying from C in alt. down to the bass G, to see which note suited his voice.

"Pretty nonsensical our leaving all the Master's work to Dillon," he muttered, and tried his part again, the lower key completely startling Miss Carrie Hourigan that she dropped her whip so that she might get to her beads under her habit.

"Thinking it was a gun out of a Zeppelin," she said pallidly. "Will you pick the whip up, Mr. Keefe, like a love, now?"

"Sorry, a Master," bustled Keefe; "this way, Mrs. Weston. Keep the track." He did it again on the high note.

"You'll certainly break something if you try so high," said Violet. "And you're distracting Mr. Dillon, so do stop."

Hounds were on now. They towled away, Home Ruler leading over the springy tussocks, every hound hunting, every tongue thrown.

The General's man sobered the young horse by pulling him straight at the spongiest piece of ground, through which they laboured and heaved, and the bay was in hand as they jumped an ugly bog drain and landed on sound grass.

The pace was fair, hounds running steadily over light springy land, fenced by small narrow-topped banks.

"It's hunting, after all." Brownlow's hatchety severe face relaxed to a look of positive surprise as he took his horse by the head and pulled out to the right of hounds. How many years ago since he had ridden there before, just before his wedding, with the bright girl whom he had met in England and come over to marry—seeing her send along a half-broken chestnut filly as if she were the possessor of three necks?

Gheena swung past him now, the same glow of delight on her young face, her eyes as ecstatically happy; but her mount was a hunter, trained and fit to go.

"Look out there! A drop!"

Gheena put the roan at a brake of brambles overgrowing a slimy spot with a heavy drop outside on to a rutty cart-track. It took a clever horse to balance on the mixture of crumbling earth and shale and slide down without a mistake.

"One way of doing it." General Brownlow looked to his right, to see his man on the bay sail sleepily into the air and clear even the boreen at the landing side.

The pace had been steady enough to shake off people who wanted to look before they leapt. The Field had thinned out. Hounds bent to the right along a rushy, sour field when scent failed a little, and headed for the road which wound its grey ribbon up the side of a steep hill.

On this something yellow caught the eye. Home Ruler's bolt was shot, but Grandjer and Beauty stopped on the low bank on to the road and looked up anxiously, thus explaining to the noisy crew behind that they were at fault.

"He has gone right back, Darby," said Annette Freyne excitedly. "So don't try on. He turned here. Oh, Lance, this is nice for you! So lucky, General, for our invalid." But at this point Darby's voice roared out immediate orders to have that car stopped. "You headed him, you something goldfish!" yelled the man, who was rapidly growing used to his position in life. "You canaries, chirrupping there, when no one wants you."

"Canaries! with a wounded hero from the front," said Mr. Freyne's mother, after a long hurt pause. "If he did see a fox, who could object, really, Darby! And canaries!"

"I'll intern you if you don't put it out!" roared Darby.

"Put it out or I'll arrest you!" blared the General, with sudden fierceness, to Lancelot.

"And it isn't as if she always started," wailed Annette. "They're crossing the road lower down; he must have gone on that far," she said a moment later, fixing baleful eyes on Darby's back. "To be so rude to us!"

George Freyne's elder sister, who was large, and muddy as to complexion, kept murmuring Darby's insults incessantly, so that when she said "Go on" for a change, Annette, her daughter, told the man to start the canary, and was accused, despite her thirty years, of impertinence to her mother.

Beauty meantime had towled across the road, followed by Daisy, Home Ruler and Spinster, and they carried on across a field of sodden ploughed upland, which would have taxed the noses of the fox-hounds sorely.

The fox had not only gone some time, but he was twisting with the ease of the unpressed animal, looking for holes here and there, and making for Craughwell Woods in front of him, where he hoped to find an open earth.

In this he was mistaken. He was hunted doggedly and slowly up and down the big woods, the long harrier note echoing among the trees, until in a downpour of rain he broke again, slipping away for the Craughwell river, which swelled bank-high in flood.

Now Darby knew too well that there were only two possible passages across the stream, one by the bridge on the road, an unlikely line, and the other a slippery ford half a mile up, where if a fox crossed, he generally made for Ardhee Cross, about three miles off and up hill, a line through series of small woods and high straggling hedges.

Darby galloped for the ford, a large contingent at his heels, to be stopped by a locked gate which even his heated language could not blast open.

Gheena flew down the long avenue to the bridge in the road, with her step-father, General Brownlow and a few others clattering behind her. She found an open gate and splashed up two low-lying fields, to find hounds at fault in a wide expanse of sown winterage dotted with sullen little pools of water.

If Darby had been there he would have let them alone. He knew their noses. George Freyne's moment was come; his black cap sat as a crow upon his head, and his office as first Master was heavy on him. He would show his brother-in-law. And just at that moment Daisy, staring about, put a hare up out of a tussock near the hedge and towled off in its wake by herself.

"Tally ho! One of the brutes has got it!" shouted George Freyne. "Here the

others. Tally ho! Forrard on!"

Gheena shrieked out that a small boy had viewed a hare away and that she could hear the horn up the river.

The assistant Master, ignoring this, whistled and blew and cheered until General Brownlow rocked on his horse.

In a moment everyone was ordered to get round hounds. Futile groans emanated from the horn. Mrs. Freyne cantered vaguely round the pack and asked them politely to go up to George.

Mr. O'Gorman bellowed, and a variety of youths whipped until the pack, upset and hustled, had reached the tuft vacated by the hare.

"It's ... immense," gurgled the General, almost sobbing. "Blow again, George! Whirrrr, and I know it's a hare! There are two hounds hunting right-handed up-stream by the bank from which they checked!

"And I've never known a fox turn this way," wailed Gheena. "It's a part we absolutely left to the foot dogs."

Hounds got on; they were always enthusiastic. They circled round the next field and turned where the hare had turned up by a straggling hedge.

"Fox never ran that way," said the General; "back again, round this field, I believe."

Then they crossed the road and over a bog and crawled on over a steep hill, to encounter at the bottom a vast and ragged ditch, unpleasantly vague as to its depth and very decided as to its width. When Gheena and the General had got over with a scramble, they found themselves completely alone in another driving storm of rain and hounds disappearing into grey misty distance over a high bank.

"That's the Quilty bog near the sea, utterly unrideable," said Gheena hopelessly. "The fishermen can only go through by paths." They floundered along the edge, keeping to the driest parts of the cart track, which was only used in summer, with deep ruts and patches from which the rapidly tiring horses had to wrest their limbs free, and came to a slightly better road with a surface of loose stone, to look across two miles of bog on one side and on to the sea at the other. Far off, faintly, they could hear the sound of hounds hunting.

Gheena pulled up her roan, now black with bog slime and sweat, and pointed hopelessly to the track which they must wallow over again if they followed the line taken by the circling hare.

General Brownlow's refusal ever to go along that track again was short but soldier-like in its decision.

"Even to catch the German Emperor," he said emphatically.

"We'll ride up here to the road, then," said Gheena dejectedly; "we pass the Wireless Station this way." She added that it was nine miles home, and she wondered where her young horse and Hook had got to.

"He made a good hand of that young horse," said Gheena reflectively. "If you could leave him here for a week any time I wouldn't mind at all."

The rain cleared off, leaving them both in the dripping stage with the wind drying them in chilly gusts. The horses stepped carefully on the pointed flints, cheering up as they turned on a twisty road between high banks, with the Wireless Station close by.

Here, as they jogged on, they were astonished to see a khaki-coloured car draw up at the door and Hook just coming out with a coastguard.

"Lost everything, sir," he explained, "and hopped into the car to look for you. Hunt reported in this direction, so I came to inquire."

Gheena looked thoughtful. Strangers were not admitted to the portals as a rule.

The coastguard's suggestion of fire and shelter for the horses sounded tempting. There were sheds at the back where an old farm had stood. Hook led the horses away, and Gheena felt gladly the scorch of cheeks which a hot room brings after a battering in the open air.

The coastguard's room was a typical one, ornamented with large conch shells and lumps of coral, and everything arranged with sailor's neatness.

They only stayed for a few minutes. General Brownlow was rheumatic and exceedingly damp, and as they watched the gate, they saw Violet Weston, her hunting hat changed for a picturesque hood, her bright colouring outlined in white furs and her expression one of piteous entreaty.

She had driven round to look for Gheena and her car had gone out. It would not start without the battery, which seemed run down. If they could put it on for half an hour she would wait. Then she saw Gheena and repeated her piteous tale. Hook, just behind, dropped off Whitebird and came forward. He respectfully suggested that he might start the car or set things right.

After a few futile tugs at the handle he lifted the bonnet.

"But are you a mechanic?" said Violet; "because if you're not, please don't mess at her. Someone did once, and I had to get a man from Dublin afterwards."

"Someone," said Hook, "has been messing her a little, Ma'am. Poking their noses into what doesn't concern them," he added softly, his face hidden.

Violet Weston whispered to Gheena. The name Stafford was repeated more than once. And, as if conjured up by it, Stafford's two-seater purred round the bend and his brakes went on with a jar.

"Darby's wailing like Rachael, a few miles back," he said. "He had one couple of hounds with him, and he's thirsting for someone's blood. He's looking for hounds now. George Freyne I met at Ardhee Cross, swearing you hunted a fox on until he lost you, and everyone who could has gone home. I came on to take someone home if I could, and to find the hounds."

Hook took his head out of the bonnet and swung the handle of Violet's car again, starting it easily.

"Just a little adjustment," he said. "And if you leave your battery here, they'll run it and I'll fetch it to-morrow, Ma'am."

"I wish to goodness I was coming out again on Monday," grunted Brownlow, as he got into his car. "I can quite see where Dillon got so much experience now."

As General Brownlow slithered round stiff bends with constant inquiries as to who planned Irish roads, they came upon the drenched Master—it was raining again—collecting his pack just outside the bog. They had just run the hare back and eaten her.

"We'd have been up to Ardhee Cross if George had let 'em alone," he said bitterly. "Matilda says he cast them so beautifully, so he has gone home now, imagining himself John Peel and Ashton Smith rolled into one." Then he whispered to Barty, who pulled a hare's pate from Daisy's jaws, and Darby with a grin attached it to his saddle.

Castle Freyne was quite full. It was simpler after a long day for people who were not staying to bring their clothes and not go home to change, so the house was all bustle when they got in. Anne, in the basement, was basking in a torrid heat, with two amateur kitchen-maids sitting among piles of feathers in the scullery and at least three turkeys ready to bake. Christmas was Christmas in Anne's eyes. The discarding of sodden garments, the joys of very hot water, preceded tea for those who had hunted. It was laid in the dining-room to-day, and included poached eggs and fried ham.

Lancelot was ensconced by the fireplace, roasting slowly, his leg propped on another chair and his expression one of heated misery.

"You may talk of hunting, Darby," said the second Master, bursting in happily; "but we left you to-day, my boy. Whatever took you off up by the ford? We struck the line just where I galloped to, guessing we should, and I clapped them on, and we ran over the big fields."

Mr. Freyne, completely happy, bustled in to enlarge on his success. How he had cast the hounds, and cheered them, despite some absurd blowing of Darby's, up the river, and how they had run on after the fox.

Darby leant on his stick and grunted.

"The fox which Darby had absolutely said was a hare. Over the big fields, running like pigeons, across Clanchy's, up Dhura Hill, fluting, and—er—then"—George Freyne looked inquiringly at his brother-in-law—"my mare refused—and afterwards——"

"They went on to a very large bog," said the General dryly, "and we—Gheena and I—lost them."

Mr. Freyne sat down to enjoy his tea; lost hounds tell no tales, he said

importantly; that no doubt they were beaten there.

Darby said slowly that Beauty could never be beaten. She would run the spectral huntsman across a glacier if she got her nose down.

"Then he got in," said George Freyne. "You got them in the road. He got in."

"Or went out in a submarine," suggested Darby; "that bog touches the sea."

Mr. Freyne, ignoring this, repeated accounts of various items of his own dash and skill, of his certainty of its being the line of a fox, and how by his determination he had shown General Brownlow sport.

"But they did not lose him in the bog." Darby limped to the table. "They killed at the verge of the road just as I came up."

Dearest George looked up.

"And I brought you the head," said Darby, putting the hare's astounded dead face on a plate before his host. "Daisy had it."

"The only thing to be regretted is that I may never see this hunting again," said General Brownlow, breaking the silence which followed, his eyes on the hare's pate lying close to the strawberry jam.

CHAPTER X

Christmas at Castle Freyne came in formally about ten o'clock with the advent of the wran boys at the dining-room windows.

Gheena fumed furiously before the sacrifice of tiny feathered things, and was ignored by her stepfather, who supported old customs principally because no one else wished him to. Custom also dictated that everyone's presents should repose on their plates; so that they waited in hunger to slash string and express rapture, and the table was littered with bits of twine and wrapping paper.

Gheena rhapsodized over a new bag of severe green leather with jail-like clasps, then embracing her stepfather with the fervour expected of her. She put it aside to pick up a variety of other oddments, amongst them a cigarette-case from "V.W." with Gheena scratched across its tortoiseshell form in silver. At the bottom of the heap she discovered her mother's string of pearls, long coveted, and exclaimed shrilly.

Dearest George grunted gratitude over two new pipes, a tobacco jar and a box of cigars, and a note-case for the new paper money from his wife.

Her plate was obliterated by a vast edifice in glass, destined to hold flowers and glimmering with a dull green hideousness.

"Got it over from London, you see, Matilda," said her husband, beaming. "Badly wanted for the drawing-room shelf to take the everlastings."

Gheena dived again, to find a big turquoise charm, with "For Luck" on it, from Darby, and a pair of race-glasses with no name.

Hooking the charm on the pearls, where it did not look at home, Gheena turned over everything once more to find some note about the race-glasses, and heard Dearest George repress, with extreme difficulty, the words which he would have used concerning a litter on the floor, if he had not been opening the case containing Gheena's present of a pipe, and had to say "Thank you, my dear," instead.

"I wanted race-glasses," said Gheena, "but who? Darby, you're a duck!"

Darby smiled as he hobbled to his meagre array of presents. Gheena always gave him a box of cigarettes. There were no little mementoes from loving girls for Darby Dillon now.

"But I say who?" said General Brownlow, picking up a little silver match-box. "I got Psyche's letter yesterday."

"I thought you wouldn't mind—that there'd be nothing on your plate," apologized Gheena shyly. "And mother sent the cigarettes. Oh!" This as the old man kissed her rather tenderly.

The theatrical advent of Lancelot with his mother and sister guarding his crutches, intercepted the sorting of presents. He came so plainly expecting general sympathy, to be installed in an arm-chair with a small table by his side, and his mother fussily superintending every mouthful of his breakfast.

They went to church presently, where the cotton-wool texts looked brave, if a little tired, and the usual smell of roast stove and drying cushions pervaded the airless atmosphere. Mr. Brady completely forgot the season when he touched upon the war. He took for his text the writing on the wall, and forgot that too, as he plunged into metaphor as difficult to follow as modern tactics; for in a breath he compared the Germans with burrowing snakes and carrion-seeking eagles, both of which expressions were listened to with rapture by his wife, and made the General and Darby tap their heads softly. Mr. Brady then explained smoothly how even as a God-fearing nation we wanted nothing but peace, and the best way to get it was to go and kill every man Jack of German traitors and treaty violators, until there were only grey-beards and infants left. "And, of course, the prisoners," he added, regretfully.

"The Redeemer of the world," he said, "never meant an army which warred on women and children to dominate humanity, and to-day, in the words of the Bible, it 'was to us to go forth and kill.'"

If he had not got on to the National Anthem very quickly someone would have cheered.

"Even if we are fighting, the texts will never do for next year," said Mrs. Keefe in the doorway. "So what would you think, Mrs. Freyne, of stuffing pillows for the troops with them now while the wool is fairly dry."

A fine rain was falling outside, and the gleam of wintry sunshine somewhere behind it; the day was very cold.

The heavy appetite engendered by church made George Freyne fidget, when Gheena delayed him by rushing off with Violet Weston. Mrs. Weston was brilliant in rather crude mauve, with sky-blue silk stockings on, and held Gheena's arm very affectionately as they whispered together.

The old Professor beamed at them all, a beam with sadness in it.

"In Germany they love Christmas so," he said gently. "The Gretchens and the Annas romp like children over their presents; they all over-eat themselves and everywhere is the smell of pine needles and candles which have burnt themselves out—the 'Tannen-baum.' The women are as bad as the men, you say, Mr. Freyne, because they look now as ever, when they are told to look. They clap their poor hands now for war as they did for the beauty of the Christmas-tree. Christmas, with empty chairs near the fire—is it not sad for all?"

"How you can say one word for the brutes who lamed my Lancelot," said Mrs. Augustus Freyne, "I do not know, Professor."

The Professor said humbly that he only spoke for humanity and Christmastide.

"We are astonished to hear the dreadful people ever mentioned," said Mrs. De Burgho Keane heavily. "After all, if there were no dreadful fat mothers there would be no brutal sons to run about murdering and rapining." Here Mrs. Keane stopped to consider if that was quite the right word, especially in the churchyard path, because the Professor chuckled softly and Darby grinned. Changing the conversation, Mrs. Keane objected to last year's texts as disrespectful to the season.

Mrs. Brady uneasily remarked that the cotton-wool was to make pillows, and it will all look quite nice with the lights up this evening.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane replied energetically that the evening would not concern her. She passed on to interrogate Lancelot as he hopped to the motor, and wished to know if the brutal Germans really laughed when they wounded people, or if that was a newspaper lie.

Lancelot replied vaguely, the tail of his eye on the General. It was a secret carefully preserved that he had not gone beyond Boulogne. His foot was badly crushed, and he was not likely to see service again.

Then came the heaviness of Christmas luncheon. A meal which was always

faintly neglected by Anne, who had dinner upon her mind, to say nothing of roast beef and plum pudding backed up by cheap sherry in the kitchen.

When it was over George Freyne helped Lancelot his nephew to his study, where he talked to him long and seriously.

A wounded man possessed the privilege of sympathy. Now was the hour to lay siege to Gheena's heart. Lancelot was not at all averse to life at Castle Freyne on a large income. The fear which he felt for his cousin Gheena now would easily turn to sulky authority when he found his position secure. A boy who had been indulged for his twenty-three years, was not likely to be a very pleasant companion through life.

Dearest George, moving his mind on its narrow ledge of cunning, decided that a new régime of petty tyranny would make his stepdaughter inclined to take her liberty at all costs, and Lancelot had promised faithfully that the Dower House would never be his father-in-law's position.

Gheena, through the soft cold which was turning to frost outside, wandered off by the sea. It shimmered in steely restlessness, mouthing white-toothed at the brown rocks. Cold held the world in its grip, the brown world looked icy, the shingle as though its touch would hurt in its chill.

"And out in the North Sea they keep watch," said a voice behind Gheena, "with the wind we find here cutting, there as a knife, and spray freezing on their eyelashes, and constant anxiety."

"And those dreadful submarines," said Gheena, turning to see Stafford, who had come up quietly over the grass.

"Which they threaten to blockade us with in the early spring."

"And—you believe there are bases here—men who help them?" said Gheena.

Mr. Stafford said dreamily that money would do anything.

"You have wanted it badly?" said Gheena.

Basil Stafford shot a swift look at Gheena as he answered that he had once wanted it so badly that he would have sold a limb to get it.

"I suppose," said Gheena, walking on, "that you won't keep to the drains after the winter here. You'll join something."

"You're not thinking of putting a white feather in my mince-pie for dinner, are you?" he said gravely. "There are other ways of helping besides wearing khaki, Miss Gheena, helping on war."

Gheena repeated "Helping on war" with sarcastic emphasis, and told Crabbit not to chase seagulls.

Crabbit leapt forth in swift pursuit of an elusive bird, a stately gull, which sailed off and then bobbed down into the icy sea, floating there gracefully, Crabbit immediately putting his paws into the water, trying to pretend that he had only come down to take the temperature. Then he pounced on something in the line

of flotsam, and galloped back to Gheena to lay the offering at her feet.

It was a pocket-handkerchief of large size.

Gheena said "Crabbit, you beast!" turning away; but Stafford bent down and picked the sodden rag up; then dropped it again with a sharp exclamation and looked out to sea.

"We'll go back." Gheena walked towards the house. The kitchen chimney was absolutely pouring out smoke, heaving against the evening light.

"After all," said Stafford, "if there had been no war someone else would have been employed for the drainage, and I should never have come here."

Gheena, nose in air, considered the evening sky.

He laughed slightly bitterly.

"And it doesn't much matter when I go away again, I suppose," he said. "There is the Professor on the cliffs. He must have sampled every rock in the place by now."

"And also Hook, coming back." Gheena stopped to look at the General's man. "He seems to do everything except look after his master, that man of the General's."

Hook and the Professor met upon the cliffs and spoke. Then the valet overtook them.

"Been right away to the point, sir," he said to Stafford. "Regular nest of caves and holes, this coast."

"There are some that one can see the water going into, but are quite hidden," said Gheena. "I believe there are entrances from the land. I know of a way down to one of those caves. My old nurse, who came from the village out there, said there were two or three others, but she never showed them to me."

Hook stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"One is curious. It's just over there, if you'd like to see it, with the tide coming in its ease."

Stafford looked longingly at the lighted house, for Gheena was already flying back through the scrum of trees and out on to the chill low cliffs with the sea moaning below. Here, diving through a tangle of dead bracken and unpleasantly live gorse, she came to a hole in the ground, caught a lichen-covered slab of slaty rock and dropped out of sight, remarking cheerily that it was pitch dark and very slippery.

The cliff ran out just there in bare slaty stone, with stunted fuchsias clinging in the crevices, and brambles creeping along, long and thorny.

To get goatwise from slab to slab in a grey gloom of almost complete darkness, with the touch of the stones biting numbly, was not pleasant, but the two men followed Gheena down.

"Here is the shingle. The sea is up. Oh——"

For Stafford snapped on an electric torch and a dripping gloomy cavern came into view. It smelt dankly salt, and cold sea-water was pouring along the wet floor, sluicing in through inlets in the rock.

One could imagine sightless slimy fish in there living in the deep pools in the rocks, chill weeds and noisome things. The sea echoed outside, slushing and gurgling, and the swelling rim of water creeping in through hidden channels was ghost-like in its grey upward movement.

"But there's no outlet," was what Hook said thoughtfully.

Stafford said it was like a nightmare, snapped off his torch and scrambled for the entrance.

The grey dusk outside was sweet daylight after the gloom below. Hook thanked them, and they scurried back to the house, through wisps of white mist which were rising in the hollows..

"Your cousin is being helped in to tea." The blinds were not drawn, and the surrounded entrance of Lancelot could be plainly seen, with a chair being made ready for him and footstools arranged.

"He went out to fight," said Gheena sympathetically. "Whether it was a cart or shrapnel, he did go out to try to be hit."

Basil Stafford's lips came together with a snap.

Lancelot complained of pain at tea-time. He carped at his mother and invited Gheena to adjust his cushions. When she had done that, he asked her for more tea, because she knew the exact quantities of cream and sugar—and then he begged her to show him *Punch's* Almanack.

The well of pity in which so much female reason drowns kept Gheena attending to the invalid and forbearing to say sharp things. He had gone out bravely and done his best.

She listened while he fretted and grumbled because now he could never do anything; his soldier's life was over for quite a year, if not more, when the war must be over. He talked of what he might have done, and of the loneliness at Cahercalla.

The big dining-room table had to have a leaf put in it for dinner that night. The Freynes had collected everyone in the village, down to the Professor, who came in baggy evening clothes and square-toed boots.

A meal of mighty courses marched solemnly to the haven of dessert—champagne creamed, regardless of war time, and from fine oysters to fine brandy-veiled plum-pudding—it was indigestible Christmas fare.

Of course everyone talked of the war, until Mrs. Freyne suddenly remembered that Mr. Brady ought to tell the General his splendid scheme, even down to the Kaiser's place of imprisonment in Runnymede.

Darby's "Why Runnymede?" held a note of astonishment.

Matilda Freyne said she supposed because it would always remind the dreadful man of Magna Charta and England's might. Well, if it was Spike Island Mr. Brady had suggested, she thought Runnymede was much more suitable, so English all round, and everyone agreed with her gravely.

They played games afterwards, to amuse the Brady and O'Toole children—blind man's buff and general post—in which game Mrs. Freyne could never think of any post save London to Berlin, and as no one would be Berlin, London got tired of hopping up vainly, and allowed poor Paris to be caught when someone called this town.

When Mr. Keefe, the blind man, spun frantically round the room amid a ring of mockers, Gheena took refuge in a window recess, to find General Brownlow smoking there peacefully.

Next minute Stafford was caught and blinded. In the whirl of pulling hands he felt one catch harder than the others, and having secured Lucy Brady, of eleven, wondered if it was chance or design that had placed a goose-quill in his button-hole. The Keefe children had had one to torment their father with, but—— He took it out and put it carefully into his pocket-book.

"If anyone did that on purpose," said Brownlow as Gheena came back to him, "it was a dirty thing to do."

"He won't forget, though," said Gheena carelessly. "And he doesn't care. Miss O'Toole might have done it."

"Don't you ever judge Don't-cares by appearances, young lady," he snapped. "And don't judge that boy, because he's a good sort, or I'm no judge myself."

Mrs. Weston, in flaming pink silk high to the throat, and wearing a becoming feather boa because she had a cold, had disappeared from view with Mr. Keefe. A murmur of voices from the firelit library indicated their retreat.

Darby, by the blazing drawing-room fire, looked on. He could not romp with the grown-up children, and no one could settle to Bridge. Some of the sadness of any anniversary fell on him. How many Christmases had come and gone in that old room! How many generations of white-frocked mites, grown year by year to girls and boys, to men and women, until they sat by the fire and tried to forget that soon they must go alone into the unknown! The withered-handed, tottering people, with their little pleasures of warmth, which glows as new life into their blood; of some favourite dish; or of love for the youth crowding them out of life—their lives are of the day; they are past looking back and dare not look forward. So the hours of waking after fitful sleep to the time when, tired out, they seek it again—makes each day a life to them. How many gay brides had fluttered in new finery to their new home, wives of the three-bottle men of old days, when shutters were shut at five and the day old by night!—women who

had no voice in life. Subservient, early Victorian wives, advanced now to dinner at seven, putting away the fragile lovely furniture which had delighted their forbears, filling the room with hideous heaviness, with round tables and mirrors, and stiff arm-chairs and clumsy cabinets. A later Victorian, Gheena's grandmother, rejoicing in an outbreak of macrame-edged brackets, of good china entombed in red plush mounts, of black and gold, of chenille monkeys, and satin antimacassars worked over with rosebuds or forget-me-nots.

An old house must be a sad thing, a looker-on at the life which comes and goes within its portals—the birth so gladly hailed, to the solemn tramp of heavily-laden men and the flower-smothered coffin standing in the hall.

Darby's own house was older than Castle Freyne, and had seen more people pass, and now he lived there alone, only son of an only son—and who would come after him? There was a cousin, a bright boy at school, heir if Darby never married.

The entrance of a huge bowl of punch carried in by Naylour broke up the games. Everyone took a spoonful, coughed apologetically, and had a little more, for it was rather a wonderfully deceitful punch, hiding its Samson-like strength behind a mild and mingled flavour of lemons and innocent things.

"To those in France who guard us here!" Gheena proposed a toast and swung her glass so vigorously that she upset a large portion of her punch over her stepfather.

"And thank goodness Christmas is over!" said Dearest George ill-humouredly, wiping sticky punch from inside his collar.

"I'm leaving two fellows I like behind me," said old Tony Brownlow next day, "Stafford and Dillon. All right, George; come on to the stables before I go."

The Stephen's Day hunt at Dunkillen began with a completely illegal race run for any stakes which could be collected, anything over four pounds being called a present.

It was run over an S-shaped course, consisting of small slaty banks and open ditches and two stone gaps, and they went round three times.

Darby gave a silver cup this year, so that competition was, as Phil termed it, fierce entirely.

Dan Rooney's That's the Boy was an easy favourite from James Rourke's dun gelding, unnamed—That's the Boy being a great over-lopped, leggy bay, almost in the book, with a whistler's head and no bone, and the dun a scrubby beast, hiding a certain amount of quality behind a goose rump and a ewe neck, but with great second thighs and nine inches below the knee. A weedy grey mare was the only other animal expected to complete the course. There were four three-year-olds willing to go until they fell from exhaustion, and Andy on the Rat, which he had begged leave to enter.

"You'll never get him round the turns," was what Darby said to young

Rooney, "and you're backing the horse as if the race was over."

Mr. Rooney replied contemptuously that That's the Boy had time to run out and back and catch what was against him, and that he hoped there'd be no talks of this race when he pulled the horse out to win in Cork Park.

"I'm allowing for a fall or two even," observed Rooney, as he pulled off his coat to display a silk jacket and a pair of very baggy drab breeches.

The dun's owner affected a flannel shirt and trousers tied in below the knee with string, and this, with varieties of shirts and trousers, was the fashionable and favourite get-up.

Darby, with the hounds grouped patiently in the background, was starter and judge. He dropped the flag directly they came at all near him, knowing the handiness of their heels, and saw them tear off in a bunch, the Rat scuttling along in the rear and the rush of That's the Boy knocking over one horse at the first fence.

"Bedam to himself an' his breedin'," commented the fallen jockey bitterly. "An' me mare gone home on me for certainty, an' maybe a boy away for the coffin before I'd be back meself."

That's the Boy's great stride carried him out with a clean lead, his Roman-nosed head in air; he shaved two banks with nerve-shattering carelessness, and being pulled in from the first turn, was crossed by a three-year-old, ridden out with whip and spur, and came down handsomely.

"There's the price of him," commented the knocked-out jockey by Darby's side.

The Field's snatched lead was easily taken back, but they had some way to go, and Darby still prophesied that the turns would do for the great big horse, even if he did not come down again.

The first stone gaps being scattered and shattered, the horses made for the second inward turn. Two of the three-year-olds were now trailing, completely done, and the little Rat, going at his ease, was close up with the leaders.

Quick and handily, James Rourke's dun slipped over the narrow banks with cat-like accurate ease, a complete contrast to the big horse's slithering bounds, invariably wrongly timed; but so far as pace went, That's the Boy had only to gallop on and win.

He tore at his head at the fences, cheeked his bit, and rushed out of the course, the violent wrench which brought him round bringing him also into collision with a rather awkward bank and sending him on to his knees.

Now a variety of mistakes will blow any horse. When Dan Rooney set his mount going again he did not meet with the same response, and the dun, the grey and the Rat were a field ahead.

"Bet you a sovereign, Rourke," said Darby. "Gheena, a sovereign."

Gheena, of course, backed That's the Boy. Wild shrieks began to arise from the crowd, and the local bookmaker could not issue tickets fast enough. He had absolutely lost count of where he stood, so much that he eyed his outside car more than once.

The grey mare, going gallantly, closed with the dun, who wore her down and shot out. Half a field behind, That's the Boy, white with foam, was being unmercifully flogged on. But the dun gave the last bank a lightning-like kick, and as James Rourke wondered if he would be caught in the run home, something slipped by him.

The Rat was clean bred, with brothers and sisters running races in England. He had been going quite within himself, and now he stretched his wicked little head and made for the hounds at a pace which completely worsted the dun five-year-old.

"The divil's delight to it, but the pony has it won!" yelled someone frantically. "The pony!"

"Andy, for the love of God!" wailed James Rourke. "An' I have three pound on at fours. Twelve pounds, Andy, I'll be dhrawin'."

"I have a shillin' on meself," replied Andy, leaning forward victoriously.

"Cosy in the trinches they might be the ways they is chattin'," said a disturbed and embittered onlooker, who had backed the big horse; "an' even the *obb*jectin' won't save us now with that Kinnat out there in front. Someone suggested obbjectin' to both for conspiracy and colloquy.

"If we could rowl a hat or two accidental to swherve thim," suggested another backer of the favourite, "an' let Rooney up."

Someone else declared the two were too tirened out to mind any hats, but the big horse was coming on. James Rourke bent down and called something out to little Andy, something emphatic.

Andy shook his head, Rourke bent again, and the next moment the Rat, instead of passing the post, made for the waiting hounds, sailing through the crowd dexterously.

And in a hail of hats and a hurricane of yells, the dun went past the post at his lobbing gallop, with That's the Boy's head just at his girth and well past him before they pulled up.

Darby declined to give the cup if there were any objections, but he went on to Andy to demand explanation.

"Well, you see, me Mama would take the cup for the parlour, an' he offered me two pounds of them twelve to pull out," said Andy equably; "an' he a dacent bye that won't break his word; so I pulled out, and that was the thraffic there was betune us."

"And such is Irish racing," said Darby thoughtfully. "You send that pony

home, Andy, and ride old Dobbin to hounds."

Basil Stafford said that if he laughed any more he knew something would give way.

"What you see to laugh at when my pony might have had a silver cup," said Gheena angrily, "I cannot see. Oh, call it Irish. You don't expect us to be Germans, do you?"

"If they could only meet you all for a little," gasped Stafford, "and see your little methods!"

"Oh, you'd like us to meet them, would you?" said Gheena. "You seem to know Germany well."

Stafford gasped that he wanted to see German officials encountering Phil and Andy, or your old Anne. That is *verboten*.

"'Forbidden. Is that so, young man?'

"'*Himmel*! Haf I not said it must not be done? Schwine!'

"'One side, young man, an' kape a civil tongue in ye're head. Isn't the right side the same as the left for th'ass a cyar if there is none in the sthreet?' Oh, if you only knew them and their superiority and their rages."

"Some people," said Gheena darkly, "ought to know them better at present."

Mr. Stafford's fingers touched his pocket-book; he leant forward suddenly.

"There is something here which you may take back some day," he said softly—"something which you gave me, I think."

Gheena turned away, looking puzzled.

"Ivery penny he paid me," said Andy deliriously joyful; "an' isn't that same bether than a silver cup on the table at home, Miss Gheena? An' sure, in honour an' glory I was first as well."

They moved on presently to draw a hill from the crest of which one could see the sea plainly.

Gheena began to talk of the submarines, wondering if the menace would ever be carried out.

"They'll want help if they do it," returned Stafford absently—"bases along coasts and ships to supply oil. People will do it. Money can buy anything, Miss Freyne, even some people's honour."

Gheena grew a little pale.

Christmas Day had interfered with stopping. A fox got to ground in covert and Darby decided to go home, glad of the chance, for hounds had had a hard day on Christmas Eve, and Barty was riding the same horse.

Gheena rode back with Darby as far as his turn and then on with Stafford, whose horse jogged dully and without spirit. He only kept one hunter.

It was cold and raw. Gheena missed Phil, when having glacially invited Stafford to tea, she slipped off in the big old yard, waving away proffered help.

"Phil is away with the two horses, Miss, to catch the thrain at the junction."

Gheena questioned wildly.

"With Whitebird and the Masther's Matty, Miss, the old mare. Tin year, he called her. The General took them both for remounts."

Gheena was young. She did not care for the youngster. But to sell her horse without her leave!

Attended by Crabbit, who was privately certain that nothing but a rat could create such haste, Gheena stormed through the back door, slamming it so hard that two panes of glass smashed, and Anne observed "Bomb-shells!" from the kitchen and tore to the library. Her stepfather, with an ugly look in his eyes which she had learnt to dread, was reading by an enormous fire.

"Four horses," he said coolly, "at the present time was absurd and unpatriotic." Gheena must remember that she was completely in her mother's hands, and, in fact ... here he saw the girl's eyes and decided that threats might not be wise.

Anyhow, the horse was gone, he said, and he had locked up the white oats.

His stepdaughter went out of the room rather too quietly.

Gheena could not censure her mother, who was nervous, expecting it, waiting for the girl's wrath.

"Dearest George had said the animal was not wanted, and there were some new farm implements which were required—chaff-cutter and oats-crusher; a new reaper for the spring. So he said you would understand, my dear."

Miss Freyne kissed her weeping mother and went into the drawing-room. Here Lancelot begged for attention, relying on her so humbly that she gave it ungrudgingly.

"They sold my horse when I was out," she said to Stafford. "My grey horse! You see, until I come of age or marry, I'm a minor without an income, and Dearest is affected by economy and wants mowing machines."

A dangerous glimmer shone in Gheena's eyes. Basil Stafford said "Indeed!" in tones of unmixed perplexity.

"I'll marry the Professor if Dearest is not careful," said Gheena.

Then with the lack of grace which haunts woman in muddy apron habit skirts and high boots, Gheena marched to her room, where Crabbit, very wet indeed, was just tearing into.

Evidently sorry she had missed that rat, he had gone out to fetch her comfort, and laid the sodden handkerchief, which he had picked up the day before, at her feet.

"Crabbit, you horrid dog!" said Gheena, her hand on his soft brown head; "but you meant it nicely." She held up the sopped rag, meaning to throw it on the fire, and saw the marking.

"Heinrich V. Belstein" in neat letters, and a number torn off.

A German's handkerchief cast up on the shores. Handkerchiefs do not float for long; even supposing it had caught in some seaweed, it was not likely to come from a distance. No submarine had been sunk. Gheena forgot that she was muddy and that a fire which she expected to see was non-existent. Someone was trafficking with German submarines. Some of the U boats must have been close in.

Gheena put her finger on the bell and kept it there, until Mary Kate, the head housemaid, arrived at full gallop, breathlessly wanting to know if Miss Gheena had a wakeness.

"Dropped down dead we all thought you must be, Miss, when the bell went on whirring."

Disappointed, Mary Kate took a message dubiously. It was teemin' rain out of the sky, she said.

"If the Masther hears it goin' out, Miss, he'll destroy us," said Mary Kate with resignation. "So I'll find some that'll ride a bicycle."

Then Gheena lighted her own fire and waited breathlessly until Mrs. Weston's presence was announced.

"She is waitin' on ye in the ould school-room. She would not come up, Miss Gheena, not a step."

After Gheena had got down, an excited clacking of tongues rose so high, that Mr. Freyne came along the passage and severely censured Maria, the second housemaid, for having lighted an extra fire in the school-room.

As she rushed down Gheena met Stafford, and all but knocked him over.

"It's Violet; she wouldn't come up," panted Gheena, rushing on.

After quite a short time Mrs. Weston drove off again, with her usual bright smile changed to a frown of thought and her lips pressed into a line.

Gheena was quiet that evening. She took very little tea and she was remotely civil to Stafford, instead of snapping at him in her wonted fashion. Lancelot she waited on patiently.

But when the order for sixty pounds for the grey came, it was made out in Gheena's name, and she said she would go to Cortra to cash it; there might be difficulties otherwise.

She came back with the same quiet look in her eyes, which was anger and mischief beaten by the whip of thought, and when asked if she had, as desired, paid the money into her mother's account, merely said it was all right.

But next day Mr. Freyne was called out to find Dinny, his herdsman, joyfully unpacking a variety of brilliantly painted agricultural machines from two carts from Cornahulty, which his master looked at blankly.

Gheena, quietly demure, came out to listen to the comments.

"Mother told me you wanted Whitebird's price for these things, Dearest," she said gently. "So I went to O'Malley's, and he knew what you and Dinny had been looking at, and he gave me discount for cash. There is just five pounds more to pay, I think."

Dearest George opened his mouth twice, and shut it on what he wished to articulate.

"An' the two men from Cornahulty want twenty-five shillin' for the haulin'," said Naylour, coming in to his stormy master. "Miss Gheena agreed to that with them, they says. God save us! but ye'd think I axed him for his heart's blood," said Naylour, when he got back to the kitchen; "an' he wrote the cheque like as if 'twas his own ordther for execution. Miss Gheena said I was to give the two of ye ye're tea."

CHAPTER XI

Darby Dillon ceased reading about the hobnobbing of Germans and English at Christmas-time to parley with the infuriated owner of That's the Boy, who had ridden over to say the horse's charackther was blighted for life not to get the race and the cup.

"Bathered and bumped an' crossed, sir, an' then to have me just obbjection pushed down me throat the same as a dose to a horse, an' all the neighbours at me, an' that broth of a boy Rourke won't even have a match to show the rights of it. Him that I could thrample on an' bate out with one stride to his two, his muddeen of a dun horse."

Andy, who was holding the blighted That's the Boy, looked up to suggest—grinning—a match with the Rat.

"Seein' that the Rat bate ye both," said Andy, "it is me ye should be matchin' with. Bate ye aisy, too."

"An' if ye bate him, why was ye not fust?" thundered Mr. Rooney stormily.

Andy, becoming reserved, said that was his bizness, and lapsed into silence.

"It would be like the likes of his birth an' breedin' to offer ye a shillin' to pull off," said Rooney bitterly; "but I did not think ye're father's son would do the dirty thrick to me father's, Andy Casey, for dirty pince."

"I will take me Bible oath that he niver mentioned dirty pince," said Andy, his face scarlet, "nor any pince."

Darby wondered how that oath would be recorded.

"Then what med ye?" Mr. Rooney scratched his chin, shaven two days before.

"It was time for me to go back to me dogs," said Andy coldly. "An' if Miss Gheena gives me the pony, I'll match ye around me own place an' down Carty's Hill an' around to me uncle's, four miles across the counthry, any day ye likes."

As the proposed course would include about twenty sharp bends to avoid bogs, the crossing of a ravine, and a collection of completely unsafe fences, Rooney replied: "Match where ye are," and left Andy, to again reproach Darby.

"Bribery an' corruption the same as ye'd read off the Holy Bible," he said sourly, "an' ye wouldn't let me spheak. I that ran fair an' honest with two falls an' a run out—an' that's prepared to back meself for twenty pounds for a match. There's more than a cup on it," he added, whimpering. "There's Janey O'Dea that is wavering between us, an' his ould father, chattin' now of the rale silver cup, an' inclined towards Rourke."

Miss Janey O'Dea was a buxom damsel, who rode in a bright blue habit topped by a tie which she ironed, but too plainly did not wash save on occasions, and a bowler hat which, as Andy put it, just perched above on her nesht of hair.

"But I got around him lasht evenin' that if it was Jamesey Rourke's chat an' I could bate his horse aisy, he'd have the word for me with Janey, an' before Shrove so that we'd settle."

Rourke was a long, lean youth, with shifty eyes and a battered complexion; he was loose of joint and given to wearing the long coats and over-baggy breeches of the horse-coper. His friends said that he was one that knew daylight when he saw it, and his enemies that there was no roguery that he had not a masthery of, exceptin' maybe the little he'd forgotten. He drank and was not attractive.

"Make Rourke do the dacent, Mr. Dillon, to make up for the way ye thrated me, an' I'll say no more."

Darby rubbed his nose thoughtfully; this long, lean youth could do a great deal to spoil fox hunting; there were two coverts on his land, and several others on those of his relations and friends.

"We'll ride over to Rourke's," said Darby to Andy. "I'll see what I can do, Rooney."

Darby crippled down the steps, swinging out more easily on the gravel with his crutch under his arm. The twisted leg was growing so strong that the crutch would soon be discarded for a stick, and Darby was looking forward with a child's zest to throwing it away. They were making him a new boot which would support the foot and help him greatly.

Yet the very flush of partial strength, the brightness of the cool winter's day, brought a sigh quickly on the heels of elation. It was hard to be able to feel

young, and yet have all youth's possessions placed well out of reach. He was a mere piece of flotsam cast up on Life's beach, riddled and battered, never to float lightly on the grey-blue salt waters.

Darby clambered on to the back of his pet chestnut. Once in the saddle he was upright, sitting easily, a cripple no longer. Riper plunged lightly and came down to the firm, light touch on the bits and the pressure of a heel. Andy scrambled on to his second mount, a stumpy and dogged roan cob, rejoicing in the stable name of Go Aisy—because "go aisy" he would except under stress of the sharpest spurs—though he had been christened Dobbin.

Rourke's house lay inland, snug in a hollow. There were signs of good farming over the carefully kept fences, the fields free of weeds, the heaps of manure out ready for top-dressing; the house was substantial and the yard clean.

Jamesey himself was ringing a young horse at the back. He was a fresh-faced, squarely-built fellow, unpretentious and good-humoured.

In answer to Darby's questions, he put in the lumpy youngster and put a bridle on the dun horse, pulling him out.

"Look at him! An', in God's name, sir, is it likely he'd ever bate that great stridin' horse again?" he said, grinning. "They are schooling That's the Boy now, an' without a crowd likely he wouldn't fall. An' why would I be out to be a laffin' sthock to please Masther Dan Rooney?"

Darby explained further in low tones.

James Rourke's face fell a little. He replied that he was really attached to Jennie once, and that all was going well until the war and the buying of remounts.

"An' then ye see me bit comes gradual, bein' honest airnin's; but Dan Rooney med a rich man of himself sellin' misfortunes to the soldiers—buyin' here an' there, he havin' a friend in the barracks. Well, before Hivin, Mr. Darby, one blind as a sthone, an' one a runaway that no man could manage, but he drugged him carryin' him in; an' one with staggers, an' a kicker that it never let ye up, an' a craythur with spavins. I couldn't be goin' to say me prayers thinkin' of some poor felly wantin' to make a boult with Slattery's grey kicker to try to get on; but Rooney bought the dhregs of the counthry-side, an' drew out more than ye'd believe, and now he has Jennie's father tormented with the show of money. A new side-car no less, with green cushions, an' silver spoons to stir tay with—he bought thim above at an auction—an' two yelly an' red china vases for the parlour table. He has the ould man mismerized, while poor Janey——"

Just then Jane O'Dea herself, on her greatly galled black horse, rode shyly into the yard, and seeing Darby there, asked behind hot blushes for the lend of a bridle, hers being unsteady. She had really come to see the cup.

With a great many protests she got down, folding a modestly unsafe habit skirt about her gaitered ankles, and was welcomed by Jamesey's mother.

Darby knew now that tea, eggs and blackberry jam were things he could not escape from. He admired the silver cup which he had purchased, and grinned as he looked—the reflection of Jamesey silently kissing Miss O'Dea being clearly mirrored in the polished surface. Later on, when the room had lost its earthly smile and grown tropical in temperature, he removed the young people to the yard, where Jane, growing truthful in her sadness, said her Dada was set upon Dan Rooney, had been shaken by the beating of the big horse and the unpleasant loss of five shillings, but now inclined, bribed by libations of whisky, to Rooney again.

"Danny sayin' he'll be aisy on me fortin'," she said tearfully, "an' not on this horse even that is me own; an' he swearin' that if Jamesey here does not run off the race, he is a coward and had no right to win; an', agen, that the raison is that Jamesey has not twinty pound to lay down ready money."

The course of true love was not running smooth. It was Andy coming over and whispering in Rourke's ear who seemed to oil the machinery. A slow smile broke across Jamesey's face, and an expression of dubious anxiety gradually gave way to one of hope.

He told Darby that he'd say in a day or two if he could run the match, and then hoisted Janey to her saddle with many "Lord, save us!" and "Have a cares!" from the unagile damsel.

Darby rode a little way with her, telling Andy to keep behind. Coyly, since it is not maidenly to express affection, she told him how she disliked Mr. Rooney, and how her heart was set on Jim.

"An' what is a few pounds extra if it goes on check ridin' trousers an' whisky," said Miss Janey shrewdly, "which is both poor value, Mr. Dillon!"

Darby said "Undoubtedly."

"An' he no farmer, but all for buyin' bad horses an' sellin' them on. A stable full there now on him, with the greenest buyers beginnin' to look at more than just that a horse is alive, as they did at first. A pianny he promised me, an' I scalded from musical pieces at the convent, pullin' out with your fingers what a musical box'd tune for you for the twist of a handle. An' if it's up there I goes, it will be with the heart broke in me," concluded Janey tearfully, as she pointed to a bleak house upon a hill. "An' go I will if poor Jamesey cannot beat that ould thoroughbred in a match."

Darby rode on to Castle Freyne. He found Gheena leaning over one of the horses' doors, her face set gravely and time of gay youth fled.

"It's Dearest, Darby," she said. "He has taken to sticking little pin-pricks into me, refusing white oats for the horses, stopping fires, keeping in the motor. He would dismiss my two new old men but mother considers their employment charity. And Lancelot is staying on for a month, and I—wish there had never been

a war. It seems to upset everyone so"—Gheena's busy unskilful fingers clicked at her knitting—"now they talk of submarines coming along in herds and our having supply bases for them. And if they have, Crabbit and I will find them," said Gheena emphatically.

"I am afraid I cannot come along the rocks to help, Gheena."

Her face softened suddenly.

"You could motor me," she said, "to points and places. As petrol is too dear to use now we are to have out the wagonette and drive the farm horses. But wait until Dearest misses the first train to Cortra," said Gheena hopefully, "and mother takes his advice as to hiring a car to go on in, because she must have supplies for the week and the curry powder is out."

Darby put his horse up and accepted a drive to the village in Gheena's pony-trap. The pony was a creature of moods which occasionally rattled along at a gallop, and more often walked and grazed. It had a hard side to its mouth, a failing which made traffic a difficulty, and it occasionally kicked when beaten.

As they drove, Gheena explained that she had strong hopes of Whitebird being returned to her. She had written to her uncle, telling of the horse's little accomplishment, which was lying down flat at a certain signal. The grey had been brought up in a circus. He had done it once out hunting at the sound of a whistle.

"And ... Uncle Tony has learnt the whistle," said Gheena softly and with meaning.

Darby observed that he understood the sixty pounds had been carefully spent, so the money would have to be returned, and a bump stopped further conversation.

"If they won't pick up their legs in time I can't help them doing it too late and overbalancing," she said severely. "It's your own fault, Ned Kavanagh, you know Topsy."

The aggrieved Kavanagh remarked sourly that he was greatly hurted where he met the road, and that it was to fall or the loss of two good legs.

He mounted his cart again, glaring balefully at the pony.

Topsy having declined to come over, they had grazed a donkey cart, and the driver's wild swoop to save his dangling limbs had resulted in his overbalancing.

They skated off a large heap of stones and pulled up in the village, when they saw two motors outside Mrs. Weston's cottage.

"Is Stafford the latest?" Darby asked.

Gheena did not reply, but was snappish to Topsy when the pony would not stand. The old Professor was in the shop—a crowded place, smelling of cheese and bacon and flannelette, where you could purchase a reel of cotton with a salted pig's head brushing your hat, and pull the flannelette of your choice out from

under lumps of butter and loaves of bread. The window rejoiced in an array of Peggy's leg firmly adhering to its glass bottles, some tins of tomatoes, an array of match-boxes and the day's bread; the far end of the shop was the post-office, smelling of damp gum and dust.

Here Miss Carty, the postmistress, had at first been greatly put out because every man in the Army, no matter what regiment they jined, good Munsthers or not, was all put into the same lot—the Expeditionary Force—where, for all they knew, they might be dyin' and fightin' with misfortunate furriners, Scotch and English. Explanation having proved vain, she gave it up and accepted the injustice. Mrs. Carty, who rolled to and fro deftly amid boxes and barrels, was a person of superior intelligence, greatly shocked just then at the hobnobbing of the English soldiers with the German thraitors at Christmas-tide.

"If it was rooses to get them over to their ditches and doctor them quietly, I could understand," declaimed Mrs. Carty; "but—but to be handin' out smhokes and dhrinks an' carryin' on pleasantly without an objec'! I have the sardines in, Miss Gheena. Thruppence a box extry, seein' the ways them under-minded boats has all the fish swhep from the say. Aisy for them to get a catch down below with the fish to be cot an' they slheepin'."

Gheena placed the sardines in the trap and got in gloomily.

They were hailed passing Mrs. Weston's door. Violet really brilliant in pale blue with a wide sailor hat on her toupée, and wearing purple shoes and stockings, was at it with Stafford.

"Watching for you," she said to Gheena, "to bring you in to tea."

Gheena observed with care how Stafford kept close to Violet as they went up the path, and looked really admiringly at her brilliant colouring and bright face.

"If she'd only let her feet out," said Darby, hobbling in.

Mrs. Weston did not excel in giving tea. It came up upon a brass tray, and was generally both stewed and chilly. Two bought cakes, crumbly and dry, and a plate of thick bread and butter were the eatables.

Mrs. Weston said frankly that tea was washy stuff, and called for the forgotten sugar.

Old Berthe, in frilled cap with banded grey hair, hobbled off rapidly. She was enveloped by many petticoats, and was a taciturn old woman, never going out or making friends.

"Poor Berthe is so anxious about her precious Switzerland," said Violet, "for fear it would go to war, and all her relations in France, and no way of hearing."

Gheena was still gloomy. She could not understand why her stepfather had grown suddenly unpleasant and niggardly, and why they seemed to collide so often. Lancelot, the wounded hero, rather interested her—she was kind-hearted

enough to like waiting on him, and was even a little pleased at his dependence upon her.

After a cup of tepid tea and a prolonged period of Mr. Keefe glaring at Mr. Stafford, Gheena got up to go home. Darby having taken the lid off the teapot looked into it critically.

"Made with cold water and let heat, foreign fashion," he said. "Why not, Mrs. Weston, teach your old lady the English way?"

Violet said, "Imagine you knowing the other!" in a curious way.

"And some of you have left your pipe," called out Gheena. She had dropped a glove and stayed to hunt for it. She brought out an ornate carved pipe, lately used.

Violet said she thought it must be the Professor's as no one else claimed it, and took it back.

The Professor, whom they met toddling back from his walk, stopped to speak, and got asked in to Castle Freyne for tea. He thought the pipe was probably that wild Mrs. Weston's. "But her garden is tidier. She did rave at the man Guinane when she came back a few evenings ago, so high that I heard her scolding. Carefully, Darby; stand still, Topsy, you beast!"

The hurt of helplessness came back to Darby; he should have been helping Gheena out. It reminded him of what he was to see her spring to the pony's head and stop the little beast going on.

"You take care of the poor cripple, Gheena," he said gently.

Gheena's eyes filled with tears as she muttered denial. Darby swung up the shallow steps, his leg was undoubtedly growing stronger.

Later on he told Gheena all about the dispute over the race.

At the next meet, two days afterwards, Rourke rode up on the little dun.

"They have me shamed, Mr. Darby," he said, "with 'Afraid ye are,' and 'How many mile would ye be left behind in two?'"

Darby wondered.

"An' 'If ye're horse is good, pull him out.' So the match it will have to be—or Juliana Carty above at the farm, an' I have no great wish for her for a wife."

Janey rode up at the moment, her cheeks polished with soap, her tie well ironed, and her pretty face looking out under a fringe of brown hair, and James sighed.

"I have a wish for Janey," he said shyly. "An' so will ye settle all for the match, sir, I'll risk it."

Darby said hopefully that the thoroughbred might fall.

"Or he might not gallop as fast as he'd think," said Jamesey softly. "Ye'd niver know. Ye'd niver know."

The result of this was that after a good hunt and a kill, Darby took the two

men home with him to settle matters.

"We will write it out proper," said Rourke, "so as to be sure."

Darby was familiar with matches. He wrote out that Mr. D. Rooney's That's the Boy, five years, by Barcol Lise, would be matched against Mr. J. Rourke's—here he lifted his pen.

"I have no right name for him," said Jamesey vaguely; "put me little dun horse, sir, five years."

"Dun horse, five years," wrote on Darby, "twenty pounds a side—over a natural course of three miles."

"An' let all have good coats on to keep warm waitin' for Rourke here," sneered Rooney.

"Yerself an' ye're dirty boastin'," returned Rourke, without the animosity which seemed natural.

"Will ye bet me five pounds I'm not in five minnits before ye cross the last fince?" stormed Rooney.

"I will so," said Jamesey firmly, pulling out some greasy notes which he handed to Darby.

Darby had a great deal to say to the match, and saw Janey, who was racked by doubt and fears.

"For he'd be the slithery class of a husband, that Dan," she said fretfully; "one that does no credit to the good bit he'd get, an' he takes drink terrible. An' Jamesey cannot win, an' yet he has a smilin' face on him; an' he ordthered two new cushions for his side-car at Carey's yesterday to drive home from chapel on. He says he'd stand me three days in Dublin straight away if I'd fancy it, too. An' he without a chance!"

The date of the match was fixed for the second Thursday in January at one o'clock, until Rooney wrote to say that he must go to the big town, and could not get back until three, so it must be run then.

Now the hours after three early in January begin to get chill and dark, but it had to be.

Everyone related to the Rourkes and Rooneys poured in from all sides to see the match; the hillside was black with cars and carts; there was even a stall laden with glutinous leathery buns dotted with pink sugar, and surreptitious porter sold and consumed behind a flapping tent. The one bookmaker had returned, to close almost immediately up That's the Boy and take all he could get for Rourke's dun.

At a quarter-past three Rourke trotted up, his mount veiled in a brand-new American rug of superlative smartness, and bandaged all round with linen bandages.

"If it's racin' I am, it's racin' I may as well look," he said good-humouredly

when chaffed.

Old Mr. O'Dea, who was stout and slow of movement, came up to say querulously that he heard it was childthers' nonsense putting out that dun at all. And that now maybe they'd hear no more boasting and chat.

James replied that with luck he might not, looking fixedly at the flushed countenance of his opponent.

Janey's father, coming to superintend, remarked to Rourke that if it was an accident his taking the cup, there was no call to make so much boast of it afther Mass, Janey listening with tears in her eyes.

Here Mr. Rooney broke in with, "An' he not able to win until Miss Gheena's pony had to be pulled off. An' the gibin' before all with 'Where was ye're racehorse?' or 'Will ye have a drink out of silver?'"

James Rourke's complete good-humour as he stood by the sheeted dun roused his opponent to further eloquence. Bitterly he informed the interested listeners that when Cup-winner James inquired where was the racehorse to-day, it was gone home, they could tell him, if any friends waited on in the could to see the thrickster come in.

Here Darby thought that if the matter was to be put to the proof, it might be better to start while there was a little light, and he looked thoughtfully at Rourke's reserved smile.

When Dan Rooney emerged from the chrysalis of his coat, as a butterfly in a pink jacket, dirty breeches and papery boots, his glitter wrought a groan of admiration from the crowd.

Old O'Dea, falling back to admire, suggested that he was the Boyo himself, the fine figure of a man, what there was of him. When James, quietly arrayed in his hunting kit, slipped the rug from his horse, leaving on the bandages, and it was observed that its tail was plaited up, fresh pleasantries broke forth.

Someone wished to know if Rourke imagined he owned The Tetrarch. A large Rooney cousin asked hilariously if Danny thought maybe that if he foxed the horse he was a racehorse he'd run faster, to which James replied pleasantly that he might, and backed himself for another pound.

Darby had laid out a fair course, over easy banks, and presenting no difficulties for a striding horse.

That's the Boy looked overtrained and tucked up. He lashed out irritably when mounted.

From the start Rooney adopted the hurricane-like tactics which he meant to win with. He tore away at racing pace, taking the first fence in his stride.

There were no horses to confuse the big youngster. He fled along at a pace which no one could possibly hope the dun to keep up with.

"All over," said Darby, putting up a pair of totally useless glasses, for it was

growing quite dusk. "Poor Rourke won't see the way the other is going in half a mile."

But to everyone's astonishment the dun horse and quietly-dressed rider clung obstinately close to the comet-like flash of Dan Rooney's pink jacket. The rider of That's the Boy shook up the big horse to a pace which set him sprawling, and all but resulted in disaster at a bank. Sobered by this, he looked back angrily and pulled his horse together; he was a fine rider. Still going quite easily and slugging hard against his bit, the dun was close behind. Rooney sat forward, using as much jockey fashion as he could master, bumping uncomfortably at his jumps.

"Did ye dhrug him?" hurled Rooney over an irate shoulder, "that I can hear him so long?"

"Three gallons of whisky. Was it cloryform yours got?" was Rourke's reply, his tone preoccupied, for they were nearing the nasty little scramble in and out of the boreen.

Gheena and Darby had cut the two racers off at this point, and listened, smiling, to them.

"But I never saw Rooney adopt Tod Sloan's style before," said Darby; "and if he can't get the horse together, he'll fall at the boreen."

That's the Boy, consummately handled, dropped in and out just without a fall; the dun struck the far fence hard, grunted, and bundled somehow into the far field, shooting his rider off. With the boreen behind him and Rourke down, Rooney cheered as he galloped on.

But the fall took little more time than a clean jump would have done. James Rourke was up again as soon as his horse and sat back suddenly.

"Be dam to where the weight is! How can he win if it is not there at all!" he stormed as he changed his seat.

Next moment, in the fast falling dusk, the spectators roared to see the despised dun closing the gap, fighting his way to the big horse's quarters, to his girth, forging ahead.

At this stage Jane O'Dea fell upon her father's neck, clasping him closely as she wailed, "It was no boastin', Pappy, it was no boastin'," into the displeased ear of a man who had invested five pounds at evens on Rooney, and who thirsted for liberty of action to get something speedily on the other.

"If he wasn't boastin', then wasn't he lyin', to pretend to let the Rat up lasht time?" roared O'Dea, when his proffered crown on the dun had been promptly refused.

An enthusiastic cousin of Rooney's offered an even crown, hotly declaring, "It's cantherin' the man is, so as to make a race of it, and shame the other."

"If he is, he is beltin'," shrilled Janey, letting her parent go. "Beltin'!"

"He has the sphur out too," grunted her progenitor. "I'll make the crown double, if ye like, Tom Rooney."

The big, bewildered youngster sprang forward to the drub of the stick and the bite of the steel in his flanks. He gave of his best, but the little dun was a length ahead, striding along, pulling double, and his rider had not moved.

They landed over the last fence, the bay closed the gap, the dun surged forward. The crowd swayed and roared, leaping into traps which gave way and upset them, hurling up hats, jumping to get a better view. The one bookmaker, seeing the dun ahead, wondered if he had got straight to Heaven through the laxity of the authorities, and looked at his book with breath held hard. As they dashed up the long slope, Rooney dropped his reins a little, so that just at the post the bay closed upon him, and the dun's head was barely half a length in front.

"It was one of them hippodromic sirringes," gasped Rooney, dropping his tired right hand. "Nothin' less. Ye dam thraitor of a spy!" He rolled off, panting. "I protest, Mister Dillon. He has an artificial horse med with one of them hippodromic doses, an' it was near out of him an' he finishing."

There was no weighing in, catch-weights had been the order. Little Andy led off the panting dun, and Darby himself saw to the exhausted That's the Boy. A few more gruellings of this type would break any horse's spirit.

Mr. Rooney, bewildered, took consolation in liquid form, agreed with several people that he was hardly treated, then his pink coat gleaming in the dusk, he squared up to Mr. James Rourke to demand satisfaction.

"I'll show ye, ye Germin thraitor," he said bitterly, rolling the word on his tongue. "I'll show ye to drug horses!"

"Will some friend counsel Dan Rooney not to put up a fight?" said Rourke with reserve. "Seein' that he has more dhrink taken than I have meself, an' that his faytures will be concayled on him for a week if he thries it on."

Further pleasantries concerning the fact that James was afraid, and a rider to the effect that "Perhaps if Daniel Rooney's present features were hidden he would look all the better" from Rourke being exchanged, Rooney broke loose from restraining friends and rushed forward, his arms going like windmills and his face aflame. Rourke shortened matters by knocking him down scientifically.

From behind an enlarging nose Mr. Rooney, on the ground, considered that this was another bit of treachery, for he found that giddiness prevented him from getting up.

"Maybe the hippodromic sirringe in his hand," he gulped, "pricked into the nose on me face."

A voice suggested that if this was the case Dan Rooney should immediately get up and show them how fast he could run away, Dan, completing the crowd's good-humour by endeavouring—he was now exceedingly drunk—to gallop on his

hands and knees, and finally being removed to an inside trap, where he swayed as a stricken pink flower and groaned drearily.

Darby drove over to Rourke's house next day to find the owner gaily gravelling the little path in front of the house, and whistling cheerily. Darby had come to buy the little dun; he wanted a handy horse and would have bought him before if he had not been afraid of his lack of pace.

James Rourke leant upon his shovel and rubbed his chin.

"If ye like to buy him for what he is," he said slowly, "a nate plodding fair and square little hunther, ye're welcome; but as a horse with great speed, no, Mr. Dillon. Ye're too big a friend to trade that way."

"Then how the mischief did he beat the big bay?" was what Darby uttered in astonishment.

James looked round cautiously. "Well, if one dun horse did not bate him," he said, "isn't there a book says 'All's fair in love and war,' sir—another did. The writing only said Dun, Mister Darby, there was no name. An' if I paid two hundred, he wouldn't risk it for less, for me cousin's little horse Custodian that won at Galway last year, and was second in Punchestown. Didn't James Rourke's dun horse win the race?"

"You—scoundrel!" said Darby, after a pause filled by uncontrolled laugh, he looked towards the stables.

"Oh, he went back the second next night," said James softly. "We walked him all the ways to Cortra. Andy did, an' it dark! I borryed Andy off Barty. I could not have lived in the place, Mr. Dillon, with all his boastin' if I either went out, an' was doing full-back all the time to his forward, or if I did not come out at all. An' for the twinty pound Janey an' meself sent it to the Belgums. Since it came from cheatin' soldiers, it is gone to thim that soldiers cheated."

An inkling of what had happened leaked out, as it was bound to, so delighting O'Dea that the banns were immediately put up, the old man giving Janey two extra cows because a certain young man deserved to get on in life.

Also, when a month later Darby drove up to present the couple with a silver sugar-basin and tea-spoons, he found Mr. Dan Rooney walking arm in arm with James Rourke, as they discussed the terms of sale of That's the Boy to the owner of Custodian, who realized that the bay had put in a really fine performance in running as he did—half fit, and never spared.

"To have been bate by that that niver could have bate me sickened me," said Rooney, beaming; "but to keep Custodian beltin' it for three mile, didn't I know

me bay horse was a bit of exthry?"

CHAPTER XII

General Brownlow returned the grey horse, accompanied by a terse letter to his brother-in-law, couched in terms which made George Freyne feel that he was almost lucky to have escaped a drumhead court-martial.

"Lay down with our fattest commanding officer in the barrack square," wrote Brownlow, "and again with a young subaltern ordered to gallop with a message. Folds up like a deck-chair when he feels inclined, and I've got you out of it with difficulty by trying him for another week myself."

With a spirit chastened but not resigned, Dearest George got a cheque to return the money, and then looked bitterly at the array of new machinery in its shed.

The same post had brought a letter to Gheena, which simply said: "I managed it, my dear—that particular whistle which brought him down in a moment."

Tony Brownlow wrote again from England, telling his brother-in-law that as he—Tony—had just got George out of a nice difficulty, he didn't mind asking a favour. He wanted a home for his sister's child. She had lived with him. Now he was moving about, the girl was on the coast of Kent and he was nervous; besides, he would like her to be friends with that splendid monkey, Gheena.

The sum offered for her board and for keeping a horse for her was completely adequate. Her name was Mona, and she was commonly called Psyche, the sprite.

Mona Delorme arrived almost immediately afterwards. She was a fragile little person, reminding the imaginative of a moonbeam—pale, with silvery yellow hair and grey-green shadowy eyes, with slender feet and hands, and light quick movements.

Sturdy Gheena adored her fervently from the hour of meeting her at the station, and was calling her Psyche before they reached Castle Freyne.

Mona cried out at the homely beauty of the hills, at the wild sea caught in the long harbour, and the white spray at the point where it sprang up free in its might.

Her father had been Irish. She took the country to her heart with its grey lights and shadows, its kindly people, its carelessness and consequent happiness.

"The flour is not after coming from Cortra, Miss, nor the box of groceries from the stores," said Dillon at the station; "an' the Master axin' for sardines these two days past—an' Anne out of flour."

"We'll borrow some from Mrs. Brady, Dillon; I daresay the mistress forgot to write. How many of your boxes have you got, Mona? They generally lose a few. Only one gone, Pat? Wonderful!"

"It must come on in a day or two, Miss," said Pat hopefully. "The war has the world an' all muddled up."

Mona was welcomed by Mrs. Freyne. She was at home in ten minutes in the old house; told to call Mrs. Freyne Auntie, and not Aunt—at all costs, not Aunt Matilda. As their relationship was so remote as to be non-existent Mona agreed with faint surprise.

She had been given one of the huge bedrooms looking out on the front, a vast expanse of room, with heavy furniture solidly occupying as much space as it conveniently could—a mighty bed, huge wardrobes in which several spies might be hidden, an arm-chair which it took a strong man to wheel along, and a small grate of dubiously new origin lurking in the vast fireplace. Mr. Freyne had replaced all the old-fashioned bedroom grates by cheap and not too economical substitutes.

Here Psyche the Sprite declared she would be lost, but peered with joy across the expanse of tree-dotted lawn to the grey sea churning ill-humouredly between the low cliffs.

"And you mustn't wink lights at night or we'll have Mr. Keefe up," said Gheena. "We are dreadfully afraid of submarines down here."

Gheena, long limbed, tanned clear brown, with bright hair and deep grey eyes, sat upon the massive arm-chair, not in it, but poised on the broad arm, her arms clasped round her knees, and admired her guest whole-heartedly.

"Psyche," she said; "nothing else. A sprite, Uncle Tony said. I can hardly see you edgeways."

Mona's hands gripped the window-sill; they were slight fragile things, with delicate bones concealed by milk-white skin. Even her eyes were pale, grey-blue, misty and elusive.

"A man on a horse," she announced. "Yes, do call me Psyche; it's pretty. Such a good-looking man. There were no men in Kent, only a curate and some people with wives."

Gheena dropped off her perch to run to the window and see Darby talking to her mother. The unmarred side of his face was towards them. There was no hint of the twisted, shortened limb, and the seam which punctured his right cheek.

"Oh, Darby!" said Gheena. "Poor old Darby Dillon!"

Psyche, late Mona, wished to know if this Darby had no money at all.

Gheena explained very gently that Darby was a cripple, lame and twisted.

They went down together—sunlight and moonlight, ripe chestnut and a mistletoe berry—having, with the mysterious ease of which girlhood is capable, become fast friends.

Darby Dillon was just hobbling across the hall. He reddened, as he always did, when meeting strangers and the shame of his marring was stared at by new eyes, summed up and pitied. But this girl did not seem to look at him as though she noticed; she came up to tell him how already she loved this grey Ireland, and to ask eager questions about hunting and jumping, and the joys which she had only read of.

"I bought quite a lot of books and read them," she said. "A Badminton and Jorrocks, and oh, crowds of things! But I've only ridden on the roads, seen hunting once or twice from a motor, so I didn't understand. You see, we lived in Scotland before mother died, and then I was abroad. But I'm coming out here, even if I fall off."

"You won't make a hole in the ground," said Darby thoughtfully.

"You ride—like men in pictures," said Psyche.

Darby looked up sharply, his face flushing, to see if she was laughing at the cripple, but the new experience of being admired after years of tolerant pity made the flush deepen.

Dearest George corrected his stepdaughter several times as to her stupidity about Miss Delorme's name.

A veritable sprite, pale, in pale-hued clothes, Psyche flitted about and took in everyone. Her appreciation of Anne's scones was duly recorded in the kitchen. Her close questioning of the injured Lancelot was listened to by his mother and called impertinent. It was annoying to meet a girl who seemed to know every town in France, every spot where the English held the lines, and discomfiting for the hero to have to shufflingly evade questions impossible for him to answer.

"It is my belief," observed pale Psyche to Gheena, "that he never went beyond Boulogne."

Gheena replied quietly that she had guessed that for weeks, and Lancelot, who played the invalid in his khaki, looked at them narrowly.

All the Freynes' friends appeared, of course accidentally, to see the stranger, Mrs. Brady driving Mrs. Weston, who came to ask for some seeds for her garden, things to sow in a frame, and was distressed to find that January sowings needed great care and a skilled man. Mrs. Brady was depressed because the news was vile and hopeless. Stafford came merely to ask for tea. He yawned once or twice, apologizing with a start.

"It's being up all night," he said; "no sleep."

"Who on earth did you find to play cards with here?" said Gheena icily.

Mr. Stafford said "Er!" and grinned faintly.

Lancelot Freyne absorbed Gheena's attention when he found it possible. She must pour out his tea and put in cream and sugar. She was the only one who could plump up and arrange his cushions. She must show him the pictures in the *Daily Sketch*. Gheena was patiently pointing out varieties of somewhat indefinite horrors of war, when Doctor Mahaffy, a stout man, who did ten men's work in his big district, burst in to tell them that one of their workmen had broken his leg.

"Nat Leary. He was coming back in the dark last night from the point, and he tripped over something like a wire, he says. Whatever it was, it stunned him and tilted him over the shale cliff, where he was only found at one o'clock, half kilt."

"The steward said that he had not come to work," said Dearest George fussily. "And Nat was an unusually sober man."

Old Mahaffy remarked gruffly that that was apparently as unusual as usual in that way; but as he tripped something seemed to strike him and smother him, and he woke up to find himself on the shale bank with his leg doubled under him. He was too sick to move, or he'd have gone over into the sea, so he bawled until someone heard him.

Something, Gheena could not have told what, made her look sharply at Basil Stafford. He was staring at the doctor, his face tense and strained, with an anxious look in his tired eyes.

Violet Weston rustled her noisy underskirts across the room to Gheena; she moved trippingly, because her shoes generally hurt her feet, and whispered in Gheena's ear.

"Up all night," she said. "He let it out. Could there be any connection?"

The flush faded from Basil Stafford's face; he grew pale and his lips set bitterly.

"Well, it's a job for you, Keefe," he said, "to go and investigate, and I'll come with you. The cliffs are all overgrown above the shale bank, but the path is clear at the edge."

"He turned in through the furry bushes to take that way to his house," said the doctor. "I left him grand and cosy now. I will take some tea surely, Mrs. Freyne, for I am cold and tired. I'm getting an old man for that two-wheeled motor of mine."

"You must have some fresh," said Mrs. Freyne; "this would be stewed. Don't you think so, Dearest? And, besides, there isn't any. I remember the last cup I poured out was not really there at all."

"And in the name of Goodness, Lancelot," burst out the doctor, "didn't I tell

you to use that foot and not be getting an atrophy in your leg from pasting it up on cushions?"

Lancelot, flushing, observed haughtily that the pain was too intense, and leant back as one who considers a matter fully discussed.

"I'd have a pain in a leg meself if I laid it up to be lookin' at it, and it only swollen and tender," remarked Mahaffy, with brutal frankness. "Unless it's sympathy you're after, Lancelot, and you do the Tango in your own room so as to soon fill out and get ready for more service."

At the thought of Lancelot in khaki gravely sitting before the looking-glass, Mrs. Freyne said: "Oh, good gracious. Dearest George, do you think?" and dropped three stitches of her involved muffler.

"Well, he should use it," observed the family practitioner, getting up. "He was always nervous from the hour he came into the world, and used to be peepin' at his bottle as if it might bite him. And now, Maria Louisa Deane has the measles—German, too—and over there I must get before I see roast goose to-night."

They tied pheasants on to the old fellow's bicycle and hung a basket of grapes on the handle and sent him off.

Lancelot, in offended majesty, sat gloomily among his cushions. Presently, when it was time to dress for dinner and get into slacks—he would wear no civilian clothes—he suddenly put both sticks into one hand, set his foot on the ground and collapsed against Gheena's shoulder with a strangled groan of anguish.

"There is really no use trying if it makes you make noises like that," said Matilda Freyne kindly. "Is there, Dearest? Though it's probably all nerves and really doesn't hurt a bit; and if you are going to try to use it, Naylour and George must help you. Gheena is not strong enough."

The invalid tearfully murmured that he wanted Gheena alone. His glance of reproach at Mrs. Freyne was a bitter one.

"He is a humbug," said Psyche, accepting Gheena's help in dressing. She had brought no maid. "And I do not care for your big lady in silk stockings."

When Gheena called Violet Weston a darling, Miss Delorme shook her head vigorously.

"The only thing that's wrong with her, Darby says," went on Gheena, "is that she wears a number eight shoe on a number ten foot and it hampers her. They're not such big feet really, if she did not squeeze them in those high-heeled shoes and wear such bright stockings."

When they came down again the little district inspector had just driven back from his examination of the cliffs. There were two shale banks along the verge, and until Leary got up again it would be impossible to say exactly where he had turned and fallen. He had told the doctor it was very dark, and he felt the

gorse and wheeled, knowing he would find the gate leading to the path across to his house, but the gorse grew sixty yards from where they found him. They had looked everywhere, and the only thing they found was a small cork which smelt faintly of chloroform.

"We chloroformed a stray old cat last week," said Violet Weston absently, "at least Guinane did. He took it off somewhere to the cliffs, because I wouldn't have the poor thing done in the house."

"It's how striking a wire or a root as he turned to go in could have tumbled the man over the cliffs is what puzzles me," said Stafford. "The verge is several feet even from the path."

It was a matter of course that anyone coming late to Castle Freyne stayed to dinner. The meal was always elastic, with reserves of vast game pies and cold pheasants and other things, which Anne smilingly "slapped up" into hot dishes at a moment's notice.

Psyche sat next to Darby and talked of horses all the time, an eager, ill-informed but intelligent patter, which seemed to amuse him greatly.

To-morrow—no later—she would get a horse and practise jumping.

To-morrow, Darby said mildly, was a hunting day.

"But if I lean back and then forward," said Psyche excitedly, "I might not fall off. Gheena says I am to have her Redbird to begin on, because he's so very quiet and careful. And then I am to have a grey for my own riding."

This was Gheena's sop to her stepfather's ill-humour, as the grey was returned; it could thus be fed free of cost.

"And—oh!" Psyche started nervously.

"It's Crabbit snuffling and Dearest throwing an orange at him," observed Darby. "Yes. Crabbit is now worrying the orange."

Crabbit chased the orange across the room, bit it viciously, chased it again, and finally left it, torn open, pulpy, just beneath the feet of the man who had thrown it at him; so that when Mr. Freyne rose gracefully to open the door, his feet slipped on the smashed-up fruit and he disappeared from view, feet foremost under the table, accidentally hitting Lancelot's foot and eliciting a yowl of anguish from his nephew.

The upheaval of Dearest George, his garments now fragrant with orange juice, was coupled with deep threats directed against Crabbit's life—deeper still, because that interested animal came and sniffed at his head when he was on the ground.

"When Crabbit dies," said Gheena, calling up her red pet, "I shall marry next day, the very next. If the Professor won't have me, Doctor Mahaffy might; I could give him a motor to drive in."

Dearest George observed something concerning drivel, but he observed it

under his breath and recognized the threat. Crabbit was not to suffer. So turning to Lancelot, he crushed his nephew by remarking irritably that soldiers had no business to squeal like rabbits.

The new-comer sang to them in a thin sweet voice, which was quite sprite-like, and she danced for them lightly and prettily, but not as well as usual, because she told Gheena she was thinking of hunting.

The meet was at Castle Freyne itself next day. It was without exception the worst meet on the card, with endless hunting through endless woods, of foxes with limitations as to sound limbs.

Mr. George Freyne, with the assistance of a reticent north-country keeper, trapped rabbits and carted them in the dawn or the dusk to the distant stations, sending them in bags by the cart of a "boy" of fifty-four by the name of Looney Rooney, who could keep his mouth shut on any subject for a shilling and open it for half a crown.

This matter of the rabbits Dearest George believed to be so sacred a secret that his amazement when a three-legger was run into and chopped was most loudly voiced.

"Those hang fisher chaps trapped all round the cliffs, and of course foxes strayed out."

"And I to poke into some queer-looking bags on Looney Rooney's cart two years ago," observed Darby once. "'Rabbits, you poaching villain,' I said to him. 'Whose rabbits?'

"'Don't be axin' me questions an' I'll tell ye no lies, Mister Darby,' he said, with his crooked old mouth under one ear. 'Here's half a crown to tell me whose,' I said. 'The shopman's,' he says, putting his mouth round until I thought he would have to get someone to feed him for the future through the back of his neck. 'Hee! Hee! the shopman's! Castle Brand,' says the old villain, whaling his jinnet into a trot, and he was a mile away when I realized that he had earned his half a crown."

Gheena, of course, knew nothing of this method of making money.

The scratch pack sat solemnly upon the lawn. They were now fit and in condition, yet in their hearts probably yearning for the many indifferent meals which they had picked up daily, instead of the one ample portion of meal and meat. Every woman who possessed a habit and saddle came out for the meet at Castle Freyne, and every man who could muster a horse.

Mr. Freyne had spent an anxious hour in the cellar, looking out some ginger cordial which had proved a failure, and which he meant to substitute for the usual excellent liqueurs provided for the hunting people.

"In war time they ought not to expect anything," he said fussily, as he decanted some inferior whisky into the old cut-glass decanters.

In the morning, a clear and sunshiny one, he saw the table ready in the hall before he went out, very important in peaked cap, to speak to the pack, and to proffer hospitality with the extremely whole-hearted air of the man who regrets it secretly. The offer comes quite quietly from those who delight in seeing their substance consumed.

The farmers took little mugs of liqueur coyly, coughing and wiping their mouths with a thanksgiving of "That's good entirely," or "Fine lightsome sthuff, Miss Gheena. Your good health, Miss! Your good health, Ma'am! Well now, one more, then."

Mr. Freyne watched without anxiety to see the distinct disappointment with which they would swallow the rather tired ginger cordial; but to his surprise, he saw Mr. Rooney cough with extra vigour, and hold out a withered hand for another go of that gran' little sthuff.

"And Matilda would have told me it was like water," he said genially, offering a drink to fat old O'Gorman as he pounded up upon his stout cob, leading his wife's lean mare. "Liqueur? Only the ginger cordial, or whisky and soda, or tea."

"Knowing Mrs. Freyne's ginger cordial, I'll have some," said O'Gorman, wiping his forehead. "That's a great plowder when you're late, Freyne, eight miles out of the town."

Miss Louisa O'Donnell, a coy and dark-haired damsel of uncertain years, also gladly accepted. She had gone through life offering unstinted admiration to mankind, hoping it might induce one of them to take it as a permanent tonic to his life; but she remained Louisa O'Donnell still—with a complexion which Darby said unkindly it was a good thing the rain washed sometimes, and a lean angular figure.

"Indeed, just the littlest taste, Mr. Freyne," she said sweetly. "My! isn't the hunting cap very becoming to a good-looking man. It will be quite a loss when we have the Master out again."

Dearest George preened peacock-wise in the sunshine, glared down at his white leathers and immaculate boots, and strode, spurs ringing on the gravel, towards the hall. "Gheena, two cordials."

But Gheena was on her way to coax pretty Jane O'Dea, a giggling bride-elect, from her horse and bring her in for some tea.

Dearest George ran up the shallow steps to note quite a crowd of men round the table in the hall, and then to call imperiously to his wife.

Her stout, fair comeliness set off by a well-made dark habit, she was standing talking to Stafford.

"Yes, Dearest. Naylour, two glasses."

Mr. Freyne, receiving them, noted with surprise that the hue of the liqueur was green, and turned in amazement, giving the tray to Naylour, who shuffled, a

white-haired Ganymedes, out amongst the crowd.

"And oh, Dearest George," beamed Matilda Freyne, "I found the old cordial which was never corked properly put out by mistake, and you were outside, so I got out the green Chartreuse you put away when war was declared instead. The other things were locked up, and the Chartreuse was handy in the dining-room press. Wasn't I right, Dearest?"

Dearest George looked bleakly at the bottles of his favourite liqueur which were being opened by Keefe; on the floor stood a degraded row of bottles of the cordial. Green Chartreuse to the farmers! Outside he heard O'Gorman's oily voice.

"I wouldn't mind another glassful, Naylour. I'm beat trotting the whole way, and that's great stuff, not like ginger cordial at all now, is it?"

Mr. Freyne made curious noises in his throat.

"Never," observed Darby softly to Miss Delorme, "be economical without your wife's knowledge. I've never known anyone so hard to corner as Matilda. She reminds me of chasing jelly with a fork; it's always so soft and pleasant, and always at the other end of the plate when you think you've got it."

Darby looked at his watch, but there was no hurry. If a little piece of Castle Freyne was left undrawn no one would grumble except George.

The gathering was suddenly enlivened by shouts from outside—Phil's, as he "practised" the new young lady over some bushes made up on the lawn.

"Sit back! Hould ye howlt! Great begorra! Now, at it agin!"

"Oh, it's lovely!" gasped Psyche, as she bumped from the saddle, gripped the mane, and yet was still there, hanging on.

"Don't be afeard, ye are still above," comforted Phil. "Let ye lane back when ye'd feel him hop and straighten yerself when he dhrops, and the Queen of England couldn't do more. That's bether. Now agin."

Redbird, a sedate little horse, now felt the spirit of the morning enter into him, and suddenly did a little jump not over the bushes.

Psyche understood a buck-jump; she sat down to it with a little coo of delight, and raced once more at the fence.

In a very pale grey habit she was as sprite-like riding as on foot.

"If we do not move on," said Mr. Freyne ill-humouredly, "we shall never leave this place."

Darby thought this a sound opinion. He limped off to his horse slowly, watching with amusement Miss Delorme's spirited efforts to master the balance of a jump.

The rejected grey was brought to the step by Phil, George explaining with disgust how he had been returned for some private spite.

"The quietest soort of a horse ever I seen," said Jamesey Rourke, and whis-

tled absently.

It was unfortunately quite like the signal which Greybird had completely at heart.

At Darby's side, Mr. Freyne was moving off, feeling that all eyes were upon him, when without warning the Greybird died for his country with extreme spirit, decanting his rider on to the wet grass.

"Oh, heavens! someone whistled!" said Gheena. "It's two whistles sharply given, and he's got it on his mind now, and he's on the croquet hoops." The grey stood up, his saddle scratched, his side smeared, with a benign expression on his good-tempered face.

"The megrums," said Rourke, excitedly catching the horse. "The megrums he has, the craythur."

Gheena explained softly. Mr. Freyne, smeared with green, remounted with bitter dignity and noisy comment.

The woods behind the house soon rang with the towling harrier note, until Grandjer, rushing out, pinned a small yellow fox which had one paw badly injured.

"Those dreadful men on the cliffs," said Mr. Freyne pompously. "Dreadful—my foxes!"

Looney Rooney, limping through the crowd, muttered "Shopman's rabbits!" happily, and grinned at Darby.

"Dirty German thing, trapping!" said Darby curtly. "If Lindlay comes back and finds out who does this, he'll make Huns of them for the time being, I tell you."

Mr. Freyne nursed the cheek injured by the croquet hoop and remained silent.

They drew on through the long wood at the foot of the hill, trying every yard of it, monotony varied by the occasional slaying of a rabbit by Grandjer or Beauty, both adepts at it. Wherever Darby rode, little Miss Psyche was on his heels. To be with the Master was hunting for her.

She squealed nearly as loud as the rabbits when the hounds gave tongue and were rated; she wailed for a hunt. She put her horse over fallen trunks of trees and piped shrilly that she had learnt to sit on at the jumps. She viewed a squirrel with a "Tally ho!" which made the wood ring.

"Now look here!" said Darby firmly. "That's not a fox. And I'll do the hollering away."

"It had a long tail," said Miss Delorme equally firmly, "and it was red. And suppose I see a fox and you don't see the fox, am I to say nothing because I am not sure it is a fox?"

Darby gave it up politely. He pulled up to rub his head and say "Hounds

noses," looking straight into the small pale face and the big grey-green eyes half hidden by a tangle of dark brown eyelashes.

"They'll be off on the scent of Cupid in a minnit," he said, "or Endymion. Siren would be a better name for you, Miss Moonbeam."

They scrambled through a hole in the boundary bank, and got out into poor pasture fields to draw more woods on the crest of a hill.

"When you run across to that—" said Psyche, pouting. That was the opposite cliff across the harbour.

"—Do you have to swim?" she asked.

"No, there's a ferry," said Darby gravely. "The fox hails it first. Then it comes back for me and the hounds and the hunt servants, and the others wait on the shore for their turn; that's the way we cross the sea, hunting here."

A small bank reared its barrier across the grass. Darby's horse scrambled over contemptuously, Miss Delorme rushing at it wildly, and recovering by the breastplate when the bustled Redbird bungled.

Home Ruler put his nose down with sudden interest, Beauty following suit. A fox had been about. They spoke to the line in the larch wood, when the whip-like tasselled boughs scratched unwary faces as they rode through. It was a stale line. Darby cheered them, hoping the fox might be lying in some clumps of gorse outside, from which there was even the possibility of a hunt.

Violet Weston's tall bay snorted and whistled as they climbed the steep hill. She was attended by her small red-faced swain, who was endeavouring to conceal from his thoughts that green Chartreuse in the morning will mount to the head.

A nip from his flask to assure himself made him happier; he found that irritability passed to loquacious cheeriness, and it took a second nip to bring a thorough glow of sweet peace.

Then he discussed the war and his work, explaining how much of it all entailed upon him—constant rushes to the Wireless Station, where they were ordered to let no one in now; incessant false alarms; the arranging of everything in case of invasion.

"You know that man with the broken leg still says he was too far in to have fallen over," he said. "He said he was amongst the gorse inland when he was tripped up and fell."

"Drunk, of course?" said Mrs. Weston.

"A teetotaller," said Mr. Keefe, again staving off irritability; "and now we have some whisper of wireless messages being sent off the coast."

"Mrs. Weston and I," said Gheena, riding up, "are going to search right along the cliffs for caves and holes. We might find where the petrol base is, if there is one, and then you'll be promoted."

Little Keefe snapped out that he did not believe in the rumours.

Beauty towled out her long note; a fox had been somewhere about.

"You must take off those lovely shoes of yours if you're going for long walks on the cliffs," remarked Keefe fatuously. "Never do it on those heels you wear, Mrs. Violet."

A minute later Stafford, who had ridden to their right, came up to Gheena. She was on the young horse, managing it perfectly, her bright face glowing as she played with his mouth.

"Look here," he said earnestly, "you are not to attempt to look along these cliffs, you two girls. Have you thought what it might mean if there really was a base, and desperate men earning their living by holding it? As their lives would certainly be over if they were found, do you think they would let you two come back quietly to tell the police?"

Miss Freyne withered him with a look before she inquired icily who had told Mr. Stafford of their intention.

Basil Stafford observed with some confusion that he'd heard of it—er—somehow.

Gheena replied that she did not remember mentioning it until that morning, and then only to two people who took an interest in the war.

At this Basil Stafford shot out "Steady," his voice shaking a little.

"Well, you can't," she replied with firmness.

"I can take an interest in folly," he observed after a pause, speaking with the extreme sweetness which marks distinct ill-humour.

"Keep off those cliffs, Miss Freyne. You see, there really is a war somewhere, a real war, and the German Emperor is not yet at Runnymede."

"You'd like us to keep off the cliffs," said Gheena. "No doubt."

Mr. Stafford suddenly allowed his ill-humour to pass to laughter.

"War includes many things which you have not even dreamt of," he said, grinning. "Keep away from it."

To which Gheena returned that so far as she could see, people kept away from it who ought to be in it, or perhaps they did not keep away.

Here she stopped abruptly and Darby's voice rose cheerily. They had found.

Scent was of the poorest. A small red fox, put up out of a clump of gorse, loped into the wood, and though they hunted fairly well in covert, even the harrier noses were at fault outside.

This fox topped the hill and made for a clump of trees about a mile away across rough heathery ground.

When the wood had given up the branch-slashed and irritated Field, they kept to a boggy track leading to the spinny where they were making for—all

but Darby, who rode with his hounds, risking the rough broken ground and the narrow rotten fences, mere uprights of soft earth, darned together with heather and fern. At his heels, exactly upon them, came Miss Delorme, crying "Oh! Oh! glorious!" as her horse stumbled and slipped, left completely to himself.

Gheena also left the track. One was glad of any excitement; hunting out of Castle Freyne and the bumpy going was practice for the youngster. It would do him good, too, to flounder on the ugly little banks.

Darby looked round. On his heels came fair, pale Psyche, radiant with sheer joy, her reins flapping, her whole mind full of the rush of the pack in front, of the towling, yapping notes as Home Ruler led and every hound gave tongue, the soft fresh air against her face, the whole unsounded mystery of it in her blood. At his left Gheena, the too eager youngster, held well together, the girl sitting down in her saddle, her hands low, giving and taking to her impetuous mount, both so young, so full of sheer keen life, both with all their limbs their own, both unknowing trouble.

The glow in their faces lashed the Master with a whip of bitterness. Here, as they rode, he was on an equality, able to ride a hunt as well as they could, to sit his horse as easily; but if any difficulty came, if he had to get down, he would be Darby the cripple, limping and crumbling through life—asking for help to get back on to his horse.

"Ou—ich!" was the exclamation trailing in his wake as they came to a nasty trappy little bank, a mere mound of boggy earth flung up and held loosely together by coarse grass, bramble vines and heather. The bay, ridden all loosely at it, did his own steadying and propping, the latter with a sufficient swift decision to fling Psyche out on to his neck, where she balanced precariously, gripping at the breastplate.

"Ooo-iche!" came a happy crow of triumph as the little figure got back into the saddle. "Oh, Mr. Dillon, he full-stopped quite suddenly."

"Hold his head," grinned Darby. "Full-stop him yourself, or you'll be in a ditch."

The fox tried the spinny, and as Phil upon the cart-pony put it, took a sweegee out around the hills. A more abominable country it would be difficult to imagine—lumps of tussocky ground rising out of sullen little boggy places, bogs on the summits of the hills and loose slaty stones, with a few tortuous tracks showing the ways of moderate safety here and there.

With the fox-hounds flashing over it, it took all one knew to keep near them; and if one let hounds go, they might top the hill and go on down to one of the best pieces of country. With the scratch pack yowling solemnly it was a pretty sight to watch them—every hound hunting; now Beauty ahead, now Daisy; again dock-tailed Grandjer, throwing his blended tongue, half hound and half terrier;

Home Ruler quite exhausted, towling melodiously at the rear of them all.

"He will be cot," shrieked little Andy, dashing the Rat over the rough ground. "He will be cot. See! there is one wavin' ahead."

The fox had sat down to consider matters, and jumped up again as the steady "Yow-ow" came slowly along, the lulls were growing unsafe, so he meditated a return to Castle Freyne, where he was sure to find some hole unstopped if he had time to look. Her pale face glowing as with white fire, her eyes ablaze, Psyche dashed on behind Darby. She splashed into bogs, she let her good little horse stumble against tussocks; the madness of hunting had bitten her, was in her blood, never to come out again. Every fence was a joy, a thrill of uncertainty. She was not sure once whether she would not follow little Andy on his Rat, because he was abreast of hounds, but was checked firmly by Darby.

Even the scratch pack were brought to their noses on a piece of cold wet ground, where the fox had lain down in a clump of briars overgrowing some rocks.

They quieted solemnly, every nose down.

"Clever as Christians," breathed Andy ecstatically. "Look at Grandjer an' Beauty, an' he nosin', an' Daisy! Whiroo!"

The fox leaped from his shelter, flying off down the hill.

"There! there! there!" Darby's right arm was caught and held. "Now, there, is that a fox or a squirrel—the thing they're hunting? And may I say 'Tally ho?"

Darby observed gravely that it was not usual for him to hunt squirrels, and cheered on Grandjer and Beauty.

They flew back down the hill, hounds running almost in view.

"I shall never go back to Kent. I'll hunt all day long," breathed Psyche wildly.

"She yappin' to herself the same as Home Ruler, an' he behind tirened out," remarked Phil to Andy. "Listen to her, an' she off afther the Masther an' howldin' his arrum an' he lookin' for his bugle!"

"The craythur!" said Pat. "She'd see nothin' but baynits in England now and Zeppylins, an' then to be out like this is life to her."

But running down wind scent failed again. Slowly, earnestly, hounds puzzled it out, now one flinging forward with a long yowl, then dropping into silence almost angrily. Slowly they trailed it on until they were absolutely at fault on some scrubby ground. Darby did not, as a rule, help the scratch pack; he looked on while George Freyne blew his whistle, and Mr. Keefe fussed about like a red-faced bee, and the steady old stagers took no absolute notice of them.

But to-day, with Castle Freyne in front, he meant to cast forward; they might catch their fox in the woods when scent held better. Barty and Carty got round the puzzled pack and whipped them on to him.

Dearest George was in a bad humour. Their return to Castle Freyne at this

hour would mean everyone in for drinks, late lunch and tea. His petty spirit rebelled, and he thrust his dual mastership forward.

"That fox is back, Darby, over the hill."

"He is not," said Darby mildly.

"I say he is. He has turned here. I say we must try back. Barty, whip those hounds back to me." Mr. Freyne blew his whistle shrilly.

"Grandjer's touching the line," said Darby; "put them on, Barty."

Dearest George wished frantically to know what he wore a black cap for if he was not to put forward opinions.

"Forrard on, Grandjer!" remarked Darby.

"And I will cast back," stormed Dearest George, "or—or resign, Darby, resign."

"Well, cast away," said Darby affably. "Cast them back now, if you can"—for at the moment Beauty gave a long yowl of joy, and held on steadily, throwing her tongue; Grandjer, Daisy and Spinster following suit.

"That is the way we came up. Heel! Back trail!" cried George Freyne.

Darby said thoughtfully it must be a really heavy heel to leave its mark for so long, and cheered hounds in the same breath.

"To know which way he has run away," cried Psyche ecstatically. "Oh, Mr. Dillon, you are wonderful!"

Darby was not accustomed to whole-hearted admiration; he smiled at the little white face which peered almost over his shoulder.

"Now, if you were a fox," he said as they cantered towards the woods, "would you go up that hill again with dusk coming on?"

"But aren't foxes like women—always doing just what you don't expect them to?" she said, as she pulled the gate open.

"Those are the twisty ones which we catch," he said briefly. "Now they're at him! Unless he gets into a hole, he's done."

George Freyne said gloomily that he would dismiss his head man. This was when the fox found refuge in some rocks quite close to the house.

"I'd better ride on and have some cold things put out, hadn't I, Dearest George?" observed Mrs. Freyne happily, "and get eggs done. Anne's hot cakes will be sure to be ready. Everyone is here and we shall have quite a party," she added pleasantly. "Come and have a drink, Rourke, and bring anyone."

"Thin I wouldn't say against another glass of that ginger wine, Ma'am," said Rourke bashfully. "There was the sweetest sort of bite in it, a sphur in the head it gave ye."

"Stay there, George; we might dig him." Darby stopped George as he turned to ride away. "Don't desert me—as fellow-Master."

Mr. Freyne put the peak above his forehead with a gesture of pure tragedy.

Nothing but a speedy rush to the house could have saved his Chartreuse.

CHAPTER XIII

"This," remarked Psyche, opening the hall door very wide, "is the loveliest place that I have ever been in."

Miss Delorme looked through the gap in the trees at the quiet gun-metal sea, surging between the cliffs. She sniffed up the soft air with its tang of salt and peat. There was in her young mind the desire to dance and run from sheer lightness of spirits. Crabbit sat upon the doorstep and eyed her with grave curiosity. He had twice endured being caught up and called a dear darling.

A well-ordered villa on the outskirts of Folkestone seemed to belong to another world, with its orthodox morning slits of open window airing the rooms, its neat and congested garden, where calceolarias, geraniums and lobelia were replaced by spring bulbs each year, in the same week, on the same day, if it did not rain. Where rooms were turned out on their appointed day and the bitter cold of leafy June never could call a fire into existence once the grate was ornamented with a plant mausoleum in chequered pottery. Here, at Castle Freyne, the asters still lingered, with here and there a flower upon them. Thomas, the old gardener, was declaring the Missus 'd ate the face off him if he delayed lashin' in thim bulbs a day longer; but what could he do when he could not lay his hand to them in any place—an' he knowin' he put them away careful.

The thought of Miss Eva Delorme with spring bulbs which would not be found brought a bubble of laughter to Psyche's lips.

Phil was bringing the hunters out for a mouthful of sweet grass, placidly letting them graze between the flower-beds.

"Destroyin' the lawn before the masheen, Phil!"

"Won't the blast of the roller flatten it!" returned Phil cheerily. "And it is the sweetest taste in the place, Thomas—like nuts, it is."

From some unseen abyss fat Anne's voice thundered to Phil that his breakfast was waitin' on him, an' if he didn't come to it there were dogs in plenty, as she would not be disorganized with the table led all night.

"Wasn't I in ten minnits ago an' not a sign of it?" replied Phil pleasantly. "So I to run out with these two, Anne; put me bit of bacon on the range, Anne Macree, till I gits in to it."

Anne Macree replied fierily in a voice of complete good-humour that it was Cragsbread his likes should be gettin', same as the Germans, and that there was a few cakes in the oven for the upstairs breakfast which he could have if he'd hurry up, himself an' his Macrees.

A shaft of light came through the grey clouds, making a bar of silver on the steely sea; the sky, travelling quickly, now showed little flecks of blue and flaws of pearly white. Yesterday's cold wind had gone.

"It's heavenly," Psyche whispered. "It is nearly ten, and at the Larches Miss Eva would now be seeing which fish was the cheapest, and ordering a warm joint which would go out to the kitchen for luncheon. And it would be batter-pudding day."

"You love it, Sprite!" Gheena came running round from the stables, her clear brown skin flushed, her bare head ruffled.

"I want to live here." The English girl looked out with her pale bluey-green eyes. "I want never to leave. I want to learn the difference between squirrels and foxes, and how to sit on at jumps, and why the hounds yowl for a time and then don't say anything."

"And I"—Gheena looked out—"I want to live here sometimes, but I want to travel, and to see France and Italy and further away still, and hunt somewhere else where it's flat going, and just be here in the summer or in the autumn, but not always."

Dearest George, who came from hermetically-sealed rooms, and was consequently very chilly in the mornings, now called out that Mona would catch a bad chill if she did not at once come in.

A roaring fire mocked at economy in the long dining-room. Anne's preparations for a visitor smoked in various forms. She had what she called loosed her hand at hot bread and produced three varieties.

Psyche ate an unsprite-like breakfast, listening thoughtfully to her host's prophetic warnings of financial downfall and the general muddle of England at war.

"At present," said Mr. Freyne, coquetting between cold game-pie and hot kidneys on toast, "we are like candles alight at both ends. Everything costs more and we have less money to pay for it with."

"Why not go back to the pie, Dearest George?" advised his wife affectionately, "and not think of the kidneys, because they'll get cold."

Mr. Freyne, saying pettishly that by now Matilda might remember how delicate his appetite was, took kidneys and returned to his seat.

Gheena was creaming and sugaring her cousin Lancelot's tea. The wounded hero was growing puffy and taking on a greenish hue from constant food and no exercise.

He wished to know pettishly—it is an invalid's privilege to be pettish—if Gheena would drive him to the village in the pony cart to see if his new socks had come to the shop.

Psyche, thrusting this aside, said quickly that Gheena had promised to go over to the kennels, so that the names of the hounds could be learnt.

"You can't call these things hounds," said Lancelot, "terriers and boar-hounds; and my leg won't fit in the trap with three other people." The complete absence of sadness at this announcement caused a fretful outburst—how when a fellow couldn't wash no one wanted him, and if he hadn't gone to fight——

"The wagon would never have rolled over your toe," said Gheena absently. Things leaked out curiously in Ireland. "To-morrow, Lance, the car is going to the station and we take tea with Mrs. Keane. Here are your sticks."

"Your arm," was what Lancelot whispered amorously, as he extended a well-covered hand.

With a welcome opening of the door, Miss O'Toole came in, apologizing for an early intrusion; but it was on the important subject of a concert for the Belgians which they wanted Mrs. Freyne to help with.

"We have been mapping it out," said the young lady vigorously. "Miss Freyne will sing the recruiting song, and Mr. Freyne, I hear, is inimitable as John Peel and the Meynill Hunt."

George Freyne made modest mention of advancing years and a declining voice. His wife, who was a musician and played his accompaniments, wondered mildly what key he would commence in.

He generally tried two or three before he rushed away on a fourth, so flat that to follow melodiously was a difficulty.

"And we thought if our wounded hero would recite—his khaki and the crutches, you know—something quite simple, of course—cheery."

Lancelot, swaying on his sticks, dived in the recesses of his mind, and remembered that he had done the "Burial of Sir John Moore" in red velvet and a lace collar at home when he was ten.

When Psyche said that she was interested in such a burial, Mrs. Freyne explained at some length that, of course, Lance did not mean Sir John Moore had put on a red velvet frock to be interred in, but that was what Lancelot had worn to show off in.

"The seven-thirty from Cortra will be in time," said Miss O'Toole eagerly, "and we'll have crowds. Then light refreshments, sandwiches and so on given, and charged a shilling each for it; they'll catch the eleven-thirty back—the people I mean—or have a special, or perhaps everyone will motor."

Mrs. Freyne thought it would be dreadful if the concert dragged on and people had to run away in the middle of God Save the King or a sandwich.

The glittering brightness of the morning was increasing. It was almost summerlike when they opened the door again and stood in the soft air.

"You might drive me in for those stockings, Gheena," said Lancelot. "Any day will do for old hounds, and I may have twinges to-morrow."

"You'll open with the Marseillaise, and Mrs. Brady is learning the Russian anthem on the harmonium. It will be magnificent! I'll put you down to help with the supper, Mrs. Freyne—cake and sandwiches and anything else. And—I'll drive you to the village, Mr. Freyne. It will only do the stubborn pony good."

Gheena said "Splendid!" in relieved tones. Lancelot had hobbled in; he disliked too much fresh air.

"Lancelot, you can go to the village," called his aunt loudly.

Lancelot appeared again with Naylour behind him adjusting a British warm—a Balaclava helmet under his cap, and thick gloves completing his entrenchment against the advance of a chill. Gheena's pony came rattling wickedly round at the moment, poking out its stubborn head while responding gleefully to whacks from Phil with thuds of iron against the floor of the trap.

Lancelot advanced dubiously,

"Oh, it's Miss O'Toole who is going to take you," said Gheena. "She says she won't mind the extra work for her pony, and you can talk about the recitation. Don't bury Sir John Moore."

With a glance which Anne from the kitchen reported to be as bither as weasels, Lancelot got into the inside trap.

The two girls drove off behind Topsy and turned inland, crawling along the narrow fuchsia-bordered road which led to Dillon's Court.

"You can only see the sea from the hills there," Gheena said; "but it's a dear old home."

The long, dull red house stood against a background of dark wood and mountain. The wide lawn was dotted with big trees, walnuts, oaks, huge beeches; one could hear the hoarse splutter and gurgle of the trout stream which tore on to commit suicide in the lake. In summer, to the left of the house, a mass of copper beeches passed to tender tinted pinky green, to sullen splendour of coppery crimson, glowing in every gleam of sun.

The wide hall door, standing open, was of panelled oak.

"You can see the sea from the gardens, Psyche. There's poor Darby!"

Hobbling down the four shallow steps before the door, a cripple, the last perhaps of a long line of sportsmen, the old place which he loved round him, a glorious frame, enclosing a defaced portrait. It was bitter to remember how he had leapt the sunk fence there so lightly once, swung up those copper beeches up to the topmost boughs, until he looked through a red cloud up to spatches of blue, shining down. Whole-limbed, disregarding torn clothes, jumping on the ponies'

backs, looking forward to life spelt with a capital L, as his father's had been, a man's life with his son to follow him. And now—he shuffled agilely up to meet the two—brown-skinned Gheena and the white stranger, whose eyes were full of something which he had forgotten—admiration. To Psyche he was the magician who made the hounds go.

"It is even more beautiful than Castle Freyne," she said, as she jumped from the trap lightly, her eight stone of humanity perfectly balanced. "Oh, what a dear old place!" she almost whispered. "You can see the ghosts of other days here."

"I can," said Darby drearily, his face changing.

"And see the spirits of days to come," she said gently.

"Days I shall go dot and go one through—yes—alone!" His eyes were on Gheena, who was romping with two sprawling joyous terrier pups.

"And the place cries for company." As lightly as the sprite they had nicknamed her after, Psyche stepped up the shallow step wall into the dim cool hall.

The hideous furniture of Victoria's reign had not been put into it by the Dillon bride of that period. It was full of mellow satinwood and darker mahogany of earlier days. Fine priceless china jostled collections of shells in a large cabinet, and a moulting flight of stuffed birds flaunted gaudily in another.

"My grandmother put the Worcester in the pantry to make two shelves for her shells," grinned Darby, his stick strafing the polished floor. "My mother then worked her artistic will in the drawing-room. She enamelled the mantel-shelf."

A wide room, with big windows looking on the lake, with exquisite pieces of old furniture here and there, but overshadowed by stiff strips of fancy-work wrought on black satin, by red plush triangles hung with china, by plates and dishes gone to ground in red velvet mounts, by black and gold cabinets, almost smiling because they took places of honour, while precious pieces of Chippendale were stowed into corners.

"I never altered it"—Darby looked at the big room in its ugliness—"but there are enough old things about to make it a treasure house if anyone bothered. I believe the marble can be cleaned. My father, I am told, regretted there being no divorce obtainable in Ireland, and wished himself an American citizen, when he came in and saw the Aspinall's enamel pot. Come into my den," he said. "I never sit here."

A low room, oaken beams, the ceiling and the walls hung with old pictures and sporting prints, tobacco and turf smoke a reminiscence in the present.

Man's deep chairs of comfort, thick rugs for dogs to doze on and bow-wow spectrally in pursuit of dream-rats; and here among them Darby dreamt awake, as his terriers and big Scotch deerhound basked. Dreamt of what he had been, and of some wondrous bone-setters who could straighten twisted muscles, patch up broken bones, and send one Darby Dillon out again walking evenly, no longer

a shuffling cripple, but a man who would have the right to go to the girl he cared for and offer himself to her.

Here, alone, he saw pictures in the fire and felt the ache and throb of hopelessness.

Psyche flitted round, looking at the pictured likenesses of men who had once sat in the room—from silken-clad cavaliers to the men painted in the present-day tweeds.

"This boy"—Psyche swung round—"your brother?"

It was Darby, painted on the steps, a great hound by his side.

"Oh, no—myself!" he said.

"Oh, then it was an accident; you weren't born——"

Psyche stopped and became a lively poppy colour.

"I thought Gheena would have told you. It was at polo, a bad smash-up, two ponies all rolling together with Mr. Dillon as a pivot. Don't look distressed; that hurts. Come and see the pack."

They went out a back way, along cavernous passages, through which in bygone days huge dishes of roasts and boiled had had to be galloped up to the big dining-room. Darby showed a kitchen in which a range lurked coyly in the vastness, and through which all the draughts of the world seemed to rush.

The yards were also built for giants, from the neat square where the coach-houses showed great black mouths, to the second stable yard, with its endless range of boxes, a few of them modernized, and again the cow yards full of buildings and lofts and barns.

Here Gheena, the puppies in her arms and Crabbit at her heels, joined them.

The scratch pack were getting used to the cleanliness and internment by now. Grandjer had abandoned as almost hopeless his desire to dig his way out, but he still howled unmelodiously, remembering happy days of freedom at the farm. Home Ruler had lost weight, and in consequence could go farther. She was a vast feeder.

Psyche almost leapt through the door on to the flags as she endeavoured to master the hounds' names.

"Grandjer, him with no tail, Miss," said little Andy. "Ye can call that to mind. He is Beauty's son. An' Daisy here with the two sphots near his axther."

Psyche took her hat off.

"An' Spinsther, him with one ear yelly and one white, an' Home Ruler he is the big dog, an' Greatness that's all black one side. An' Beauty he is nearly all yally. He is Grandjer's mother, didn't I tell ye, Miss?"

"It isn't quite as easy as playing Bridge," said Darby, listening. "There, Andy, not any more now."

Miss Delorme was persistent. She did not leave the kennels until she had

got four hounds off by heart as she said. "So that I can call up any of those lot," she said contentedly, "if they are near me."

"That being, of course, the usual procedure for the Field," observed Darby with unabated gravity, "to call the hounds to them. Now there are the nags."

Psyche revelled in a sight of sleek coats and gentle snuggling heads, of soft muzzles nibbling at her hands. Legs Miss Delorme looked upon as merely things which were necessary to a horse to travel on; but heads and necks were to pet.

She tore herself away to eat mutton chops and cold pheasant off a little table drawn close to the fire in the big dining-room, after which she showed a distinct desire to return to the kennels and learn more about hounds.

Instead she was driven home, leaving Darby alone on his steps, his eyes wistful as the pony galloped off.

The silence of the big house seemed to sob to him as he went in to the fire, his dogs at his heels, the loneliness to become something tangible and almost evil and alive, until he got out the car and followed the two girls to Castle Freyne.

Castle Freyne was occupied by the committee of the concert, headed by Miss O'Toole, with Lancelot drooping sulkily alone in the library, his foot full of twinges.

He was only a poor wounded creature, and, of course, they were right to leave him alone and not bother about him, and he was going home next day, he said.

Gheena's easily-pricked conscience felt the pangs of remorse; she fetched Lancelot his tea herself, ministering to his growing weight with honey sandwiches and heavily-buttered potato scones and chocolate cakes.

"Where he do put it all an' he never to give it a shake down with a minnit's walk even, 'd make ye wondther," Naylour had muttered once audibly in the door.

This was after an invalid's luncheon of beef-tea, a chop, a partridge, and a sponge pudding, had completely disappeared from the tray. Lancelot's foot held twinges which only nourishment could assuage.

When the subject of songs had been fully discussed and a selection, marked by tepid affection and absence of much air, chosen by several singers, the war, of course, swept aside even the discussion of the music which its stern necessity was to evoke.

None of the people were really anxious about it, but they quoted prophecies to make them thrill, fears of invasion, of submarines, tales of spies.

"You know it really brought it home to us when dear Mrs. De Burgho Keane was attacked by them—no, by the bees which Philip had put ready for them. That was a dreadful scare. It is all owing, no doubt, to Mr. Keefe's promptness"—Mrs. Brady flashed a smile which blended appreciation with the respect due to the official in authority upon Mr. Keefe—"that we are all sleeping in our beds now."

Darby looked at the large sofa and coughed thoughtfully.

Mr. Keefe, who was wrangling with Miss O'Toole because she thought "Violets" rather an old song, and he was determined to sing it, looked round nervously.

"He warned the Germans by wireless," said Darby earnestly, "that if they dared to come here he'd be waiting on the Seals Rock with his sword on.... He had time to gallop home for it ... and they put the Fleet's head nor'-east-south-south-west immediately."

Mrs. Brady replied absently that it must be nice to know exactly how they would alter things, and really now with this wireless to send messages by—they were regularly up to date at Kildrellan.

"If it's illness," said Darby, looking severely at Psyche, who was choking and weeping close by, "we also have a doctor, and if you're good, I'll tell you about the bees and Dearest's nose."

Miss O'Toole's spectacles glimmered severely at Mr. Keefe.

"I say sing something new," she said, "something from an opera. 'Violets' is full of sickly sentimentality—tarity—tallity—that's it, tallity. Now, say, 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee.'"

"They died of frostbite when I was a boy," said Darby. "Try forrard, Miss O'Toole."

"Well, something from, say, *Betty* or *Bric-à-Brac*—'They never believe Me' or 'My Old Pal.'"

Mr. Keefe's underlip looked faintly obstinate, and he hummed 'Violets' in an apologetic tenor. He meant to sing it.

George Freyne trilled the "Meynell Hunt" over the tea-cups blithely, and with variety as to keys.

Mrs. Brady would, of course, give "The Harp that Once" in the faint echo of a one-time tuneful little voice, and the Vicar would recite "The Bells."

"We can put those two just about train time, can't we?" said Miss O'Toole, "when everyone's fussy. And Mrs. Weston?"

Mrs. Weston said that she would sell programmes and violets. She was not musical. "Unless a fiddle," she said lightly; "if anyone's got one, I can play that."

Miss O'Toole thought that one might be found. It would be a variety, as no one fiddled, except in the village at weddings. And the Vicar, of course, remarked upon one being at the conflagration of Rome and waited for his laugh expectantly.

"He has made the same jokes for years," whispered Psyche, hysterically. "You can kind of fancy that it's always the same here, with no one growing older or changing."

Darby looked down at his stick, stifling a quiet sigh. Lancelot Freyne was duly taken home next day, his expression one of puffy peevishness. Even the

wielding of the sword in France had not taught him how to advance his suit with Gheena. He left a gap which let in sunshine behind him, but with this clearness came frost.

Dearest George grew openly disagreeable. He growled over money. He hinted at the complete suppression of hunting.

Gheena was twenty. Five long years of dependence stretched before her—five years, during which the horses she loved would grow stout and shapeless upon grass, and she would fret and fume under the burden of authority. The two-seater which she had hoped for was out of the question now.

Mr. Freyne could be disagreeable. He could look over his wife's accounts and growl over Gheena's new clothes. He had not the greatness of any open aggression. To have fired off a big gun and borne the recoil would have been beyond him. He was one of the small bird shooters, peppering with No. 10, firing from behind hedges, nagging with a patient smile.

Sympathetic friends learnt, from reasons which a kind stepfather suppressed, how difficult Gheena was to get on with. She went to bed in a room where the grate would have gleamed with cold blacklead if she had not gone out and cut up branches and lighted a fire of wood and turf—the turf smuggled by Phil up the back stairs.

As the English held on grimly in their ditches of frozen mud, Mr. Freyne saw no reason to believe in the end of the war, so anticipated a poverty which he was never likely to see. He reproved Anne's limitless kitchen hospitality, the stout old cook sending away blind Barney ostentatiously, and then garnishing a humble piece of cod with several expensive things out of bottles.

Barney went no further than the harness-room, where a meal concealed in a stable bucket was carried to him.

"The war is above in the Masther's head," said Anne pleasantly. "An' I have all them trifles that he's so sot on emptied out over the cod, that he hates too, but me Darby loves thim."

"He has taken to ordering me about," said Gheena a little bleakly to Darby and Psyche—"to making things disagreeable for me. He wants to know my plans for the day, and tells me he wants Topsy himself so as to spare the car, and then he offers to drive me to see Lance. He wants me"—Gheena lifted a mutinous face—"to marry Lance. He hints at it with the subterfuge of a—a——"

"A charging bull," suggested Darby, "or a liner coming out of harbour." His eyes watched Gheena wistfully.

"If he is not careful," said Gheena, "I'll marry just to have the place. I'll marry——"

"Mr. Stafford, Miss," said old Naylour, opening the door.

Gheena's look of gloom deepened as she eyed the offender's grey tweed

suit.

"I came to tell you news," Stafford said. "A submarine sighted off Cortra harbour last night, and again not far from here."

"Someone here is supplying them with petrol," said Gheena—"someone."

"There are tales of strange motor-cars seen about at night," said Darby thoughtfully.

Psyche's grey was a little lame; she remembered it now, jumping up to drag Darby out to know what was wrong. "Because there will be a meet to-morrow and I want to go," she whispered.

Gheena, left alone with Stafford, remarked intelligently that the evening was chilly.

"You are very down on me, Miss Freyne"—he looked down at her, his arm on the old marble mantelshelf—"because I don't join the army."

Gheena said "Then why don't you?" her cheeks fiery.

"Well, at present I can't. There are the drains, and other reasons."

"To prepare potato ground for Germans," said Gheena, "ought not to be one. As for other reasons——" Her eyes flashed.

"That's one way of referring to the drains," he said good-humouredly, his eyes twinkling. "And I run messages to the Wireless Station and up to the coast-guards, and take out Mrs. Weston to drive. It's not all drains."

Gheena sat silent, pulling Crabbit's ears. Her suspicions were deepening; she grew suddenly white.

"You can't even forgive me for being a slacker, I suppose?" Basil Stafford's eyes lost their twinkle. "Perhaps I don't approve of fighting?"

"Of fighting Germans," snapped Gheena.

Mr. Stafford feared that she would never be taken on as a diplomatist. He walked to the window and added that no lights were to be used now at night near the sea; the coastguards were on the alert for offenders.

"So if the pups stray you are not to look for them with the stable lantern," he advised.

"Or with an electric torch," said Gheena, her cheeks fiery again.

"Miss Freyne," he said gravely, rather angrily, "if a man can't help himself——" He stopped suddenly, came back from the window, and said irrelevantly that he was changing his car for a new one, or perhaps he would keep both.

Psyche returned at a run to shout out that the grey horse could hunt and they'd got the second post.

It included a letter from Miss Eva Delorme, who wrote a firmly-pointed hand and could fill two sheets of notepaper with ease.

"A Mr. Stafford, you say, on the drainage works," she wrote. "I knew Staffords of Old Hall in Worcestershire, very poor people, had lost everything.

Don't judge hastily; these drains may be for home defence."

Psyche gave Gheena the letter; Miss Freyne read it carefully.

"And the new car is coming—when?" she said to Basil Stafford.

"Next week, I think. What's that, Miss Delorme? Did we live at Old Hall in Worcester? Yes, that was our place. It's let. My mother's in London. She was in a sky-scraping flat before her operation, but now I've taken a nice house for her, and she won't leave for any Zeps. It's so hard to get a chauffeur, two of hers have gone. I gave her a car last June."

Gheena's lips came together. Riches had sprung up swiftly for this young man.

Basil Stafford left, looking tired, lines round his pleasant mouth.

The scratch pack hunted a fox with leisurely determination next day from Green Gorse Hill and through a nice hunt. Psyche rode close to Darby. She got in his way several times; she chattered at moments when she should have been silent; but the small face was so rapturously happy that he said nothing. Dearest George remonstrated fussily with his guest.

"You must keep quiet at the checks, Mona," he said, "and let Darby alone. He is my colleague, remember, a Master, as I am."

"He rides in front, and do you stay behind to make the lazy dogs keep up?" asked Psyche with interest. "Is that why there are two Masters?"

Amid a clarity of silence, broken only by Darby choking, George Freyne rode away.

"My! but that was the bither remark ye threw at him," murmured Rourke softly, "an' he always tryin' to conceal the way he lies back. My! but——" Mr. Rourke suddenly abandoned himself to uncontrolled laughter while Pysche mentally pigeon-holed this new piece of knowledge. She nearly fell off over a piece of timber; she rode straight on top of Darby at a drop into the road, all with serene joy. They closed on their fox, pace improved, and as they ran fast over a fair country the glow on the girl's face was as of moonlight. The small hands clenched on the reins, her little body swaying to the gallop; the extreme pleasure of it was almost pain.

They put the fox to ground at the outskirts of Longfield Wood, Darby getting off to see what the hole was like.

"To think of being you," gasped Miss Delorme, holding Darby's horse insecurely, "to direct it all, and make those cooing noises, and to have people get out of your way, and to whistle to them with that lovely hunting-horn! And oh, would you change with anybody on earth?"

"With heaps of 'em," said Darby, looking into her pale face—"the bodies, not the men. Here is my rear-guard fellow-Master coming now, looking malignant."

"I shall hunt all my life," announced Psyche earnestly, "and over here. I

want to stay here always."

They rode down through the long wood. Darby's servants were sufficiently Irish to produce hot cakes almost as soon as everyone got in. The old library was warm and homelike, and Darby's dogs politely allowed guests to occupy the hearth-rug.

Admiration is a pleasant medicine. Darby felt less lonely and out of life than he had for months. He seemed to step from his horse with scarcely any difficulty, and he only used his riding-whip to steady him as he went into the house. He even forgot to look grimly at the scarred side of his face in the glass. The stir of the gallop was still in his blood—his horse's jumping, the movement of perfect shoulders, the keenness of a good hunter, unfaltering, how seldom visibly tired. And how well Grandjer, Beauty and Daisy, and the rest of them had hunted, plodding along on relentless foes.

"It's fun, anyhow," he said gaily, watching with man's carelessness precious Crown Derby cups being put out for tea.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane took off her gloves to pour out graciously. The tea-table was such an excellent stronghold to hear all news from. People had to wait for cream and sugar, and could not run away.

But it was the two girls who made tea, recklessly giving cream to everyone, splashing in water much too late, and looking dubiously at the straw-coloured second cups which were the result. Lancelot's mother and sister, who had driven to-day in a pony cart, stood close to Gheena, both looking unhappy, and presenting the expression of people who expect to be questioned, so that Gheena hoped politely that Lance was out walking as he was not driving.

To which his mother replied that Lance was either in bed or on the library sofa, she could not say which, suffering from depression and twinges.

"He does not pick up," said Lancelot's mother. "Gheena, that is only hot water; ring for more tea. Now yesterday we had to coax him to take a second meringue, and the roast beef he began with was not half eaten. He is unhappy, dear Gheena, my poor wounded boy, and for a remedy..."

"Soda mints," said Gheena absently. "I see, I must keep on filling up with hot water and not wait till it's only tea leaves. I never pour out at home. Yes, try soda mints. It's never moving about and such a lot to eat. I'll come to see him soon, I'll promise."

Mrs. Freyne got up, telling her daughter that Gheena was impossible and rather rude.

Miss O'Toole worked hard at her concert. She was a person of high ambitions, so flags of various nationalities had to be produced to festoon above the raised stage in the schoolhouse. The walls she decorated with anything which she could get, and the platform was such a nest of greenery that performers had

to dive in amongst it to get into full view, and even then were hemmed in by palms and boughs. The harmonium, clasped in the Union Jack, crouched among a nest of palms in one corner; the piano, its back covered with the Tricolour, and a toy lion and a bear on the top, stood out below the platform.

The performers, when finished, fell off steep wooden steps at the back, generally noisily, so that the encores were marred by sundry rubbings of injured limbs, Dearest George, in pink, handing the singers on and off vaguely.

A congested house sat in intense heat to listen to the first important item. They had opened with a piece on the piano, the doctor's daughter clawing out concerted airs of the nations, and quite forgetting to omit Germany's which was somewhere in the middle, so that the General commanding in Cortra entered to the strains of the "Watch on the Rhine" and sat down extremely surprised as it changed to "Deutschland über Alles." Joan Flynne could not in any case read German, and had learnt the piece at school. The first song was then given by Mr. O'Gorman, its opening bars being interfered with by his nervous wonder as to what on earth was crawling down the back of his neck.

"'Steadily, shoulder to shoulder'"—Mr. O'Gorman moved and a second palm spike tickled his ear—"'Steadily'"—he caught at the ear, dropped his music and missed a bar—"'blade—by——' We're out, Miss O'Toole. What!" Miss O'Toole was looking up and almost wailing "Palm fronds"—"'blade—by——' Damn the things!"

Mr. O'Gorman wheeled and clutched.

"Palm fronds!" shrieked Miss O'Toole.

Mr. O'Gorman nodded happily, the bars were successfully adjusted, and the "Old Brigade" marched to a tuneful ending.

When everyone encored and a response was being made, Mr. O'Hara could be heard at the side.

"Right! I'll give 'em 'Toreador.' 'Toreador,' Miss O'Toole. Sorry I put you out, but in a place like this no one knows, does one? A sash on? Good gracious! why should I dress up like a bull?"

"Get on with it. Now then."

Mr. O'Gorman was nervous but a favourite. He swayed a stout body energetically, and his last magnificent effort of "a-do-or" was faintly marred by an audible "Damn!" and a clasp at his ear as a palm frond got him again.

Certain young ladies then warbled of loves and kisses, sweetly and fairly audibly.

Gheena sang the "Recruiting Song" with extreme energy, fixing her eyes alternately upon Mr. Stafford and a local butcher, who sometimes spoke vaguely of "giving them Germans a 'slice' with his chopper, th' ould divils."

The General commanding the district was still upset by his musical recep-

tion, and sat by his pretty wife listening absently, even to Gheena's appeal for recruits, her hands outstretched as if to gather up men.

There was a pause after this, Miss Freyne fleeing from an encore. The stage was empty until the thrilling strains of the Russian National Anthem were beaten from the harmonium, and some of the audience who recognized it shot to their feet because they thought they ought to, the rest following suit and wondering why.

To this massed enthusiasm Lancelot Freyne, upon crutches, made entry alone, bowing gracefully to an outburst of cheers and honours. Miss O'Toole pounded more anthem, everyone sat down, and George Freyne, with a whisky and soda in his hand, rushed in tardily to announce the item—"The Charge of the Light Brigade."

"'Half a league, half a league,'" said Lancelot casually, then proceeding with the "Charge of the Light Brigade."

The General commanding the district rubbed his head hard.

"But why—for this—the Russian anthem?" he whispered. "For this!"

"'Cossack and Russian reeled from the sabre's stroke—shattered and sundered,'" said Lancelot pleasantly, Miss O'Toole continuing the music with the soft pedal down, and just a boom when big drums were mentioned.

"Why?" remarked the General hopelessly. "And the beginning when I came in!" Then—he had a sense of humour—he looked at his wife, and the rest of his evening was spent in laudable endeavours to check unseemly laughter and to subdue his wife's.

"'Into the valley of Hell, into the mouth of Death,'" said Lancelot, and paused to look for his sister at the wings—"that is—'mouth of Hell.'" She was prompting.

Boom! went chords in the bass.

"It's the damn piano puts one out!" murmured Lancelot over his shoulder to his sister. "What's next?"

"Make some action," hissed his prompter.

The General buried his face in his pocket-handkerchief, overcome, as Mrs. De Burgho Keane said.

"'They rode back again, but not—not the six hundred,'" remarked Lancelot casually, and waved one crutch swiftly. The principal effect of the belated action was to upset the lion on to Miss O'Toole and make her last piece of Russian anthem a discord.

Lancelot hobbled off amid loud clapping of hands, and his mother thought with rapture of how he would look if he did it in London.

Mr. Keefe and Mrs. Keane were both upset by the fall of the lion, considering it to be a bad omen for the war.

The interval for sandwiches and liquid refreshment proved a brilliant success. Mrs. Weston showed a bag full of silver collected for programmes. She had charged all the men a shilling for programmes.

"And it was worth it," said Darby, "with such a lot thrown in—the 'Watch on the Rhine' and Lancelot's recitation."

"I would not," observed the General, "have missed it for a fiver, especially if the second half is as good and as funny and as er ... patriotic as to tunes."

Lancelot's mother wandered up and down for plaudits for her boy, discussing the "Charge."

"No exaggerations," she said, "no undue emphasizing, just the beauty of the thing—the one swing of the crutch when they were all killed, and my wounded boy doing it."

Sir Abel replied that he had never in his life been so touched by a recitation.

Just then Mrs. Freyne took off her gloves and made nervous way to the piano.

She played the prelude to "John Peel" loudly, lifting her hands then to endeavour to follow her husband on his devious paths.

He had put on his velvet cap.

"'D'ye ken John Peel?'" roared Dearest George, and found it was too high.

"'D'ye ken John Peel?'" he boomed loudly.

Mrs. Freyne struck a chord softly, and without hope. The General, who was musical, grew quite anxious.

But by the time he had got to the "Break of day," George Freyne was, so to speak, in his stride, with his wife following delicately, afraid to show marked preference to any key.

Having been loudly encored, Mr. Freyne asked his wife to play the tune and give him some help, and gave the "Meynell Hunt" with as much variety, as Darby said, as if the pack was in full cry.

A song and dance by Miss Delorme made the audience wonder if it was quite right for them to be there, for Psyche in costume gave them a song about the moon, and her dancing was as if a sprite floated over earth. By this time all the men were yelling "Encore!" and Mrs. Keane wished audibly that she had left Estelle and Maria at home.

Psyche was back again to give "A Little Bit of String," out of the *Circus Girl*, and another dance of fairy-like lightness. Then Mr. Keefe, pink and moist, was bustled on after his song had been given out.

Miss O'Toole played a prelude emphatically, unnoticed by the nervous performer.

"'Every morning I bring thee violets,'" trilled Mr. Keefe, with the piano vamping "My Old Pal" loudly.

"'Every morning I bring thee'—— Oh, look here, hang it!" said Mr. Keefe. "I can't bring them to that music, Miss O'Toole. I told you so. I said——"

Mrs. Weston threw a bunch on to the stage.

When there was a possibility of hearing him, and Miss O'Toole had changed her music gloomily, Mr. Keefe brought violets very irately, and flounced off in obvious ill-humour, declining his encore.

"To start like that when I told her time after time," he said, as he sought solace in a whisky and soda.

Then, fetched by the M.C., Violet Weston went on to the platform; very brilliant stockings gleamed under her white skirt. She was somewhat garishly handsome as she stood in the light; but as she took up the violin her expression changed. She cuddled it down, her fingers loving on the strings; she bent to Miss O'Toole, who shook her head hopelessly, as she looked at the score.

Matilda Freyne was called on; she listened, and took up the music.

Next moment the violin was rippling out wild Hungarian dances, spirits of elves, patter of breathless witches, rustle of feet on dead leaves, on polished boards, evil in merriment—they were all in the elfish music. Only two people in the audience realized what a master hand played to them—the General from Cortra leaning forward entranced, and another listener, the old Professor, sitting hidden in a corner.

With a sigh as of tired dancers it ended.

The Professor leaned forward listening. He leant back frowning, searching for something half forgotten. When had he heard this rendered before, with the same skill, the same feeling? The memory brought with it recollection of crowds, of a town.

He left his corner to waddle to the platform where Mrs. Weston was giving now a selection of Irish airs to vociferous applause.

"I have to thank you," he said simply, holding out his hand. "Music—music is all to me. But ... somewhere ... once I have heard someone else play that just as you do."

"Everyone plays it much the same, I should think," said Violet Weston, a little abruptly, moving away.

Miss O'Toole made seven pounds clear and had given, as she said, a wonderful musical treat to everyone. In fact Sir Abel Huntley had assured her that if it was a choice between another concert in Kildrellan and one at the Queen's

Hall, he would come to hers.

CHAPTER XIV

"Not tired again, Violet?" said Gheena reproachfully. "And we began a mile on to-day?"

Mrs. Weston explained that she had twisted her ankle coming down the stony little lane, and she really could not go on. She said acidly that they had come miles, and one could see all the caves on the shore, and she did not believe anyone could hide things in them.

"There are one or two ledges," said Gheena thoughtfully, "and I've heard the water gurgling inside the rocks. I shall go on looking with Crabbit if you can't come."

They were close to the little fishing village of Leeshane. It crouched in the hollow of a shingly bay with the rocks poking out on either side, the cliffs gradually rising to the point, where ships swung into the calm water of the harbour.

They had been along the cliffs quite often, searching through the gorse bushes and trails of bramble and stunted fuchsias, until Violet Weston grew tired; high-heeled shoes soon caused twinges of pain on the rough ground.

March had come in weeping to brighten to a promise of spring. Primroses shone pale gold in more than one sheltered hollow; the wild anemones were blue in the woods; green grass was nosing through the rusty fronds of yesteryear. The catkins danced over the banks of the little trout stream.

In France, men wearying of bitter cold, welcomed the first warmth of the spring, for there they had frost in their very bones, and the cold chill of mud had clung to them as day by day they held on doggedly and waited for the advance which they were told was to be. The wild interest in the day's papers had died to a dull endurance. People got fewer wires.

While the great monster War went on drinking blood and swelling hideously, March would see the end of the hunting, and a dreary summer only enlivened by constant hopes that something must happen to end it all would be before them.

Gheena generally went away from home. This year her friends were fighting or in mourning, and she meant to stay at Castle Freyne.

"Well, if you can't go any further," said Gheena, "I'll come out myself."

"When?"

Gheena said that she did not know, because she meant to search by herself or with Psyche the sprite.

"I'll look down here now," said Gheena, dropping over the cliff.

Mrs. Weston, left alone, kicked off one shoe and rubbed her brilliant foot ill-humouredly. Then she sketched idly on a small block, a neat little sketch absolutely devoid of any claim except that of neatness; and she put that away and yawned and moved her released toes.

Gheena and Crabbit were scrambling in and out of caves, swinging along the cliff, with the tide nosing in sluggishly close to high-water mark. The sea was silvery grey under a silver sky, lapping and gurgling calmly. When a voice close by remarked that it was "airly to be lookin' for, say, birds' eggs," she turned to see Guinane, a particularly intelligent-looking youth, with bright blue eyes and a cunning mouth.

Gheena said briefly that it was. "But you never know in war times what a bird might do. It must upset them greatly, Mike, when they find they're roosting on a submarine instead of swimming," she said gravely.

Mike Guinane observed that he saw a submarine above in the big harbour, and it looked like a ship and nothin' else. Himself he doubted their powers of running down undther the wather, and thought it was mostly chat.

In fact, after a brief pause, he thought that all the war was mostly newspaper chat entirely, and got up too, to make labour scarce and dear.

Mr. Mike Guinane, Gheena noticed, was dressed in a new and completely unsuitable bewaisted blue serge suit, and sported a watch and silver chain. Evidently he was paid well.

"Supposing you stay here for a bit, Violet?" Gheena saw Mrs. Weston hobbling on over the rough ground. "I'll get on past the village."

Mrs. Weston looked at her feet and sighed.

"If I was not so dreadfully vain!" she said cheerfully. "Let's look at the Dower House instead, Gheena."

Gheena immediately thought of something brilliant. The neglected gardens of the Dower House stretched in melancholy confusion down to the water's edge. Box trees endeavoured to look forest-like as they stretched in unclipped luxuriance; spring bulbs made patches of colour here and there on the edges of the walks. The shuttered windows blinked blindly at the sunshiny world. They would have tea at Girtnamurragh—send Guinane to the village for provisions and have a picnic.

"I told Dearest that I could not be back to entertain Lance, because I was obliged to attend a meeting at the school-house," said Gheena thoughtfully. "He'll never know. And Psyche said that she was coming with me, and she slipped out

the back avenue for a ride. Dearest is so cross nowadays. Then we might get a car somehow to take us home."

Mrs. Weston considered it an excellent plan. She begged Gheena to come back from the cliffs. It would take ages to get beyond the village, and if they went up to the road they might find a boy to take a message to Darby or Mr. Keefe—or even see someone.

Gheena paused irresolutely on the cliffs, which in summer would be fragrant with wild thyme and bright with trailing trefoil and sea-pinks. Now the gorse bushes dotted them and the air blew chilly.

The little fishing village crouched in the hollow, men shaking out nets to dry, tarring boats and getting ready for the summer.

War seemed a vague thing, far off and almost impossible.

They went in to the flat garden with its high hedges of fuchsia planted for shelter. It was a gloomy place. A thick belt of yew trees looking down at the drawing-room windows, had been planted for further shelter; the house was squat and inornate and built of weeping stone, oozing clammily in damp weather.

Stone men, battered and peevish from neglect, guarded either side of the wide entire garden walk, their faces pimpled with green patches.

At the back the usual vastness of old yards stood grass-grown and half ruinous.

A short avenue ran to the twisty lane coming down to Girtnamurragh, a lane bordered by low banks and gorse bushes, sprinkled with gold and sweetness.

Up this, abandoning her quest for caves, Gheena walked. Mrs. Weston hobbled, abusing the ruts and stones.

They reached the narrow ribbon of the coast road, to find its only occupants at the moment Looney Rooney and his ass car, and an old man going to the village for provisions.

Looney Rooney stopped to listen while Gheena spoke to Flaherty, who was pleased to talk of the sad state of affairs.

"Sugar risin', Miss, an' flour. All cakes, I suppose, the soldjers ates beyant near Mons, an' it terrible hard to live, but gran' times for shops. Hasn't Guinane taken over Rooney's old house next to this own to store all the supplies he brings in? Faix, the aisy time he has with yourself, Ma'am."

"Not looking after my cabbages," said Violet, sitting down and again kicking off one shoe.

"A big slhated house for all his supplies, no less. God save us, Mr. Stafford, but you were there as silent as a Roosian!"

Basil Stafford had appeared suddenly, coming over a gap on to the road.

"A slated house he's taken, has he?" he said to old Flaherty. "Are you hunting for submarines, Miss Freyne?"

Violet Weston said that she was, personally, hunting for a drive home, and must get it somehow, as her shoes were hurting her.

She grew radiant when Stafford pointed out the long grey nose of his new car, standing in the shelter of the hedge some way down the road. Return being made simple, they must ask Stafford to the picnic tea, and Gheena did so lamely just as hoofs sounded and Miss Delorme took a narrow bank on to the road with complete confidence and loose reins.

"Over ye'll be, Miss, if ye will not lay a howlt to his head," said Phil's voice warningly.

"Also, if Looney Rooney had been at his own side of the road, you would have jumped upon him and his ass," said Darby mildly.

Mrs. Weston remarked that it was quite a party now, and someone must get more bread and butter from the village. Rooney volunteered obligingly for a bribe of sixpence.

Psyche jumped off; she was riding in her everyday tweed skirt, having been afraid to put on a habit, and Phil led the horses down the lane, receiving promises of rugs from Stafford.

The wind was cold; they were all gathered in the shelter of the hedges when the clip-clop of a horse sounded coming down from Castle Freyne.

The bright sunshine flickered on a white horse's coat.

"It's Dearest!" Gheena leapt through the gap off the road. "He's coming here. He must see us if he passes before we have time to hide behind that gorse, and he'll never forgive me. Hide the horses. Darby, get up; call back Phil!"

Darby said hastily that Mr. Freyne might be going to the village. "And, in any case, he can see over the low bank, and there's no time to get to the yard," he added hopefully.

They all crouched closely in the warm spring sunshine, Gheena leaning against the bank, peeping over.

"And I told him I could not come to look over trout-flies, because I had business," said Darby. "And he's here, so I'm caught too."

Dearest George rode along airily, at peace with the world and secure in a good track, the white horse walking quickly.

"My horse," said Psyche.

"You couldn't flash a foot at him and blind him, I suppose?" suggested Darby, looking at Mrs. Weston's green stockings.

Gheena raised her head. Mr. Freyne was not going to the village, he was turning down to the Dower House to see how many stalls must be replaced after the winter's wind. Shrilly and decidedly Gheena whistled the quick "One—two—three" which Whitebird had learnt so thoroughly.

He cocked his ears and turned his big docile head. The whistle rang again.

Then just on the edge of the turn where it was muddy, the white horse folded up and died obediently, pinning his rider's foot quite securely under him.

The yell which reft the air did not disturb him in the least. He died, got up again, and saluted at his own time.

With a rush on hands and knees, Gheena explaining as they fled, the crouchers scrambled past the open gap, and round behind a thick clump of gorse on the hill in the field, from which they could get through a gate and into the yard, or be hidden where they were.

"You—something—something brute! You German!" came in staccato from the road.

"Do you think he's hurt?" whispered Stafford in Gheena's ear. They were crouched close together under the prickly shelter.

Gheena replied briefly that she was not going to see.

"He's up," hissed Darby, "and quite annoyed."

The white horse arose and saluted, looked for a rewarding carrot, and saw instead a threatening whip, so backed faster towards home, wondering what he had done wrong.

"You Hun! You Hindenburg!" foamed Dearest George, scraping off the mud. "You stand still, will you?"

The white horse retreated solemnly at a jog, now pursued by a lame and irate man.

"He'll go home in any case now to Mumsie," said Gheena composedly. "He's all muddy. It was the only thing I could think of. Now we'll have tea."

"Resourceful but heartless," said Stafford quietly. "Supposing he'd been hurt?"

"He folds up so gently, that horse," replied Gheena equably.

The getting into Girtnamurragh by opening a window—there were heaps of panes broken—proved quite simple. The long dark room gushed damp at them, so that they moved hurriedly to the kitchen, where turf and wood soon blazed hotly and the usual difficulties of pioneering commenced.

The pump would not pump for ages—they had forgotten to send for a teapot. But the afternoon was long, and they all laughed over rebuffs, until mounds of buttered toast and well-smoked tea stood ready on the wooden table.

"I thought of smugglers," said the Professor mildly, peeping in, "so I came up."

"You were out along the cliffs, Professor," said Stafford a little sharply.

"Upon the rocks. I saw you upon the cliffs," said the Professor affably. "Now that one may see a periscope on the sea, it is interesting."

Mike Guinane and Phil hung upon the outskirts of the tea-party, getting

fresh water and toasting more bread, until Phil declared the horses 'd get their deaths and almost ordered a start.

"I am going out again in a day or two," Gheena remarked, as they drove home—"off far away on the cliffs."

"Keep off the cliffs"—Stafford had packed them both in his two-seater and Gheena was close to him—"keep off them." There was a ring of authority in his voice.

"Oh, no doubt you'd like me to," said Gheena icily.

She felt rather than heard a quick sharp sigh and the new car swerved a little.

They found Mr. Freyne, immersed in ill-humour, resting in the library with one foot in an old slipper.

With voluble anger he poured out his story—the horse tripping and falling quite suddenly and running away for a mile and more, and the mud, and his severe pain. Lancelot, pale and unsympathized with, was sitting in a corner without even a cushion for his foot.

"Someone whistled just as I fell," stormed Mr. Freyne, "but no one came to my assistance. Oh, doubtless some ruffian using the stables at Girtnamurragh and whistling warning."

"Horrid trick to play you!" said Stafford sympathetically.

At the word "trick" Dearest George looked thoughtful.

"It is just possible," he said, "but he only does that old trick for a signal. Gheena knows it. But she was at the school-house this afternoon."

Gheena and Mrs. Weston stood together in the doorway, talking earnestly.

"Why is he always upon those cliffs?" said Gheena. "Why always out alone?"

"These are things which make one thoughtful," said Violet. "But I can't believe in much real mischief down here. It's so out of the way."

The spring slipped on before Gheena went out again to the cliffs. She hurt her foot out hunting, knocking it against a gate, and was too lame to scramble over rough ground.

Psyche had learnt to sit on at her jumps now, but custom brought no abatement of her joy in the chase.

She still glowed and cried out, and still as a shadow followed the Master.

He got used to the little white face close behind him, to shining eyes filled with admiration.

"It's so wonderful! You just blew the horn and squiggled them along and they bow-wowed again," was one of Psyche's happy remarks.

"Gave tongue," said Darby politely.

Psyche replied unabashed that it was all the same noise, and glowed again.

She had learnt how to steady her horse at a fence, how to hold him together galloping.

"And I want to hunt ever and always," she said—"always. I'll never live in Kent again."

There had been unguarded moments when Darby, riding home with his never-weary follower, had even told her how he felt his crippling.

"I had dreamt," he said one evening, "of a different life, little sprite, of someone that I cared for being with me—through it."

Psyche knew—the white glow faded a little and her eyes darkened.

"If one cared," she began, "nothing would matter."

"But that is it. She was too young, too. And now it's not my place to try to make her care. Go alone for all time, Psyche. I've thought that Stafford——" he added after a long pause.

"She thinks him a spy," said Psyche slowly, "and despises him for not joining."

"In the name of God, Grandjer—the foxy Tom that I lambasted ye for this morning—Grandjer, howld on!"

Little Andy darted after the disappearing Grandjer, cracking a whip, as a comet-like streak of red dashed through the hedge.

"The Widow Casey's Tom," said Andy, returning, "an' I only just to save the craythur. There is some sort of a purry sthrain in him, an' she sets the divil's sthore by him for it."

Psyche suggested Persian, and Andy replied that it was maybe "Purry Shan," and patted the erring Grandjer fondly.

Confidences were broken off, and crippled Darby said good-bye at the next cross-roads.

To ride on with the pain of his loneliness biting him hard—his way was to the emptiness of his big house, to the long dull evening, with the paper to read over and over and the fire to stare into, with the pictured Dillon men, vigorous and whole-limbed, staring down at him contemptuously. There were girls, perhaps, who might marry him for his place and his income, but Darby knew that he would never ask them.

Directly her foot mended, Gheena asked Darby to drive her to the cliffs beyond the village.

"I don't want to take Violet any more," she said decidedly. "Her shoes begin to pinch after a mile or so, and I want to explore for holes and caves. You can wait for me," she said, seeing him look at his leg. "It's quite warm, and we'll get tea from old Maria Delaney."

Darby came obediently, waiting outside the gates, because Gheena found that it was better to do all things secretly and not get scolded. Hints of Lancelot

coming to spend the afternoon or of being driven to see him made her rush blithely through the wood, Crabbit at her heels. Fast as she went, lighter feet pursued and caught her—Psyche Delorme, hatless and breathless.

"Gheena, Dearest is looking for you, and your mother is asking his advice as to where you are likely to be, and I don't want to drive in the car with them."

Gheena looked hard at the blue wash of waves seen through the tree-trunks, then she swore Psyche to silence and they ran on together.

"The sprite followed me," Gheena explained to Darby. "She has got no hat. Do drive on, Darby, because Dearest has got the car at the door, and he might come down to see if I'd walked to Cassidy's."

The car swept along the narrow road, bordered by a screen of fuchsias along the edge of the cliffs. They tore down the slope into Leeshane, scattering dogs and hens, took the steep ascent, and were out on the exposed road, which wound round eventually by the open sea.

It ran between low banks, never going down close to the cliffs, but Darby knew of a tortuous lane, which he dived into fearlessly, scraping the sides with his mudguards, bumping and crawling, until he reached an open close-turfed plateau with the sea growling just beyond it.

Gheena swung away, diving in and out among the clumps of gorse, peering behind boulders, looking down rabbit holes.

She noticed how in one spot the ground was trampled, and a path led away towards the road, then slipped over the verge and climbed among the rocks. The cliffs were honeycombed by caves—then irregular cavities, their mouths choked by fern and fuchsia, a reek of fox coming from them, showed high up, dark fuchsias below them. Some of them, narrow-mouthed, forbade entrance; others could be climbed into and explored.

They were damp places, barely innocent of concealed petrol. Gheena clambered on until Psyche grew tired and went back to where Darby sat in a sheltered nook, warm in the spring sunshine, his pipe between his teeth. He looked desolate then, his eyes following the active figure flying over the rocks.

"Petrol on the brain," he said patiently to Psyche.

Presently Gheena came to a deep channel running up to a rather large cave. The tide was flowing and the water lapping up at the big slimy boulders in the mouth of the dark place.

To go in might mean getting wet, but Gheena risked it, slipping and sliding over the stormy rocks. Crabbit grew excited, barking and growling, sniffing at the walls.

Something kept Gheena lingering until she had to take off her shoes and stockings and wade out. Outside a deep fissure led into another cave, an opening with a black sense of hollowness behind it, but no room for a man to pass in.

Crabbit was into the blackness in a moment. Gheena could hear him snuffling inside and even growling, then leaping up, trying to get out.

Sudden fear gripped Gheena, her dog might be entombed in there with walls too slippery for him to scramble up. He appeared quite suddenly, hooking on with his strong paws and coming out looking ruffled. There was a strip of shale just beyond this and no dark cave mouths showing. It was not far from the opening of the harbour. So Gheena scrambled up to the top of the cliff to find it thick with gorse, some of it cut down and piled up to dry for firewood, and shook her head sadly.

It was quite hot in the shelter of the cliffs, with the sun shining. The air was full of the scent of the gorse and the tang of salt.

Leaping down on to a little shingly beach, Gheena all but fell over the Professor basking in the sun, his hammer in his hand. Crabbit wagged his tail. He liked the Professor, and Gheena said it was a long way to walk from Dunkillen.

The Professor, blinking sleepily, asked if Gheena was out for birds' eggs or submarines, and Gheena hovered close to confidence before she thought better of it.

"Exploring caves," she said with strict truth, then inviting him to Mrs. Maloney's tea.

As they climbed to the verge and stood on the short sweet grass, they saw a dark figure some way off swinging along the edge of the open sea.

"It is Mr. Stafford. He walks that way to get to the Wireless Station. Exercise is good for the young," said the Professor dryly. "Perhaps he, too, is looking for submarines. I will follow you, Miss Freyne."

Gheena sat down for a few minutes in the nook which Darby had chosen for himself.

"I was not much help, Gheena," Darby said a little drearily.

Something in his voice touched Gheena. She remembered how years before Darby had scrambled with her over the rocks, and not sat looking on crutches by his side.

"But you're always a help, Darby," she said quickly.

Little Psyche, her hands round her knees, bunched into a bundle, said nothing.

"Always someone who wants help," he answered laughingly.

"Not out hunting," snapped Psyche resentfully.

They took tea in Mrs. Maloney's cottage. Its complete absence of windows flavoured the meal with turf smoke, which oozed out of one of the two doors ventilating the house, one facing to the sea where a land breeze blew, one to the land where the wind roared in from the sea.

But the little place was spotless despite the smoke, the brass candlesticks

shining, the blue china on the dresser polished—a big home-baked cake appearing, delightfully indigestible, from the three-legged oven, and Maria's half a pound of butter used recklessly.

Boiled eggs and whisky were also proffered but refused.

"I couldn't get any butter from Anne to bring out," said Gheena, when they were coming away. "So I must tell Maria to get some at Guinanes'. That's the way we manage. She gives me her things and I return them. She wouldn't take money. Dearest counts the pounds of butter now when the churning is done, so Anne is going to put away cream, because she says 'It's orkard on her, an' people comin' to tay, an' the Masther axin' where the butter do be goin' to.' You must stop at Guinanes', Darby; I've told Maria to get a parcel from them."

As they bumped out of the lane, the whining purr of a high-powered car sounded outside it, and the long grey nose of Stafford's Daimler swung aside to avoid them. He had left his car evidently on the road.

"We found the Professor out rocking, and we are taking him home," said Darby.

"Oh!" said Basil Stafford quietly. He looked worried and out of humour.

"News—up there?" queried Darby.

"Not pretty news," Stafford answered grimly. "The submarines will do some harm in time." He sighed a little. "And you were all out on the cliffs," he added, staring at nothing.

"Miss Freyne was out upon the cliffs," said Darby, "I was not."

"Let those cliffs alone," said Stafford sharply. "I wish you would, Miss Freyne, in war times."

He laughed a little bitterly as Gheena looked at him.

It was still early, and a complete distaste for her own home made Gheena say that she would go to see Mrs. Weston.

They stopped at Guinanes' on their way back to order a parcel for their old hostess.

A stout woman at the counter was making complaint as to damp flour.

"Soggen and weighty, Mrs. Guinane, an' it near to swheep the life from Thomas Martin with the pain it gev him. 'The centher of me is on fire, Ma,' he cried out, an' it twelve at night—'an' I will surely die.'"

Mrs. Guinane, apologizing profusely, looked darkly towards the door which led to the kitchen.

"Mike, are ye there? He was there a minnit ago. I towlt him not to take the flour out of where 'twas always, to put it in that new house he has, for flour, says I, will not do unless there is a fire, says I, an' not one of us will he let in to put a fire there, but in an' out for himself always. Mikey, will ye bring back the flour ye have destroyed with ye're obstinacy, an' not be spilin' good food?"

Mrs. Weston's man put his shrewd blue-eyed face round the edge of the door and muttered something half aloud.

"Or will Mary Kate folly ye now with an apern full of turf," said his mother, conciliating him, "till we airs that new sthore ye have?"

Mike said "She will not" shortly, merely promising to bring back the flour bags to dry quarters.

"An', Mike, we are out of washin' soda. An' it locked up with him inside."

Mrs. Guinane then announced hotly that she was scalded from the new store, and turned to Gheena.

"Thim Germans has the poor ruined, Miss," she said, as she took the order. "Heapin' pince on everythin'."

Mrs. Weston, yawning profusely, was at home in a tobacco-scented atmosphere. Ends of cigarettes were littered about and feet cased in green silk were hurriedly removed from a comfortable rest on the mantelpiece and thrust into tight shoes. The old Swiss maid hobbled past the visitors out of the oven-hot room, curtsying as she met them.

Gheena only left a message from her mother. She could not have stayed long in the close room. But before she went she whispered one or two things to her friend. Mrs. Weston was not pleased to hear that Gheena had gone alone to the cliffs.

"Even if my shoes were too tight," she said. "And you found nothing?"

"Nothing at all," said Gheena absently, because at the moment she was thinking of the curious cave with the channel running into it, and of some sound which had not struck her at the time, but which came back to her now.

They found George Freyne accumulating chill and bad-humour upon the doorstep, looking out for his step-daughter.

"If you had told me that you actually wanted me to go for a drive," said Gheena patiently; "but you were not sure, Dearest, so I went for a walk and Darby drove us home. I—I wasn't spending money on anything, driving the car or being extravagant."

"Dearest has been quite put out," Mrs. Freyne confided. "Lancelot was driven over, lying back on cushions, Gheena, and looking as if he thought he was ill; he's very stout. And you were not there, and they asked us all back to dinner, which would have meant, Dearest said, no dinner here, so he's put out, Gheena darling, and says he'll sell another horse."

"If—he—dares to sell mine!" said Gheena with a queer little gulp.

CHAPTER XV

Darby Dillon refused emphatically to believe "a word of it." He listened to Gheena and his expression leant towards rudeness.

"Not one word," he said. "He's too good a——"

He stopped quite suddenly. If Gheena looked on Basil Stafford as a slacker and perhaps worse, she would never get to care for him, and hope is so strong a thing that there was always at the back of Darby's mind some vague thought of getting much better, and then in his fairy dreamland he would think that he might try to make a girl care for him. If she was gone, that dreamland would close its doors.

Then honesty came first. "He's too good a sort," said Darby gruffly, and observed also that Carrigeen Freyne, in this instance, had not Grandjer's nose.

Gheena said that Darby was very rude, and took up her gloves. They had come in to tea with Darby after a hunt. Hunting was just over now, even though here on the edge of the sea they sometimes killed a May fox. Still meadows were being closed up and fences mended, and it was only possible to hunt in the woodlands or on the mountains.

It was April now, treacherously fine, blue-skied and finely white-clouded, with all the birds singing, and spring holding out hands to early summer. Horses looked stale and dry-coated, but Darby held on. His year was over when hunting stopped, and he must hobble while Dearest George and Mr. Keefe melted opposite each other on mossy tennis lawns, and stood bravely up at the net until someone hit them.

"Mr. Freyne is so wonderful at the net," was a quotation made with bated breath by the country tennis-players.

"Just because I won't let you run away with things, you," said Darby—"you want to go without tea. I say Stafford's a good sort, Gheena, even if he won't fight or can't."

Gheena kicked the turf fire vigorously as she railed out fresh indictment. Money so suddenly obtained here, etc.

"I would write to the admirals if I knew them," said Gheena with dignity, "about—well, about things. And I did write to someone, who isn't stupid." Here

she withered Darby with a glance.

Darby repeated equably that he refused to believe it. Stafford was a good sort, and he offered tea just as Psyche, a sprite even in her severe habit, came in, Dearest George, severely aloof, following her gloomily.

As he drank strong tea and ate several eggs, he spoke with feeling of his nephew Lancelot's health, and the complete arresting of his convalescence. He also talked of economy and the awful future of Great Britain's finances.

"Money," said Dearest, "being a thing which people cannot go on finding for ever; and as for horses, no one would be able to afford them, even if the war dragged on."

Darby saw Gheena's face cloud and assume an expression of one who had heard this particular form of foreboding too often.

The two girls jumped into the back of the car when they were starting, leaving Mr. Freyne to sit alone, wondering as he let in his clutch what petrol would go to and how long he would keep the car going.

"And if we were poor," stormed Gheena—"if we were, but we're not; and it's all mine, or it will be when I——"

She nodded icily to Stafford who was jogging home alone, riding rather close to Mrs. Weston and Mr. Keefe, who, with their heads almost touching, ambled in front of him through the opal twilight.

The sweetness of a spring morning was broken next day by the arrival of the motor from Cahercalla, with an urgent message saying that Mr. Lancelot was not well, and wished Miss Gheena to come over.

Gheena went without enthusiasm. It was a sunny morning, and she knew that she would find Lancelot lying down and basking in a huge arm-chair in the morning room, with an enormous fire and all the windows shut. There would be a smell of beef-tea and toast, coupled with that of a variety of tonics and cotton-wool, and Lancelot would betray the peevishness engendered by lack of exercise and too much heat.

As she had thought, she was engulfed in the pale brown morning room. Mrs. Freyne was winding wool of a lank variety, rasping it off a chair-back with dexterous fingers, Evelyn was stitching flannel night-dresses, and Lancelot was drinking Bovril and eating toast. He brightened up when Gheena, holding the door open for as long as she could, greeted him, and he at once told her how ill he felt. Mrs. Freyne went on for a time with her winding, and remarked after a time, apropos of nothing, that she had just heard from Geoffery, her second son, and that Lancelot never seemed really happy at Cahercalla, and that Geoffery would love to live there. Here she left the room to see the cook, followed in a moment by Evelyn.

Gheena found herself alone with her puffily fat cousin, who suddenly

showed some interest in life.

He said it was good of her to come over. He blushed and upset his mother's work-basket, and then asked Gheena if she had been listening. Gheena asked to what, with restrained impotence in her voice.

At this point Lancelot sat up and possessed himself of Gheena's hand and asked her to marry him. It took Gheena some little time, sitting with crumpled brows, to realize what he was talking about.

Lancelot was not lacking in humbleness, nor yet in certainty of acceptance. He explained to Gheena the suitability of the matter—how he would come to live at Castle Freyne, and being such a friend of his uncle's, no changes need be made in existing arrangements. Of course, he might be again employed in the Army, even if not on active service, but war would not last for ever. And then he sat quite up and sighed with the satisfied air of a child who has repeated a lesson correctly; his next glance was at the clock.

Gheena's firm removal of her hand did not trouble him at all.

"Shall we call back mother," said Lancelot, "as it's time for my tonic, and she'd like to know?"

"Oh, she went away on purpose," said Gheena. Then with extreme candour Miss Freyne explained that she was very sorry, but she had no intention of marrying at present, and certainly not her distant cousin Lancelot.

Lancelot replied peevishly that he understood that Gheena wanted to be independent, and that why not now instead of later. Complete refusal he evidently did not understand.

Gheena looked at his plump cheeks; she conquered an intense desire to laugh heartily and she fell into thought. If she were engaged to Lancelot the wheels of everyday would no doubt be oiled, and the fever of economy be cured. But Gheena had no meanness in her.

Quite decisively this time, she told Lancelot that an engagement was as far away from her thoughts as matrimony, and that he could put the whole thing out of his head.

Lancelot plumped his cushions and quoted Uncle George feverishly. He produced a pearl ring bought for him at Cortra, and then his pocket-handkerchief. With tears of sheer temper in his eyes, he said a great many things which could not possibly further his suit.

Gheena rang the bell, a haughty look in her face. She remarked that Lancelot wanted his tonic, and endeavoured to look vacant when Lancelot made tearful mention of Prussic acid, and it was plain that his mother took in the whole situation at a glance.

The tonic, irony and bitter, was brought up solemnly to be rejected by the invalid, who even upset the bottle, declaring that health was no use to him now.

After this everything was even plainer.

Luncheon with Lancelot glaring furiously at her over the hot chickens, which he wanted to eat and would not, was not a pleasant meal. When her son refused apple meringue and shook his head at a *foie gras*, Mrs. Freyne grew almost frantic, and the only conversation was a spasmodic one between Gheena and Eva.

Castle Freyne was eight miles away. Gheena had to wait to be called for by her stepfather, and the afternoon stretched hot and interminable before her.

Lancelot did not wish to go out. The prospect of sitting in the morning-room, seeing his aggrieved face outlined against the red cushions, until five or six o'clock seemed almost unendurable.

Making some vague excuse about a message, she slipped out; even a short respite was something, and once in the fresh air she considered the eight miles of road between her and home.

The avenue was a short one. She got to the gate and looked out. Her shoes were not thick and showers were coming up from the sea. Gheena wavered between the thought of hours dragged out under accusing eyes or of a two and a half hours' tramp, which would include a meeting with her stepfather.

At that moment the long grey nose of Basil Stafford's car swung round the bend in the road, and was pulled up beside her. In this she could be home in twenty minutes, get up the back avenue, and take refuge in the school-room for tea.

Very jerkily she asked to be taken home, murmuring something about offence given.

It did not take a far-seeing wit to discern the reason. A flicker of laughter curved Mr. Stafford's lips and he opened the door at the side.

Gheena flung propriety on one side. She drove back to the door and told Evelyn that she was going home, as she had forgotten to do something particular, and whispered "Go on" to the willing driver. The pace at which a high-powered car can go, even on narrow roads, was demonstrated to her in the next ten minutes, for to meet the Castle Freyne people would mean disaster. They reached the back gate safely, and Gheena, who had sat silent, could only ask her rescuer to tea, which, she explained, must be taken in the school-room, and that they must hide.

Basil Stafford accepted readily. Together they ran up the rough avenue until they reached the shelter of the large hay-barn, from which they could see if the coast was clear. Scrambling up into the fragrant hay, peering out across the wall, and then dodging quickly into the haven of the inner yard, to hear a familiar voice asking for Phil.

A variety of men grinned softly as Gheena dashed into a stable and went

up the ladder to the loft at the double, followed by Stafford. Here among piled-up oats they crept forward and looked through the window down into the yard.

Mr. Freyne had come out to speak seriously to Phil—that morning traces of white oats had been observed in the mangers while Phil was out exercising. Black, and black alone, were to be used.

"And black it was," lied Phil pleasantly, "with maybe a grain or two of white getting mixed in."

Mr. Freyne looked upwards. He said that he knew exactly the quantity up there and would see if it had been depleted. Gheena drew a long breath, and remarked that she must face it, unless she went under the oats.

"And have a care of the ladder, sir," said Phil's voice below. "I was up lasht when turnin' the heaps an' two rungs broke on me. I just slipped them in somewheres, I'd say middleways."

Dearest George, checked, raved hotly at Phil for thus replacing rungs which might give way and kill a man.

"Well, I was afther meanin' to," observed Phil guilelessly; "but knowin' I would not be goin' up to the white oats maybe agin before May or June, I thought to put in a fresh laddther, that same bein' pure rotten. Would I put down a sop of hay in case ye meet the two, sir, an' they gives?"

When Dearest George spoke again it was in the yard. He told Phil several things then, as he gloomily awaited the arrival of his wife, who ambled out from the kitchen, a basket in her hands.

"Just a few things for Dayly's sick wife," she said. "I won't keep you a minute there, Dearest, because it's scarlet fever, and I'm sure you'd advise me not to and Gheena will want to come home. She always does from Cahercalla."

"This time," said Mr. Freyne, "Gheena will not wish to come home."

"If you mean she'll be engaged to Lancelot," said Matilda Freyne. "Of course, Dearest, if you think so, but I do not. He's so young and so stout, and she never liked fat men, and I'd much rather it was Darby."

Dearest ensconced himself behind the wheel and swore softly.

"He's saying 'Damn it! I should know best,'" whispered Stafford.

"At this distance you can't hear," said Gheena.

They were squeezed up together in the window, safe behind a veil of cobwebs, a friendliness unknown before between them. Gheena had forgotten war and spying. She was with someone who was protecting her.

"Shall we go out the back avenue? it's shorter," said Mr. Freyne.

Instantly Gheena's hand went out and caught Stafford's arm. They remembered the car down there.

"Mike Dundon put new sthones upon it only yesterday," said Phil stolidly. "And the off tyre is shaky, sir."

Basil Stafford felt that no half-crown had been so well earned as that which he put into Phil's hand when the car had hummed away out the front gate.

Gheena, a little shaken and upset, gave him tea in the school-room. One cannot snub a man who has hidden with you in an oat-loft. They talked and laughed with the same new friendliness, Stafford telling her of his years abroad, of Italy, of France, and then of Germany. The cloud came suddenly into Gheena's eyes.

"You were there for years, weren't you?" she said.

"For some months," he answered absently; "in Berlin. I knew some nice men there too."

"Whom you would not care to fight against now, I suppose?" Gheena muttered half to herself. "Oh, if there was only no war!" she flashed out, "and no economy, and no black oats, and wounded people and things!"

Basil said gravely that it would be a far better arrangement. He saw the cloud which had risen up.

"And—there being a war—we cannot be friends," he said slowly, coming to the mantelshelf, looking hard at Gheena.

Gheena felt a very hot flush being succeeded by pallor as she replied that one could not be friends with someone one could not understand.

Mr. Stafford said, "Or—anything else except friends," still keeping close to her.

"Gheena, a little bird whispered to me that you were home. They saw you coming, and I've news for you. Oh, Mr. Stafford!" Violet Weston pushed open the door, her golden head gleaming, her shoes of purple suede pinching her so that she limped.

"And the news?" Basil asked softly.

Violet replied, "Private news," lightly. Mrs. Weston sent Stafford out. He went to fetch his car, and she broke into excited whispers of how she'd heard that there was news of some spy about, and several other things, which could only have come from Mr. Keefe.

She sat on the edge of Gheena's chair, and was still there, one arm round the girl's shoulders, when Stafford came back to say good-bye. Gheena had already made doleful confession concerning Lancelot's proposal and the scoldings it was likely to involve her in.

Darby and Psyche had been out riding. They were just in when the unwelcome sound of a motor heralded the early return of Dearest George.

He came in quite slowly—happiness, of course, makes tripping feet, and sorrow heavy ones—and took off his motor gloves with tragic intensity.

When Darby remarked that they were back early, Mr. Freyne returned that he could not stay to watch sorrow, and particularly wounded sorrow.

"He even refused scones for tea," said Gheena's mother; "but I saw a tray on the writing-table, and he'd been having Benger's food—don't you think so, Dearest?—and plum cakes."

"He seemed quite annoyed by that question," observed Mrs. Freyne a moment later, when her spouse had quitted the room noisily.

Gheena, taken to task presently for girlish caprice, spoke out with complete honesty. She would never marry Lancelot. In her eyes he was a mere fat youth, and she had never been able to fix the halo of wounded hero about his head.

After this the hours marched to bedtime through a mental atmosphere of Cimmerian gloom.

When Darby made a cheeky remark, Dearest George quoted the casualty lists. If Psyche broke out about hunting, he said that all horses were now munitions of war. The taunting reproach in his eyes made a game of Bridge into a species of *Kriegspiel*, for, of course, Gheena cut her stepfather, and went "No trumps" after his repeated "Nos," because she said she thought he was only no-ing from bad spirits, the result of several lost shillings not improving matters.

But next morning, as Gheena and Crabbit forgot troubles among the daffodils under the trees, with the wind making the flowers as a sea of silvery gold, floating on spears of green, Mr. Freyne showed that he was in earnest.

Coming across the grass, he nodded good morning and called to his wife. Unsoftened by sheen of gold, by glimpse of blue restless sea, he scanned futurity with mental field-glasses and mapped out the following winter's campaign with precision.

He regretted it, but except Mrs. Freyne's cob—she was afraid of her weight and must ride—there would be no horses at Castle Freyne.

"And mine?" Gheena cried. "My horses, Dearest?"

Gheena's stepfather observed that there would not be anybody's horses. He reminded her coldly that until she came of age or married, she had not even an allowance.

Redbird, Whitebird, Blackbird—friends true and tried—to go to France as troopers; Redbird, little Redbird, with her fretful temper; Blackbird, fretful and excitable. Gheena heard the words pour on, catching one here and there, realizing vaguely their tone of threatening anger rather than their full sense. Then she recovered. It was nonsense! In four years she would have too much in her power. Even in war-times her stepfather would not dare to sell her horses. But four years! Forty-eight months! how many hundred days?—an age interminable!

"You don't mean it really, Dearest?" she said, smiling bravely. "Now, do you? And poverty is nonsense."

Mr. Freyne had delivered himself of much oratory; this retort snapped the thin thread of his patience.

His dark look at his stepdaughter worried her far more than any outburst of rage would have done.

"If you marry," he said smoothly, "the power will be in your own hands."

Gheena flew to her mother, who was bedewing socks with facile tears. Matilda Freyne explained that a wife must take her husband's advice, and that Dearest George had fully explained the urgency of everything.

"If you married Lancelot, darling Gheena," she said hopefully, "you could ask him about things. You see, the difficulty with you is that you are always asking yourself—and now I have dropped three stitches, and I must call Mary Anne."

Gheena refrained from bitter retort. So far the unending battle between her and her stepfather had been one of manoeuvring, firing blank shells; they had pulled in different directions, Gheena always sublimely certain of ultimate success. Now she was faced suddenly by a mobilized foe and was frightened.

"Your Dearest—that is, Dearest George—means it," said Mrs. Freyne tearfully. "And I——"

"I won't vex you, Mumsie," said Gheena gently, just as a messenger rode up with a message from Cahercalla.

It stated in the long pointed writing of Lancelot's mother that the boy was fretting and ill.

"He has had a complete set-back and refused even meringues and golden plover for dinner," wrote Mrs. Freyne. "He is now still in bed suffering from the shock of this unforeseen upset. Why, when everything was so absolutely suitable, Gheena could not. She had better come over at once before Lancelot's luncheon is due."

Gheena backed towards the door, listening to the reading of the letter. Then as Dearest was called for, she swung out hatless and raced into the wood with Crabbit at her heels, and slipped through the gardens into the stables. The swift saddling of Greybird was followed by her escape down the back avenue at a gallop and a reckless school across country until she dropped on to the road close to Darby's house.

He was out, limping among the horses, his dark face lighting as the girl rode in.

Gheena explained fully. Darby had always heard her troubles. She came into the warm old library and sat there muttering her forebodings.

"Psyche will find me," she said, looking out. "I left a note." She forgot trouble in the quiet old house. Darby talked of cheery things, of a speedy ending to the great war and of Dearest's seeing the error of his ways.

By the time the cook had, in her own language, slapped up a sweet, and lashed the phisint that was raggety-lookin' into a fricassey, Psyche had arrived

upon a bicycle.

It was, of course, unfortunate that Gheena should have chosen one of the bones of contention to escape on, and that George Freyne should have, after some angry questioning, driven to Dillonscourt, looked for his lost step-daughter, and captured her out upon the lawn.

He was merely reproachful as he drove her on to Cahercalla, where Lancelot wilted in fiery heat, with untouched beef-tea, greasily tragic, by his side.

He explained very gently that he merely felt tired, but his poor mother was worried, and Doctor Malone said...

Here the old doctor upset the atmosphere of gentle pity by bursting to say he thought something must be very wrong if Lancelot couldn't eat as much as three; but with the help of a few liver pills, please God ... and then he told Lancelot to keep quiet. The memory of that visit was not a pleasant one to harassed Gheena. She was young and soft-hearted. By the time Lancelot's mother had talked to her feelingly in the vast chill drawing-room, and his sister had carried her off to the seclusion of a neat bedroom to clinch the matter, Gheena felt like a criminal, who ought to show repentance by immediately accepting the wounded hero downstairs, but she went away, leaving him sorrowful.

Two weeks of soft spring weather brought April almost to an end. It was weather almost summer-like, the sun turning it into summer and sheltered corners. The water was even warm enough for Gheena to take to swimming.

But through the woof of sunshine ran the warp of trouble. Lancelot languished. He really grew thinner and weak from hot, airless rooms and want of exercise.

The tale of his woes was told by degrees to all Dunkillen. Mrs. Keefe came to ask Gheena to change her mind because the boy was a wounded soldier. Mrs. De Burgho Keane called to say that any girl ought to be glad to find a husband now that all the men were being killed. At the end of a fortnight Mr. Freyne read the war news, and decided that the German tactics of attack were the best he could use, but he said nothing.

Gheena had had a swim. She came in glowing to dress warmly, and bask in the hot sunshine right in under the shelter of the cliffs. There was not a breath of air in her nook. The rocks caught the sun and flung it back, and in front the sea plashed calmly.

She saw Guinane's boat being pulled towards the village; it was heavily laden with stores. Another boat dashed out from the rocks, showing for a moment and then disappearing. Gheena knew it for Stafford's. She shrugged her shoulders, and felt the world in an elusive spring sunshine was not the place which it had been. The tide crept higher, bringing a cold breath with it, but

Gheena could scramble out of her nook, even at high-water.

She was going to move when a snow shower of torn paper obstructed the view, falling in little scraps, some upon the water, some upon the shingle.

Crabbit cocked his ears and Gheena grew curious; steps died away on the cliff, and with quick fingers she took up most of the scraps of paper and put them in her pocket.

Stamp paper and toil helped away at least two hours in the house, until with great difficulty she read some of the letter. "Undoubtedly ... Submarines ... coast ... wait. Ba. Get the supply." Gheena raised her head. A few minutes before the note had fallen Basil Stafford's boat had shot in to shore; her eyes grew heavy.

Hunting was almost over, Darby still pursuing in big woodlands which were useless in winter, going out early, as if for cubbing. The horses, with rusty coats and looking far too fine, going with fire or spirit after their long winter. But it was something to do, and little Miss Delorme did not see why they should not hunt all summer in the mornings. She never missed a meet.

The attack meditated by George Freyne was carried out one day, and revealed by Phil, who went tearing to the shore to find Gheena.

"Save an' bless us, Miss Gheena, but Hartigan is afther bein' below in the yard an' all the horses soult! When he clapped his eyes on them, 'How much,' says he, 'for we have too many,' an' the Masther says 'Lump them,' says he, 'for a quiet sale.' An'——"

Gheena said "My horses?" very slowly.

"Redbird an' all." Phil was sobbing openly. "The craythur I reared from a foal to g'out to be run afther by thim haythens, and where will we all be, Miss Gheena? And God save us, don't get a wakeness, Miss!"

Gheena had not moved. She stood dreary, stricken; they were using their power. She was to live a virtual prisoner in her own home—no horses, no next season to dream of directly this one was dead.

"An' when he sighted the grey over the half door, 'He has the head of a rogue,' says he; 'lave him there;' but he come around an' said there was weddin's always, an' so he'd take him too. So Miss Mona's horse as well. And, Miss Gheena——"

For Gheena, abandoning all dignity, sat down and wept hopelessly, with Crabbit walking round, deeply upset.

"You next," said Gheena, feeling the dog's cold nose.

"You next." Phil went away back, crying himself, through the budding wood, with its sheen of blue anemones and tender green of growing moss. He clambered heavily over the sunk fence to meet Darby on the avenue—Darby, riding, whistling as he came, some touch of the spring making him happy.

"It is Miss Gheena," said Phil, answering Darby's look. "The horses soult

from undther her feet, an' she cryin' the eyes out of her head. The Masther an' his wars. Isn't it enough that there is a war in France?" burst out Phil, "not to be colloging with it in Castle Freyne. Black oats was bad enough; sure we always took a grain of white, but when there's use for neither white nor black—"

"Who bought them?" Darby bent down.

"Hartigan of Guntreen. He is within yet, atin' beef."

Darby turned and rode away down the road.

When Gheena, shaken and exhausted, her grief being rapidly burnt up by anger, came through the wood, she saw a motor at the door. This carefully-planned-out visit by Lancelot was a clumsy effort of diplomacy. Dearest George had mapped it out.

With the horses still there, Gheena was to cry out that she would obey her people's wishes, and an afternoon radiant with joy was to be spent by the family.

Instead Miss Freyne eyed her cousin with distant rancour, and came in to luncheon in a dangerous mood.

She congratulated him on having improved his figure, and warned him against baked potatoes, and hoped his indigestion was quite gone. The horses she ignored completely.

The failure of the plan made Mr. Freyne visibly ill-humoured. He came majestically to the drawing-room, where he shut all the windows, and helped his sister to lecture Gheena. It was disconcerting when Gheena excused herself as she had an engagement.

"We are taking tea with Violet," she said politely. "We are walking," she said hurriedly, when Lancelot began to get up, "and you could not come."

George Freyne said, "Of all the obstinate, ill-mannered—" when Gheena had closed the door. "But if she thought she is going to have her own way——"

As they walked to the village they met Basil Stafford in his car, and Gheena remembered the letter, and with her eyes completely devoid of cunning she told the story of the scraps, watching him closely.

His quick reply was that he would give a great deal to see the scraps. Gheena remarked that she was going to show it to someone, and she remarked it malevolently.

Mr. Stafford became eloquent. He said that scraps of information might be valuable in war-times, and if there was anything in the letter, he would see that it went to the proper people.

"The people who would like to see it," said Gheena meaningly.

Finding Mrs. Weston out, they invaded the Professor, who made toast for them himself, and sent to the shops for strawberry jam and barley sugar, which he smashed into neat pieces and piled on a plate in tiers. Gheena told him also of the letter.

"And *Hein*! You could read it." He dropped a spoonful of jam into his tea, fishing for it patiently. "You read the scraps. You were there, then—a little sea bird. Will you show me the letter, Miss Gheena, if it is with you? It is not good, this syrup that I have made. No, you have not got the letter. Well, later."

The girl's return to Castle Freyne was as marching from sunshine into a pea-soupy London fog, in the centre of which sat Dearest George, and Lancelot, frail and fretful, resenting the sorrow which he had immersed in.

The sea kissed the feet of an opal sky. The air was soft and fresh. Gheena sat, white-faced, with ill-concealed impatience, listening to fresh arguments as to her future and her folly in not agreeing with everyone else.

"Eleven more obstinate men I never saw," remarked Gheena to the fire, and referring to the one juryman who upset the verdict for hours. Psyche, stepping in and out of the close library, now whispered of a hunt on the morrow—a meet at Mount Beresford at ten in the morning.

The word "meet" sounded like a knell. Gheena meant to stop the horses going, to appeal to her mother.

"And even if it's woods the hounds will yowl and we shall gallop," said Psyche.

Here Mr. Freyne, rising, assumed the attitude before the fire so dear to man, and remarked that the hounds might, but no one from Castle Freyne would.

Gheena stood up also; she stared.

"Because I have done my duty towards my country," went on Dearest George heavily, "and retrenched. If Gheena had been back an hour ago"—his stepdaughter's face frightened him a little—"they might have been. But now—the Army."

"You have—sold all my horses," Gheena heard a strange hoarse voice whispering—"Redbird, which I loved. Not—you dared——"

Mr. Freyne a little nervously replied that he had acted as he thought best and Lancelot hurriedly asked for the car.

Without a word Gheena went out, out into the opal-tinted evening to the yards.

"Oh, Dearest, do you think it was wise?" said Mrs. Freyne tearfully.

Mr. Freyne said testily, "Lancelot will now represent independence, and she has left the door open."

There were open doors in the yard, many of them—fresh yellow straw ready for feet which could never trample on it, Phil, sitting on the pump trough, weeping unashamed. There were no eager eyes and solemnizing heads thrust out, no muzzles ready to nose for carrots.

Quite quietly Gheena went from box to box, Phil tramping after her, entreating her not to be fretting.

"When it is your own, Miss Gheena, you can have horses in the coal sheds—above in the farmyard, when it is ye're own."

Four years, nearly five, and the pets she had seen grow up were gone. Crabbit, deeply dejected, wailed at her heels. Four years ... they seemed as eternity.

If she married Lancelot it would be her own, or if she married anyone she could have her horses.

"An' I clane forgot that Mr. Darby sent two notes,"—Phil produced a letter—-"to be givin' immaydiate; but when I seen the horses go——" Phil wept afresh.

For one moment Gheena had looked at the car which the chauffeur was winding up, then she opened the letter.

"Don't worry, little girl, I've bought the lot. They're here for you to hunt to-morrow, and at any time."

"God save us! couldn't he lave you alone?" said Phil, as Gheena leant against a manger, sobbing openly again.

Darby, always her friend, kind, crippled Darby—Darby, whose eyes followed her. If—if——

The housemaid's bicycle was at the kitchen door. Gheena looked at it.

Voices sounded across the yard. A cart was coming in.

"An' God help us! I niver got the pison the Masther sent for, an' he will ate the face off me now. Prussian acid he wanted, an' I declare I forgot it. Sure I can tell him they're stockin' none of thim German affairs now."

Gheena looked at her red cur. In a moment she was on the bicycle, which was far too short for her, and with her knees stuck up in unpleasant publicity, was tearing down the avenue.

"Light in her head to be makin' afther them now," said Phil bitterly. "An' it all the Masther's fault."

The opal glow faded to a silver dusk with little mist wraiths in the hollows, and light glint of damp on the budding leaves. Darby was alone in his library before a glowing peat fire, his dogs at his feet, when they got up growling quite politely as the door was flung open and Gheena came in.

She was white, rings showed round her eyes, her breath coming short.

"It was the length of Maria's legs which made me so tired," she said. "Don't stare, Darby. Oh, Darby!"

She came across, holding out cold trembling hands.

Darby rang the bell sharply, ordering strong coffee.

"I came, Darby"—she knelt down, the glow of the fire-light turning her hair to bronze—"I came, because you've always helped me, to know if you'd—marry me, Darby?"

He held the cold hands more closely, he hid the bitter pain which leapt into his eyes. She had come to offer herself to the man who had loved her so long,

simply that she might be free.

"It would be a poor thing to do," he said slowly; "there is something more than freedom and paying out Dearest George in matrimony, Gheena, something more."

Gheena showed no surprise. It seemed to her natural that her reasons should be so plain.

"But you like me, Darby, and if you won't, I'll ask the Professor, or someone."

He looked for one glimpse of love in her eyes, for anything except the complete trust and the weariness of the overstrained face, as she explained that she would not endure for four years, and that she wanted a friend.

"Four years, or for ever?" he said. "Gheena, it hurts just a bit." Then he dropped her hands, putting his on her head. It came to him that he was strong enough to bear an engagement, to see her through her troubles, until he stepped back with just a little more pain to bear, and left her happy. And—perhaps—the strongest of men dream—cripple as he was.

So Darby said "Right." He said it quite cheerfully. "And here's coffee. You are just worn out, dear, from that ride."

"It was Maria's legs," said Gheena. "Darby, you'll drive me back, and how tired you look! But aren't you glad?"

He got up, limping, to look for matches. A cripple, a maimed, scarred thing, to whom this light offering of what never could be love had hurt worse than his injuries. Gheena would never care for him. He was just old Darby to her. She came to him to help her as she had done all her life. She could probably even marry him just as old Darby, and drag out her life cheerily, hurting him, never knowing happiness herself.

"I couldn't do much walking with you, Gheena," he said.

"But you're so much better," she answered. "And I shouldn't know you if you could walk fast now, Darby. And you can let your sister have this house; she always wants it and it's splendid!"

The awful presence of Dearest George, enduring the night air, was on the doorstep when they drove up to Castle Freyne.

He said icily that old friend as Darby was, he could not have his stepdaughter disappearing in this fashion, and that some change in discipline must be made.

"And all my muscles are stiff from the length of Maria's legs," said Gheena cheerily. "And you'd better see about the Dower House, Dearest, because I am going to be married."

"You've persuaded her," gasped Dearest George.

"To Darby," said Gheena, lifting Crabbit. "To Darby Dillon, Dearest, so don't buy the Prussic acid now. Let me alone."

”To Darby Dillon!” repeated Dearest George, sitting down on the damp steps.

CHAPTER XVI

Basil Stafford offered his congratulations on almost the same spot where the three had stood in the autumn.

It was fair spring now, nearly May, with a blue glint on the water. But Gheena had been out for a swim and had come in glowing, while Crabbit still pursued gulls and hoped to catch one.

Darby sat in a sheltered nook. His face had grown thinner; some inward war had drawn lines round his mouth. A lithe figure sat beside him—Psyche, with some of her light gaiety gone too. Basil remarked that he had come to congratulate, and he also looked quiet and subdued.

”Oh, thank you very much,” said Gheena. ”Lancelot had three helpings of beefsteak pie yesterday, and Dearest is glooming at the Dower House over the expense of putting in radiators. I’ll never let mother go there, of course, but the radiators won’t matter.”

”Even in war time,” said Basil thoughtfully. ”Mr. Freyne looks quite thin.”

”He says we shall lose the war now and nothing will matter,” said Psyche, ”and he’s going out to drive a motor ambulance if they’ll take him.”

”Everyone,” said Gheena, ”is doing something now.”

Basil Stafford sat down in the shelter.

”And perhaps I am too,” he said a little impatiently, ”even if it’s not what people think.”

There was open hostility in Gheena’s eyes when she replied that perhaps he was.

She climbed the cliff lightly, slow Darby left behind then jumped back again and slipped, Stafford springing up to help her, both young and strong and whole-limbed. Darby’s sticks went slowly and heavily as he toiled up.

”Just here,” he said, ”we thought of the scratch pack. I have not sent them back yet, they amuse me; but they must go next week, after one more hunt.”

”It will be so awful when one can’t see you hunting hounds.” Little Psyche’s eyes were full of the admiration which Darby never saw in anyone else’s.

”Which you think I do well,” he said, laughing.

Psyche replied that he did everything well, and Gheena came up the cliffs again, kindness in her eyes, friendship; but as he limped on, Darby had seen her look at Basil Stafford. The lines of pain deepened in Darby's face; then he laughed again. He was no worse off than he had been six months before, and he had helped Gheena on. Now that she was engaged, with the prospect of taking over her inheritance when she chose, Dearest George was perpetually apologetic and almost wistfully anxious to please. He had referred to the engagement to his wife as being in the nature of a trench mortar—something hurled at him when he slept.

"Look here, Miss Freyne," Stafford stopped Gheena—"I want you not to wait on the cliffs at night, or go out in your boat, but especially at night. The submarines are blockading and they've been seen near here."

Gheena said cheerfully that they were not likely to waste a torpedo upon her.

"Supposing someone saw you out alone. It's possible. I heard you were off near the point two nights ago."

"I am looking for the base," said Gheena composedly. "I shall find it too."

Here Mr. Stafford made the grievous mistake of telling her hotly that no one wanted her to look for it, and, in fact, that she was not to. The fewer people on the cliff the better, and certain people would be pleased if she did not wander there.

"That I can understand," said Miss Freyne, adding that she would go out when and where she chose, and after this haughty outburst her face clouding and growing sad.

Mrs. De Burgho Keane was at the house to offer congratulations. She did it quite gracefully, suggesting that Darby's injuries would keep Gheena from gadding about quite as much as most young women did, once that she knew they would be happy.

"Poor Lancelot, of course, will never go back to be killed," she added pleasantly. "He was too young for you, Gheena."

Gheena jumped up to kiss Violet Weston, and to remove her to the far end of the room, where they whispered together impolitely. A fresh expedition along the coast was planned, but before it came off Gheena went off alone in her new two-seater, going down the same narrow lane which she had last driven down with Darby, and pulling up only just in time on the plateau.

The beauty and chill of spring lay on the sea; a silver shade touched the brightest cold blue; little speckles of white, steel edged, rimmed the tiny waves. The illusiveness of girlhood was in the mood of the day, fair and yet too bright for warmth. Rock roses crouched in the clefts of the stones: little yellow flowers, and here and there a rare blue gentian brilliant against the green. Fern prongs were

pushing up, and the white gulls sailed happily on the water, mocking Crabbit's barks.

And on the water and in it, mischief—lurking demons down below; machines oiled by human relentlessness, dealing swift death gladly to the toilers of the sea.

Amid the sheen and the glitter Gheena almost brought herself to believe that she saw the black rim of a periscope.

It was only a floating piece of wood dipping up and down, but it made the girl spring forward and over the edge of the cliff down on to the black rocks bared by the tide—a low one. There was only one cave which she wanted to see, the cave close by the hidden one which Crabbit had gone into. "Hi, Crabbit, leave these gulls!" said Gheena; "I want you." She peered into the hole which Crabbit had leapt through, wrinkled her nostrils, wrinkled them again, her heart thumping. She scrambled into the open cave as if she were Grandjer hot on a fox, her eyes sparkling and yet full of fear. It was a slimy cave, with a wide creek leading into it when the tide was high. A large boulder in the cavern stood in a pool of cold dank water. Gheena removed her shoes and splashed into the pool, squeezing between the brown boulder and the wall; the pool deepened, but next moment, with a scream, she felt a hole leading into the next cave. Switch went her small electric torch, and she saw the dark gap, completely invisible from the far side of the boulder. Beyond it was a kind of open ledge quite wide enough for a man to pass through comfortably. Next moment Gheena and Crabbit were peering into the further cave, the torch making an elusive glimmer, and still her heart thumped heavily.

The lower half was damp where the tide poured in, but the torch glimmered.... The upper and dry range of irregular ledges was covered with tins of petrol.

It was so easy to see that Gheena knew some light must come from above, and then saw a little tunnel going to the outer world, enough to put a little light and air into the place.

The easiness of rowing stores up the creek and putting them through was now completely apparent; and, at the same time, with a crisp chill not caused by the atmosphere, Gheena remembered that this meant war, and that the man who had put the petrol there would probably add Miss Freyne and Crabbit to his store if he found them. Which man? She slipped out of the cave, splashed through the pool, noticed how an overhanging rock almost completely hid the aperture, and bolted for sunlight with her shoes in her hands. She put them on her numbed feet outside, and then going back to the car, absolutely sat down to think.

The elusive quarry of her chase stood before her with bared teeth, and, never having expected to catch it, Gheena Freyne backed away. This was grave. It

was war. Something outside light confidences to Violet Weston, or the Professor. The trouble grew deeper in her eyes. It was something to watch for herself.

A boat in the shadows outside by the point would see the submarine run and *see who supplied it.* Gheena shivered, and Crabbit went down to catch a gull.

Yes, who supplied it? Her eyes were heavy. If she went to the coastguards, their clumsy zeal would be sure to muddle everything. "They would sit about the rocks like a lot of puffins," said Gheena aloud, "and pretend they were looking for shrimps in May." General Brownlow must be written to, but ... Behind it all lurked a fear deeper than she had felt in the cold cave. The fear of whom she might see rowing out in the boat ... the betrayer ... a paid German agent and, doubtless, spy.

It was a very long way to row round from Castle Freyne, but no great distance from the Dower House, and no comment would be made if she took a boat over there, left it and walked back. Phil must paint both grey to match the night ... and then ... *Who did it*?

Crabbit sat on the car when he was whistled for; he was blighted and put out. These gulls were afraid of him, and barking from pinnacles of rock was not amusing.

Gheena pressed her self-starter, wheeled round perilously and bumped up the lane, her discovery weighing her down. Who supplied the petrol? Whose face would she see when she watched from the shadows?

She saw Mr. Basil Stafford's at that moment, and nearly ran into him, when he failed to put his long-nosed car out of her way.

"If you don't keep off those cliffs," he said irritably, "we shall have to make them forbidden ground, Miss Freyne. It's just getting serious now, you see."

She stared at him moodily. Basil Stafford's eyes flashed. "You've ... found something?" he burst out, leaning across.

Gheena saw a sullen-looking little revolver lying beside him.

"I found a new cave full of rocks," she said nervously; "that—that was all."

"You'll tell me if you do—promise," he said earnestly.

"When I tell anyone it will probably be you," said Gheena drearily. "And do get out of the way.... I'm cold."

Even Dearest George's complete depression, because he had already caught a chill in the garden at Girtnamurragh, failed to cheer Gheena. The one-time tyrant humbly asked her where she had been, and himself helping her to her favourite omelette could not make Gheena smile.

The magnitude of her discovery frightened her. They were really at war, and there was really someone paid by an enemy—the real enemy ... and this close to her own home....

The loss of a small and favourite bangle also worried her. If the spies found

it they would probably track her. They would know someone had been there.

Darby, with the sadness deepening in his kind eyes, wondered what was the matter when she sat on the arm of his chair, and, with her hand in his, was palpably almost unaware of his presence in the world. He dropped the slight brown little hand and Gheena stroked Crabbit with it. She sat close to him, without a trace of self-consciousness. He was Darby, the friend who had helped her, and marriage was a thing they could talk of some day.

Psyche, sitting on the fender stool, had seen the dropped hand go absently to Crabbit's head, and her eyes darkened.

Violet Weston's coming to tea roused Gheena up, but she looked nervous instead of pleased.

"Gheena," said Darby, "has been submarine hunting and is feeling the effects of failure; she is depressed."

Mrs. Weston said lightly that she believed it was all nonsense. They might find out something—she nudged Gheena—but it would not be petrol bases on the coast.

"Despair and tight shoes," said Mrs. Weston, "stopped me looking; but, of course, I'll go with you again, Gheena dear."

"I'm not going to look any more," said Gheena heavily.

Violet Weston smiled as she admired her mauve suede shoes. She said that mysterious motor-cyclists passed through the village when all respectable motor-cyclists ought to be in bed, and wondered who they could be. She had heard them twice or three times, and had told Mr. Keefe about them.

Just then Mr. Keefe, trying to look as if his visit was accidental, blushed behind Naylour, and explained a lengthy drive and the tempting vicinity of Castle Freyne. When Mrs. Weston, who made room for him beside her on the sofa, continued to talk about the motor-bicycles, he grew pinker and looked embarrassed.

It seemed to Mr. Keefe that a great deal of nonsense was talked about bases and so forth.

"But the fact remains," said Darby, "that someone supplies the beggars, or they would not attempt this blockade they are so cock-sure of...." Then he muttered "The O'Tooles" in tones of depression.

The clergyman arrived primed with war news and plans. In his opinion the Allies had only just to go there and move up there, and pinch Germany in one place and nip her in another, and Poof! it was over. Just a little dash. Nothing more.

"If Napoleon O'Toole," murmured Darby—"oh, thank you, Gheena, I could get my own, really."

It was part of the hurt to have Gheena wait upon him, to see her jump

lightly for hot cakes, a fresh cup of tea.

"Much better let me ... the table's miles away. Mum always entrenches over there."

Mrs. Freyne poured out nervously, asking everyone's advice as to sugar and cream, and confusing matters greatly by taking the last person's unswervingly until she asked someone else's.

Dearest George, sneezing gloomily, had no words even to offer upon the English advance. He did think the submarines would be nasty; the sea was so beastly chilly, but land tactics had ceased to interest him, and he only grunted.

They had just finished tea when Stafford drove to the door and sent in for Mr. Freyne, saying he was going to Cortra on business.

"He motors such a lot," said Mrs. Weston softly—"at night and all times; that car is a fifty sixty, and almost silent. He looked excited or worried."

Gheena did not answer, she was watching the sea.

"Gheena, you did not come on anything to-day?" Mrs. Weston put an arm round Gheena, bent down to speak to her, kissing the soft cheek.

"Only a severe chill," said Gheena, growing red.

Basil Stafford slipped away. He looked worn out, his eyes haggard, as though from lack of sleep. With another heavy sigh Gheena Freyne peered seawards.

In the drawing-room, Darby and Psyche left alone, drew near to the fire.

"When you are married——" began Psyche.

"When!" said Darby. "Does it strike you, sprite, that I should marry a girl who scarcely thinks of me, and that it would take a great deal of love to make anyone forget my leg and my scars?"

Psyche replied very sharply that she did not think so at all, and poked the fire until it collapsed in ruins.

"Didn't I tell Mrs. Malone to co*nn*fine them?" rose Phil's voice outside. "Thim haythin Germans of Faverolly's, an' into the spring beds agin with them. I'll hunt thim, Ma'am." Further yells and shoos from Phil, with some comments added to the effect that thim beds wasn't Mongs or Pars, and advice to make in for thimselves before Crabbit turned them into sossidges.

Psyche went to the window.

"Crabbit has removed several tails," she said, "and there is no place like Ireland. I never want to live out of it."

"No?" said Darby absently.

The elusive sunshine next day sent Gheena bathing, off to her favourite pools, where she dived under the rocks and came up a little blue. It was a treat at first. The vigorous young life seemed a thing apart from Darby's. Yet it was Gheena who was content, and Darby Dillon who looked drearily at the vista of

the future. He feared the sudden thunderclap of his fortune—the nugget of gold which he had dreamt of and come upon unexpectedly was too heavy to lift, too valuable for him to hold.

"Some day," he said to Gheena, "we'll be blasting that rock to get you out, Gheena. You'll never come up. Will you drive with me this afternoon up the hills to see about returning my hounds?"

"I? Oh, take Psyche. I am going for a row," Gheena stammered a little. "I should be so cold after a swim, Darby, in the car."

Basil Stafford watched her start for her row in the newly-painted, half-dry boat which Phil had spent a day at. He stood pondering as she shot out on the gay ripple of the sea and up the harbour. As cautiously as he could, he started along the cliffs, taking cover behind friendly gorse, bending inland at times, his mind occupied by possible orders which he must give to the coastguards.

Gheena, rowing easily, saw the figure on the cliffs, knew it too well, a dull fog of misery creeping between her and the sunshine. What was he watching for?

She made the boat secure at Girtnamurragh, told the men to leave it, and made an ostensible survey of the garden which spades and forks were rending ruthlessly. The old straggling border had been put to rights, shrubs were being clipped. Dearest George, sneezing with complete lack of spirit, stood superintending the renovations, and shivering at the chill airs off the sea.

"You could even shut those out if the air inside the house wasn't like a tombstone," he remarked, looking limply at Gheena.

"But Gheena is in no hurry, Dearest," replied Mrs. Freyne, "and the fishermen are sure to steal the vegetables if we're not here. Don't you think they might?"

Gheena grinned softly, kissed her mother, and asked for a drive home; she was tired. It was opportunity sent to her. The watcher on the cliff thought it a completely natural thing when he saw her go by in the motor. The boat was now ready close to the cave.

Phil was made fellow-conspirator, pledged to see that the small car was placed at night in an outhouse beyond the yard gate ready to drive.

That night Gheena slipped from her side door, poor Crabbit left behind, but only walked to the harbour and rowed out a little then. The vast loneliness of the sea at night frightened her; she wanted to get out to it—to the eerie laps and gurgles among the rocks, the white gleam of the waves' caps, the voices of the night. Lying still, she saw a boat shoot past—some of the fishermen making for the village—then left the boat and was stealing home when someone rose out of the dimness and spoke to her.

"Gheena—Miss Freyne—you must not do it! What are you doing out like

this, and war time?"

"And what are you doing out like this in war time?" retorted Gheena, an uncertain note in her voice.

Stafford caught her by the shoulders, holding her.

"I ask you, I pray you, not to come out," he said. "I'll ask Darby to say..."

"Darby will only say what I want him to," observed Gheena; "that's what Darby is there for."

"A man has some right over his future wife," said Stafford slowly.

Miss Freyne murmured several indistinct beginnings of remarks, and left them all unfinished rather nervously.

"Poor old Darby!" she said amiably at last.

Mr. Stafford returned gloomily that Darby was one of the best. If Miss Freyne meant to marry her intended——

"But ... of course." Then Gheena's voice died again. She was acutely conscious of a struggle with tears as hands gripped hers for a second.

"You must keep off the rocks at night," said Stafford. "For a reason. Promise, I beg it of you."

"If you will keep off them" was what Miss Freyne muttered in a strangled voice. "I ... ask you to." She ran away.

"Hang," remarked Stafford savagely.

A few days later Mr. Keefe got his commission, and left at a few hours' notice, wildly excited. He was now Captain Keefe in a well-known regiment, and his mind was taken up by Sam Browne belts and revolvers. So quickly did he go that his farewell even to Mrs. Weston was a brief one, though he had just time to hint that he now thought if he survived he might ask anyone to marry him. He was replaced by a rather elderly man, whom the police seemed to regard with awed respect.

Gheena had almost broken down when she had talked to Stafford, but her resolution was only deepened. She must see, and see alone the face of the man who had arranged to put petrol in those caves!

For several nights the two-seater slipped unheard down the back avenue and along a narrow by-lane to the Dower House, where it was left hidden near some bushes until Gheena crept to her boat. She grew used to rowing out alone in the chill darkness in her short skirt and a thick coat, until one night, in a murky warmth, she rowed right out opposite the cave, and thought that she heard voices on the shore—voices subdued and muffled. Creeping in, Gheena saw someone on the shore—a dark, indefinite figure on the very edge of the sea. Next moment her heart throbbed suddenly, for even in the darkness she believed that she knew it. And she rowed desperately out. It felt safer at sea; she did not want to be sure. After this violent spurt she let the boat drift, lying in the trough of the swell;

it would be time enough to pull when she heard the waves on the rocks. She drifted quickly. Lying there, she was almost invisible, and Gheena Freyne's heart leaped and missed a beat, a chill horror of certainty creeping up her spine as, quite naturally, the periscope of a submarine nosed up quite close to her, and a long thing like a whale showed in the dim light.

It might be an English submarine. It might.... Gheena sat as a bird before an able-bodied snake, completely afraid to do anything, because just then very low and cautious murmurs commenced to discuss matters in German, and a laughing gull called. Also, it seemed to Gheena, with a German accent.

One man said that he trusted that the Irish pig would be out in a moment, and a second, subservient but decided, trusted so, as if he did not, then, owing to the sudden unforeseen accidents, they were completely powerless to get away. This voice appeared to regret the blasphemous language of the Herr Captain, but repeated its statement decorously.

"As none of these pigs of fools ever keep a look-out," remarked a third voice, which was young and pleasant, "just do the laughing gull again, Max."

The excellent imitation of the laughing gull was repeated; it now became evident from the conversation, that it should have been answered by a whistle from the cliffs. Then as Gheena began to paddle away, noiselessly she hoped, someone exclaimed blasphemously. She heard the quick splash of a swimmer in the water, and with so much to be afraid of that she forgot fear, she heard the scuffle of a man climbing into the boat.

"If you scream or make a sound," said someone in excellent English, "I..."

Gheena said she supposed then that she had better not, and that she was only out amusing herself, and would like to go home.

But the answer to this was to find herself moving as in a dream on to the back of the steel whale, with everyone buzzing round her in undertones.

The captain asked her if she understood German, to which she said "No" hurriedly, believing it might be useful to pretend ignorance. She again asked politely to be allowed to go home.

From the ensuing whispers she gathered that she was not likely to be allowed to. Someone argued that it would not matter, and the voice of the engineer said if they could not get away it certainly would not, and Gheena found herself being propelled down into an atmosphere reeking of oil, where light was permissible.

Here a stout senior officer positively gloated at her capture. It appeared that he was even a minor admiral, whose varied manoeuvres had run the "U" boat out of fuel. He sat at a small table and glowered, while Gheena, not at all sure that she was awake, was conscious of glances of rapt admiration from the senior lieutenant, the owner of the pleasant voice ... so Gheena stood closer to

him.

"Good evening; I want to go home," said Gheena in French, why she hardly knew. Someone had told her to address herself to the head admiral.

Having addressed some abusive remarks to her in German and seen these received blankly, they decided that the strange woman did not, owing to usual lack of *Kultur* of her race, understand any language but her own and French.

The question of the petrol appeared to be pressing. There were even low-voiced fears concerning treachery, and Gheena gathered that it was even possible that a boat must be sent to try to discover a certain cave if they were not signalled by—Gheena could not catch the name.

"We sent word by wireless," she heard, "to him.... It has always been right...."

Gheena went very white. Who had they sent word to?

The inferior admiral grunted fiercely, and motioned to Gheena to sit down. She did so, closer than ever to the lieutenant who looked good-natured. She was told she was to answer questions.

"In England," said the admiral, "I suppose you are all now so terrified, you only come out in the dark; that is why a young Fräulein boats alone at night!"

Gheena nodded thoughtfully, but she said that it was not England exactly; in fact it was Ireland. She said it dreamily because she was sure she was asleep.

"Tell me"—the admiral opened a pocket-book—"what do they say of our Zeppelins in stricken London?"

"Zeppelins!" Gheena raised her head. "Oh, yes ... the recruiting balloons, of course," she said thoughtfully.

The stout officer grew purple so slowly that it was quite interesting to watch him—a purple which straddled gradually across his big nose and lost itself in his beard.

"The ... *Himmel* ... ball ... oons," he said heavily. "Balloons!" At this point the senior lieutenant developed a nasty cough and had some trouble with it.

"Yes, the things got up to get more recruits," said Gheena sweetly, flickering a glance at the lieutenant. "I believe some people really believe they are German, sent by the Socialists who are against the war; but we all think here they're only for recruiting. Some always come when we're short of men."

"They who strike the terror, the death-shower! Girl, you rave!" The admiral got up and glared.

"But I was really in England once, Commander, when balloons did come," said Gheena, "and all the stories of misery are invented just for a purpose. You tell your poor cross Kaiser when you go back...."

The admiral sat down again, and his big mouth opened slowly, showing discoloured teeth; a muffled voice somewhere in the background wondered anxiously when the boat would come.

"You see, in England we are never afraid," said Gheena carelessly, but she felt a singing in her ears then when the admiral said something about when she got to Germany.

"You are not going to take me back there," she whispered. Gheena Freyne realized her folly. She would be imprisoned, questioned. She would be a girl alone and friendless. "You have no right to," she said hotly. "I've uncles who are generals, and you've no right. Let me go!"

If—the commander, who was lantern-jawed, cleared his throat—if the gracious Fräulein would answer a few questions intelligently, she might perhaps be landed somewhere on her own coast; they had no desire to be harsh. Every nerve in Gheena's body thumped almost painfully. She feared, above all things on earth now, the thought of going down in this close atmosphere and being taken away a prisoner. Basil Stafford had been right, it was dangerous out alone.

"Your spy," she said unevenly ... "the man ... I know him...."

The commander then said she must certainly be taken along and imprisoned, and, still as in a dream, Gheena realized the folly of this last remark, for the admiral, fading rusty brown again, said something about troublesome prisoners and made unpleasant allusions in German to the bottom of the sea.

Meantime the night was passing. The engineer sent for, suggested that they should sink and someone row in to see what had happened. He thought, in fact, that the Herr Lieutenant knew the cave.

She must escape. Gheena thought she felt the boat sinking. She grew suddenly cunning. With a quick stagger she caught at the impressionable lieutenant and muttered, "Air! air! air!"

"A breath of air—all right," whispered Gheena, reeling.

It was the lieutenant who persuaded them to let her be taken on deck for a moment. He would see to her not screaming. Gheena was helped up very tenderly, and left for a minute to herself, gripping the rail.

"I've English friends; I'll look after you," the lieutenant whispered, and went for brandy. The time was enough to allow her to slip her arms out of the coat and unfasten her skirt; she had knickerbockers underneath.

When the perturbed Germans grunted gruffly and discussed their difficulty, Gheena sprang.

She dived very prettily to the accompaniment of muffled bad language, and as she came up, heard hoarse whispers concerning immediate death if she did not return.

The threats were nothing, but the sound of a splash made the girl shudder. They dared not show a light or fire a shot, but a strong swimmer would catch her easily. She dived again and swam under water until her bursting lungs seemed to crack, then shot up, treading water, to see the long whale still close to her and

hear a man swimming, but not in her direction. Down again and again, until she felt too far away to be caught. Then lightly she struck out for land, and just as she did a shrill whistle sounded from the shore.

But cold, fright and those underwater swims had tired Gheena out. She swam less and less vigorously, swam until her arms seemed lead and every stroke brought a panting, wheezing breath. Then for the first time Gheena cried out, a feeble cry for help as her lips tasted salt and she nearly sank. It was answered by a splash of oars and a boat shooting out close to her.

The face which she had dreaded to see was outlined for a moment by the flash of an electric torch. Gheena felt warm hands hurriedly pull her into the boat, and as she crouched, completely exhausted, Basil Stafford's voice said "I told you not to" in tones of annoyed remonstrance.

Some outer covering was wrapped round Gheena, whose teeth had begun to chatter. Her resentment at the lack of sympathy due to her blended with a dull sorrow which was stronger than the resentment.

Looking up, Miss Freyne chattered out that she had been nearly drowned, and wished it had been completely.

"If you will go out alone—" Stafford's oars were making no sound in the water. "And your boat?"

"That's somewhere near it. You're not—going to take me out again to it?" said Gheena excitedly. "I won't go! I won't go to Germany!" And she sat up. "I must tell ... they're waiting for the oil. I must tell! Oh, why—why did you?" said Miss Freyne, breaking down into unrestrained sobs. "Oh, why is it you, and why did you?"

She stopped sobbing, because it is difficult to cry comfortably when someone grips your shoulders and actually shakes you. Gheena knew that a face which she felt sure was an angry one was close to hers, and a hoarse whisper was demanding information. She gave it brokenly; she sat back with a gasp as the noiseless oars shot the boat through the water, and she could hear Stafford muttering to himself excitedly.

"Don't cry out, do you hear?" he whispered. "Not a sound, or I'll..."

Miss Freyne snapped out "Shoot me, I suppose," with rancorous dignity and as clearly as chattering teeth would allow.

"To come here ... to eat our food ... with—with us ... and give oil to that Father Christmas!" were the indistinct words which reached Basil Stafford, who was breathing heavily. The boat bumped rather sharply against the shore.

"Don't speak," said Stafford grimly, "or it's Germany for you. This way.... Don't you dare to speak."

The path in the dark might have been anywhere. Waiting for the first opportunity to slip away, Gheena was propelled along it. She heard voices, a door

opened, and next minute she was in a big room, with shutters shut closely and a small fire burning in the grate.

Then Gheena, recovering, demanded liberty, for it was the drawing-room at Gurtnamurragh, and these traitors were using it to hide in her house.

Stafford's hands fell heavily on her shoulders; his eyes were very sad, but determined.

"It is all your own fault, and you will stay here until I come for you," he said coldly. "You can't get out, I'm going to nail the shutters. There are blankets in the corner and I'll stoke up the fire. Perhaps the blanket first."

Gheena put one on hastily, conscious of her costume.

The fury of Gheena's wrath left him unmoved. To be left there alone while the submarine was fed, to be treated in this fashion! She said several things about it all.

"You are, of course, quite sure that I was going out to her?" said Stafford, as he drove big nails home.

"I was afraid. I went alone because I was half sure." Gheena checked herself. "I found out your cave days ago ... and I've watched." She began to cry again.

He came close to her. Something lit up his eyes.

"You came out alone—because you were sure you would find me. That was why you went alone; and having found me, you must tell—you would have told—or would you?"

"England first," said Gheena, her voice mixing pride and broken dreariness. "But..."

"Then you won't!" he snapped out quite cheerfully, banging the door.

But he came back with water for the kettle, and pointed out that there was tea in the basket near the fire.

Then he left again. Gheena heard the muffled voices and silence fell. She was far too angry to be frightened.

Wrapping herself as thoroughly as possible in a blanket, she put the kettle on, piled up the fire and stamped wrathfully.

The events of the night now felt to her as though she had been through an evil dream which could not be real—a submarine close in—waiting for petrol—and all their suspicions realized. Basil Stafford was that vile but necessary thing, a spy.

"As I actually met him going out to it," said Gheena wearily—"actually met him—there is no mistake now."

Gheena did not cry out. Patriotism fought with something which for a time worsted it completely. Then, rousing herself, she cooed dolefully, listening to the echo of the cry ringing through the empty house.

Inspiration came to her. The iron fastenings of the old shutters, if the wood

could be burnt round them, might be wrenched free. Gheena seized a small piece of broken iron paling which someone had used as a poker and stuck it into the glowing heat.

In a very short time she had burnt quite a good sized hole, and the room was acrid with the smell of charred wood. Someone had left a candle on the table. Gheena lighted it to peer at her work. Having seen with dismay that it would take another half-hour before she could even hope to move the bar, Gheena swung round to see Stafford's face thrust into the room.

"Lights!" he said bitterly. "I might have known I could not trust you."

Gheena repeated the word "trust" rather blankly, and gathered her blanket round her.

"Lights—here," he said again. "Of course, nothing may happen, but that's not your fault, is it?" He seized the candle.

The door banged. This language from a detected criminal had bereft Gheena of speech.

She put the poker back slowly, to start in real fear, for, as if conjured up by the speck of light, voices sounded, rang in anger, bare and almost animal-like in its sound, and came the paff-paff of revolver shots—then silence—then voices again.

"Safe and sound we has him, an' I near to be shot"—this was the voice of Thomas Hassett, one of the coastguards—"safe and sound with the stroke Ned Murphy drew on him."

Ned Murphy was the village sergeant.

Gheena adjusted her blanket and took out the poker absently, her face very white.

They—had caught Basil Stafford—other people were on the watch. It was all over now.

Paff-paff—more shots, the noise of running feet, a yell of someone in pain.

"God save us! the arrum is hanging on ye, Misther Stafford," said a sympathetic voice; "an' who could belt away for the docther as quick as ye could yerself in ye're cyar?"

"They to come along to the wrong sphot, when ye were afther bringin' in Miss Gheena, an' we only three. Will I run a taste ov rope around the cross one, sir? He is lively."

"I tell you I—— Put it down, Mr. Stafford." Gheena heard the Professor's voice, as in English, with no trace of German accent, he entreated someone not to be an idiot. The door was flung open. Two coastguards tenderly helped in a man who crumbled and tottered between them. With a gasp of terror Gheena recognized the polite lieutenant, and her first thought was that she wished he had not seen her in a blanket.

Opening wider, the door admitted the Professor holding out something and talking volubly, and Basil Stafford, his left arm hanging down and his right gripping a revolver.

"And I—thought," said Stafford apologetically to the Professor, "that it might be you."

The Professor grinned sweetly; he looked at the wounded officer.

"The sorra a thing wrong with him but a clip on the head, Miss," said Mr. Dunne. "Let ye not be frightened. He'll be all right when he sees clear again, an' the sthars is in."

Gheena now observed that Stafford had no coat on, and realized that she was wearing it; she said so nervously.

He looked at her rather sternly.

"So you were determined," he said quietly, "and you found a way. It brought them here, anyhow, before I got away."

Gheena let the poker fall slowly; it lay upon the end of her blanket, singeing it—yes, it was her work.

Stafford soon went out, Murphy with him. The German lieutenant sat up and groaned heavily. He stared a little wildly when Gheena proffered him hot tea.

"Treachery," he said bitterly. "I was sent out to look round as the man did not come, and we rowed to the signal—three flashes—a stop and one."

Gheena looked thoughtfully at the guilty candle.

The Professor, breaking into fluent German, questioned rapidly, and the lieutenant replied sulkily to the effect that he did not believe the "U" boat could safely go down again. Then he fell into a species of stupor, breathing heavily.

"Light schulls they have," said Murphy pleasantly. "Any of the little sthrokes I dhrew on him wouldn't have med one of us miss a pint of porther?"

Completely bewildered, forgetting even her blanket, Gheena breathed fast and stared.

The old Professor, who appeared to have thrown off several years of life, chuckled pleasantly.

Then he ceased chuckling to ask gravely if she could possibly keep a secret, and make no mention of this night's adventuring to anyone save Darby.

"It was your light which did it," he said. "And Stafford here practically alone. You flashed it; I saw the gleam. He says he told you not to."

"You'll imprison him—or——" Gheena's voice was unsteady.

The Professor said "With other prisoners of war," in an absent voice, and thought Irish girls were impressionable.

"But a spy—a prisoner of war!" Gheena's head was down; she hid her eyes.

Here the Professor remarked a little impatiently that the officer of an enemy

ship was not a spy.

"Stafford found out the eyrie a week ago"—the old Professor chuckled again—"and, of course, I got to hear of it. He had men waiting in that cave until, Murphy tells me, they came out whitened like celery in the dark. And he got Guinane there easily last night. He told me all about it outside just now. Guinane has given it all away."

"But—then, who——?" Gheena sat down on an upturned box; she felt she needed support.

The Professor merely chuckled cryptically, making no reply.

"It's not Mr. Stafford?" said Gheena.

At this the old gentleman also sat down on another box which was not up to his weight. Extracting himself from the ruins, he said "You too," and abused the flimsy nature of grocery boxes.

"The fellow's store full of petrol," grunted the Professor—"his new house, y'know. Guinane was well paid."

Ned Murphy thrust an anxious face into the room. "If any could guide the mother, sir?" he whispered. "He is bleedin' and a shiver sot in on him, an' he won't come anear the fire, but mutherin' words half delarious. If we could get him where he'd be cared an' there wouldn't be talk! Th' ould docther, if ye brings him here, 'll be chatterin' for all the world like a magpie."

Gheena said sharply that she could drive the car, but not in a blanket.

Mr. Murphy was a married man. He produced a penknife eloquently, and suggested a couple of slashes an' a taste of twine would make a skhirt while ye'd be waitin'.

Gheena, still bewildered, stood in meek silence, her blanket reft from her to be rent in twain. The skirt manufactured by Murphy would not have done for Ascot, but it complied with decency. Very quietly the girl went out into the still, dim night, looking back once at the polite lieutenant lying in stupor on the floor. She was not at all sure that he would not vanish.

Someone walking feebly was helped out by two coastguards. Gheena did not turn to look; she kept her head down.

"And for Heaven's sake remember you're not driving Darby's tin-kettle twelve-power," said a weak but unashamed voice, "and go slow. I wanted them to get a donkey cart for me."

Gheena said "Where to?" as she slipped the clutch—was she in this nightmare to drive to the county gaol twelve miles away? The Professor replied, "Why, Mrs. Maloney's, of course!" rather peevishly. He was watching the nearness of the banks in the narrow lane and the pace at which their dark shapes were sliding by.

But Gheena drove skilfully; she slid round the corner, and the car seemed

to leap forward at the road.

"Steady; there is not much room," said the Professor, "and Murphy was on the dickey."

"Begonnes, I am here still, sir," said Murphy cheerlessly, "though that whip around near spilt me."

The gleam of dawn was in the east, a pinky yellow glow chasing grey night away.

They slipped past sleeping Castle Freyne and into the village, with the little dark houses clinging to the edge of the cliff; dun shapes growing just visible. They pulled up with complete disregard for Stafford's tyres, and he was helped out; the hall door of his small house stood open, ready for his return at any time. Gheena's lips tightened as she saw it. She had now to walk home before any light came. She stood uncertain, waiting.

The Professor bustled out to order her in, saying that Basil was feverish; they had sent for the doctor.

Basil was on the sofa in his dressing-gown; he looked wan and lined, and he had one hand to his chest as if in pain.

"I'm sorry," he said quickly, "for what happened."

"Yes"—Gheena held her own hand to her throat because it hurt her—"yes, it was all my fault."

"But I simply had to shut you up," he said. "We were watching at the cave, and your torpedo-destroying in that little boat was spoiling everything. Of course, I never expected to find you swimming. Then you flashed that light, and the fellows we caught—they thought that it was Guinane's lamp and rowed right in to us; they fought. I told you not to poke round—but—but—they nearly caught you and took you away, and I've never said——"

Here Stafford's voice grew very weak. He sipped something out of a tumbler.

"You were watching in the cave to catch Germans? You haven't been spying? Haven't sold yourself for money?" Gheena's voice took a clearer note of sheer clear joy.

"Oh, look here!" said Stafford a little grumpily. "It hurts. I used to watch you and that Western woman. I've learnt a bit of lip language and it hurts, besides being ridiculous. Now do I look like a spy?"

To which Miss Freyne replied incoherently that he had understood they always looked like unspies—that was, no spies—and being young and nice-looking and so on—and she grew confused.

Stafford put his hand on hers for a moment.

"I was in a regiment in India," he said. "Got a funny wound on a little frontier expedition, so they wouldn't pass me for active service. It's caught again

now. And I had a friend; I badgered him until they sent me here to spy round on this coast—so they said. And all the time they had a regular secret service man at it, and were only keeping me quiet for friendship's sake. But I did find out something in the end. There was I watching the Professor, and fellows grinning as they read my reports about him. I knew you suspected me," he went on, "and even that you believed the money which I spoke of was German money. And it's only lately I realized that—that it hurt you to believe it, Gheena. You went alone so that no one else might see me. I hope to get back to my regiment next year to do real work. And—if you gave me this"—he fumbled at a note-case—"will you take it back and say it was not deserved?"

He pulled out a note-case and out of it a feather, once white. Gheena took it to see it was now stained red in one place—red with blood.

"I never gave it," she whispered. "Not that."

"Gheena," said Stafford, sitting up, "you didn't give it; it was Miss O'Toole. Oh, I say, Gheena! And you belong to Darby! Oh, I say, and I cared so much!"

Gheena was sobbing almost wildly over the little stained plume.

"But—I belong to Darby," she said, when she could speak. Somehow, brought suddenly face to face with the naked realities of life, explanations seemed useless things.

"Gone," said the Professor, running in, "off in his car." He sat down and groaned. "Waiting too long, as usual!" he stormed.

"Who has gone?" Gheena hid her face.

"Mrs. Weston, otherwise Heinrich Helshumer. She's left all there—shoes and stockings, and you might as well look for needles in hay, and she has a wireless there."

"Mrs. Weston," said Gheena weakly.

"Her man gave her away when we cornered him. I'd suspected for some time. I knew from her playing on the fiddle. What is it, Stafford?"

"The dam fellow—was always fussing near you," said Stafford, and fainted.

CHAPTER XVII

Gheena Freyne found the household awake, when arrayed in a long coat of Basil Stafford's she got home. George Freyne, who was on the doorstep, announced directly she got within earshot that he had sent for Darby. He would not coun-

tenance the absence of his stepdaughter during the night and her reappearance in knickerbockers in the mornings.

Gheena passed him as if she did not hear. She went heavily to her room to try to remember that she was not dreaming, that it was all real, and to try to banish the tingle of bitter shame as she remembered how she had suspected Stafford, and a hotter blush recalling hours spent with Violet Weston. To all questioning she merely answered that she had gone for a row and had upset the boat.

"I can't believe I am me," she said to Psyche over the comfort of hot tea and toast. "I can't, and I can't tell you even why!" But being a girl she told some things.

"And now"—Psyche's small face looked peaked—"now you know it is not only looking on Darby as a friend but caring for someone else."

Gheena said, "And I never thought I could care," very drearily, and Miss Delorme stamped very gently.

Whispers of great happenings buzzed across the day. Someone had heard shots and someone else had seen a German crew somewhere. Miss Gheena could tell and would not.

Dearest George questioned civilly and with authority, his stepdaughter's return without her skirt and the loss of the boat making him believe that she knew something. But Gheena merely replied again that she had lost the boat and swum in near the Dower House, and that was all she knew. A warm feeling that England depended on her for silence was near her heart.

She told Darby when he came over and stood leaning on his sticks, looking down at her as she lay back in a chair. He heard it all.

Some things he knew already.

"They were watching some strange car," Stafford tells me, "which Guinane met out on the Dublin road at nights, and they've got that and Guinane, and the 'U' boat—the patrol boat caught her."

Gheena said "It was not a bad haul," a little tremulously; also that she would like to send her love to the Admiral.

Darby looked at her for quite a long time.

"And you took Basil for a spy," he said slowly. "Of course, egged on by the real one. And you've been in terrible danger, Gheena."

Gheena replied briefly that she had thought of it first herself, without any egging.

"I always said he wasn't the sort for a spy." Darby put his hand on Gheena's shoulder. With a little wry smile he felt her shrink. "Now we'll go to see him," he said cheerily—"you and I, Gheena, at once."

Limping behind her light quiet movements as they went to the car, laying

his sticks aside as he got in; the wry smile clung to his lips as they drove to Mrs. Maloney's, where a faint reek of disinfectants wafted to them through the door. Basil Stafford, very white, was sitting in a big chair.

"Bullet touched up the old wound," he said. "And you'll stay to tea with me, won't you?" He avoided looking at Gheena.

Mrs. Maloney produced somewhat mountainous buttered toast, and a cup of what she called melted chicken tea for Basil.

"Great it should be," she said, stirring the weak-looking compound, "with every taste of me young Plymouth Rock in it, down to his yelly legs."

Basil gave it to Crabbit, and took tea instead.

Presently, when Darby went out, they sat silent, the noise of the sea crooning in through the windows, with the scent of violets strong in the sunshine. Mrs. Maloney's son grew them for sale.

"And you've forgiven me?" Gheena said at last jerkily.

Basil said that there was nothing to forgive. He scarcely recognized humbleness in one who had snubbed him for months.

"But if you hadn't misjudged me," he said, "I might have dared to ask you to—well, to use me as a buffer instead of Darby, and you'll be far happier with him when you're married—so it's as well."

The complete bleakness of Gheena's voice as she repeated the word married was too easy to understand; she repeated it almost angrily. Stafford said that engagements generally ended in marriages, and she would make Darby happy, for he loved her.

"Oh, yes, of course!" Gheena stood up. "I mean to end in marriage. I mean to. I would not hurt Darby."

There was a note of interrogation here mixed with defiant firmness.

"No, for he has been hurt enough," said Stafford simply. "I shall never be unhappy now, knowing you might have——"

Darby limped into the room, slowly even for him.

"The door was open," he said. "Gheena, I never meant to tie you to me. I knew always it was only for a time to keep Dearest in order. Darby was just your friend, as he always will be, and one who saw how things were all along. It's all over now. No, don't talk."

Perhaps as he limped out he had his reward in that low-voiced "Darby!" as Gheena's whole heart seemed to cry out to happiness.

Mrs. Maloney's house possessed a porch of what she called rusty work. A long-limbed, feeble-hearted rose of the rambler family trailed over it, hauled into order here and there by large pieces of old cloth nailed on by Thomas Maloney, Junior. In this Darby stood alone. The porch faced the land, the scrambling rusty hills towered high above the harbour. The harbour smell of tar and salt water

came strongly with the scent of the violets.

Darby leant back against the unstable rusty porch and with the raw pain came comfort.

It was at least over. Day by day he had found it more difficult to bear Gheena's careless ignoring of any thought of love for him. He was Darby, nothing more. Just Darby Dillon, who had always helped her. Would there not be something almost of relief in the cessation of friendly endeavours to isolate the lovers, to place them alone in chilly sitting-rooms, or send them for walks with carefully modest references to be sure to go down the yew walk, or the walk with the laurel hedges? And life behind the hedges just the same as in the open; Gheena unembarrassed, trying to time her quick movements to the cripple's, Gheena ignoring the word "marriage." Then lately, Gheena downcast, moody, with watchful eyes fixed on the sea; Gheena afraid for the man whom she suspected, afraid of his unmasking.

A small white face peered into the porch; little Miss Delorme pushed back an untrammelled length of rose and spoke feelingly of thorns.

She perched on the unstable bench and chattered for a minute eagerly.

Mrs. Weston had disappeared and Ned Murphy had let out that she was a spy and the old Swiss a man with her. "Hadn't they found pipes and tobacco in his room and men's boots and what not, an' he seen to lep to the car like a mountain goat?"

"She put Gheena up to everything," pattered Psyche, "to keep suspicion away from herself."

"And Gheena suspected Basil, and Basil suspected the Professor, and they all ran round in rings," said Darby smilingly, surprised to find that he could smile.

"Gheena?" asked Miss Delorme.

Darby replied steadily that Gheena was looking after Mr. Stafford, and was, in fact, going to look after him for the rest of her life.

Psyche's small face grew peaked and hard. She looked at Darby.

"You'll go in to congratulate her," he said quietly. "I was never really in the hunt, you know. It was just a play for me."

"I won't," said Psyche. "I can't. Because—she has made you unhappy!" seemed to almost float back across the garden full of violets, as Miss Delorme ran away back to Castle Freyne.

Later, Darby was able to sit listening to Basil talking, and almost wonder why his pain was not deeper.

Basil Stafford told, laughing at it now, how he had tracked and watched the old Professor over slippery rocks and on the sands and along the cliffs. Also how that it was quite certain that the Guinanes had knocked down Nat Leary when he came close to them unexpectedly. And then put him upon the shale cliff to

slip over or no as Providence ordained. In fact, Guinane had confessed to it.

"Spying was bad enough," grunted Basil, "but to"—he looked at Gheena jealously—"dozens of times," he burst out, "before everyone's eyes."

Miss Freyne, behind a mantle of blushes, observed frigidly that Violet was always more affectionate in public than elsewhere, to which Stafford replied that he trusted so, somewhat coldly.

When Dearest George heard it he was quite upset. In war time he considered trifling with two men was almost prodigal coquetry. He gloomed before a large fire until Matilda told him that Gheena had made up her mind to go about with Basil's regiment for some years—that is, if Dearest George thought there would be any regiment to go about with—as, of course, he would know.

Mr. Freyne, glaring at the fire, then decided that he would grow potatoes at Girtnamurragh, and also that Lancelot had played his cards very badly indeed not to have worked his wounds for more.

Mrs. Freyne thought that it was the fault of the cart wheel. "If it had been a gun," she said—"but Gheena said it was not."

Mr. Freyne grunted again; then he whistled. He began to see a vista of many years of saving, with Castle Freyne at his mercy and a growing quotia of solid investments.

"After all," he said briskly, "she will be much better away travelling, Matilda, and Darby has an eye like a hawk, a nasty way of saying things too, behind a smile."

Someone said a smile of gold, startling Dearest George exceedingly. He felt sure that it was his wife until she assured him that she had been silent, so he took to whistling again and shut the open door.

"Lancelot," said Mrs. Freyne, looking out, "is driving up in Miss O'Toole's pony trap. She seems quite attached to him, don't you think, Dearest?"

Mr. Freyne's reply contained some mention of grandmothers as he marched to the door to admit Lancelot, who had forgotten his courtship, and who had found someone who understood his symptoms.

The installing of Basil Stafford as an invalid at Castle Freyne, with Gheena waiting on him and and wondering if she had ever felt alive before, was followed by a spell of dry weather, chill nights, days of bright sunshine, evenings and mornings swathed in silver fog.

May was with them, the sea dimpling to her summer blue, with discreet return to steel in the shade.

Darby stood one morning with his hounds, the scratch pack, leaping clamorously at the bars, and decided to take them home. They knew him now; they would not run riotously when he let them out, but trot at his horse's heels.

Hunting was over; Grandjer and Beauty and Greatness were never likely to

come to Dillon's Court again. The sadness of all endings tinged his glances at the medley of hounds. They had possessed noses, they had hunted keenly and with infinite patience; they had pulled down foxes and had given him many hours of pleasure, many hearty laughs.

It was early morning. The sun had not lifted the mist wraiths from the hollows; dew lay everywhere and a maze of silver gossamer threads caught the glints of light. Scarlet anemones, blood red, peered from the beds; in the front, narcissi were replacing the yellow daffodils.

"I came—you said they were to go back this morning." Psyche dropped off Whitebird. "Oh, I shall never love anything again as I have running after them, the darlings! Anne gave me some early breakfast."

"You'll run after real packs," said Darby, "and forget my assortment."

"But they—the others—will never be my first pack," said Psyche with logic, "and I want to stay here with them."

They pattered out of the yard, the hounds going dejectedly, the horses stale from working for too long; Carty's chestnut apathetic even as to whip lashes, Andy with tears in his eyes. A wondrous winter had ended and school loomed before him. They passed from the mists to the higher ground, where they could cut across the hills to the house of Andy's mother.

What brought an old fox out on that May morning, sunning himself close to a patch of gorse? And he must have wondered what brought a pack of mongrel dogs, all related to hounds, trotting through the heather and over the shining slates. Grandjer threw his tongue almost savagely; the old fox turned tail and fled, and in a moment the whole pack were yowling in pursuit as he topped the crest of the hill.

The rusty-coated horses woke up; Andy screamed Barty's "Forrard away!" rolled down the hillsides, and the four turned to ride over a country with all the gaps fenced up, with corn sown, meadows growing.

"This," said Darby philosophically, "will cost me twenty pounds. Be careful, Psyche." Her name slipped out as Whitebird topped a newly-bushed-up bank and pecked in the tangle.

"Isn't it great entirely? That same is Thady Lawless's rye grass, an' he will be upset over it," piped Andy. "Have ye the nippers, Barty; there is wire oberight us."

They got round the wire. Red clods of dry earth, wheat sown, rattled up from their heels. The scratch pack pounced on a breast-high scent down the slopes and into the fertile valley, with the woods of Dillon's Court on their left.

Here the old fox was plainly making for Castletown Roche, four miles ahead and up hill.

"An' a planted counthry," said Andy. "Look at Grandjer! Isn't he the boy?"

Scent failed as the sun rose higher; where the mist clung hounds ran fast, but more slowly in the open, a they sped across meadows, while astounded owners remarked bitterly that it was a damn shame entirely, until assured by Darby that hounds had got away were being chased until caught.

"Lie back a field, then," advised Andy, "an' if they thrun up we could not do that same excuse for the next man."

"The worst man of all," said Darby, "will be Sir Hercules Roche. This is all rye grass we are crossing."

Sorrow died as they galloped, with the horses fencing accurately, with hounds driving steadily ahead, the music echoing and ringing, with little Psyche, her face aglow, close by the Master, crying out in pure rapture, oblivious of crops or damage.

The first wood of Castletown Roche lay on a steep slope. The servants, going to the left, got into the place with difficulty. Darby pulled up, listening; then he scrambled off. The old fox, sorely astonished, had saved his brush, and was safe in a big rabbit-hole.

Sun had now filtered through the trees; the soft carpet of mist was almost warm.

"I am no master of hounds. I am glad he got in," said Darby. "We took him unawares."

"And he'll run next year." Psyche slipped off, a glow on her small pale face; she took off her hat, her light gold hair shining.

"Next year," said Darby. Through the dreariness of futurity came a glow bright as that of the unexpected gallop. He had come to the moment when he had to chain sorrow, lest it should surprise him by running away. Life with Gheena would have been too hard a thing in its inequality.

"Next year, when Gheena is married, who will want to keep up the scratch pack?" he said slowly.

They could look down on the budding woods of Darby's old home—a sea of tender green, with the smoke from the chimneys filming blurrily in the clear air. They could see the glitter and ripple of sea, and far out the grey-green roll of unsheltered waters.

The old country, the old grey-skied land, had cast its glamour upon the girl. She wanted to live there among the childish, thriftless, and yet industrious people, who carried young hearts to their graves—where order and law did not count, and what ought to be done to-day could always be done to-morrow. And to her, Darby, limping, crippled, was man apart, perfect when he rode, seemingly part of his horses, the hunter of the hounds; every note in his voice, every look in his kind eyes, were dear to Psyche.

She must go back to trim order, to neat servants who toasted muffins ad-

mirably, but could not "slap" up cakes at five minutes' notice; to breakfast at eight-thirty and lunch at one; to sewing parties and small talk; to frigid douches of cold water thrown at that dreadful country, Ireland—a rebels' land, a land of law-breakers; to hear that hunting was not right in war times.

With her whole heart crying for the lap of the sea, for the tangle of the humping hills, the brown of the bogs, she must go.

"If I were here," she whispered, "I should want to——" She muttered something of her rebellious objection to returning to Kent.

Darby saw the glint of tears under the thick lashes.

"If you could stay to hunt hounds with me, little Sprite!"

"Oh, if I could!"

Darby looked again. He had heard and seen several things which amazed him. He knew suddenly how he would miss the small pale face out hunting, the shining eyes which he saw whenever he looked over his shoulder; the admiration in them which he had never dreamt of seeing in any girl's again.

"Sprite, Sprite, you could not want to stay with Darby Dillon, who will limp through his life?"

Sorrow rolled up as mists caught by the sun. He knew now why he had felt Gheena's loss so lightly.

"Since you peered over my shoulder," he said unsteadily, "and tallied the squirrel, I think then..."

"Ever since you blew at the hounds," said Psyche. "If you would keep me here always, Darby!"

Andy, unseen, rode the Rat into view and remarked: "There's for ye now, an' the fox earthed," and rode out of view again thoughtfully.

"The sorra a dog will go home this day," he said to Barty; "so we'll be bilin' agin to-night, an' me name is not Andy."

But Andy said nothing of what he had seen. He was a gentleman.

Even as Andy said, the pack returned to kennels, Darby riding among them through the hot sunshine; the old house looked lonely to him no longer. Already his crippled limb seemed to grow stronger, and as they rode he planned.

The Castle Freyne motor was at the door, Dearest George remarking peevishly that he had come over to look for Miss Delorme, who really must not disappear before breakfast-time, the result being leathery bacon, as he no longer used the copper heaters.

Gheena came swinging round from the stables with Stafford, Crabbit at their heels. The two matched well, even if Basil Stafford still looked pale, and knew now that the old hurt reopened by the wound would not heal for six months.

"Gheena," said George Freyne, "talks now of being married next month. It

seems to me heartless, Darby. And your Aunt, Mona, wishes you to return to Kent. She is suffering from nerves. She has written to me."

Miss Delorme said briefly that she was not going.

"But if Dearest George advises it——" said Mrs. Freyne vaguely.

Gheena ran up to them. "Dearest is dreadfully upset," she said. "It's Lancelot and Miss O'Toole. She is going to marry him. It isn't nonsense, Dearest, she will."

From Dearest George's next remark he seemed to think all matrimony nonsense, especially between unsuitable young people.

"And Miss Delorme's aunt insists," he repeated; "she is guardian or something joint. She insists, she says so."

"I shall not go," said Psyche.

George Freyne started the car gloomily.

"Because I am going to stay here with Darby," said Psyche softly—"always."

THE END

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