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Nelson Novels

Spring Horizon

Stephen Mangan, son of a corn merchant and grocer in a little Irish town, found his everyday life a most absorbing adventure. There was his home, with his Gaelic-speaking parents, the shop, the bar parlour, the garden; there was school, where promotion to the Sixth brought with it a new set of perplexities and interests; there was the town itself, full of adventure, from the strange, secluded Castle to the railway station, from the river to the fair-ground. And beyond the town was the great world; Cork, for example, that breath-taking city which made Carberymore seem so small and tranquil. . . .

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SPRING HORIZON

a novel

T. C. MURRAY

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS LIMITED

LONDON EDINBURGH PARIS MELBOURNE
TORONTO AND NEW YORK

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THOMAS NELSON & SONS LTD

35-36 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.4 **;** PARKSIDE
WORKS, EDINBURGH ; 25 RUE DENFERT-ROCHEREAU,
PARIS; 312 FLINDERS STREET, MELBOURNE;
91-93 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO;
381-385 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

*First published*, 1937

TO MARY

THIS EARNEST OF A
BROTHER’S REGARD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR—

Plays:

Spring and other Plays

Birthright and The Pipe in the Fields

Autumn Fire

Aftermath

Maurice Harte and A Stag at Bay
 Michaelmas Eve

The Blind Wolf

A Flutter of Wings

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The characters in this book are purely imaginary
and have no relation to any actual person living
or dead

**Chapter** I
SPRING HORIZON

**INTERIOR**

STEPHEN’S father and mother sat by the kitchen fire. His father was resting on a homely-fashioned unpadded armchair—one made for enduring service. The local carpenter used to say that the stuff which came from his workshop was a challenge not to time but eternity. Stephen’s mother was seated on a low stool darning a boy’s stocking.

However dull of perception you might be, you could hardly fail to be struck by the physical contrast between these two, who had been man and wife for more than twenty years. In his rugged strength Roger Mangan suggested a figure hewn out of rock. His head was massive, and there was an immense breadth of shoulder. A mane of straight black hair was brushed back from a great expanse of forehead. His eyes, under the boldly projecting brows, had depth and intelligence. Unlike most men of his day, he was clean shaven, so that there was no shadowy grace to soften the uncompromising line of his mouth, or the strongly moulded chin. In the language of the people, “a powerful big man.”

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His wife, the mother of his three sons, seemed little more than a girl playing the woman. She wore a white lace cap, which left the parted hair over the brow un­covered, and was fastened under the chin. Where it passed over the ear it foamed into frills. This matronly cap, no less than the plain black dress and the dark woollen wrap which she wore, was absurdly out of keeping with this slight little woman of forty; but marriage and motherhood imposed these grave trappings on most of the women of southern Ireland in that day. Her face was almost perfect as a miniature. The more intense one’s scrutiny, the more its delicate subtleties became revealed. It was a face full of patience, of tenderness, of wisdom.

Roger held a rummer of steaming punch in his hand. In the glow of the lamp that hung on the limewashed wall the drinking-glass made a quiver of faintly coloured lights. Whenever his wife looked up from her knitting her eyes were caught by the amber glow of the spirits, the pale yellow rind which held the greenish pulp of the slice of lemon floating in the liquid, the slowly dissolving lump of sugar at the bottom of the glass, the gleam of the spoon.

He stirred the brew, the spoon making a pleasant tinkle on the glass. The little cloud of vapour rising from the surface was pleasant to his sense. Its sour- sweet pungency impregnated the air. He savoured the punch slowly, renewing the deeply-felt enjoyment which marked this hour every night.

In the room also was Stephen, their second son, a boy approaching his fourteenth year. He was seated at the table engaged in his home lessons. In his absorption he was only vaguely conscious of their presence.

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At the moment they were bathed in the afterglow of the pleasant excitement of the afternoon, of which he had been the source. He had burst in upon them after school, and poured out the tidings of his triumph over his class-fellows.

Listening to his story, new vistas of possibility opened before their minds. As they were dependent on the profits of a fluctuating business, the problem of the future of the children whom they had called into being often tormented them. If death or disaster came, how would it be? If God, however, should bless each of their children with a quick intelligence, the way was clear. To the scholar, however hampered by lack of worldly means, bright avenues of opportunity always lay open. To be slow-witted was to be a hewer of wood, and their pride and their love shrank from the doom which this implied.

Eager with excitement, his eyes and cheeks glowing, the boy had broken in upon their midday meal.

“Look; I was put into Sixth to-day!” he announced, as he tossed the strap of books dangling from his hand on to the window-sill. He was conscious that few things could interest these two people more.

“What?” exclaimed his father, dropping knife and fork with a clatter. “Into the Upper School?”

“Yes.”

“Goodness, Stephen, how could that be?” inquired his mother.

“’Twas the inspector’s doing,” he explained. “He came on a surprise visit.”

“Mr. Wolfe?”

“Yes. He frightened the soul of us. ‘Quick! Quick! Quick! ‘he kept yapping as he let fly his

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questions. The class was struck dumb. You’d pity Mr. Wiseman—his face like chalk. ’Twas awful for him—no one but myself answering a blessed word.”

Borne on a wave of emotion he had told his story thus far. Now, all of a sudden, some instinct warned him that, strictly true as the recital had been, it sounded like bragging. At the thought the colour rose into his cheeks. He felt uncomfortable. He wished he had said nothing. To cover his confusion, he bent down to stroke the cat, which was mewing for the scraps that fell to her during meals.

His mother divined the thought that led to the mo­mentary break in the boy’s narrative. She sensed the pain that sent the blood into his cheeks. A wave of tenderness for this painfully sensitive boy passed over her.

“Oh, don’t bother with that cat,” said his father, a little impatiently. “What else happened?”

The hot tide of colour slowly receded, bringing with it a cooling sensation and a grateful return of self-control. He lifted his head.

“’Twas like this,” he resumed. “The inspector turned to Mr. Wiseman and pointed to me. ‘Send that boy into the Upper School,’ said he, ‘he’s wasting his time here.’

“‘I thought to do so more than once” explained Mr. Wiseman.

“‘I see’ he kind o’ sniffed. ‘Pious intentions are all very well. Better put them into practice’

“‘I know, sir. I only held back lest it should appear I was showing favour.’

 “‘The boy’s interest comes first’ he snapped. ‘Al­ways remember that!’ There was dead silence in the

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room, so that we heard every word. We all drew a long breath when we saw him gather up his rugs, his umbrella and things, and march away.”

The father thought with pride, “Stephen’s got the brains of my people.” His mother’s heart was full. Her son to be singled out like that! And by a man so high up in knowledge.

“You’re a great boy, Stephen,” she said, smiling.

He hated to be praised thus openly. It jarred some inner chord in his being.

“Oh no,” he returned, a note of protest in his voice. “’Twas just luck. I’d be as hopeless as the rest only that I was excited seeing Mr. Wiseman so desperate. He looked at me in a way that made me think of some one drowning. Then, all of a sudden, things flashed into my mind.”

“’Tis plain you saved the day for him, anyway,” remarked his father. “Did he say anything?”

“Yes; he thanked me, calling me a good lad. ‘But for you,’ he said, ‘I’d have been shamed for ever.’”

“That was nice of him,” remarked his mother, her heart thrilled.

“Then he got into a kind o’ rage, and turned on the class. ‘Never,’ said he, “never, never did God Almighty bring together such a pack of numbskulls!’ Then he laughed, bitter - like. ‘He should have blamed the Lord, not me,’ he said. ‘I hadn’t the making of your empty pates. Had I?’ said he. ‘Had I? Had I?’

No, sir,’ we answered, shamefaced and half sorry like.

Better break stones on the roadside than go teach­ing,’ said he ‘’Tis no life for a man. Did any of you

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ever hear of Dante?‘ he went on, and turned to write his name on the blackboard.

“‘No, sir,’ we all mumbled.

“‘Dante,’ said he, ‘was a great poet out of Italy. He put into verse a vision that he had—a vision of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. Do you know what he saw graven over the gates of Hell?’

“‘No, sir,’ we all mumbled again.

“’Twas this,’ he said, and began to chalk on the board:

“’Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.’”

“God save us!” murmured Stephen’s mother.

“Strong words, no doubt,” came from his father.

Take it from me, boys,’ said he, ‘teaching is hell, and all who turn to it are damned.’ When school was over he called me to his desk and gave me this book.’ A little token of my regard,’ said he, ‘on our parting. It’s beyond you yet, but I know you’ll have the mind to understand it—and to love it—some day.’”

“Now that was lovely of him,” said his mother gratefully “You thanked him, of course, Stephen?”

“Oh, surely. As I turned to go he called me back. ‘Your people, Stephen,’ he said, ‘may one day want to make a teacher of you. You yourself may be prompted to follow that calling. Don’t, don’t, boy. If you do, every day of your life you’ll rue it.’ He turned away then, and I left.”

“That was strange advice,” observed his mother. “I always thought that teaching was a fine life for any one.”

“And so it is,” observed her husband. “None better. Mr. Wiseman was in a temper when he spoke

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like that. When we’re vexed we all say things we don’t mean.” He put his hand in his pocket, drew out some silver, and selected a florin. “You’re good” he said, giving Stephen the coin. He was always so sparing of praise that the words fell on Stephen’s ear with some­thing of the sweetness of a canticle.

“Thanks, father,” he said, his voice quivering. Taking up his cap he went out, leaving the two alone to finish their meal.

II

Roger stirred the punch slowly, crushing the lemon pulp to extract its essence, and offered his wife a sip. It was one of those rare gestures of affection which came from him. Not that he didn’t love his wife in his strange, sombre way. He did. To give utterance to his feeling would be a betrayal of his nature, a sapping of man’s natural dignity. This enticement to share his drink was a means of showing his deeper feelings without the necessity of becoming articulate.

She could never be persuaded to take more than a spoonful—and that only on festive occasions. The three boys loved to see their mother’s pleasant face become a network of wry gestures as the spoonful of liquid fire rasped her tongue and throat. Individually and in chorus they would beseech her to take a second spoonful —but there she was adamant. Gentle as she was, she could be strong and unyielding when the occasion seemed to demand firmness.

Now she responded to her husband’s gesture, knowing that it would please him and because they had been brought so close to each other by their common pride

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in their boy. Her face became puckered, and her eyes blinked as she drank the tiny measure of punch, which seemed to turn the silvery hollow of the spoon that held it into gold.

Stephen sat at the table, writing and figuring. So absorbed was he in the task of wrestling with his prob­lems that he was only dimly conscious of the presence of the others in the room. He did not sense—for they spoke in Irish—that he himself was the subject of their speculations. It was their custom to drift instinctively into the native tongue when the conversation took on a note of intimacy. They knew the language “out of the cradle,” as the Gael expresses it, while their three boys, Owen, Stephen, and Garry knew English only.

In the country towns of southern Munster, half a century ago, most of the elders, like Roger Mangan and his wife, were bilingual. English only was the language of the schools. In the mind of the younger generation the native language was associated with peasants and drovers, with those who had to dig the clay, and whose lives were lived in contact with the beasts of the field. It was the vulgar jargon of men and women uncouth in manners and dress, who once a month invaded the town like a barbarian horde, and who, with their loud traffic in buying and selling, made the streets a pande­monium. They crowded the public-houses from early morning, turning every tavern into a scene of boisterous good fellowship. At times some distempered element would be released, and straightway forgotten enmities were aroused and men swung at each other in a blaze of anger. Far into the closing day the Bacchanalian revel went on, while a stream of maudlin folk balladry issued with the reek of men and beer from open doors. At

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night they went home in their carts, bawling to the stars, their women-folk beside them, patient, tired, often hungry, accepting it all as the preordained circumstance of a woman’s lot.

These were the class whose natural medium of ex­pression was Gaelic, and thus in the minds of the young the native language connoted a crude elemental stratum of society. A generation was springing up not only ignorant of the native tongue but contemptuous of a spiritual heritage which was the very life-breath of the national being. Roger Mangan and his wife could thus talk openly of their most intimate concerns in the presence of their children, who realized during these interludes of Gaelic speech that a gate had been opened into some preserve from which it was deemed wise they should be excluded.

“Aye,” Roger said, pursuing the thread of a thought, “he’ll do something yet—the fellow with the big eyes,” and he looked at the drooped figure of his son still deep in his studies, and then at his wife who had resumed her knitting.

“With the help of God,” she responded fervently.

“There’s something in the lad brings back that brother of mine who died,” he went on reflectively. “Maurice. Just the same turn of the head, the same way of doubling himself over a page. You remember Maurice?”

She shook her head.

“I forgot. You were hardly born then. If ever a boy was gifted, ’twas he. Scholar’s English he had. Could talk it like a book. And he could turn you a verse in the Irish with as little thought as it takes a bird to give out a sprinkle of song.”

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“He could?”

“God’s truth. Let the blind fiddler play, or a young girl twist a dance in the moonlight, or anything new and strange to happen, and in less time than it would take you to bless yourself, he’d have the wonder of it caught in a rhyme.”

“Your people had always a great gift of learning,” she remarked.

“They had” he assented, with conscious pride. “In every generation of the Mangans there was some scholar. God to have spared him, Maurice would be a star of knowledge. Look at that trunk full of his verses, all in the Irish, upstairs. Only that there’s no respect for the tongue in these days, with many that have it ashamed to speak it, his praises would be sounded east and west.”

“A thousand pities he to die so young. What hap­pened to him, Roger?”

“ ’Twas how he rambled out one spring evening and threw himself down under a tree, reading. He was after a hard day’s ploughing, and with the great weariness that was on him he fell asleep. There was a dew falling. He woke with a heavy chill upon him.”

“So he would.”

“Then some kind of a fever took him. It burned him up. There was a fearful thirst on him. All hours he’d be gasping, ‘Water—spring water.’”

“God pity us!”

“Strange ways he had. ‘I’ll make a poem some day,” he’d tell us, and we sitting round the fire after supper, ‘that will live till the trump of the Archangel is heard. ’Tis stirring in my mind: I feel it like a thing quickening to its birth.’ And he’d prophesy ’twould set men’s

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hearts burning. Many a night he’d be up in the moun­tain with no living soul but himself—pondering, ponder­ing, and it shaping itself in his mind.”

“Alone?” she exclaimed, dropping a stitch. “In the darkness of the night?”

“Aye, surely.”

“Wasn’t that terrible queer?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it was. It used to put the father in a red rage anyhow. ‘what the devil’s on you to be alone up there, your head among the stars? ’he’d shout.”

“ ‘I’m never alone,’ he’d say. ‘There’s always a crowd.’

“ ‘A crowd ? What crowd? ’ he’d ask, puzzled.

 “ ‘My thoughts.’

“ ‘Your—thoughts ? ’ and a shadow would come into my father’s eyes. ’Tisn’t losing your senses you are?’
“ ‘No fear,’ he’d answer, smiling. ‘With every step upward my mind grows clearer and clearer. Up there over the world I gather all the wonder there is into my soul. One day I’ll give it out the way the summer breaks on the earth with its tide of miracles.’ ”

“God forgive me, Roger, but that was strange talk out of a young man’s mouth. Nothing like anything I ever heard. He mustn’t have been altogether right in his mind.”

“Others said that as well as you—said it out of their ignorance,” he remarked, frowning.

“But no man, and he to be in his right senses, would have his head full of such wild fancies, surely?”

“Wild fancies only to them that lack knowledge. The old priest, Father Harmon, made it plain to me.”

“The priest should know.”

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“Aye. He did know. For he was a man full of understanding. The books that he had no man could reckon. Histories and poems and the like in half a dozen languages. ’Twas said he could shame many in Rome if he had the will to do it.”

“I often heard talk of him, and I a child. And what did he say of Maurice?”

“ ‘Tell me, Father’ said I one day, soon after the brother had died, ‘was there anything wrong with Maurice ? No one knew him better than you’

“ ‘Why do you ask that, Roger ?’ he said.

“ ‘Well, Father’ said I, “ ’twas how there was a kind of whisper abroad that he—he wasn’t all there.’

“He laughed at that—the way you’d laugh at a child’s nonsense. ’Twas dusk at the time, and we were walking along the old glen road. ‘Look there, Roger’ said he, pointing to the east, ‘ do you see that star?’

‘It’s a wonder for brightness’ said I.

“ ‘It is’ said he; ‘but a greater wonder for brightness was the mind of Maurice Mangan.’ ”

“He said that—the priest?”

“He’s dead and I wouldn’t belie him. I’d swear to the words before God.”

“Well, surely.”

“ ‘It’s like this’ said he. ‘Most of us live our lives shut up in a bit of a room with only a single window. Always the one view. The same patch of sky. The same field and bush and tree. Things fixed as in a painted picture.’ ”

“What did he mean by that?”

“Wait. ‘You’ll meet an odd man here and there’ says he, ‘and the room that is his has windows open to the four winds. His eye and his mind take in the whole

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ring of the world. When such a one talks of things from which ourselves are shut out we’re dumbfounded. We whisper to our neighbour that he’s a bit odd and queer—a little touched, maybe. Maurice was like that. He had wisdom and knowledge hidden from those around him. You never heard of one Virgil?’ said the priest.

Indeed no, Father,’ said I.

Well,’ said he, ‘Virgil is dead—dead these thousands of years. He wrote verses. Wrote, like Maurice, of simple country things—of the good earth, of seedtime and harvest, of shepherds and ploughmen. ’Twas in the Latin—his own tongue—he made his songs. They’ve outlasted the centuries. They’ll outlive you and me and the generations to follow us. And now let me tell you, Roger Mangan,’ says he, ‘that never was there a human mind so close to another’s as was your brother’s mind to his.’

“ ‘But my brother’s rhymes and the like,’ said I in wonder, ‘they’re all in the Irish.’

“ ‘That’s of no account,’ said he. ‘Language is but an accident. ’Tis the thought that matters. And their thought was one—each a spark from the one living flame. I have compared them closely, and only that Maurice hadn’t a syllable of the Latin, I’d swear his words were but a scholar’s echo of his reading in Virgil. Tell them they lie,’ says he, ‘them that say he wasn’t all there. Do you see’—says he again— ‘that little kid on top of the fence nibbling the green shoots on the thorn bushes?’

“ ‘I do surely,’ said I.

“ ‘How much does the little creature know of what you and I are saying? How much of what we are thinking? Of what we are feeling?’

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“ ‘As little’ said I, ‘as the bush itself.’

 “ ’Tis well answered’ said he. ‘A wide gulf lies between our intelligence and hers. ’Tis hardly as wide as that which sundered your brother’s mind from that of the common herd about him. They lie, Roger, they lie!’ he repeated, anger in his voice as we parted. I remember every word as if it was only yesterday.”

“Glory be to God, that was wonderful. Yet I wouldn’t wish Stephen to grow like that. I’d be troubled. I’d be happier, somehow, and he not to be too gifted.”

“No one can be too gifted.”

“But ’tis said that too much learning often goes to the head.”

“Too little of it makes one a fool. Knowledge is no burden.”

“You’re wiser than myself in such matters, Roger,” she said humbly.

“I am. With a good head and the will to learn, any man can rise in the world. Look at Peter O’Donnell. You remember the starved bit of a place his people had?”

“I do indeed. A couple of perished fields. One or two cows, and they hard set to find a mouthful of grass between the stones. Never a drop of sweet milk, God help them, till after the calving.”

Aye so; but young Peter had brains, and the wish to get on. When he went to Cork he had hardly a stitch on his back. Look at him now—one of the strong men of the town, with his castle of a house up in Montenotte, his carriage and pair prancing through the streets, his sons and his daughters mixing with the best. And what did it?”

“A miracle of God, I suppose,” she ventured.

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“No miracle,” he answered dryly. “The power of his brain and the strength of his will, that did it. I know—I had it from himself. The aunt put him to a job where he slaved for a crown a week. But every night he’d go to classes. He told me he used to stay up long after Shandon had struck twelve—and often one and two—mastering the languages and the sciences, and God knows what. ‘I set out,’ said he, ‘to find my way to the top, and never once did I look behind. It was a stiff climb, for I was no better than a cripple setting out with only a scanty share of learning and less money. But a strong will and a quick mind,’ said he, ‘will conquer the world. Stephen has the scholar’s mind—that’s clear from what happened to-day; but ’tis too soon to say if the will behind it is strong. He’s a queer lad in some ways.”

“I don’t think we’ll ever need to worry about him,” she said. “He may be a little different from the others— but then, what two children were ever alike in every­thing?”

Stephen had finished his task and was carefully blotting a page when, amid the rich flow of Gaelic inflection, he caught the sound of his own name. He turned to them.

“You’re talking about me,” he said, laughing. In­stinctively he addressed his mother. She was the centre of his affections. His father’s place was in that dim frontier where love mingled with a sense of respectful fear.

His father recognized the distinction, and had no quarrel with the adjustment. To him it seemed wise and natural that the relations between fathers and sons should never approach the region of intimacy. Nature had drawn the line, and to overstep it was to pervert the instinct of paternity.

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With mothers it was different. No impossible gulf of masculine strength and stern force of character stretched between the child and the mother. Hadn’t nature, he reasoned, taught the child in its infancy to seek life at the mother’s breast? It was only to be expected that the nascent intelligence should reach out its tendrils to the drooping stem rather than to the upright bole.

He felt no jealous pang in discovering, as the years advanced, that this attitude tended to become constant. That was only as it should be. Alone with her the boys could be gay and boisterous and even quarrelsome. When he was present he saw to it that the urgency of their youth was held in check. So now it was to his mother Stephen addressed his playful comment “You’re talking about me.”

And it was she who answered, u If we are, Stephen, we’re saying nothing that isn’t good.”

**Chapter II**

**NIGHT AND MORNING**
I

THE following morning Stephen woke early. The house, always so full of life, was very still. In the silence he could hear the regular breathing of his younger brother, Garry, who slept beside him, and the slow tick- tock of the old-fashioned clock in the adjoining room. The fresh light of the young day was pouring in. A flutter of leaf shadows patterned the window-blind.

His mother, always the first to rise, was not yet astir. On her slight but uncomplaining shoulders much of the burden of the home seemed to rest. It was her morning task to call Ansty, the servant girl; to open the shop; take down the heavy window shutters and place them one by one—twelve in all—in the recess at the far end of the store. Having breakfasted, it was time for her to rouse the rest of the household. This ordinarily simple task had to be done with anxious care, for family custom had ordained that during its progress her man should not be disturbed. Roger Mangan hated the hustle attendant on school going, and came downstairs only when his three boys had left for school.

The interval between rising and school going was one to draw out all the reserves of her patient forbearance. Healthy young animals sleep profoundly, and calling

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them is an ungrateful task. The young have to be dragged through thick webs of sleep to the surface of consciousness. Like fish disturbed in the deep shadows of a pool they awake from a world of slumberous ease to encounter the raw reality of the common day. Who can chide if there is a momentary sense of resentment against the angel who has troubled the waters?

Bred of the urgency of preparation, there was always a note of fitful unrest in the air. The very noise of the tea things seemed to enjoin haste, losing half its pleasant suggestion. Nerves were sensitive; tempers on edge. The playful give and take of the evening meal had given way to a waspish impatience. Some one was fated to mislay a book, another a pen, a third an exercise. Irking in its repetition could be heard the question, “Did any one see?” At the last moment a button would be missing from a trousers, a shoelace had snapped, a rent in some garment revealed itself and needed to be sewn. In the midst of it all, busy, patient, hushing alarms, soothing nerves, everybody’s handmaid, was the mother. Only when the last lunch had been stored, the last schoolbag strapped, the last querulous complaint satisfied, did she know peace.

Stephen’s awaking long before this hurly-burly was due to a disturbing dream. He was one of those imaginative boys whose nights are often troubled with half-delirious fancies. The same dream would repeat itself at frequent intervals. There was one which so oppressed his spirit that fears of its recurrence would often invade his mind as he knelt down by his bed to say his night prayers.

“ I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, . . . was crucified. . .

That was a clear-cut image, easy to perceive with the mind’s eye—and there was the crucifix on the wall to hold in the wandering fancy—but the shadow of the impending terror would suddenly interpose and blot out the imaged Christ and its reflex in his mind.

The source of this haunting dream was the old mill in which was ground the corn which his father used to buy extensively in the town market. The ponderous mill wheel slowly revolving on its great axis, and the turbulent rush of waters in the mill race always aroused in him an oddly confused emotion in which joy and fear seemed to contend for mastery. Standing on the bank beside it, he used to feel strangely small and weak. Through the thick curtain of sound made by the onrush of the dam and the throb of machinery voices from the opposite bank came to him wanly. Queer, ghost voices. When he halloed to his companions his own voice sounded strangely unfamiliar—a muffled note such as comes with the impact of a hammer on soft wood. All the time trickles of water kept slipping from rung to rung on the broad band of the revolving wheel. It was funny the way they glistened as they fell. They made you think of icicles dropping from the eaves.

In his dream he always saw himself prone on the giant wheel and being whirled round and round with no hope of release. His clutch was frantic, and when in an agony of terror he tried to scream for help, his voice was held prisoner in his throat. Should he let go his hold he would be precipitated into the swirl of waters which flung their icy spray on his body each time he passed underneath. Round, and round, and round, and no one in all the world to see him, to pity him, to respond to that strangled cry, “Help! Help!” Always when

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he woke his body was drenched with sweat, his hair matted, his heart pounding. The oppressive horror of the dream threw its shadow on his waking conscious­ness. If he woke while the room was yet in darkness it held him in its grip for a long time. When, as on this morning, the light of the new day brightened the room, revealing all its familiar objects, the overpowering shadow soon gave way to a sense of security.

He rarely told any one of these dreams. He could be communicative to a point of eagerness about many things, but he shrank from any disclosure of the inner movements of his mind. Often he sought to puzzle out the source of these troubled visions, and usually he could trace them back to some happening of the day, or to some story which had absorbed his imagination. As he lay awake now, he recalled how at nightfall on the previous evening a ballad singer in the street had sung a rhymed chronicle of some of the political happen­ings of the day. The singer had an audience composed of a knot of street urchins who lustily joined in the oft- recurring chorus which hammered itself into his brain:

“That’s the way the wheel is turning,

Rolling on from day to day;

Marwood died across in England,

Carey shot upon the say.”

In this image of time as a revolving wheel he perceived the germ out of which, like some monstrous growth, his dream had sprung. He tried to shake off all further thought of the night’s horror by turning his eyes on the pictures hanging on the walls of his room. They were only two, and had been placed there years before by

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his father. Roger Mangan was rigid in his belief that nothing of worth could be had cheaply. He was slow to spend, but always he sought the best within his means, and his judgment was seldom at fault. He knew nothing of art, and the names of Raphael and da Vinci held no meaning for him, yet when he went into an art store in Cork, instinct, his only canon of taste, directed him to a fine coloured print of the Madonna de la Sedia, and a large engraving of The Last Supper.

Stephen’s eyes wandered now from one picture to another. He was so long familiar with them that he could reproduce them in his mind even to the last detail. Always he felt that the eyes of the Madonna followed him, no matter from what point of vision he looked into her face. Their expression was constantly changing. When sin troubled his soul they held a look of half tender reproach, or of wistful melancholy. When he came home after confession, his spirit a very bubble of joy, the film of sadness gave way to a transcendent smile. This morning, knowing as she did the tribulation through which he had passed in his sleep, they were full of maternal pity.

The Last Supper inspired a different mood—a mood oddly out of tune with its subject. He was aware that the theme was profoundly religious—the radiant figure of the Christ was sufficient to enable him to perceive that—but the spiritual emanation flowing from the scene was of too mystic a quality for his apprehension. It was the physical attributes with which the artist had endowed the individual figures in the group which stirred his imagination. Strength and beauty touched some deep chord in his being. They were gifts which Nature, he thought with some bitterness, had denied himself.

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He felt that he had no comeliness of person. Had Nature given him a choice, he would have modelled himself on one of these twelve men of rugged vigour. He liked the strong moulding of each head, with its profusion of hair curling so thickly from the brow to the nape of the neck, the splendid frame, the clean chiselling of the nose, the firm yet sensitive mouth.

His nature shrank from uncomely things. It was attracted in the same degree by what seemed lovely in his eyes. He used to shudder at the sight of a poor man whose neck had been wasted to the proportions of a human wrist by some malignant disease. As he saw him move slowly, step by step, along the pavement on his way to Mass each Sunday morning, holding himself upright in the way of a woman with a pail poised on her head, he used to wonder how on so frail a prop the head could maintain its poise. He had a shuddering vision of its collapse one day, and felt he should cry out in horror were he to witness the ghastly spectacle.

The sight of a bleary-faced harridan of the tinker class, her hair disordered, her bodice ripped open, her tongue shrieking vile obscenities as she was being hustled by the police to the bridewell on fair days, used to make him sick. While his companions roared with laughter he pretended to smile. He hated himself for feeling like that, and wished he could be like his fellows. The haunting fear that they should discover in him a lack of these qualities common to themselves goaded him into doing things that aroused into mute protest something deep within his soul.

He had little physical courage. Yet this sharp spur of pride urged him into actions which seemed to spring from a spirit as daring as that possessed by the most

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adventurous. Only few of his companions had ever attempted the perilous feat of clambering round the turret which rose midway from the battlement of the bridge high over the swirling waters of the river. The turret was encircled by a grass-covered ledge, scarcely half a foot wide. This was the only foothold. You moved round with infinite caution, preserving your balance by groping along the stonework with outspread hands. A false movement—a quiver of a nerve—and you were lost. In one of those desperate urgings of desire to put himself on a level with the best, Stephen attempted the feat. He emerged unscathed from the ordeal, inwardly exulting in his triumph. Of his own volition he had submitted himself to this supreme test of courage, and who among his friends could ever divine that it was but a frantic gesture to cloak his real self?

Here, awake in his bed in the early morning, his mind could move as his will prompted. There was no irking code of schoolboy convention to which he had to con­form under pain of being an outcast. For the moment he was master of circumstance, not its slave. And so his eyes wandered from the figure of Saint Peter to that of his brother Andrew, and from him to Thomas, and from Thomas to Philip, and he felt how a man endowed with such a vigour of grace as these could march through life rejoicing in his strength, scornful of all the tyrannies which the herd would impose upon him.

II

He heard a slight movement in the next room and knew that his mother was dressing. The knowledge was

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comforting. There was a sense of loneliness in being awake while all the house was hushed in sleep.

She was passing through his room on her way to call Ansty, when she was attracted by the wide-open eyes.

“Awake so early?” she asked in surprise, hushing her voice so as not to disturb his brothers, who were both sleeping soundly.

“I couldn’t sleep somehow,” he answered quietly.

“Was anything wrong; your teeth weren’t troubling you?” she asked with concern, noticing the tired face.

“Oh, no. It was just that I woke early and couldn’t sleep again.”

“Hadn’t you better get up then?” she asked. “We’ll have some breakfast together. You must be longing for a cup of tea. I’ll put on the little kettle and ’twill be ready in no time.”

“I’d love that,” he said eagerly.

She left to call Ansty, and then went downstairs to open the shop. He liked the idea of a meal alone with his mother. There was in it a kind of lovely intimacy. With the exception of this early repast she took all her meals with his father. The Sunday dinner was the only meal at which the family sat down together. It was a wise arrangement, for the boys, under the shadow of their father’s dominating presence, felt oddly constrained and ill at ease.

He slipped into his clothes, and sank on his knees beside the bed. He said his prayers with less delibera­tion than at night. In the morning, the pleasant daylight around you, you were not so acutely conscious of God, nor so much afraid of the thought of Death and Judg­ment, of Heaven and Hell. At night it was different, with only the light of a candle and shadows flickering

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in remote comers. You recalled how, at the Retreat, Father Xavier cited instances of many who had died in their sleep and had to face God without the grace of a moment’s preparation. And you remembered, too, the tragic story of one Hamlet, whose ghost appeared to his son, and made great lamentation because he had been taken in his sins. With the possibility of such a monstrous fate befalling you, you repeated with intense fervour:

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, assist me in my last agony.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you.”

He raced now through his morning prayers, hardly aware of what he was mumbling, and in the pause between the Hail Mary and the Creed, and again between the Creed and the Confiteor, he had a sudden vision of the breakfast-table downstairs—the clean, fresh cloth— the cups of hot tea, sending up their little clouds of steam—the toast so brown and buttery—he and his mother talking.

He galloped downstairs, taking two steps at a time, and entered the kitchen. Breakfast was just ready, and Ansty had gone into the shop to keep an eye to things while his mother was having her meal.

The simple breakfast had all that quiet intimacy which he had foreseen. Usually the family board was a noisy one. Cups of tea were being continually filled and re­filled, cream jug and sugar bowl kept passing and re­passing like figures on a chessboard, rounds of bread were being cut and buttered, and all the time there was the incessant shrill of voices shot through with shafts of irony and bitter retort.

How pleasantly quiet it was this morning! The shining spirit of the May day outside was in the room.

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The toast was just the delicate brown that he relished. There was cream skimmed from the milk left in the bowl overnight—the one indulgence that his mother permitted herself. He stayed her hand when she went to cook an egg for him. Eggs gave him an uncom­fortable feeling. If he ventured to eat one on Easter morning it was only because it was Easter. It seemed a kind of duty somehow. He had been told that the egg was a figure of the Resurrection. The emergence of bird life from the shell was an image of the man-God breaking from the tomb. The egg in itself was so dis­tasteful that his inner mind refused to accept it as a fitting symbol of the great mystery. The sight of the yolk always made him feel queer inside. It had sometimes a faint reddish tinge, and once or twice, on breaking the shell, he had found a speck that looked like blood floating in the yellow liquid. That gave him nausea. He com­promised now by accepting the top of his mother’s egg. He could nibble at the white. It was firm, and looked like china.

“It’s nice to be up early,” he remarked, crunching a piece of hot toast.

“It is—on a morning like this. In the cold and dark of the winter, Stephen, it isn’t so pleasant.”

“I know; but it’s lovely to-day—so quiet and every­thing. Look, mother,” he said eagerly, “I’d love to have breakfast this way always. Won’t you give me a call every morning going downstairs?”

“And spoil your fine morning’s sleep?” “I’d never mind. Not one bit. Honest, mother,” he assured her, his eyes glowing.

“You think so now, Stephen,” she smiled. “To­morrow you’d be grumbling at losing a whole hour’s

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 rest. Why, you’re all as cross as a bag of weasels when you’re called.”

“Only try me and you’ll see,” he answered, laughing.

“I’ll jump up like a trout to a fly.”

“Very well, then, if you’d like.”

When they had finished, and Ansty had been called to her breakfast, they went into the shop. The inner part of the store was a public bar, and was curtained off in green baize; the outer portion served as a general grocery. A counter ran through its entire length. At the rear of the bar was a square taproom panelled in oak-stained wood and furnished with tables of the same colour as the panelling. This was a haven for those who liked to sit down leisurely, seasoning their drink with talk.

This part of the concern only served, however, to provide useful trimmings for the more substantial trade in corn which Stephen’s father carried on in the adjoining store. Though a door of communication led from this store to the bar and grocery, Roger Mangan held himself aloof from that part of his business. To sell tea and sugar, or to serve every Tom and Dick who needed a drink was, he considered, a form of traffic out of keeping with his dignity.

It was different in the meal store. To hoist a bag of Indian meal, or of flour, on to your shoulders, and to heave it on to a waiting cart, was work which no son of Adam need disdain. This task, however, only fell to him when some inconsiderate customer came after hours when the two workmen whom he employed had left. On these occasions he stormed inwardly. The farmer or his serving man had, however, come a long way for his cartload of feeding stuffs, and were he to

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betray his feelings the town had many rival traders who would be glad to welcome his customer with open arms.

Stephen liked the fresh cleanliness of the shop at this hour. His mother made it a rule of life to leave every­thing shining before shutting up at night. Pewter drinking vessels and glasses were scoured and carefully polished; the drainer, a contrivance set in the counter to receive the frothy overflow from foaming pints of beer, was emptied of stale liquor and then soused with hot water; the counter, topped with linoleum the shade of light chocolate, was so polished as to give dim re­flections of the drinking vessels placed upon it.

A shop in itself is not a subject calculated to awaken the sensibility of an artist, yet with the May morning pouring in through the open door and window, the bright patches of light and the pools of shadow, the gleam of pewter and crystal, the transparent hues of the wines and cordials—of port and claret, of sherry, of whisky and brandy—there were elements of beauty. Its wholesome sweetness penetrated Stephen’s senses. He had seldom been in the shop at this early hour. In the evening it had always lost much of its fresh comeli­ness. There would be the sourish smell of spilt liquor. Wet rings left by drinking vessels would show on the bar counter. Customers would be coming and going. There would be talk, perhaps noisy argument, and some­times awkward overcrowding and the splash of spilt liquor. The air would hold the reek of many odours— the pleasant pungency of whisky penetrating through the more drowsy fumes of wine and other liquors. There would be the sickening sweetness of raspberry, and sometimes the strange odour of gin which was

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measured from those funny bottles ranged on the shelf like a row of little stocky men, their heads sunk deep in their squat shoulders. They had always, Stephen noted, heart-shaped labels, with “De Kuyper’s, Holland” on them. Some of the red wines from Bordeaux had lovely labels, showing clusters of dark luscious grapes the colour of sloes, a faint purplish dust on the richer purple beneath.

He went to the door and looked out. Directly over the way was the baker’s. Fresh loaves, piping hot, were being brought on large wooden trays from the ovens, and being stored on the shelves and in the window. Across the street he could sniff the mellow fragrance of the new bread. He wondered how the loaves could be always brought to the same degree of brownness. When he speared a round of bread and held it before the bars of the grate it often took on a lovely golden brown, but there were times when it turned to a dark bronze, and when you were not overcareful (letting your mind wander) your thoughts were suddenly shot back by the smell of burning followed by a little puff of acrid grey smoke. You could, of course, use the knife edge to scrape away the burnt patch, but the toast had then a faint sooty flavour, and you hid it maybe in the pile of broken bread which was given at intervals to some neighbour who reared fowl.

Stephen liked best the loaves called lumps. They were crust all over—a golden brown crust. Cutting them made you think of a hazel kernel, for under the crust the pith had the whiteness of snow. Several little peaks, like the brown, upstanding ears of a fox, rose from the top. When you were sent for a lump it was tempt­ing to break off in crossing the road one of those peaks, and to feel its crisp, nutty sweetness in your teeth.

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There were pan loaves and wellingtons, and, lastly, there were the common loaves which were sold cheaper. These had a darker colour and a coarser grain. You knew when you saw a boy munching this bread in school that his people were not too well off—that he was different, somehow.

The most enchanting feature of the baker’s window was the display of currant buns. You could buy one for a ha’penny. They had a buttery shine on top. Sometimes you picked out the currants one by one and ate them. They had a lovely jelly taste, but those em­bedded in the upper crust were often burned dry. They tasted like ashes, and you spat them out, hastily wiping your lips. The currant buns were steaming now, and, though he had had his breakfast, he could not resist the craving for one. He ran across the street and returned, picking out the sweet hot currants. He was sorry to have come so soon to the last mellow mouthful. Why was it that all exquisite sensations seemed to pass in a moment?

He suddenly thought he should like to go into the garden. Never had he or his brothers ventured there before school. You had always the fear of being late urging you on. That was why, in lacing your boots, you skipped over every second eyelet, why your hair was often a tousled mat, why, on an odd morning, when you overslept, you gave your face only a Scotch lick. To-day he had oceans of time.

He passed from the shop into the yard, then made his way through a lumber shed, where there was only a dim light on the brightest day, and was a place to shun after dark, and, unlatching a gate, ascended by a dozen flagged steps into the garden.

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It was only a little garden, but how different it was at this hour, with everything drenched with dew and sparkling in the sun. He could smell the southernwood. His father loved its scent, and liked to break off a spray of its feathery green and stick it in his buttonhole. In after years a chance whiff of its aromatic perfume, blown from some garden, would always call up a vision of his father. He saw him sitting on the old garden seat, his great shoulders slightly hunched as he read his paper, in front of him the clump of southernwood from which he had broken off the silvery green spray which he would sniff at intervals.

Stephen’s curiosity in flowers was almost a passion, and in spring many of his odd pennies went to the purchase of little packets of seeds, which showed on their front rainbow-coloured blooms. Many of them had impressive names, and it was often a bitter disillusion to find that some, whose description promised a pageant of colour, turned out little better than the common flowers of the wayside. Linum grandiflorum rubrum—that sounded like a fine sonorous phrase chanted by a priest at High Mass. Patiently you waited from April to June, a vision in your mind of something splendid as the Apocalypse, and your reward was but a weedy, scarlet thing—pretty enough in the mass, maybe, but as absurdly named as homely featured girls who answer to the names of Gloria and Christabel.

This morning he moved eagerly from patch to patch of seedlings, and thrilled at their vigorous promise. In the evenings, after school, when the sun had burned the surface of the earth to ashy grey, they had none of this quivering sense of life and growth. He came on a big snail preying on the tender heart of an aster, and promptly

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removed it. He disliked the cold slimy feel of the creature, and a little wave of repulsion passed over him as he crushed it underfoot. It made a crackling noise, and left a sickening smear on the garden path. To dispel the sensation he plucked some leaves of flowering currant, pressed them between his palms and sniffed their pleasant sour-sweet smell.

Early morning was an undreamed of miracle which had been revealed to him only to-day. He left the garden half reluctantly, and made his way back to the shop. His mother was bent over the morning paper, which was spread open on the counter. As he came in she lifted her head.

“What on earth have you been doing?” she inquired.

“Just fooling about in the garden,” he laughed. “It’s different in the morning, somehow; everything wet and shining.”

“Early morning is the best time,” she remarked. “Here in the town you all grow up knowing as little about it as if you were born blind. Out of bed, a gobble of breakfast, and off to school wiping the sleep out of your eyes. That’s the way with all of you.”

“Used it be different long ago?” To the young the youth of their parents is always “long ago.”

“Bless your heart, boy, when I was a little girl in the country we’d be up with the lark and away into the fields. The dew used to be over everything, and you’d see the print of your feet in the grass. We’d run this way and that, weaving a kind o’ pattern with our bare feet. We used to be wild with delight coming on a shower o’ mushrooms, and they sprinkled like curd in the patches o’ grass favoured by the sheep. Dear, dear, what fun it used to be,” she concluded, a little catch in her voice.

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Stephen saw it all wistfully. It seemed pitiful, some­how, this change from the young delight of a little care­free girl in the fields to this small mother of his with so many cares pressing on her kind shoulders and ever surrendering herself to the clamant needs of the house­hold.

The clock chimed the quarter after eight.

“It’s time to call the rest,” he suggested. And then, eagerly, “I’ll rout them out for you this morning.”

“Well, if you wish, Stephen. But warn them on their lives not to disturb your father. No talk or argument, mind.”

“Trust me,” he flung back as he hurried off.

He was conscious of the superiority which the early riser always feels over those still lying abed, and moving up the stairs he carried himself a little jauntily. When he entered the room he found his brothers still fast asleep. He shook each of them in turn. They brushed their hands across their sleep-filled eyes, and seeing who the disturber was, gave a sleepy protest and cuddled deeper into the warmth of the bed. He straightway swept off the bed-covering, leaving their hot bodies exposed to the cool air from the open window.

Instantly a gust of temper shook them. Each in turn flung some stinging epithet at him. He laughed de­risively as he saw them clutch the trailing ends of the sheets and drag them on to their beds. Owen, the elder, stung by his brother’s mockery, leaped from the bed, and, coming into handigrips, endeavoured to hurl him to the floor. Stephen struggled desperately, and in his rage tore a long rent in his brother’s nightshirt. An ominous movement was heard in the next room. . . .

“Father!” all three whispered in dismay. They had

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barely time to fly, panic-stricken, out of the room, when he appeared in the doorway, a blaze of wrath, more dreadful because of his disarray and his mass of rough hair, always brushed back, now tumbling over his forehead. Stephen, in his retreat, caught a momentary glimpse of his father. Something seemed to clutch his heart.

Roger growled, and, finding the room empty, returned to his bed. A minute later two half-naked figures stole back on tiptoe, slipped with drawn breath into their clothes and, half fearful of pursuit, made their way stealthily downstairs.

**Chapter 2**

**MASTERS**

I

A LITTLE after nine o’clock Stephen set out for school. Scarcely had he left the door than his mind became perturbed. All the impressions of the morning van­ished. Even that grotesque but terrible apparition in the doorway of his room receded into the background.

Other mornings it would have been different. The simple happenings of the household would have lingered on till, stepping into the school porch, the hum of voices reached his ear. That was the signal to strip your mind of all thoughts of home. Learning, he had discovered, was a jealous mistress and bestowed her gifts only where she received undivided loyalty. So this hum of voices had come to be a warning signal to bury deep down within you things floating on the surface of your mind, letting them emerge only when you flung out of school at three o’clock.

This morning he had to go into the Senior School— Mr. Hill’s. Instead of turning to the right when he entered the porch, as he had done since a child, his way would be to the left. To what unknown experiences might this change of direction be the prelude? The

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thought gave him a queer tightening of the heart. The lads, they would be all right. Stephen knew all of them by sight, and more than one familiarly. In a small town community like Carberymore no school-going boy is a stranger to another. As he was normally quiet and self-effacing in his ways, he was not likely to come into conflict with others. Only those of his own household divined the passionate nature lurking under his shy manner. They knew he could be forbearing almost to weakness, but that when touched to the quick all the floodgates of reserve would give way. In these mo­ments he was capable of any madness. At most times, however, he was sufficiently self-controlled to be able to bank the dangerous fires smouldering deep down within him. In the school there was no ragging of new boys, and the change from one set of classmates to another did not disturb him.

He was less at ease in reflecting on the teacher under whose desk he would have to sit this morning. He had a warm liking for Mr. Wiseman who had steered his course so far. His temper was pleasant, and when, as on yesterday, circumstances being too much for him, he raked the class with a withering fire of invective, he was gentler than ever next day. You knew somehow that he had endured pangs of remorse in the interval, and that he was conveying by everything but explicit state­ment his regret for his outburst of distempered passion.

Mr. Wiseman, too, had a way of looking into your heart and mind. He sensed your feelings. He was tender to your faults. While he took a natural pride in those who shone, he had pity rather than scorn for the dunce, and would patiently help the stragglers along the road.

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At times he made learning so pleasant that you forgot you were in school. Places on the map were not merely round black dots to be dabbed at with a pointer. Every dot was a seed that blossomed into flowers, or like one of those rockets that make a puff of sound in the air and send a lovely chain of stars sailing down the atmosphere.

Some half-forgotten relative dying in New Jersey had left Mr. Wiseman a considerable sum of money. This he used in travelling to far places during his midsummer holidays. He had a way of describing these scenes that made them living pictures in your mind. It was as if for a spell he had given you his own gift of vision. He invited you at one time to ramble with him through Paris, to drink coffee with him at one of the shining cafe tables under the green trees in the boulevards, to go idly along the Quai Voltaire, lingering at the old book­stalls, to drop on your knees in Notre Dame, and go lastly to the cemetery of Pere-Lachaise. “The end of all dreams is here,” he used to say. Breathing it all in, you felt as the lesson ended that you were awakening from some exhilarating dream.

Imaginatively he would take you into a gondola in Venice, and you were thrilled as you glided along the Grand Canal. The gondolier held his oar suspended as you passed under that palace where, “like a cloudy fire,” Mr. Wiseman said, “the spirit of Lord Byron burned.” He was the poet who had written The Isles of Greece— that splendid poem in your school reader. You always remembered that the National Board of Education, fearful of planting the seed of rebellion in your heart, had carefully omitted a short passage of three lines from the poem. There is a glamour in forbidden things, and you kept saying to yourself:

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“Freedom’s battle once begun,

Bequeathed from bleeding sire to son,

Though baffled oft is ever won.”

“Come to Bonn,” Mr. Wiseman would say another time. “Quaint old town set in the woods. Why are so many strangers making for that small house over there in the little narrow sunken street? Come, lads, let us troop after them. . . . Upstairs in this low-ceilinged room a wonder boy was born. They called him Ludwig Beethoven. He filled this little house with the music of Heaven. Outside in that high-walled old garden he sat under the trees and dreamed such dreams as no man ever had since God set the world spinning. I’ve been hoping all my life that some boy may pass through this school who will bring as much glory to this old town of Carberymore as did this other boy to Bonn.”

He had a comical way of explaining things that made them stick in your mind.

“No split in the infinitive,” he’d warn you.

“No, sir,” you’d sing in chorus. “Catholics can never be divorced, can they?”

“No, sir. Only Protestants.”

“Neither can the infinitive and its sign—they’re tied for better or worse. Remember that.”

And somehow you always did.

But he could shake your soul though—Mr. Wiseman. That awful day when some fellow scrawled some obscenity on the wall of the playground. He rang the bell in the middle of playtime and ordered all into school. This cutting short of the play hour had never happened before. You felt there was something big

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and threatening in the air—just like the dark clouds that come up before thunder.

You shuffled to your seat whispering, “What is it?” “What’s happened!” The buzz of sound suddenly ceased. He stood quite still facing the school, and for a space never uttered a word. You could feel the silence deepening, deepening, deepening till you had the sense of an invisible web being folded round and round you. His eyes held you, and you dare not turn a glance to the right or to the left.

“Something has happened to-day that has wounded me to the soul.”

He paused a long time, while your heart hung sus­pended.

“There is among you here one who is rotten—rotten to the core. Who he is I don’t know—and never wish to know.”

Vague suspicions of this boy and that passed like shadows across your mind.

“What wrong has he done? . . . Something that makes my soul sick. The eyes are the soul’s windows. Through those windows good and evil enter the mind. Into the soul of each of you whose glance rested for one moment on the work of this boy’s hands the seed of evil was blown. . . .

“Better for that boy that he had never been trained to hold a pen—better for him that his hand should have been a withered stump—better for him that he had never been born than to live to do this vile thing.

“Let no one tell me who he is. Knowing that, I should have to throw him out like a stinking rag. That would be to brand him all his days. In the street, in the hurling field, going and coming from Mass people

would nudge and whisper to each other, ‘That’s he’ …

“Good God, what must his mind be if this is the foul thing it casts up! I hope the Almighty will forgive him, I can’t. Never!”

You went away frightened, half sick, wondering who it was, horribly curious as to the nature of the unclean daub of words, darts of intense relief in the consciousness of your own freedom from guilt shooting through your mind. Some of his terrifying words haunted you.

“Better his hand should have been a withered stump . . . flung out like a stinking rag . . . people whisper­ing ‘that’s he.’”

Yes, it was a wrench to be parted for ever from Mr. 'Wiseman. He seemed to fill a big part in your life. You felt that something of his spirit had gone into yours, nourishing it as the rain and sun nourish a plant. The lads always called him Mr. Wiseman. If some uncouth fellow spoke of him as Wiseman, you felt that some­thing was wrong. It jarred, somehow, like a false note in music. No one felt about Mr. Hill in that way. Most of the fellows referred to him as Ould Hill. Some of the lads, twisting his Christian name of Bernard, called him Barney-O. They had a rhyme about him:

“Between Hill and Hell there is but one letter;

If Hill were in Hell the school would be better.”

 II

As he made bis way along the street Stephen’s mind became a shadow-show of doubts and fears. He fondly

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hoped that the new-comer would pass unnoticed among so many boys. That could well be, for Mr. Hill was growing old and forgetful. On the other hand, should Mr. Hill’s eye alight, unhappily, upon him, would he have to suffer the ordeal of an oral test in the presence of the whole school? Every eye would be on him. Every ear open.

Some of the fellows, he knew, would titter at his nervous blunders. Others might laugh openly. He would be all confusion and misery. His face would be fire, and he’d feel a little quiver at the mouth and try to repress it.

He had been told that it was wise, before sitting for examinations, to pray to the Holy Ghost for enlighten­ment. His lips breathed now, “Spirit of Wisdom, illumine my mind.”

Always a prayer began and ended with the Sign of the Cross. Passers-by seeing him bless himself openly would think it queer. If it were the noontide Angelus, no one would wonder. But that was some hours ahead. He compromised by whispering to himself, “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” furtively making the sign on his breast.

He felt less disturbed now. All would be well maybe. You were often troubled about things, and nothing happened. Then you thought what a pity it was you had not seen ahead.

Passing over the old bridge which linked the two parts of the town, he unconsciously slackened his pace. He loved this tender morning beauty of the river slipping out of the blue-green mists of woods and hills. The scene always ministered to some need in his spirit. However frequently he crossed the bridge, and however

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urgent the errand on which he was being sent, he paused a moment, leaning on the moss-covered parapet to glimpse its loveliness.

He quickened his pace as he left the bridge. Going up Rock Street, he gave a passing glance at the window of a hardware shop. It was the only shop in the town which sold books and periodicals. The window was crowded with an assortment of delf and cutlery, but a comer was reserved for the display of books. The same volumes were set out in the same haphazard way from year’s end to year’s end. Jonah Barrington’s Recollec­tions, Froude’s Oceana, New Ireland, Speeches from the Dock, and The Spirit of the Nation. The only periodical was The Shamrock. Its appearance each week was looked forward to with such eager interest by Stephen and one or two of his friends that they always went to meet the train which brought it from Dublin. They could not brook the hour’s delay that would elapse before the railway porter was free to deliver the parcel, and bore it off in triumph to the newsagents.

Stephen loved to watch that ritual of the unfastening of strings, of the removal of the brown wrapping paper, of the folding of printed sheets with their fresh damp smell into periodical form. And he had always a pleasant thrill when the gentle faded old lady, who always wore black, and had a fine gold chain suspended from her collar, handed him his copy and smiled at him with such understanding. Was it that in this ardour of youth she saw again the bright urgency of her maiden­hood?

He crossed the Market Square, and made his way along the Main Street.

The National School was down Rubbleton Lane. It

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was the last place under Heaven in which young life should be housed during its most formative period. The narrow laneway, ending in a cul-de-sac, was flanked by two rows of squalid little houses, occupied mostly by cobblers and nailers. Most of the cabins, Stephen always noted, had a green patch of house leek growing on the roof. The lane folk believed that the leek was a charm against fire. It was the only vernal thing—if you except the young life flowing through it—in that atmosphere of drabness and decay. The school build­ings, dismal and shabby, occupied the end of the lane. At an earlier day they had served as a temperance hall. They had now that mildewed look which makeshift buildings take on with time.

Stephen’s heart always sank a little as he turned from the main thoroughfare into the cheerless laneway. He stepped into the school porch and stuffed his cap into his pocket. The crowd parted into two streams, and he drifted into the current pouring to the left. He found himself in a gaunt room furnished with long desks on which were graved the initials of many generations of boys. The high walls were limewashed. Their only decoration was a map or two, the official time-table, the General Lesson, and a tablet which bore the inscription, “Practical Rules for Teachers.” A thin blur of dust obscured the wording on the charts. Only the large black-letter type of the first passage of the General Lesson showed clearly. It ran—

“Christians should endeavour, as the Apostle Paul commands us, to live peaceably with all men.”

Mr. Hill was seated at a table making entries in the rolls and register. The boys shuffled into their seats.

There was still some little time before school work was due to begin.

The master’s figure was a familiar one to Stephen, but now for the first time he was able to see Mr. Hill at close quarters. The brief but intense scrutiny affected him disagreeably. He disliked the short, straggling fringe of iron-grey beard under the blue-shaven chin. The pale colourless eyes, the clumsily moulded nose, the droop of the heavy mouth repelled him. A smeary trickle of snuff, reddish brown, came from one nostril. His clothes were clumsy and ill-fitting, and the upper part of the vest was stained with snuff. As his pen moved across the page, a growth of coarse hair showed on his wrist. It grew more sparsely on the back of his hand.

Something in Stephen always shrank from the sight of hair on the hand. He felt that its contact would make him half sick. His father was a big mountain of a man, but his hand was bare as a bleached bone. Mr. Wiseman’s hands were white and delicate. When he shook hands with you on winning a prize they had a warm pleasant feel.

All but a few stragglers had now arrived. Mr. Hill blotted the page, closed the register, and blowing his nose in a red cotton handkerchief, stood up. A short cane which he always carried stuck out from his arm- pit. His eye fell on Stephen.

“You’re Joseph Mangan?” he inquired.

“Stephen Mangan, sir.” The sound of his own voice fell on his ears strangely.

“Very well. One’s as good as the other. Mr. Wiseman has been speaking to me. He seems to think a good deal of you. I hope he hasn’t made a mistake. He often does.”

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Stephen coloured.

“Well, let us see what you’re made of.”

There was an expectant hush. He was the quivering centre of a hundred pairs of curious eyes.

“Let us begin with Arithmetic. You’re good at figures, I understand?”

"I don’t know, sir.”

“Oh, well, it’s easy to determine. Let us see. What’s the formula for an arithmetical progression?”

Stephen was silent. Progressions were outside the scope of the Junior School.

Huh! Never learned progressions?”

 “No, sir.”

“Well! Well!

“Give the formula for an arithmetical progression,” he said, turning to the class. In lusty chorus, as if to proclaim Stephen’s wretched ignorance to all the listening world, the voices shrilled:

“n minus i, multipled by f, equal to l.”

“You see?” he said in triumph.

Stephen’s lips quivered.

“Well, let us try something very simple. Um—a circular ring. How do you find its area?’

Stephen shook his head.

Mr. Hill smiled bleakly.

“Tell him,” he said, with a wave of the hand. And again came the shrill response from the squad of chor­isters.

“Sit down!” he barked, with a contemptuous note of dismissal. The sibilant made a stinging sound like a lash.

Stephen dropped into his seat quivering. Shame, rage, humiliation, a burning sense of injustice filled him.

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He was prompted at one moment to leap like a wild cat at his persecutor, grasp the straggling wisp of beard, and drag it bleeding from its roots. All the primal elements of his nature were unleashed. The Furies possessed him.

What rankled was the overwhelming sense of in­justice. To measure his knowledge by posing problems on branches of a subject which had never been touched on in the course he had covered! To condemn him as one who had flaunted an unmerited reputation—he who was so reticent, so free of any taint of self-esteem. For to Stephen, acutely aware of his own defects of character, bragging seemed to be the most despicable of human weaknesses. He recognized that the gifts of nature were no merit in us. That was a frequent saying of his mother. If Mr. Wiseman had thought well of him, was the fault his? It was all cruel and horrible.

Time soon heals a boy’s wounds, and as the day pro­gressed he began to sense the quality of the strange at­mosphere which pervaded the school. He saw that most of his schoolfellows were governed by fear. On being caned the more devil-may-care showed their re­sentment openly, giving black looks and muttering defiance. These recurring scenes had at first a disturbing effect on his mind. He had the helpless, half-bewildered feeling of one cast for the first time into the rough and tumble of life. Always in the Lower School a note of quiet harmony had prevailed. Each day was like the other. Here no one could forecast what the day or the hour would bring forth.

As the day advanced, the morning scene of which he had been the centre began to emerge in a new perspec­tive. Against the background of the day’s happenings it

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seemed to lose much of its significance. It was to shrink to very small proportions indeed before the school day was ended.

From the high, roughly mortared ceiling of the school­room Stephen noticed a number of paper figures dangling from strings, and making a fantastic dance in the currents of air that blew in through the open windows. He in­quired of his friend, Tom Halligan, who sat beside him, how they came to be there. “I’ll show you,” he said.

It was a favourable moment for idling. Mr. Hill was engaged in marking a number of home exercises. The class had been set to work arithmetic on slates, each boy with his text-book open before him.

“See here,” said Tom, and taking a sheet of paper he swiftly pencilled in caricature the outline of a man’s figure. The head was a full moon, the neck, rising from a body Falstaffian in its proportions, consisted of two close-set upstanding lines. A pair of spindly legs completed the figure. Stephen laughed at the piece of grotesquerie.

His companion, producing a pocket-knife, cut out the figure in sharp outline. This being completed, he chewed the paper waste into a soft pulpy mass. Having got a piece of string, he ran one end through the head and weighted the other with the pulp.

“Watch now,” he said. He glanced to see if he were safely out of Mr. Hill’s line of vision, and sent it flying upward. There it swung like a marionette among the other swaying figures.

Somebody laughed aloud. Mr. Hill sat up sharply. He noticed the sudden dropping of many upturned eyes.

“Who threw that?” he inquired.

No one answered.

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“Who threw that?” he repeated, with an angry emphasis as his eye raked the class.

Stephen felt the colour rising in his cheeks.

“Was it you, Mangan?”

“No, sir,” Stephen answered.

“It was,” he said, and laid the cane across his back.

As he swung it again, Halligan jumped up.

“It wasn’t Stephen Mangan,” he protested. “’Twas I.”

A sudden rage possessed him, and dragging the self- confessed offender from the desk on to the floor, he sent him reeling to the end of the room.

“Good God,” he said, “such blackguardism!”

He was pale and breathless as he sat down to resume the work on which he had been engaged. There was a solemn silence. Nothing could be heard but the steady beat of the clock and the scoring of pencils on slates.

When the smarting pain on his shoulder had subsided, Stephen, moved by curiosity, ventured to turn round. His companion was standing by the large wooden box at the end of the room in which, for want of a cellar, the winter fuel supply was stored. Catching Stephen’s questioning glance he winked back and smiled drolly, as if it were all a jolly adventure.

Stephen was thrilled. He thought to see him crushed and broken—his eyes, perhaps, wet with tears. He was to discover later that no boy was so weak as to shed tears in Mr. Hill’s school. His mind was already growing in stature.

III

An atmosphere of strained peace settled on the school. Mr. Hill went on with his work, the heavy pile of exer-

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rises before him steadily decreasing, the coloured pencil which he held between his thumb and forefinger wear­ing down to a stub. Boys spoke in subdued whispers. Stephen glanced more than once at the hands of the clock crawling so slowly over the dial. Long, tedious intervals seemed to lie between the beats of the pendulum that swayed to and fro behind a glass shutter on which was painted a green sea with a white sail. In a few minutes the clock would give a little warning buzz, and hammer out one, two. Only an hour, then, between him and freedom.

Mr. Hill had reached the last exercise. As he took it up he gave an audible sigh of relief. The correction of so much written work was an irksome task, but he regarded it as important. To all who bothered about the progress of their boys these red and blue pencillings were visible proof of his thoroughness. He turned over the pages of this last dog’s-eared exercise several times. Something was amiss.

“Pat Halligan—come here.”

A boy left his seat and came forward. He was a brother of the young outcast who, still in detention, stood yawning by the coal-box at the end of the room.

“How’s this?” he asked, holding up the copy. “I can’t find any home work here.”

“I didn’t do it, sir.”

“Why?”

“I hadn’t time.”

“Hadn’t time?”

“No, sir. I was sent on a message to my uncle’s place at Carrigallen. When I got home it was too late.”

“That’s no excuse. Hold out your hand.”

The boy’s face darkened. He made no move.

“Hold out your hand, sir!”

He shook his head.

“Take that, you fellow, you!” and the pliant cane whizzed like a serpent and quiveringly descended, leap­ing in turn from one part of the victim’s writhing frame to another.

“Leave the class!” he thundered.

The young Spartan, master of himself in a moment, strode indifferently to the place of detention, covertly winking to his class-fellows on the way. There he stood smiling, defiant, unrepentant.

Mr. Hill looked derisively at the two rebels from his end of the room. “Par nobile fratrum!” he exclaimed, quoting one of the tags from the dictionary.

“Translate,” he said, turning to a monitor.

“A pretty pair of brothers,” came the answer.

“What about your brother?”

The taunting challenge came from Stephen’s friend, Tom Halligan.

The colour forsook the old man’s cheek. There was dead silence. Strange things had happened in that school from day to day, but none of such monstrous import as this. Would he, in a frenzy, batter the boy to death? What dreadful birth was labouring in this womb of silence?

He remained rigid for some moments. To Stephen each moment seemed to stretch out to the last point of tenuity. Then the thread snapped. He spoke. His voice was hard and deliberate.

“My brother’s in the workhouse—and I’m paying for him there.”

Then, without another word, he turned to the class, giving the order, “Show slates.” He passed between

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the desks to assure himself that each had done a reason­able amount of work, and then turned to the next lesson.

His voice had a strange calm. A greyish tinge mottled the sickly pallor of his face. An air of strained silence hung over the room. The continuous murmur, like the drone of a hive, which usually accompanied the day’s activities was absent. Its absence seemed as unreal, as unnatural, as the sudden cessation of the sound of the tide. Each question of the teacher, and each answer which it elicited, vibrated strangely. Everything seemed to have acquired a new value as at a seance.

When the clock struck three some invisible force clutching Stephen’s young heart released its hold. The crowd surged into the porch and out into Rubbleton Lane.

How blessed was the sun! How transfigured the grimy little rut of a laneway. How good this world outside the school.

**Chapter 4**

**GARRY**

I

STEPHEN set out for home. The release from school had set his spirit soaring. Yet a strange bewilderment lay in the background of his mind. Would every day’s experience be like this? Would to-morrow be a jangle of discord as to-day had been?

Mr. Hill? . . . What good was learning if it made you like that? Mr. Wiseman used to say that the more you learned the more your mind was uplifted, and the more knowledge you had the nearer you were to God, who was all knowledge. Mr. Hill, for all his learning, seemed very far from God—else God was harsh, and cruel, and unjust. On the other hand, Mr. Wiseman was gentle and understanding—just as men say Christ Himself was. It was all very puzzling.

He crossed the Square, turned down Rock Street, and glancing at the window of the bookshop, emerged on to the bridge. There was no need for hurry—he felt no desire for dinner. The thought of food was almost distasteful to him. He dropped his books at his feet and leaned on the parapet at a point which enabled him to take in the full sweep of the river.

The morning mists had long disappeared, and he

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could see, clear against the sky, the outline of the huddle of far-off hills among which the river had its source. As it sang its way towards him it brought to mind that poem in his reader:

“I wind about, and in and out,

With here a blossom sailing.,,

The Auling—his river—was just like that. He could see floating towards him the wind-blown petals from the fields—little flecks of white scarcely distinguishable from foam. There were, too, green leaves of beech and elm, and silvery grey leaves of the sally tree, all making a lovely sprinkle as they came sailing, sailing towards the bridge where the waters, breaking suddenly in a great confusion, surged through the arches.

Sometimes a company of ducks came sailing down­stream. It was funny to watch how, as they oared themselves along, each of them cut the surface of the water into two trailing lines that kept widening like the sides of a triangle. Sometimes a drake, his neck a green- purple sheen, would bear fiercely towards them, where­upon, fear-stricken, they’d fly away in a rush of fluttering wings. A water-hen would swim from bank to bank. Always she seemed in a hurry to reach the point opposite. It was different from the ducks’ easy motion as they sur­rendered to the idle movement of the stream. When you threw a stone from the bridge it made a splash, and set in motion a series of circles that widened and widened till they reached the bank, where one by one they broke and disappeared.

At the bend of the river, near the clump of sally trees, some swimmer was coming out of the water. He was stark naked. The custom of using swimming garb had

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not yet reached Carberymore. Stephen could see that he had a crop of dark curly hair on his head, and that when he raised his arms the tufts beneath showed like little pools of shadow. A sudden urge must have moved him to plunge in, for he had brought no towel. Little drops of water fell in a bright shower as, standing on the sun-warmed bank, he shook himself. Funny the way he kept hopping on one leg, then on the other, to eject the little wells of water gathered in his ears. Stephen himself often did that, but didn’t know it could look so comical.

The man went to his clothes heaped on the bank, searched out his pipe, and, sitting down in the sun, struck a match and began to smoke. The little spurt of flame from the match looked wan in the sunlight. He seemed so happy there, Stephen thought, soaking in the warmth of the day. He sat so still that were it not for the little clouds of smoke issuing from his mouth he might have passed for a statue set by the river’s edge. He looked so contemplative Stephen wondered what thoughts absorbed his mind.

His own spell of thought was broken by the noisy approach of a knot of schoolfellows who had loitered on their way from school. They were kicking a small tin canister before them on the dusty roadway. Snatch­ing up his strap of books, he joined in the pastime. They were soon clear of the bridge. At its end was a lodge that had Gothic windows almost flush with the pave­ment. The lodge keepers, an old man and his wife, were gnarled and bitter. They were known as Paddley and Norrly. All boys were their natural enemy. Some clumsy shoe gave an ill-directed kick, and in a glitter of silver the battered tin hurtled through one of

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the windows. There was the sound of falling glass, followed by a wild stampede. When Stephen hurried in home his heart was panting.

II

As he slipped into the shop he saw that his mother was engaged in earnest conversation with a woman in a hooded cloak. She just smiled faintly at him as he passed through. His mother’s face, he perceived in his sensitive way, had that pathetic droop which came when anything touched her deeply. Hers was the sympathy of complete understanding. Though she had many cares herself, they never dulled the fine edge of her pity for others. And she had that excelling virtue of never betraying a confidence. Her instinct for what was right imposed on her conscience the same strict sense of honour which his priestly vows do upon a father confessor.

Thus it was that women who would endure any dis­tress rather than reveal their hidden grief to others were moved by some intuitive understanding to confide in her. Whether the story was one of the wild unreasoning jealousy of a husband—the growing passion for drink in a son—the threat of financial ruin darkening a home, they felt strangely comforted listening to the rare com­mon sense that came from her lips. It was as if some canker in their souls had been arrested, some stabbing inward pain subdued by an exquisitely controlled in­telligence.

In a glance Stephen took in the significance of that tremble in her lip and wondered what was the source of the sorrow that was being revealed to her. Though the

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cloaked figure of the woman was turned from him, her accent, falling on his ear, awakened recognition. He always reacted to his mother’s deeper feelings, and her compassion for this woman had its reflection in his mind.

He knew, for it was common talk, that through the recklessness of Mort Donnelly, the woman’s husband, their one-time comfortable farmstead had been lost, and that he had gone away—no one knew where— leaving his wife and children derelict. What further blow had fate dealt this pale unoffending creature who hadn’t the strength to stay her man on his downward course? A pity his mother was always so reticent. She would only be offended if he begged her to tell him what had happened, and this restless desire to know would go on beating in his mind.

Desertion was an event almost unknown in the Irish countryside, and news of the upheaval in the Donnelly household had broken upon the little rural commune with something of the force of a personal disaster. All but a few pitied the woman. These spoke harshly of her. What if her man was hard and conscienceless, and she gentle and yielding, had she not her children’s rights to nerve her into action? The hen will fly at a prowling cat in defence of her chickens.

“On my soul, ’tis hard to pity a poor-hearted creature like her” said Cauth Horgan, a bold-faced, sturdy woman who kept her own six foot of a man in meek subjection. She was addressing a little group of women making their way along the field path home from Mass on the Sunday morning on which the news first reached her.

“But look at the kind o’ man she had to reckon with?” reasoned Mrs. Gaynor. “Crazed with drink

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half his times. And every curse out of his mouth enough to darken the midday sun.”

“There isn’t a man living I’d be afraid of—and that’s as true as if I swore it on the Book!” proclaimed the sturdy Cauth.

“We’re not all like you, Cauth,” remarked Mrs. Drummy. She was a pale freckled wisp of a woman with thin biscuit-coloured hair which kept slipping down in an untidy ravel. “Bravery like yours, my dear, it only comes by nature. ’Tis born in one.”

"Faith, it isn’t,” she protested. “There’s many a time when I do be as frightened as the next. The time one of them big storms comes rushing down from the hills I go all to pieces with the little house rocking around me. And the fear o’ God do be in my heart, and I be lying in my bed in the dead o’ night, and the thunder clapping overhead reminding one of Doomsday. But they’re only the will o’ God. A man’s a different story. Stand up stiff to the best o’ them, and you’ll see what they’re made of.”

“And what might that be, Cauth?” inquired Mrs. Gaynor with a nudge to her nearest companion.

“Pride. Empty pride. And every woman’s like a bellows puffing it into them. They keep swelling like a bladder you’d see children blowing up to make a foot­ball, and then shrivelling into nothing at the first prod of a thorn.”

“Most men have their faults, to be sure,” conceded Mrs. Gaynor. "But so have most of ourselves. We’re none of us saints”

“Indeed and that’s true,” chimed in Mrs. Moore, a gentle woman who had been silent up to this. She was so near to being a saint that she was always hard set when

making confession to discover a venial offence to expiate. “There’s none of us so good, Cauth,” she went on, mildly reproachful, “as to warrant us faulting others. There’s no field without its share o’ weeds.”

“Think what ye like,” said Cauth uncompromisingly “I’ll have my own opinion. The men are what they are because of ourselves. From the first day a little; garsún sticks his legs into a pair of breeches he thinks he’s king o’ the castle. You’ll see him looking for notice like a little crowing cock, and his sisters gathered round him making great wonder. And if he’ll only take a bit o’ switch in his hand they’ll fly helter-skelter like a flock o’ geese before him, and he roaring at their heels. To put him across their knees they should and knock the teaspaigh\* out of him. And if Maura Donnelly had any spunk she’d have her man and her farm still, instead of being as she is, a show to the world.”

“Ah! God help the creature, anyway,” pleaded Mrs. Doran sympathetically. “Six little children, and she with hardly a stick or a stone this blessed day.”

The other women sighed and nodded their heads compassionately—all but Cauth, who shrugged her shoulders, a hard unrelenting line sharpening the edge of her determined mouth. . . .

When Stephen made his way to the living-room his brothers were half-way through their dinner. His plate was laid, and he sat down. The untidy table was hardly one to stimulate his appetite. At either side of him his brothers’ plates were messy with meat and vegetables. The smaller plates beside them were laden with potato skins. He made a feint of attacking the slice of fried steak that lay like a crusted island in its pool of gravy,

\* High spirit.

then pushed it from him. Owen, whose appetite was as lusty as Stephen’s was delicate, slid the rejected food on to his own plate. Stephen’s distaste excited no surprise. It was too usual to be matter for comment.

From a shelf littered with old books and tattered periodicals he took the Shamrock and made his way towards the garden. The excitement of the school day had exhausted his spirit, and he longed for quiet. On unlatching the gate he heard a familiar voice humming tunelessly. Tom Maguire, the younger of the two workmen, was planting cabbage. Tom was a well- built, lithe young fellow in the early twenties. He was in his shirt sleeves, and his trousers was fastened by a strong leather belt with a very bright brass buckle, which in his off moments he was much given to polishing. Stephen admired Tom’s easy strength, and liked to watch him drive the spade through the soil, lift the manure on the fork, lay it along the trench, and set the plants in geometrical lines like soldiers at attention. Work seemed play to him, and he sang or whistled all the time.

“Well, Stephen, my lad, home from school?” he saluted, resting a moment on his spade.

Stephen nodded.

“How’d you like Ould Barney-O?” Tom had learned of Stephen’s promotion to the Upper School.

“Not very much.”

“You’ll like him less, my boy, when you know him better. Many’s the skelp he gave me in my time.”

“Not without reason maybe, Tom?”

“Right you are, my son; but I couldn’t abide his jeering ways. I went straight for him once,” he laughed, “and that was the end of me.”

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“You didn’t?”

“Bedad, I did. I’ve good cause to remember it. ‘Atch, you fellow, you,’ said he, bringing his cursed cane down on my shoulder. I had some kind of a sore here”—he indicated the place—“that was just healing. It stung like a wasp. I was like a devil with rage, and, hardly knowing what I was doing, I wrenched the cane from his hand, snapped it in two, and flung the pieces into his ugly gob.”

“Honest, Tom?”

“I wouldn’t tell you a lie. That was my last day in his damned old caravanserai of a school.”

“You never went back?”

“Never again. There was murder at home—the mother and father having every second swipe at me. But if they crucified me I wouldn’t face down Rubbleton Lane again.”

“I’d—I’d like to have your pluck, Tom.” Stephen’s eyes were glowing with admiration.

“It wasn’t pluck, Stephen.”

“What else?”

“I dunno. Kind o’ sudden madness like. And ’twas foolish—for it put an end to my schooling, and left me where I am. However,” and he spat on his hand and resumed his work, “’twill be all the same in a hundred years.”

Stephen, sensing the slumbering discontent in the other’s mind, made his way to the garden seat and sat down. He kept repeating to himself “’twill be all the same in a hundred years.” The saying, though worn to a commonplace, was new to him, and his mind, as was its wont, began to turn it over.

In a hundred years, he reflected, Tom Maguire and I

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will be dead. My father and mother and all in this house will be under the sod. Not one of all the people I see at Mass, or at the fair, or at the sports will be walking the earth. All the crowds swarming the streets of great cities—all the workers in the factories—soldiers on parade—sailors on the high seas—will have breathed their last sigh. In a hundred years ’twill be the same for them as if they had never been born. Joy and anguish, hope and despair, triumph and defeat, the good and evil in their lives will have passed away as a breath from a mirror.

But thought breaking into thought, like ever-widening circles in a pool, his reason asked, “Will it be the same? And tags of philosophy from the pulpit returned to his mind: “After Death—the Judgment.” “Our days are but a stepping-stone to Eternity.” “As a man sows, so shall he reap.”

These remembered admonitions made him uncom­fortable. He was in doubt as to how he stood in the eyes of God. Externally he knew that he conformed to all the ways of a good Catholic—but what of those queer disturbing thoughts that sometimes rose unbidden in his mind? What of those vague stirrings and sensations which some secret voice within him told him should be repressed, yet which kept bubbling up, he knew not how, in his nature? Had any one else the same disturbing thoughts, the same promptings? If he dropped dead this moment, what of his soul?

He visioned Hell as it was described in a penny booklet entitled Hell Open to Christians. A fiery furnace, chains glowing at white heat, devils in number beyond all reckoning, in horror beyond all conceiving. It was all vivid to his imagination, and not for a fleeting moment

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had he a doubt of its authenticity. Wasn’t it there in that mission booklet in black and white? Who would be so daring as to build up a story concerning sacred things that wasn’t true? A little shudder passed over him, and with an effort of will he shook off the oppres­sive mood and idly turned over the pages of the Shamrock.

His young brother Garry, a sturdy lad with frank bright eyes, came into the garden. Alive with energy that clamoured for some outlet, he straightway seized the garden fork to help Tom in his work. Stripping off his coat, he tossed it with a workmanlike air on the hedge and set to work in his shirt sleeves.

A small untidy heap of manure lay in an obscure corner of the garden. He trotted backwards and for­wards, spreading each forkful along the newly opened trench. At intervals Tom, whose favourite Garry was, flung him encouraging words. It was good to see this abounding health and energy which almost rivalled his own.

Stephen, half envious of the gusto with which he saw Garry work, felt prompted to take his turn with the fork. The notion, however, passed. He hadn’t that urgent desire to be doing things so characteristic of his brother. And there was, too, that faint rancid smell just arising from the sodden dungheap. He settled down to read. Always, in reading, so complete became his absorption that the visible world about him seemed to dissolve, giving way to a visionary world more intensely real to his imagination. Tom and Garry soon faded into a pale shadow in his consciousness.

A shout brought him back to violent reality. For a moment he felt like some rider suddenly lassoed and

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dragged to earth. As Garry was making his way towards the pile of manure a rat had suddenly scampered across his path. With the steady nerve and swift decision for which he was remarkable, he darted forward and with unerring aim pierced with his fork the slinking lean­bodied creature. With a shout of triumph he had swung the fork high over his head, and, holding it upright, watched with delight the agonized twistings of the wretched beast impaled on the prongs.

Tom Maguire roared with laughter.

“My soul, but you're the plucky little devil, Garry!”he cried. “You've speared him rightly. Let down the beggar and I'll give him a clout with the spade.''

Garry, however, decided to prolong his triumph, and in a hideous revel marched along the path, his tortured victim giving thin squeaks, his blood dripping all red on the handle of the fork.

Stephen was sick with horror. He sat powerless, numbed, unable to move, his eyes held by the horrid fascination of the spectacle. At last he gasped:

“Let it down, Garry—let it down! It’s not fair— it’s horrible!”

Garry laughed, and, shouting to Tom to make ready, tossed the creature, now visibly weakening, on to the ground, whereupon, with a single blow of his spade, Tom mercifully ended the sadistic orgy.

Garry picked up the body by its long tapering tail, held it suspended for a moment between his fingers, and with a gay laugh swung it towards his brother. It made a momentary blot in the sun as it sailed through the air and landed with a plop in Stephen’s lap. He gave a cry of disgust and shook it off. A spatter of blood was on his hand, and a red smear on the paper.

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“You rotten dog, you!” he shouted, rushing at his brother.

Garry, showing all his teeth in laughing defiance, seized the fork and pointed its bloodstained prongs to­wards him. “Come on, if you dare,” he challenged.

Blind with rage, Stephen snatched up a stone to hurl at his tormentor, when Tom, till now an amused spec­tator of the scene, sprang forward with a cry, and with good-natured raillery put an end to the conflict.

III

Sick with a sense of nausea Stephen hastened down the garden steps. The contact of his flesh with animal blood had filled him with loathing. He felt he should like to dive into the sea and feel the shock of the strong waves, or lie down and let the surf break over him, drenching his body till he was as clean of pollution as the sea itself. For a passing moment he saw himself emerging from the sea, his body white as curd and glisten­ing with spray. The taste of brine was on his lips, the smell of it in his nostrils. A little shiver of delight passed over him.

Making his way through the lumber shed he passed out into the yard. Here there was a water-tap, protected by a cupboard-like fixture in which were stored a lump of yellow soap and the blue-bag. Beneath it was the washtub.

He set the tap flowing, and having removed his coat and rolled up his shirt sleeves, he plunged his hands up to the elbows in the clean cold water. He lathered his hands repeatedly, letting the running water wash away

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each fresh coating of foam. The surface of the tub of water was flecked with floating clots, some of which were tinged with a faint red. Tilting the tub, he let the water splash through the sunken grating that covered the shore. Some of the blobs of pinkish foam clung to the grid. Snatching up a bucket, he kept dashing water on to the grating till the last bubble of soap had disappeared.

He felt hot after the unwonted exertion, and his fore­head and hair were damp with sweat. As he was wiping off the beads of perspiration with his shirt sleeve his mother appeared.

“Why, what have you been doing?” she asked in surprise.

“Having a scrub,” he said, and in lively colours he began to describe Garry’s adventure, making it appear that he had shared whole-heartedly in its spirit. “Did you ever know such a plucky lad as Garry?” he con­cluded.

“Oh, it’s kind for him,” she remarked. “Your father’s the same. He hardly knows what fear is.”

“I wish I could feel like that,” he said a little wistfully.

“Goodness, why? Haven’t you as much courage as the next? Most people feel like you about rats. They’re wicked things—sly and full of venom. The sight of one, dead or alive, always gives me a turn. Put on your coat or you’ll be getting a chill. You’re all sweat. Oh, tell me, Stephen,” she asked eagerly, “how did you get on in school? With people in the shop I hadn’t a chance of a word with you.”

“Oh, all right,” he answered casually, struggling into his coat. “It’s not like Mr. Wiseman’s, of course,” he went on; “but it’s a long sight better than I

thought, I’ll be well into the way of things by the end of the week,” he added cheerfully.

He couldn’t reveal to her his wounded feelings, and, wishing to be spared the discomfort of returning answers that fell short of the truth, he instinctively diverted the conversation into another channel.

“Oh, by the way, mother,” he asked, “did you hear about Mr. Hill’s brother?” “What about him?”

“He’s above in the Union.”

“Who told you tha”

“’Tis true. Honest it is,” and he described the devastating scene of the afternoon.

“Well, even if it’s true, ’tis no concern of ours. It’s no fault of Mr. Hill’s. Men will go their own stubborn way. You can’t hinder them from going downhill, and you to be a brother a hundred times. Tom Halligan’s a dangerous boy, Stephen. Have no truck with him. Only a scamp would behave to a teacher as he did.” “But he was driven to it.”

“When boys do wrong they must be punished. If you did anything like that, Stephen, we’d never get over the shame of it—your father and I.”

“When you’re treated savagely you forget things. A fellow can’t help it.”

“A teacher doesn’t cane a boy for nothing, Stephen.” “Old Hill does, anyway.”

“Now don’t say that,” she said with a faint touch of annoyance. “Mr. Hill has turned out hundreds of fine scholars—and if he was a bit rough with them now and then I’m sure they’re none the worse for it to-day.”

“If you were looking on, mother, as I was, you’d understand.”

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Some one called her just then, and she had to leave him to attend to the shop. He was disturbed to find himself so much out of tune with her mood. He felt a little rebellious. That his mother who could never look on suffering unmoved—that she could uphold Mr. Hill was incomprehensible. “It’s only because she doesn’t un­derstand,” he thought. “A scamp,” she had called Tom —Tom, who in his courage and in his honest ways stood for everything that was fine in Stephen’s imagination. Always so wise, why—why was she so blind in this? For all her censure the image of his friend would hold its place undimmed in his heart. Yet he was troubled lest her frank disapproval should dull the pleasure he derived from their close comradeship. It would be there like a shadow haunting him. It was all because of old Hill. And he revenged himself by repeating:

“Between Hill and Hell there is but one letter;

If Hill were in Hell the school would be better.”

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**Chapter 5**

**NOCTURNE MACABRE**
I

THE shop closed down at ten o’clock, and shortly after, according to custom, the boys were ordered to bed. Their father’s supper was delayed till that late hour. He liked to have his meals undisturbed, and never supped till his sons had all gone upstairs to their rooms.

They were usually reluctant to exchange the bright warmth of the living-room for the subdued atmosphere of the sleeping apartment. It was queer how subtly your mood changed when you stepped into the bedroom. The pale candlelight, the quiet face of the Virgin looking down upon you from the wall, and the figures of the Apostles, always seated at that long table, imposed some hushful spell on your spirit.

By various subterfuges the boys often contrived to delay the moment of departure. The preparations for their father’s supper created, too, a vague longing for food, even though they had had an abundant meal some hours earlier. This desire they would satisfy by taking a slice of buttered bread and eating it on the way up­stairs.

Sometimes their mother, in response to a whispered entreaty on their way out of the room, would slip

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quietly upstairs when the three were lying in bed, bring­ing with her a steaming jug of hot tea. This she poured into a cup, and, beginning with the eldest, she would look on with a deep sense of satisfaction as she watched the sheer animal zest with which each in turn swallowed his food. A wave of grateful affection passed over all three on these occasions, and as she left to slip downstairs there was a warm vibration in the voices which followed her.

“Thanks.”

“Thanks, mother.”

“Thanks very much, mother.”

No food of the gods ever tasted so good as this, and it derived not a little of its virtue from the awareness that it sprang from a conspiracy between their mother and themselves.

Their father would glower did he suspect that she had been so indulgent. Boys should be bred to sterner ways. They had regular meals, the well-stored cupboard was open to them all day long, and that should be sufficient. But this secret repast took place only at infrequent intervals, and its enjoyment was of so rare a quality that the very memory of it would reawaken all that subtle sense of gratification with which it was attended.

They now made their way upstairs, Owen leading, a candle in his hand. The stairs had a small square landing which gave on to a passage leading to the sleeping apartments of the household. On the wall of this pass­age hung a picture depicting a hunting scene which, because of its subject, appealed vividly to the eldest boy’s imagination. The picture having been acquired only recently had still the charm of a new experience. Owen’s love for dogs Was a passion. Their bark was

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music to his ear. The feel of a dog’s tongue licking his hand was an exquisite sensation. Passing through the town, he could not resist the impulse to lay his hand caressingly on every stray mongrel that came his way. You were sure to find him at any form of sport of which dogs were the centre. On Sundays, in the season, he would tramp long distances with the local pack of harriers, returning home in the evening tired and dishevelled and consumed with an immense hunger. His mother would keep piling his plate with cuts from the cold joint, and would become faintly alarmed when, plate after plate having been refilled, his hunger remained still unappeased.

Yet he had no dog of his own. His father sternly refused his persistent appeal to be allowed keep one. “Dogs are a nuisance,” he would say, “and I’ll not have one upsetting the house.” At each refusal Owen suffered heartache.

Unlike Stephen, he showed no pronounced taste for books, yet he loved the spirited description of “The Chase,” which formed part of the verse scattered through his school reader. He used to declaim it at the fireside, and there was always a perceptible break in his voice when he came to the closing passage:

“Close on the hounds the hunter came
To cheer them on the vanished game;

But stumbling in the rugged dell
The gallant horse, exhausted, fell.

The impatient rider strove in vain
To rouse him with the spur and rein . . .”

And so when he came on this picture in the passage on his way to bed he instinctively halted, holding up

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the candle so as to study the scene again in clear outline. Stephen and Garry paused too. It was better to yield to their brother’s whim than to go into the unlit bedroom and wait for Owen to bring the light. The scene, vigorously drawn in black and white, showed a stag closely pursued by horsemen and hounds at a moment when they had broken on to a railway line. At a far-off bend of the line, obscured by a drift of high hedges and trees, was an approaching train. In the passionate excitement of the chase neither huntsmen nor quarry are aware of the impending danger. It was the kind of scene to thrill a young boy’s imagination.

“Don’t you feel,” said Owen, “as if you’d like to shout a warning to the huntsmen and dogs?”

“And to the poor stag?” added Stephen.

“The Stag? He’s doomed, anyway. Don’t you see that the dogs are right on his traces?”

“It’s a cowardly kind of sport—stag-hunting.”

Owen laughed in derision. “What’s cowardly about it?” he asked.

“Would you think it fair to be attacked alone by a lot of fellows—all out for your blood?”

“I wouldn’t—but its different. A stag’s born to be hunted.”

“How do you know?”

“How do I know? What’s a hound for, man?”

“’Tis cowardly all the same,” repeated Stephen.

“How could it be cowardly?” challenged young Garry, breaking in. “Such codology!” he added with contempt.

“Shut up, you! No one asked for your opinion,” snapped Stephen, nettled.

The door at the foot of the staircase was heard to open.

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“What’s all this noise for?” came thundering from below.

There was instant silence, and all three faded quietly into their room. Downstairs a door closed with a bang.

II

The brothers, having removed their shoes, knelt down to pray, Owen at his own bedside, Stephen and Garry at theirs. There was family prayer only during Lent, when, immediately before retiring each night, the Rosary was recited. On these occasions Stephen felt oddly uncomfortable. At all other times you prayed silently in your own room. In each of the sleeping- rooms were a crucifix, a holy water stoup, and some pictures. Conscious of these sacred symbols, you dropped into prayer as you did in a church. It was in the living- room, so bare of suggestion, that the recital of the Rosary took place.

It seemed strange to see his father’s vast bulk leaned against the kitchen chair, his shoulders slightly stooped, his beads in his hands, his great voice droning out the prelude and the First Mystery. And his mother—how little she seemed kneeling a little way from him at her own chair. And when she in her turn took up the Second Mystery, how tenderly and womanly her voice seemed in contrast to his. A thought would float into Stephen’s mind:

“. . . thy sounds were sweeter
Than the dome of Peter
Flings o’er the Tiber, pealing solemnly. . . .”

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Strange, no matter how you bent your mind to prayer, how thoughts like this kept darting in and out to break the pattern in its weaving. You felt a little prick of conscience, and pulled yourself together for a more tense effort of will. These vagrant fancies would then hold off for a little time, but would inevitably begin to dance in and out again. They were like coloured butterflies fluttering into the church during Mass. Try as you would, you could not hold your eyes from following their lightsome gambols as they tossed in a slanting beam of sun. . . .

He was physically exhausted as he fell now on his knees and dropped his head on his hands, but his mind was not responsive to the drowsy call of his limbs. It was like an instrument whose strings kept vibrating after a passionate movement had ended. Thoughts of the day’s happenings made wanton with his efforts to pray. He was repeating a pious formula, but the words held no meaning, and as he rose from his knees he felt a sense of dissatisfaction.

He undressed and lay down, waiting for Garry before composing himself for sleep. In the candlelight he thought the Madonna smiled at him a little wistfully. Was she hurt by that blur of words which was meant for prayer? The figure of Garry stepping over him, his shirt flapping, blotted out the vision. Owen blew out the candle, and darkness—always so solemn, so mysteri­ous—enfolded them, and in a moment all three were fast asleep.

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III

For Garry and Owen sleep was always a deep draught of forgetfulness. Dreams never came to disturb the spell of drowsed content which it breathed. They awoke refreshed, their bodies stored with the gathered energy which only complete oblivion engenders. At most times Stephen slept fitfully. Out of the raw material of the day’s happenings imagination kept weaving dream fantasies—terrible at times; at times beautiful: never without a quickening of the pulse.

To-night he was back in the schoolroom in Rubbleton Lane. He was seated at a desk, intent on a problem, when the buzz of an insect distracted his thought. He lifted his head, and, glancing upwards, sat transfixed by the vision that met his eyes. There, dangling among the fluttering marionettes suspended from the ceiling was the figure of Mr. Hill. His face was leering down at him; he could see the coarse hair on his hands. His body kept swaying to a slow rhythm. The other boys were all wrestling with their sums, unconscious of the gaping horror which froze his blood. With suspended breath he watched the pendulous movement, fearful lest the cord snap and the body crash down on him.

When he awoke his body was bedewed with sweat, his hair sticky. He wondered what time it was, and hoped it was approaching daylight. He listened to the throb- throb of his heart, and instinctively placed his hand over it to nurse it into quietude. Outside the night was very still. The only sound was the quiet flow of the river. He blessed himself, and, closing his eyes, sought to turn his thoughts to common things. He gave a slight start

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when from the darkened street outside came the watch­man’s voice, intoning his nocturne:

“Fine night:

All is well:

Past twelve o'clock.”

In the deep silence the chanted words took on a strange solemnity. He sighed on discovering that the night had advanced so slowly, and tried to compose himself to sleep.

Dreams came to torment his soul again. He was in the garden, bent over a book. He heard a queer scampering noise and, lifting his eyes from the page, saw a dwarfish smoke-grey figure with a rat face squat­ting in front of him. The mouth was like a thin thread of scarlet, and the teeth, porcelain white, were chiselled to a fine sharpness. In the black beaded eyes which held him fascinated there lurked a mocking cruelty. He dared not stir. He felt that at a tremble of the eyelid the hideous thing would leap into his lap. There they sat, gazing at each other like two carven images.

He thought he heard footsteps approaching stealthily. The Thing heard too, and glanced round furtively. Garry! The garden fork was in his hand, the points of its prongs gleaming. With a whoop he made a lunge towards the goblin-like creature, whereupon Stephen woke to hear the clock in his father’s room strike three. . . .

Three long hours to daylight. He forced himself now to keep awake. Should he drop off while his mind and body were still quivering he would inevitably plunge

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again into dark waters. He moistened his fingers with spittle and touched the tired lids of his eyes. To keep his senses active he began to go over in his mind the cycle of poems and ballads he had learned during his years at school. He had almost completed the round when there came to him from afar off, breaking the stillness of the hour, the sound of a voice, strangely disturbing in its modulation. “Diarmuid a Buille,”\* he said to himself. “He’s out on the hills again to­night.”

Diarmuid was a gaunt, sombre-looking man of the farming class whose mind had a twist. Intermittently he set out from home long after dark, and urged forward by an irresistible desire to give voice to the prophetic visions haunting his imagination, he strode along the hills till he came to a point of vantage where his eye could range over the sleeping town. There a frenzy possessed him, and, with wild gestures, he sent his dire prophesies hurtling into the night.

At first the more timid of the townspeople were filled with alarm, but on discovering that, apart from these nocturnal paroxysms, he was a mild, inoffensive creature they paid as little heed to his stormy prophesying as to the undertone of the river.

On Stephen the voice always acted as a spell, stirring his imagination to its depths. In his mind he would see the would-be prophet alone on the heights, his body prone against the sky, his eyes ablaze, his arms flung out in passionate gesture, his beard blown on the wind as in the pictures of Jehovah.

He listened now intently, but the words were indis­tinguishable. He could only hear a voice rising and

 \* Mad Diarmuid.

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falling in a monotonous chant. He stopped his ears more than once to shut out the sound, but the voice came to him as through the thick folds of a curtain. In its even flow it seemed to go on interminably as the tide. Owen and Garry—how blessed they were lying there; Garry beside him, Owen in his own bed. Steeped in slumber, breathing so contentedly, they knew nothing of that fever of unrest which kept himself turning and tossing in the darkness. He wondered if that tenebrous chant would never end. Surely such passionate utter­ance must soon burn itself out. And suddenly, as if in answer to his thought, came silence.

His mind began to play new tricks with him. He thought to go to the parlour window and look out. The cool wind would toss his hair, its breath would be like dew on his body. The sight of familiar things would be reassuring. The baker’s shop would be over the way, the Home Rule Tavern beside it—he could glimpse the bridge and the river—there would be the glint of stars on the waters as they escaped from the arches to tumble over the weir.

To reach the window he would have to feel his way out of the room, grope along the passage, open the par­lour door and stumble past a welter of confusing objects towards the oblong of dim light. When he pulled the Venetian blind the slats would make a queer clatter as they raced upwards. Was the game worth the candle? It was wiser maybe to remain as he was, listening to Garry’s even breathing beside him. Familiar, too, as was the street outside, it would perhaps take on a ghostly look at this haunted hour. In the far north in Ballyshannon hadn’t William Allingham seen his own street suffer such a change?

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“I heard the dogs howl in the moonlight night;

I went to the window to see the sight:

All the dead that ever I knew
Going one by one and two by two.”

With his mind’s eye Stephen was gazing upon that dim procession slowly wending its dolorous way. There was the long line of wavering figures—each moon- blanched face cowled in shadow—the eyes cast down— the hands folded like the ivory hands of the dead. They were passing along the silent street outside—moving one by one and two by two past his own house—they had reached the lodge, and he could see them now, their footfalls awaking no echo, moving over the bridge and disappearing slowly in the massed shadows thrown by the great pile of the castle and the overhanging trees at the farther end.

A deep sigh escaped him, and he squeezed the lids of his eyes in an effort to blot out the haunting memory of what he had just beheld. Would he wake Garry? That would be a betrayal of his weakness. Better this feeling of numb terror than the shame of that. Garry would always hold him in contempt, and would fling his cowardice into his face every time they should quarrel.

He reached for the holy water stoup over his bed, moistened his finger, and crossed himself. With the first friendly chirp of the sparrow he dropped into a dreamless sleep.

Some hours later his mother, passing through on her way downstairs, paused in fulfilment of her promise to waken him. The intense pallor of his face, the tired droop of the eyes, made her hesitate.

She shook her head and went away quietly.

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**Chapter VI**

**ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS**

DESPITE the disfavour with which Stephen’s mother regarded his close companionship with Tom Halligan, his devotion to his friend remained constant. His faith was too deeply rooted to be shaken by any wind of circumstance. He felt that in his loyalty to his comrade there could be no disloyalty to his mother. How, he asked himself, could she understand the code of honour implicit in a boy’s relationships? No subtlety of speech could give it an interpretation. If he attempted to justify himself he would only blunder, and, losing his balance, confirm her the more in her opinion. To ask him to break with Tom merely because, in a moment of resentment, he had been moved to fling back insult for insult in the schoolroom—wasn’t that imposing upon him a task beyond a boy’s strength? Loving and wise as a mother could be, she couldn’t always see things in the clear light in which they revealed themselves to a boy’s understanding. Why, he reflected, had he been so unwise as to describe for her that scene in the school? He should have divined that, in the way of his elders, she would uphold the teacher, however monstrous his be­haviour. But the excitement of that first day had been in his blood, and was clamouring for release. It was often like that when your mind was disturbed. You

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did things in a moment which you remembered all your life with a feeling of anger against yourself.

Young Halligan’s was an ardent, generous nature, and if he was too prone to let the heart rather than the head dictate his actions, his impulses sprang from an inborn dislike of anything that seemed to him mean or cruel or unjust. His mother was dead, and as his father was much from home he knew none of the repressive in­fluences which such an upbringing as that of Stephen exercises on a boy’s nature. In his affection for Stephen there was something protective. He sensed in some dim way the more delicately strung nature of his younger companion, and it aroused in him a tenderness unusual in a boy of such robust fibre.

He was something of a revolutionary in that he passionately hated all forms of coercive laws which tended to curb a boy’s legitimate freedom. It chafed him that in a small town, set in a wide-spreading country, the only playground was the narrow streets. The ox and the sheep, every wild creature of wood and brake, en­joyed its birthright of freedom: boys only were driven to herd in a cobbled thoroughfare. In the estate of Lord Carberymore, which extended for miles along the right bank of the Auling, every blade of grass was sacrosanct. To set foot on the demesne was to run the risk of being run down like a hunted thing by the gamekeeper or one of his underlings. To Stephen the gamekeeper’s name was one of sinister suggestion. Simon Doran was a grim dark-bearded man dressed in a brown velveteen jacket, drab breeches, and leggings. He was seldom seen with­out a gun under his arm.

The pasture lands that bordered the opposite side of the river were let to graziers. If you ambled along the

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faintly trodden footway that kept twisting with the river course, you had always the uncomfortable feeling that you were doing so on sufferance. There being no right of way, you never knew when some scowling visage would confront you and hint darkly of having you “up in court.” Thus from all the delight of green fields and woods and running waters which Heaven had flung at their feet, the boys were as jealously cut off as from the cave of treasure in the wonder tale of the East.

Sometimes, taking their courage in their hands, the boys would slip into a field tucked away in some obscure angle of a farm to engage in sports. In the midst of their simple enjoyment the irate landowner, his face purple with passion, his arms waving menacingly, his dogs at his heels, would be discovered striding fiercely towards them, whereupon there would be a wild scramble for coats and shoes and a breathless rush for safety. Always they ran with their heads bent downwards, in the hope of concealing their identity. The fearful joy of this guerilla warfare against the rights of ownership gave to a boy’s life in Carberymore a sharp edge of adventure.

With a conflict of feeling Stephen entered into most of these enterprises. As his father’s very clearly defined ethical creed was ever present to his mind, he was haunted by the fear of discovery. To his father the laws of the realm were sacred, and to challenge them was to place oneself outside the pale of decency and respectability. You became one with the corner boy, the tramp, the tinker, the drunken militiaman. To have a boy of his in the police court, however childish the offence, would be a shattering blow to that tradition of orderly living which obtained in his house. Stephen was acutely aware that were his wrong-doing ever to

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come to light he would be doomed to live all his days under the heavy cloud of his father’s displeasure. This very real terror was ever lurking in the background of his mind. Yet always in his overmastering desire to be one with the crowd he entered with such apparent zest into the spirit of every adventure that no one could divine the fear preying on his heart.

When, however, it was proposed that they should raid a garden on the outskirts of the town he sang dumb. All the instincts of his nature shrank from a deed which seemed to smack of dishonesty. Crooked dealing was to his father the sin against the Holy Ghost, and he held that the bankrupt had a slenderer chance of entering the Kingdom of Heaven than the three cited in the Scripture. More than once, on reading Stubbs’s Gazette, Stephen had heard him bitterly denounce the men whose names appeared from week to week in that list of wrecked enterprises. “Unrepentant thieves,” he would call them as he turned over its pages. And so when this freebooting expedition was urged, Stephen felt his heart turn to stone. When some one, however, observ­ing his silence, taunted him with cowardice, the blood mounted into his cheek, and passionately protesting against the imputation, he committed himself to an enterprise against which all the deeper instincts of his nature made resentful protest.

The garden was about half a mile distant from the town. Its owner, a retired army officer, was a peppery little man, with apoplectic face, watery eyes red at the lids, and a bristling grey moustache. He walked with a curious rickety gait. The big rambling house in which he lived alone was, like its owner, mouldering into an unlovely old age. From the entrance gates, their white

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paint mottled with rust, a grass-grown drive straggled up to the porch. The scatter of stunted trees on the lawn seemed to have been nourished on uncongenial soil. Some had turned to dead wood, and wisps of moss, bleached grey with age, drooped from their gnarled boughs. Colony after colony of crows had cawed into old age in this sanctuary, and their untidy nests showed everywhere through the crazy network of branches.

Sam Doorley, the colonel’s man of all work, lived at the lodge, companioned only by his notorious bulldog Cerberus. In small boys man and dog inspired feelings of terror.

The raiding party assembled at sundown and set out on their expedition. To Stephen every step of the way was a Via Dolorosa. A torturing pain burned in his breast. Yet he had so disciplined himself to play his part that by jest and laughter he conveyed the impression of being one of the most carefree of the company. At intervals they paused on their journey to make “cock-shots” of the insulators on the telegraph wires. Only a sportsman seeing a pheasant rise can understand the fascination which an insulator, perched high above the road, exercises on the destructive instinct of the schoolboy. Usually in this vagabond pastime Stephen showed astonishing skill. He had a way of focusing his eye so intensely on the object that the arm responded sensitively to the taut vision and the missile sped un­erringly to the mark. This evening his throws were reckless, the missiles, as if flung by a drink-fuddled roysterer at a fair, whizzing wide. When their ex­citement in the game began to ebb, he strove to rekindle their ardour in the desperate hope that by teasing out

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the time something should happen—he knew not what —to wreck the enterprise on which they were so soon to embark. His strategy, however, failed of its purpose, for some one, impatient of delay, suddenly broke from the crowd and, striding forward, cried to them to follow— that the sun had almost gone down, and that twilight would soon be upon them. In a moment they were at his heels and going forward at a brisk trot. The ram­shackle chimneys of the old mansion soon showed through the trees.

Their plan of operation was to make a detour by the fields stretching away to the rear, to work their way through the copse which formed a windscreen on that side of the house, and then scale the garden wall. At that hour, with the first dews beginning to fall, it was unlikely that the colonel or his henchman would be moved to enter the garden.

They broke into the copse, subduing their voices to half whispers. The air outside was still suffused with the afterglow. Here, as if they had suddenly stepped into a church, they found themselves moving in a dim grey light. Overhead the intersecting boughs made a mass of shadow. At points a wandering ray of light pierced through, tinging the coarse wood-grass where it fell to a strange unnatural hue. Every sound—the crack­ling of dry wood under his feet, the sudden flap of a bat-wing, the flutter of a moth blundering into his face— set Stephen’s heart palpitating.

Directly on reaching the garden wall they began to hoist each other up. Stephen crooked his back as a platform for the others to mount, and now stood solitary at the foot of the wall. Two of his fellows threw them­selves face downwards on the coping, and, leaning over,

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gripped his hands. In a moment he was levered to a place beside his fellow conspirators.

His eye swept the garden. Neglect had reduced it to a wilderness. The long untended fruit trees were grey and mossed, and their lower branches were smothered in the tangle of undergrowth. The only sign of cultivation was a patch of broken soil on which some lettuces had recently been planted. Already the trailing grass and weeds, as if resentful of the attempt to check their unfettered freedom, had begun to make inroads on the reclaimed territory.

Bushes of red currants grew by the wall which the raiders had scaled. The boys, lying flat, reached down and snatched handfuls of the ripe berries, transparent as red wine, the seed showing at the centre, and ate in greedy mouthfuls, swallowing in their haste the thread­like stems with the fruit. Stephen, half dizzy with terror, his eye on the garden door, his ear tense, his mind conjuring up the vision of a man and a ferocious dog striding in, had succeeded in clutching a single cluster of berries and leaves when hurrying footsteps and a low voice calling “Cerberus! Cerberus!” were heard.

There was a moment’s stricken silence. Then, swift as thought, a huddle of figures dropped from the wall, and each in turn struggling to his feet broke away through the copse. As Stephen picked himself up, his ear, refined by fear to an exquisite degree, caught the click of the raised latch within the garden. In scamper­ing through the copse the brambly undergrowth often impeded his progress, throwing him forward, and he presented a wild air of vagabondage as, dishevelled and torn, he climbed a low ragged fence and emerged—the last of the fugitives—into the open sunlit fields.

They stood in a group, half gasping for breath, their voices a quiver of excitement, breaking at moments into little gusts of nervous laughter. They were thrilled at their luck in having restricted the scene of operations to the garden wall. Had Sam Doorley and Cerberus come upon them foraging within the garden, escape would have been impossible. What might have followed they hardly dared to conjecture.

To Stephen the sense of relief was overwhelming. The painful tightening of his heart relaxed, the oppressive cloud weighing on his mind lifted, a glow of conquest began to flood his spirit. It was as if he had plunged into dangerous waters, and, wrestling with the forces arrayed against him, had emerged triumphant. But all other emotions were submerged in the feeling of immense gratitude that his parents would never know that their son had been tempted to share in an escapade whose discovery would have shaken their world to its founda­tions.

As they set out on their homeward journey the last pale glow of sunset ebbed around them. Their long stalking shadows became merged in the invading dusk. Some one pointed out the first star trembling into the ether. In wonted custom each of the boys pulled off his cap and blessed himself. In a little time they came to a small bridge whose single arch humped itself over a brawling stream that raced in and out between stones and boulders as if eager to pay its tribute of peat-brown waters to the Auling. They seated themselves on the low parapet, and recounting their personal misadventures, released the excitement still beating in their minds. One, with a laugh, showed a ragged gap in his stocking, another—a little ruefully—displayed a triangular rent

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in his trousers, its torn flap hanging loosely like a dog’s ear, a third, baring his knee, revealed a crimson jag in which the blood had congealed.

Stephen’s plight was more disturbing, for he had come limping along more and more painfully in the wake of his companions. With an air of professional gravity Tom Halligan dropped on a knee, and having removed the shoe, set to examine the foot. He found the instep swollen and slightly discoloured. A moment’s reflec­tion and he was directing the others to lift Stephen on to his back. Wading with his burden into the water, he set him down on a moss-grown boulder midway in the stream. The current swirled round him, and obeying Tom’s instructions he let the running water play on the affected part of the foot. The cool shock was pleasant, and when he felt that the pain had eased, Tom hoisted him on to his back again and, with Stephen’s arms clasped round his neck, warily picked his way amid the boulders and on to the low wall of the bridge. With gentle care he dried the foot and began to slip on the stocking and shoe. The others had gathered round in a knot, watching the operation and admiring the assured skill of the physician, when some one, turning round, gave a warning cry:

“Sam Doorley!” they gasped.

A burly figure could be seen approaching from the crest of the narrow hill road sloping to the bridge. For a moment they stood stock still, their senses frozen, then like the wild flurry of starlings on the report of a gun they took to flight, calling into action all the reserves of energy stored in muscle and nerve of their young bodies. Stephen, urged on by Tom, limped a few yards. At every step a shaft of pain smote him.

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He stopped dead, a sense of fatality, of inevitable disaster, invading his mind. He knew that he was lost, and surrendered to the thought with the dead calm of despair. All hope of outpacing that portentous figure moving steadily downhill was past. He could only wait dumbly and cry for mercy. Already his comrades—all but Tom —were a long way ahead.

“No use your waiting,” he said to Tom. “I’ll—I’ll be all right. Run for it, you. He’s still a good way off.”

Tom looked at him ruefully A pucker of helpless doubt and irresolution wrinkled his brows. He turned a searching glance in the enemy direction. Man and dog were now screened by the wild tangle of thorn growing on either bank of the narrow hill road down which they were moving. With swift decision he caught up Stephen in his arms, staggered with his burden towards the bridge, and, wading into the stream, sought for sanctuary in the deep shadows of the arch. Here, gasping, he set him down on a boulder and dropped on to another little rock-island beside him. Recovering his breath, he turned to Stephen.

“Safe here—safe as if we were in heaven,” he said with a laughing grin, showing all his teeth. “A narrow shave, though.”

Stephen nodded. His lips were trembling.

“I’ll—I’ll never forget, Tom,” he stammered.

“Sh!” came the sudden warning. They could hear the plod of Doorley’s steps on the roadway. A minute later he was crossing the bridge. As he passed a crumb of mortar dropped from overhead into me stream. Its splash could be heard against the gurgle of the water. A moment’s sudden fear possessed them. Would the

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sound bring Cerberus, as it would most of his tribe, questing to the bank? But a kindly Providence, tender to the wanton ways of youth, was on their side. Man and dog proceeded on their way.

“Bloody thieves— I’ll have ye ye” they heard the man call to the fugitives as he saw their lessening figures disappear in the little cloud of dust kicked up by their flying heels.

**Chapter VII**

**HIGH FESTIVAL**

I

There are little towns in Ireland on which time seems to have impressed a look of settled melan­choly. You feel that at the core of life some vital element has been half extinguished, leaving the soul a mere breathing entity. They remind you, somehow, of those drab defeated beings who sometimes pass you by in crowded cities, their eyes bent on the pavement, their bodies drooped to a hunch of hopeless resignation. While all the countryside responds to the seasonal changes these small towns maintain their look of dismal unconcern. The stir in the blood that comes to the peasant with the breaking of the earth in springtime, the joy that runs through his veins when the nurturing sun and rain of summer quicken the fields into one quiver of vernal life, this deep content on gazing on the fruition of his hopes, the chill that comes with perished fields and drifts of rain sweeping day after day over the sodden country—this continual flow and ebb of life awaken no responsive gesture in the huddle of streets and shops set greyly in its midst.

Carberymore was different. Most of its elders had been country bred, and their roots were still in the soil. All their people lived on the land. Every subtle change

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of mood in their kinsfolk in the fields had its reflection in the town.

To-day, its streets were astir with bright anticipation. Drab shops lost their frowsy look; the more attractive stores glittered. Voices of children could be heard in the streets long before school time. All over the country­side men in the fields, and women in the farmhouses, were ending their morning’s work in advance of the sun. For to-day was to be one of high festival. The circus was coming to Carberymore.

To Stephen this annual event was one of overflowing happiness. His father, always stern in his refusal to per­mit his children stay from school, would on this day of days make a pontifical gesture and withdraw the inter­dict. This alone was sufficient to give the day a bright sharpness in his calendar.

He and his brothers were early astir. It was their custom to travel, each with his own set of schoolfellows, some miles outside the town to meet the circus on its way. Stephen snatched a hasty breakfast and was off. Impatient of delay, his companions, he knew, would be waiting for him on the bridge.

On his appearance there was a noisy shout from the group assembled at the meeting-place, urging him im­patiently to come along. They all raced swiftly across the bridge and galloped up Rock Street, which straggled awkwardly up a short steep hill. They were soon out of breath, and slowed down into a more leisured pace as they crossed the Market Square into the Main Street. At the narrow opening into Rubbleton Lane they instinc­tively halted

The lane, always seething with young life at this hour, looked strangely quiet. One or two small boys were

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making their way disconsolately to school. The others regarded them with something of the pity and scorn of the emancipated for the serf still dragging his chain. Poor beggars, doomed to be imprisoned in school while all the trumpets of the world sounded the good tidings. “The circus! The circus is coming!” Why was life always so partial in the sharing of her gifts? When they passed haltingly into the porch the laneway was empty of life save for a flock of hens picking grains of corn from the droppings left by a carrier’s horse.

Stephen and his friends pushed on, catching up with group after group of boys eagerly moving towards the open country. A continuous chatter, like the noisy chirping of sparrows, rose into the bright summer air. When they had got clear of the town the roads were covered with a soft pad of dust. The shine of their shoes was soon hidden in chalk-grey powder. In their exuberant spirit some of the more lusty sent cloud after cloud of dust whirling into the air.

The wayside hedges were dry and parched, every leaf- pore choked by the dusty particles. Here and there the unripened blackberries hung in reddening clusters from the briars which showered like a green waterfall from the tangle of whitethorn bushes fringing the road. Along the grass banks they often came on patches burned to tan. A pleasant whiff came from the hayfields, still moist with the night dew. At roadside cottages women and small children came to their doors to stare at the unending knots of noisy wayfarers. With every twist of the road their eyes strained forward, seeking for the smother of dust that would herald the first arrival. Sometimes a far-off rumble would deceive them. The

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cry**,** “Here it is!” would be followed by the appearance of some farm cart lumbering into the town.

Their throats were parched, and when they came to a stile leading to a spring they all clambered over. The little twisted pathway to the well was moist, and on either side the grass was refreshingly green. The well lay deep in cool shadow under a projection of moss- covered stone. At its mouth was a broad flagstone that served as kneeling-place for the pitcher bearer when bending down to plunge the vessel in the water.

The boys threw themselves flat on this stone, and, leaning over, drank each in his turn. As one withdrew, making way for the next, water trickled from his nose and chin and dropped on to the flag. If his hair fell untidily over his forehead he emerged with dripping fringe, which he hastily brushed back with his coat sleeve.

Some of the less thirsty, like Stephen, went on their knees, leaned over, and, cupping their hands, drank more leisurely. Through the clear water Stephen could see a number of funny-looking little creatures—some shiny black like coal, others a speckle of brown—crawl­ing over the bright pebbles at the bottom of the well. Floating on the surface was a drowned daddy-long-legs, which he tossed on to the grass before drinking. When the last of the knot had drunk long and eagerly they hastened back to the highroad.

The first of the circus vans had just come into view. Like a torch flung from hand to hand the news was passed from one crowd to another. It raced along the highway into the town. It ran like wine through all the veins of Carberymore, sending a flush of life into its mouldiest laneways and alleys. It penetrated to the grey walls of

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the workhouse, from which thirty small boys, clad in coarse grey, would emerge later and, marshalled by their master, march to the midday performance.

The circus had travelled from Killnamara, nearly a score of miles to the east, and for all its splendour, looked worn and travel-stained in the bright sun. The boys sat on a fence and watched it go by, keeping up an incessant flow of eager comment. The gorgeous pro­cessional cars, like royal galleons, had their glory hidden under great sheets of canvas. In one the covering had slipped, and as the car thundered by they laughed to see themselves reflected for a passing moment in the tremb­ling pool of the mirror. A flock of fairy ponies came trotting by, while a bunch of small boys, hot and tousled, ran beside them, keeping up the pace all the way into the town.

In most of the sleeping-cars the blinds were still drawn. For Stephen, a house on wheels was always enchantment. He had often glimpsed the interior while the circus stood on the fair field, and his mind carried away a kaleido­scopic impression of polished mirrors, of pictures, of ornaments, of beads, skin rugs, and richly dyed curtains with gold embroideries. The vision always set in motion vague longings—dreams—excitements. This was a circus on the grand scale, and as the cars passed at irregular intervals, it was long before the last of its dusty splendours had rumbled by. The boys raced in the wake of the last carriage into town.

II

The circus encamped on the fair green. Then came the watering of the horses. This was an outdoor turn

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which almost rivalled in interest the most thrilling feats of the ring. Below the bridge, on whose battlement leaned a crowd of onlookers, the Auling spread wide. The sandy bed of the river sloped gently on either side, forming midway in the stream a channel sufficiently deep to allow the horses swim freely around. Each rider came along with half a dozen horses roped together and splashed in over the sandy bottom. Approaching mid­stream the water began to rise gradually, covering first the fetlocks of the animals, then the knees, then their hot, steaming bodies, till they were almost completely sub­merged. They swam round and round, some of the younger quivering with fear, a startled look in their eyes, the more seasoned breasting the current with a grave content as if the waters of the Auling were their native element.

At times the more daring riders knelt on the horse’s back, and, caught by the wash of a wave, came ashore drenched. In their laughing, challenging air, their strange accents, their riding breeches, their gaily coloured shirts, their bright scarves knotted loosely at the neck, they symbolized for Stephen some world of romantic adventure ever haunting his imagination.

At midday came the great open-air procession, with its music and its splendid pageantry. Half an hour earlier Bimbo, the stilt walker, set out, and with his jerky eccen­tricities set the little world of Lilliput beneath him agape with wonder and wide-mouthed laughter. With folded arms he sat on the roofs of houses calmly surveying the midget multitude swarming at his feet. Sometimes, bending down, he thrust his head through an upper window crowded with young seamstresses, putting them to flight in a wild peal of hoyden merriment. And when,

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amid the cheers of the crowd, some one passed him a tankard of beer through a tavern skylight in the Square, how royal was his gesture as he raised it to his lips and tossed it off in a single draught. With the first crash of cymbal and drum, of oboe and cornet, of horn and euphonium that heralded the procession, his star declined. His little hour was over. He had become that most tragic of spectacles, a king deserted by his people. Sic transit gloria!

The gorgeous cavalcade began to go by. Peasant women hooded in their sombre cloaks watched it in solemn wonder, doubting if it were real. They had been drawn, many of them for the first time, from their poor cottages on the edge of remote boglands and lonely mountain glens. “Mother o’ God,” they gasped, “what must heaven be?” “The seven wonders o’ the world I’m seeing this day!” exclaimed a withered old man, humped on his stick. “Many the fine sight I’ve seen in my time,” observed another ancient, “but never the like o’ this for grandeur.”

With proud, imperious air fair ladies swept by on their prancing steeds. A high scorn of the rabble through which they had to pass was written on their brows. Their robes of violet and crimson and green velvet were all aspangle like the night sky. From their riding hats drooped white ostrich plumes. “How humble and common God has made me,” thought Stephen as each exquisite vision, surrendering to the next, passed from his ken. One, less haughty than her sisters, smiled as she saw his dark earnest eyes upturned to hers, and he felt his heart cease beating. In the secret tabernacle of his mind the bright memory was to keep glowing for years. The passing of the great triumphal car, resplen-

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dent with mirrors and adorned with dragons and unicorns carved in gold, closed the procession. Its monstrous masked figures with their heads nodding gravely or turn­ing slowly from side to side, their eyes rolling dreadfully, their red tongues lolling out like those of panting dogs, made Stephen laugh uncomfortably. They recalled some of the dreams that shook his soul of nights.

The triumph ended, the country people made their way to the fair field for the midday show, while the townsfolk drifted homewards. Stephen, like all his town-bred companions, regarded with no slight con­tempt the country fellows who had to see a show lack­ing all the glamorous excitement of the night. For what a poor, tawdry thing at best is the circus field under the glare of the midday sun! What an aura begins to emanate from the deepening dusk when the flares begin to burn like pennons of flame!

III

To the young, struggle is life, and Stephen loved the surging, swaying crowd along which he was swept to the pay-box, clutching the while as if for dear life the small silver coin in his fist, and thrilling when the brass disc, larger than a crown, was passed to him in exchange.

The magic of the circus always penetrated through every pore of his being. The great billowing tent, the sizzling naphtha lamps with their saffron flames, the “sur-sur” rising from the sea of humanity around him— all became fused in one intoxicating dream.

He sat in the midst of his companions, close to the ring. From their memories of past shows the boys had

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arrived at an exacting standard of values. Their scorn of the equestrian who used a broad pad on his horse was as intense as their admiration of the bareback rider. Lloyds, they recalled, had long since discarded all such contemptible trappings. While they laughed at the drolleries of the clowns they compared them with others, whose fooling, they held, had been more comical, whose quips had been more wise, whose songs had had the kind of refrain that you could in a moment whistle with ease.

The high light of comedy always came when the clown, making his way to the ringside, sat himself down beside the shawled figure of some shy young woman and, laying his hand on his heart, made clownish pro­testations of his love. Always it hurt Stephen to see the poor bewildered creature thus made a mock of to pro­vide laughter for the groundlings. His heart cried “Shame!” though his lips were dumb. Had he been any of her kin, he felt that he would in a passion of rage tear the ruffles from the clown’s neck, clutch his throat, and, heedless of the uproar, hold fast like a tiger till they tore him away.

But it was reserved for the trapeze act to swing the sensitive curve of his emotional response to its highest. The grace and poise of the artistes’ bodies, the pliant mould of their limbs, the grave, deliberate beauty in their movement, the assured ease with which they glided from one dazzling feat to another—all this exquisite harmony of form and motion made him draw a deep breath, in which a tremble of fear mingled with the ravishment of his soul. All that followed was anti­climax — a climbing down from a high peak in Darien.

IV

The circus was over. The clown had spilt his last jest, the tumbler thrown his last somersault. Tonio, the world’s most daring rider, after whipping men’s hearts into a fine foam of excitement by failing twice in his act, had leaped from the ring clean on to the horse’s back amid salvos of applause. The ringmaster, frock- coated, sleek-haired, polished and shining down to his glossy shoes, had, with a royal flourish, thanked them for their patronage and retired. For three intoxicating hours their joy had bubbled up like wine in a cup—and now the end.

How strange one felt emerging into the cool darkness of the night. You made your way home through lamp­less streets, talking like one who had been a guest where the wine circled too freely. When a door suddenly opened it flung a bright path across the road, revealing nakedly every broken flint on its surface. You passed through the beam of light, and then the street was darker than before. From every side voices came to you out of the darkness—grave remembering voices of old men, the challenging voice of youth, the chatter of children, sometimes a girl’s shrill scream of laughter that made you shiver as when a piece of grit on your pencil rasped a slate. Passing down Rock Street you came on the bridge. How lovely the river—and the glint of stars where the waters broke—and the quiet of the fields.

And how good was home to-night—how warm with life and human affection—with you and Garry and Owen devouring a late supper—your mother piling food on to your plate—and all three of you responding,

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between mouthfuls, to your father’s questions: “How many balls did the juggler keep tossing?” “Did the wire-walker fiddle a tune as the Brothers Lloyd used to do?” “Did the show come to an end with the death of Black Bess? . .

The boys went to their room in a mood of deep content. The thirst of the young spirit for life and the craving of the growing body for food had been equally satisfied. A pleasant weariness weighed on their limbs, and they sank on their knees by the bedside in half a drowse. Their prayers were a blur against a bright tapestry of tumblers and horses and clowns. Before closing his eyes Stephen resolved to glimpse the last of the circus as it left the town in the early morning. It would pass by his house in Carrick Street on its way to Killnaree, a town some fourteen miles to the west. Should he wake he would leave his brothers undisturbed. Lord, what a fine crow over Owen and Garry !

V

The first rumble of the cars in the stillness of the dawn aroused him. He slipped out of bed and, clad only in his shirt, made his way silently along the passage to the parlour. Pale slants of light shone between the slats of the green Venetian blind and were reflected on the wall opposite. He pulled the blind and the grey morning poured into the room. Outside in the street horses hitched to wagons laden with heavy lumber strained against the incline. Tent-poles, bales of canvas, great coils of rope, wooden benches stacked almost as high as the window on which he leaned, went by amid the

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cracking of whips, the jingle of harness, and the voices of men urging their horses to a fresh endeavour. The great processional carriages, their splendour hidden again in sailcloth, trundled after. There was an interval, after which the sleeping-caravans went slowly by.

In which of these cars with their drawn blinds did the trapeze artistes, he wondered, lie asleep? He saw them in his mind’s eye lying side by side—like Garry and himself—their dark, clean-chiselled heads on the pillow, their tired bodies and supple limbs at rest, their dreams a fantasy in which they saw themselves swing their bodies from arc to arc of the broad horizon—all men’s eyes upturned to them in living wonder.

Leaning far out of the window he watched the last of the long train disappear like a fleet of full-rigged ships dipping slowly under the sea. He had a sense of triumph in the consciousness that he alone had witnessed that mysterious passing of the circus in the dawn.

Making his way to his room he slipped quietly into bed.

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**Chapter VIII**

**THE YOUNG LIBERATORS**I

IF God had said to Stephen, “You are dissatisfied with yourself—in whose image and likeness would you wish to be re-created?” he would have answered in a breath, “Tom Halligan’s.” Pressed for a reason by his Creator, he would with the same ardour have replied, “He knows no Fear.”

For bravery like Tom's seemed to Stephen the finest thing in life. Fear was an evil thing. It hung suspended like a shadow over your soul. You never knew when it would spring upon you. Sometimes it came suddenly as a storm that whips a door open and blows out the lamp. At other times it crept stealthily into your heart as a ghost into a room. At first you were only dimly conscious of its presence, then the perception of danger grew. You braced yourself to shake off the oppression —to struggle back to safety—but you were drawn by some irresistible force and engulfed in dark waters.

Tom Halligan’s courage was that of finely tempered steel. Stephen had seen it put to the test many times and never fail. He could slip at night into the castle demesne poaching rabbits, and passing the gamekeeper next day look steadily into his eyes, never betraying by even the

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flicker of an eyelid that the rabbit which he had snared was at that moment hanging in the kitchen larder. Stephen’s heart would have stopped dead. His guilty secret would have driven the colour from his cheeks.

Sometimes they all rambled a long way outside the town and ventured into sheep fields to gather mush­rooms, or to pick blackberries from the briar-covered fences. Should the farmer appear, he usually gave chase, the boys flying in a panic towards the highroad. On finding himself outdistanced, curses and threats would come hurtling on their ears like stones out of a crater. “In jail I’ll have ye—by my soul I will—every mother’s son of you. Pack of little town rowdies!”

On these occasions, while the others still kept running, their breath coming in gasps, Tom would stop dead, turn round for a moment, and in mocking derision fling back his threats, “In jail I’ll have ye—by my soul I will —every mother’s son of you!”

On winter nights when a hard frost set in they often sloshed buckets of water on the roadway to make a slide. At the sudden cry, “A bobby!” they would fly helter- skelter, seeking refuge in the shadows of doors and gate­ways, or in the house of a friendly neighbour. Tom, with easy assurance, would slip on to the pavement, and, assuming the casual air of a passer-by, go his way un­challenged.

Courage like Tom’s gave you a sense of arrogant power not unlike that of the big hill over the town which always seemed to mock the gathering of the storm clouds in the sky. How splendid life would be if, like him, you could laugh equally at the farmer with his mouthing threats, the gamekeeper with his gun, the constable with his truncheon!

And, apart from his courage, how good to look upon was Tom himself—Tom, with his sturdy body, his strongly moulded head, his bright, good-humoured eyes. There was something in his clean strength that recalled the vigour of some of those figures in The Last Supper. Fine, too, was that chivalrous instinct of his which always made him passionate in his defence of the weak against the strong and out of which sprang his ardent patriotism.

In Ireland a boy is fated to live through political strife, restless and unceasing as the conflict of wind and wave on its rocky coast. It beats around his cradle. Try as he will he can no more be deaf to the storm than a man of Aran to the wild sea-clamour into which he is born. The tang of it is ever on his lips, its salt breath in his nostrils, on his ears its eternal roll. The spray which it flings up impregnates his mind and body.

Tom and Stephen had only a vague sense of political values. The country was in the throes of the agrarian struggle, and the cry of the hour was, “The Land for the People!” On every side tenant farmers were holding out against payment of rents which had so crippled them economically that their lives had become an unending struggle. Poverty stalked them like a shadow. Battling with circumstance they blasted the rock, dragged the briar from its root, drained cold stretches of land little better than a bog, so that the reluctant soil might be forced to yield a little of the treasure which it clutched so fiercely to its breast. All the energies of their body were being burnt up in this wrestling with the clay, and they often reeled home in the half dark, beaten to a dumb resignation. A supper of bread and milk, or strong tea, the recital of the Rosary, and they crawled into bed, to renew the grim struggle at dawn. Every penny that

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could be saved was put by to meet the inexorable call of the agent on the forthcoming gale day. To add a few shillings to the precious pile being garnered to meet the landlord’s demand the last drop of milk had to be sold, so that mothers were often driven to nurse their infants long beyond Nature’s period.

For generations the mass of landholders had sunk into the acquiescent torpor of beasts of burden. Now they were slowly awaking. Here and there men had flouted the summons to appear in the agent’s office on gale day. Eviction soon followed. Some made a desperate resist­ance, yielding only when the bailiffs, under the pro­tection of an armed force, used crowbar and battering- ram and shook the house to its foundations. Out of this travail was born the Land League, the national movement to emancipate the peasant.

Tom and Stephen drank eagerly of the heady wine which bubbled up out of the conflict between the people and the Crown. Political meetings in the Square were frequent. From every point of the compass droves of peasants invaded the town—rough-coated, thickly shod men and boys whose lumbering gait and hunched shoulders told of labour in the furrowed soil. Some strode heavily to the shrill war-march of fife and drums. Many rode on horseback. At points along the main thorough­fare banners with slogans were flung across the streets. Among such battered war cries as, “Ireland a Nation,” “Remember ’98, ’48, and ’67,” was the new aspiration, “The Land for the People.”

The platform stood in front of the market gate. Round this the crowd swirled. However turbulent the human tide, the two boys dived in and always bobbed up right in front of the speaker. On the outskirts of the

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crowd squads of police officers—symbols of the Crown— stood helmeted, belted, watchful. There was a spate of oratory, and the crowd drank lustily from the torrent of rhetoric and responded to every passionate gesture of the speaker. They liked their political sermons salted with fire.

The seed of anger against the oppressor dropped into the hearts of the boys. Yet the land struggle in itself made no direct appeal to their imagination. To amelio­rate the lot of the peasant farmer might be patriotism of a sort, but to Tom and Stephen all patriotism centred in one burning point—the freedom of their country. There was a romantic appeal in the idea of men marching into the field to do battle for such a cause. There was little to inspire town-bred boys in a national movement springing from the aspiration, “The Land for the People.” “The People” were to them mostly “country yahoos,” whose hungry hearts would not permit a boy to quest for mushrooms in their sheep fields, or gather blackberries from their briary fences. Patriotism seemed a finer, a bigger thing than that. Lord Edward, Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone—theirs was the vision reflected, however broken the pattern, in their boyish minds.

II

The six boys had been lying on a sheltered bank by the river-side playing “Thirty-five.” A rubber had just ended and they were scrambling to their feet with the intention of returning home when Tom Halligan spoke. Something in his voice arrested them.

“Lads,” he said, “before we go I’d like to put before you a plan that’s been on my mind a long time.”

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They looked at him questioningly, their eyes bright with interest. Tom’s plans were always exciting. Unlike so many of their own projects, they sprang from no mere boyish fancy. Behind them was some deeply felt con­viction.

“What do you say,” he asked, “to the idea of our founding a secret society—like the Fenian Brotherhood, you know? Who would be ready to join?”

“I for one.” The quick response came from Stephen.

“I, too,” came as promptly from Charlie Hyland. “’Twould be rare sport,” he added light-heartedly, his eyes twinkling with fun.

“That’s a queer notion,” said Halligan, frowning. “Planning and working for the cause of freedom isn’t a funny business.”

The rebuke brought the colour into the other’s cheek. They saw that Tom was wholly earnest, and, dominated by his will, one by one they gravely nodded assent.

Stephen was thrilled. Here was an idea in which there was something of romance—of mystery—the things for which his young heart had so often yearned. If, in the background, it held lurking gleams of danger— what odds? They were so faint as hardly to be per­ceptible. The secret bond was a safeguard against dis­covery. Who of the six would dare to play the other false? The project was all very vague, of course, but one could trust Tom to give the idea form and substance. He was never one of those fellows who idly talked of doing things and left them suspended in mid-air. When he projected a plan it was virtually accomplished.

Their first meeting was to be in the stables of the Bridge Tavern. This was a big detached house with an enclosed yard sloping to the river. At that end of

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the enclosure remote from the dwelling house was a jumble of roughly built cowsheds, haylofts, and horse­boxes in which, on market days, country folk stabled their horses.

Stephen never forgot that meeting. The evening was steeped in sunshine. Slipping out of the bright sun into the darkness of the stable was like plunging into a deep cave. The stable was lit by a narrow unglazed window, little more than a slit in the masonry. The sunlight which pierced it cut sharply through the gloom. Par­ticles of dust from the mouldering roof kept gyrating in its quivering beams. Flies, darting to and fro, made a flicker of bluish wings. Near the eaves the crumbling mortar had given way, and the crannies were like dabs of gold made by a child’s untidy finger.

A rickety partition separated the stable from the horse­box on either side. The air held the heavy, warm scent of the litter and horse dung under their feet. Gradually the twilight seemed to lift, and blurred objects and the faces of companions began to emerge in clearer outline. A rack for hay, a manger, a halter hanging from a hook, cobwebs flecked with particles of lime, and swinging heavily from rafter to rafter. From the nearby stable came the slow contented crunching of a horse eating mouthfuls of hay. When he moved they could hear the softened thud of his hoofs on the straw.

They felt awkward and constrained, their minds a ravel of vague speculation. Instinctively their thoughts became centred on Halligan. They looked to him to reduce their nebulous fancies to some definite pattern.

Some one spoke. “Well, what are we going to do now that we’re all here?” The voice pricked their leader into action.

“First of all,” he began, “we have to find a name for the society. I thought of one or two myself. Some of you may hit on something better.”

“What were they, Tom?” inquired Stephen.

“Well, I thought of ‘The Greencoats.’ ”

“Oh, that’s fine!” exclaimed Bob Moloney. Poor Bob was as incapable of producing an idea as a mule of reproducing its kind, and gulped down without a thought those offered by his friends.

“I don’t know, Bob,” said Halligan dubiously, “it wouldn’t work. It would mean wearing coats of green like the United Irishmen. What sense would there be in the name otherwise? How could we get them? We’ve hardly a bent penny between us.”

“Besides,” remarked Stephen, always sensitive to possible ridicule, “fellows might jeer—if they ever got to know—and call us ‘The Greengoats.’”

They laughed.

" What other idea had you in mind?”

“The Emmetonians.”

“The what?” they asked uncertainly.

“‘The Emmetonians.’ After Robert Emmet, you know.”

“I think that’s great,” commented a voice.

“Aye; but it’s no more practical than the other. What hope have we of ever providing a uniform like Emmet’s—jackets of green, with doeskin breeches—and no end of accoutrements?”

“What about ‘The Croppy Boys,’ Tom?” suggested Barry Dwyer.

“‘The Croppy Boys’? Men no longer fight with croppy pikes. They’re less than useless against powder and shot.”

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“What would you say to ‘The Young Liberators’?” asked Stephen with some trepidation. And he went on, fearing a gibe, “O’Connell was a great leader. He dressed much like ourselves. We’re out, like him, to liberate Ireland.”

There was cordial assent. The title sounded well, and it suggested the purpose for which the society was being founded. Stephen felt a glow of secret pleasure. A moment ago their society was nameless—was little more than an abstraction. In giving it a name he had given it something of personality. And—who could tell?—it was a name destined, perhaps, to go down the years. It was like the baptismal rite through which, he had been told, life within life was set flowing eternally.

The question of leadership didn’t arise. They all knew themselves to be poor in heart and spirit compared with Halligan. Whatever of strength or vision they had, had its source in him. Nature had ordained that he should lead and others follow, and they accepted its decree as they accepted the predominance of the sun over the satellites whirling in a dance round it. Without him they would be sheep without a shepherd. And he, without arrogance, and without false modesty, knew that he was born to lead his fellows.

The manger had to serve as a rostrum. Into this he climbed and stood erect. Throwing back his shoulders slightly, as he had seen public orators do, he paused before addressing them.

Stephen’s heart was burning. Here, surely, was the very stuff of romantic patriotism!

“Brother Liberators,” he began, “true friends of free­dom….”

Some one spluttered. To little Charlie Hyland it had

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been all solemn foolery. There he stood abandoning himself to his sense of the ludicrous, half intoxicated with the sheer joy of it.

To Stephen, magnetized by every movement of his leader, the laughter was as deep an outrage as if the stable were a holy place.

“Shut up!” he snapped, a note of bitter impatience in his voice.

“Blithering fool — spoiling everything!” came in savage protest from another.

Charlie stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth while tears rolled from his eyes.

A flush of anger burned in Halligan’s cheeks. He turned to the offender.

“If you think this is play, Hyland—go! At once, too! The door’s open to you. You may have come here for clowning; if so, you were never more mistaken. We’re in earnest—in dead earnest, too, Hyland—each of us.”

Charlie’s face dropped. “I’m—I’m sorry,” he stam­mered. “I didn’t mean anything. Honest, I didn’t. It came on me. I—I couldn’t help it somehow.”

“That’s all right, then.”

He resumed after a moment.

“Brother Liberators, friends of freedom…”

Charlie tried to look solemn, failed, and choked again. Tom leaped down from the manger.

“Open the door!” he shouted.

Stephen lifted the latch and flung the door wide. A flood of sunlight poured in, blinding him for a moment. Halligan threw himself on the other and lifted him bodily. “Go! Go!” he said passionately, and tossed him on to the stinking heap of decaying horse litter out­side.

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The door was slammed to and the stable became a blur of peat-brown shadow again. There was silence—a silence which hid at its heart a smoulder of anger. All had resented young Hyland’s unseasonable mirth. It shattered the mood of high seriousness which had enfolded them. It gave them an uneasy feeling that their stern purpose was not all that it had seemed. If Charlie could only see in it matter to excite laughter would not others grin too—deeming them no more than a crowd of ridiculous playboys? His laughter had left some cor­rosive element that set them doubting—questioning— unhappy. Unconsciously they began to look at them­selves from without, and wondered if they were as fine and impressive as they had deemed.

All but their leader. The unforeseen assault on this beautiful fiery dream of his imagination almost at its nativity only served to quicken his ardour into a tenser flame. He leaped clean on to the manger and faced them. His eyes were burning. His face had paled. The taut nerves had visibly sharpened his features. When he spoke his voice had a note of repressed passion, which, like a lasso, swung them within its quivering circle.

“First and foremost,” he said, “if there is among you any fellow who has come here to play with patriotism as children play with shops, the sooner he follows that cur outside the better. If you’re not in earnest, you’re no good to us. There’s no place here for sham. The door is open for any fellow unwilling to run risks or to make sacrifices.”

He paused, waiting. No one stirred.

“Very well. This is only the beginning. It’s not a bad beginning, even if it has proved one of us a renegade. The Apostles were twelve. One was Judas. . . . We’ve

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got a name for the society—a splendid name,” (Stephen’s heart quickened) “and that in itself is no small thing. Everything else will come in time. A house isn’t built in a day, or in many days. It grows up stone by stone. The first thing in building is a steady foundation. I see no surer foundation for this society than the life and aspiration of Robert Emmet.”

He paused to wipe the beads of sweat standing on his forehead.

“I’ve been reading about him ever since I could first spell. His one desire was to free his country—his country and ours—to break the chains with which the base, bloody, and brutal Saxon has bound her.” (How they loved the bludgeon sound of the phrase so familiar to their ears from those meetings in the Square!)

“Emmet failed,” he went on, “but in failing he triumphed—for his work is an inspiration to every true Irishman. He died that we might live. For love of this land of ours he sacrificed everything that was dear to his heart. He must be our guiding star. That star will lead us to freedom as surely as the star of Bethlehem led the three wise men of the East.”

All these well-worn tags came tumbling out of his mind as if they had been new minted. He was hardly aware himself that his words were but the current coinage of the mob orator of the day.

“The English,” he went on, “gave him a mock trial— the kind of trial every martyred Irishman got from the Saxon knaves. They asked him as he stood in the dock if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him. He answered them in words which will burn for ever in the hearts of his countrymen. I know Emmet’s words—know them as I do my prayers

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—and I can think of no more fitting way to begin our great work than by giving out to you that speech of his from the dock.

“Try, if you can, to forget for the moment who I am and where we are gathered—imagine that Emmet him­self is speaking, this stable a court in Dublin, and this manger the dock where he stands, proud and un­defeated.”

Here he paused, lifted his head, threw his shoulders backwards, and with passionate gestures began to declaim the noble speech, unexampled in its impassioned elo­quence.

“‘What have I to say that sentence of death should not be passed on me according to law? I have nothing to say that can alter your predetermination. ... I have no hopes that I can anchor my character in the breast of a court constituted and trammelled as this is. . . ”

He went on, never stumbling for a word, as if he were a medium controlled by the hero-spirit of the young revolutionary.

“ ‘ I appeal to the Immaculate God, I swear by the throne of Heaven—before which I must shortly appear— by the blood of the murdered patriots who have gone before me, that my conduct has been through all this peril and through all my purposes governed only by the con­victions which I have uttered, and by no other view than that of their cure, and the emancipation of my country from the superhuman oppression under which she has so long and too patiently travailed; and I confidently and assuredly hope that, wild and chimerical as it may appear, there is still union and strength in Ireland to accomplish this most noble enterprise. . .”

His hearers, he knew, were no longer keeping pace

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with his thought. Some one, forgetting, yawned, then pulled himself together. No matter! Like it or like it not, they should hear him to the last word. Such a speech, uttered in such circumstances, needed no apology. And he went on:

“‘If the spirits of the illustrious dead participate in the concerns and cares of those who are dear to them in this transitory life, O ever dear and venerable shade of my departed father, look down with scrutiny upon the con­duct of your suffering son, and see if I have ever for a moment deviated from those principles of morality and patriotism which it was your care to instil into my youthful mind, and for which I am now to offer up my life.

“‘I have but a few more words to say. I am going to my cold and silent grave; my lamp of life is nearly extinguished; my race is run; the grave opens to receive me, and I sink into its bosom. I have but one request to ask at my departure from this world: it is the charity of its silence. Let no man write my epitaph; for as no man who knows my motives dare not vindicate them, let not prejudice or ignorance asperse them. Let them and me repose in obscurity and peace, and my tomb remain uninscribed until other times and other men can do justice to my character. When my country takes its place among the nations of the earth—then, and not till then—let my epitaph be written**.** I have done.’“

He bowed his head and, exhausted with emotion, slipped off the manger and came among them. Most of the Young Liberators had become apathetic long before the speech was ended. The edge of their interest began to dull when the splendid periods soared into heights beyond their understanding. Their thoughts went wandering, and matters trivial, inconsequent, slipped

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in and out of their minds. They tried to stifle their yawns as they shifted restlessly from one foot to the other. Stephen alone had hung rapt on his leader’s message. He felt himself borne along on its strong wave of eloquence, and the passion and fire of the speaker entered his heart, making it glow to a white flame. This was life—thrilling, mysterious, splendid.

“That was glorious, Tom,” he whispered, tensely earnest. “You—you were fine.”

Tom smiled. He knew that Stephen alone under­stood him. He divined with almost a clairvoyant sense what was beating in the minds of the others. He had noted the bored look in their eyes, their listless attitude, their vain attempt to suppress a yawn. They were no better than Charlie Hyland. Worse! He had the honesty, at any rate, to show what he felt. Nationally they were like the litter under his feet: rotten. Incap­able of being kindled, however fierce the flame tossed into their souls.

He would go on a little while, but deep down within him he knew that his work would be as futile as if he strode into the churchyard folded among the trees on the other side of the river and sought to quicken the sleeping dead into life.

“That’s all to-day,” he said.

They went out of the stable, out of its gloom and its close animal smell, into a world of golden evening light, tingling with wholesome scents. The renewed con­tact with all the familiar traffic of the closing day—men lounging at the comer—women gossiping—farmers on their way home with laden carts—dogs asleep on the pavement—the sound of a sledge on the anvil—of children singing—of the Auling flowing by—made all

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that passed as shadowy as a dream. They became gay and frolicsome as puppies let loose from some close prison of a backyard—barking, gambolling, sniffing the air for joy of their freedom.

Tom looked on. Wrapped in a cloak of bitter dis­illusion he made his way home in silence.

Stephen understood, and the knowledge brought with it a queer dull pain. A life had come into the world, quivering for a bright moment in a stable, and passed out. The Young Liberators were dead.

**Chapter IX**

**THE MATING**
I

AS Stephen stepped into the shop on returning from school one afternoon he sensed something unusual —he knew not what—in the atmosphere. His mother was engaged in conversation with a stranger—a stout, good-humoured, apple-faced man of the farming class. He could see at a glance that both were pleasantly excited.

“The hand of God may be in it—one never knows,” he heard his mother say. “You may as well come along and see them now. They’re upstairs.”

She lifted the hinged flap of the counter and came outside. The man tossed off the dram of whisky in his glass, brushed his hand across his lips, and prepared to follow. Mrs. Mangan, catching sight of Stephen, his strap of books swinging from his hand, turned round a moment.

“Have an eye to the shop till I return,” she said in a casual aside, “I won’t be a minute.”

She made her way through the door opening to the yard, thence through the kitchen, and, followed by the man, went upstairs.

All this was to Stephen matter for wonder. Who was this friendly stranger with the ruddy, jolly face?

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Who were the people whose business was so important as to secure for them possession of the parlour? What did his mother mean by saying, “The hand of God may be in it”? He tried to puzzle it out, but his vague speculation led him nowhere. He saw that he would have to restrain his curiosity till his mother returned.

The thought of the pleasant room upstairs in possession of rough, uncouth farm folk affected him disagreeably. He could see the untidy disarray of pewter pints and glasses on the brightly polished table, the splashes of stale beer, the slovenly figures sprawling on the chairs and sofa, his scanty collection of books tossed around.

A ballad singer in the street diverted his thought. A gaunt, dark-skinned, melancholy man. His voice was of great volume, but harsh and toneless. National ballads whose spirit demanded passion and fire, he ullagoned like a threnody, lengthening each quaver to a crotchet, each crotchet to a doleful semibreve. He was singing now:

“By memory inspired,

And love of country fired,

The deeds of men I love to dwell upon.”

Two men who had come into the shop laid down their drinks to listen.

“My soul, but that fellow have the big voice,” remarked one.

“Divil much music in it though,” came from his companion. “Did you hear that singing fellow in the street one night about a month ago?”

The other shook his head.

“A pity. ’Tis he had the gift. You’d stand in the snow listening to him. God, ’twas music for angels!”

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His words struck a chord in Stephen’s memory. The singer had appeared in the streets soon after nightfall. His appearance and his voice made it obvious that he wasn’t of the race of traditional ballad singers. Most likely some ill-starred artiste driven to the roads. As he went from street to street, the crowd, growing larger every moment, had followed him enchanted. Sober-suited merchant tradesmen, usually jealous of their dignity, could not resist the spell of his voice, and stood on the outskirts of the throng, discreetly aloof from their humbler neighbours. Father Keville, returning from the church where he had been hearing confessions—it was the vigil of Saints Peter and Paul—was held too by the voice, and stood listening on the fringe of the crowd. As the last notes of the song trembled into the dusk he made his way to the singer. The crowd parted with that ready courtesy to a priest instinctive in the Irish character, and gaped when they saw him hold the stranger in friendly converse, slip some silver into his hand, and move away.

Stephen attended the last Mass on the holiday. He went alone. Garry and Owen had been to early Mass. They had planned to spend the day fishing on the Barra —a little twisted trout-stream all broken with moss- grown rocks, the water foaming into currents and then dropping into quiet pools. Stephen rarely joined them in these excursions. He couldn’t subdue his fitful nature to the patient mood of the angler.

It was lovely in the church. Through the windows he could see the tops of green branches in the convent garden stirring lightly in the sun. A twitter of bird song dropped into the air. The coloured windows over the high altar had a jewelly radiance, turning the flame of the six long candles pale like curd. At the Offertory his

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heart stood still. Arrestingly there came from the organ loft a strange voice—the voice, he suddenly recalled, of the evening before. Here in the church it seemed to his thought stripped bare of earthly passion. “God, how lovely!” he cried in his heart. . . . And now, squatting here in the bar, a tankard in his hand, a man was echoing his emotion, “ ’Twas music for angels!”

His mother returned to the shop.

“What’s up?” he asked, his eyes bright with curiosity.

“Nothing that concerns you,” she answered. “Run along to your dinner—and don’t spend too much time over it. There’s some people upstairs. They’ll be pass­ing in and out, and Ansty wants to tidy up.”

“I only want to know, mother”

“The same again, Mrs. Mangan,” called one of the two men still engaged in discussing the art of the ballad singer whose dreary voice could be heard coming now from a pitch farther up the street.

She left him to serve her customers. For the moment he had to be content. If he persisted he knew she would give in. Unless the matter was of grave importance she always did. He had all a boy’s art of insinuating himself into a mother’s confidence. Anyway, he felt he could cajole Ansty into telling him everything. He made his way to the kitchen, tossed his books on the window­sill, and took his place alone at the table.

Ansty was cross.

“Late again—and I at my wits’ end to get the place tidy. The house full of strangers trapesing in and out.” She clapped his plate in front of him. “Your brothers came home nearly an hour ago. What kept you?"

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“There was a funeral. Some of us followed it into the churchyard.”

“A funeral? What funeral?”

“Some old lady from the east. A Mrs. Rutherford. A Protestant,” he added.

“A Protestant? And you went to the funeral?” she gasped in horror.

“What harm?” he asked in surprise.

“‘Tis a terrible sin. I wouldn’t have it on my con­science for a million.”

“Who said ’twas a sin?”

“I say it—and any one knowing their religion will tell you the same. ’Twould upset your mother in a fright and she to know this.”

“But you’re all wrong, Ansty.”

“I know my religion, and it’s an awful sin. More, you have to go to the bishop himself to get pardon.” Nonsense. There’s no sin unless you join in the service. The moment the minister began we all made off.”

“For all that ’twould trouble my soul.”

“The more fool you, then,” he laughed. “Oh, look, Ansty,” he asked, turning to her abruptly, “what’s all the to-do about? What’s going on upstairs?”

“Matchmaking.”

“Matchmaking?” He dropped his knife. So that was it! Here, under his own roof, was being enacted a scene which he had always passionately longed to witness. What could be more intriguing than this mating of a man and a maid? “Who are they, Ansty?” he in­quired eagerly. “Do I know them?”

“You might, and you mightn’t. They’re customers only since Lady Day. Diarmuid Mor \* they call the

\* Big Diarmuid.

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father. A fine man to look at. Big as a house. A bit of an old rascal, though, for all his years. Always gaming.”

“Don’t I know the old lad. He chanced to come into the yard outside one day. Happening to see the weighing-machine he asked me if I would weigh him. He turned the scale at seventeen stone nine. ‘That’s a fearful weight,’ said I. ‘Take three pounds off, my son,’ said he, ‘ for I’ve three pints of Baymish inside me.’ —and away he went laughing.”

“Oh, that’s himself. For his eldest daughter the match is. Johannah. A big, soft girl.”

“And the boy, Ansty?”

“There’s no boy.”

“No boy?” he echoed in surprise.

“Well, there’s no sight or light of him yet. Hours ago he was to have met them here. To reneague he did, I’m thinking. One Timsy Dorney he is. A returned Yank.”

“God, that’s awful, Ansty!”

“ ’Tis so. No wonder the big man above to be in a raging fury, and Johannah, the creature, a pity to the world.”

“That stranger who went upstairs with mother— what has he to do with it?”

“How would I know? Ate your dinner, and quit out o’ this. Gab—gab—gab.”

“Ah, go on, Ansty,” he pleaded.

“A boy shouldn’t be so curious. I’m not going to tell you, and there’s an end to it.”

He assumed a faintly aggrieved air and ate in silence. Under her rough husk Ansty was fond of Stephen. He suddenly stopped eating. “For the last time, won’t

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you tell me?” he entreated, a hint of reproach in his voice.

She hesitated. “Look, you’d try a saint, Stephen,” she smiled, and sat down facing him. His dark eyes, avid of knowledge, looked into hers.

“It’s like this,” she began. “Down at the Bridge Tavern there was to be another matchmaking to-day. For a boy of the Sheehy’s west from Coolamore. What do you think, Stephen, if the young girl or her people never came next or nigh the place?”

“The girl reneagued?”

“Faith, she did. And somehow or other didn’t the others come to know the story of what happened here?” “Good Lord, who told them?”

“I dunno. It doesn’t take long for news to travel in Carberymore. Only whisper and off it goes in the wind. Now comes the best o’ the story. ‘Wouldn’t it be a good thing,’ said some one, ‘we to bring the two disap­pointed parties together? Who knows but something might come of it?’ That stranger you’re so curious about is a kind of go-between. Now, in all your born days, did you ever hear the like o’ that, Stephen?”

He shook his head and recalled his mother’s words, “The hand of God may be in it—one never knows.” It was all so clear to him now.

“Wouldn’t it be strange, Ansty,” he remarked, “if it came off? Like a play somehow?”

“Whisht!” she said, hearing a heavy foot on the stairs, “he’s coming.”

He came in, his face glistening like an apple after a sunny shower. His bright blue eyes were twinkling. He flung them a pleasant “Good-day to ye,” and made his way to the shop.

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“He looks pleased, Ansty.”

“Pleased? Why, the old boy’s walking on air. Sure as day they’ll be crowding in upon us in a minute” —and straightway she began to whip the cloth from the table and to seize the broom.

Stephen could not resist following the man into the shop. “It’s all right, Mrs. Mangan, he heard him say, his face one broad smile of satisfaction. “They’re every bit as agreeable as ourselves to talk it over.”

“That’s great news,” she remarked. “’Twould be a miracle ye to come to an agreement. God direct ye to do what’s best.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Mangan. I’ll go now and bring the boy and his father straight here. We’ve wasted the best part of a day and the sooner we begin, the sooner we’ll be done.” And with that tag of common sense off he went.

II

“I know all, mother,” said Stephen with a smile.

“Of course you would; you had it from Ansty, I suppose?”

He laughed.

“Well, keep it to yourself. It’s not fair to people. That poor girl upstairs has suffered her share. If the story went abroad she’d be the talk of the countryside. You wouldn’t wish that, would you?”

He shook his head. “You know I’m not like that,” he added.

“Very well. Keep an eye from the door and tell me when you see them coming.”

“Mother?”

“Well?”

“I—I want to ask you something.” He spoke hesitatingly.

“Well, what’s bothering you?”

“Were you and father married—in that way? I— I mean, was it a made match?”

“Well, of all the funny questions!” she gasped. “Why, Stephen, we knew each other for years and years. Just in the friendly way of people living in the same townland.”

“I’m—I’m glad, somehow,” he smiled.

“You’re the funny fellow,” she laughed as he went to take up his position at the street door.

As he stood there, leaned against the jamb, his eye bent on the Bridge Tavern, he was almost painfully excited. What if this boy, like the other, should change his mind? What if he should decide not to come? The unwanted Johannah—how stricken she would be! Passed over again; like a white cow at the fair which no one favours. Smart playboys would make rhymes on her, maybe. “The Ballad of the White Cow” or something. Poor Johannah!

And if he did come, what a strange mating! For the first time in their lives they would meet to-day, this boy and this girl. In a week or two they’d be man and wife, maybe. He had read the marriage service in some Prayer Book. “Till death do us part,” it said. If they should ever come to hate each other—what then? Always bitterness and heartache. No rest till death, the peace­maker, came between them. But then, how seldom one heard of man and wife hating each other. All these farmers and their wives who came into the shop, how comradely they were. You’d know, somehow,

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they were content. Yet, till their marriage day, most of them were as much strangers to each other as these two. When he grew up he wouldn’t be mated in that way. He’d rather be drowned! The funny thoughts that came into one’s head! God, if any one knew—or half knew! At the thought the colour rose into his cheek. He frowned, angry with himself. Just then the jolly-faced man hove in sight, in his company the youth and his father.

“They’re coming!” he cried excitedly, turning to his mother, " three of them.”

She smiled as she saw the leap in his eyes. “Pretend nothing,” she said. “They wouldn’t wish a boy like you, Stephen, to know their business.”

“All right, mother,” he said reassuringly, “I under­stand.”

The Examiner was on the counter. He snatched it up. When the three men appeared in the doorway he seemed lost in the day’s news.

His mother saluted them in Irish. “The light of God to you,” she said.

“Long life, woman of the house,” they replied in the same tongue.

She offered them a drink to mark the occasion, and all three readily accepted. “Begob, we’re in fine fettle now to meet them, Mrs. Mangan,” said the apple-faced man, wiping his lips.

“Come along then—and the best o’ good luck to ye,” she replied, as she led them through.

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 III

Stephen, from his place at the other end of the counter, had followed the scene with absorbed interest. He had studied the young man curiously. A soft, shy fellow— dependent, he could see, on his father’s will. What must be his feelings going into that room upstairs? Meeting the woman with whom he might have to live all his days? Eat with her, drink with her, share the same room with her? What would he, Stephen Mangan, not give to be a spectator—just to look on like one at a play?

He tried to build up the scene in his mind. His inner eye was held by two figures—a man and a maid. The others resolved themselves into attendant shadows. Shy and awkward, the two were sitting apart on the sofa— she with downbent head. Now and then, consumed with a burning curiosity, each stole a sidelong glance at the other. What were their reactions to those swift, searching glances? Was there the sudden recoil of natures hostile in their elements? Or was there that leap of the heart, that throb of the pulse, that delighted recognition, by which Nature infallibly proclaims her choice? Sometimes he could see each catch the other’s questing eye, whereupon they felt distressed as children discovered thieving. He could see them colour and turn away, pretending to be absorbed for a moment in some object in the room—a picture on the wall, a photograph on the mantel, Owen’s stuffed otter under the glass shade.

Or was it all different? Did the man boldly sit close to her and swing his arm about her waist, the others laughing and making such full-blooded jokes as only

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men in contact with the earth, and the beasts of the earth, can let fly from their tongue? He’d question his mother on her return in order to discover the truth. Yet, could he? She would not like it. She was always so reticent about everything like that. If he could only look on for a moment—not merely try to imagine things. . . .

Here was his mother now, followed by Ansty. She went inside the counter, filled a half-gallon measure with porter, and set it on the drainer. The liquor was high, and foamed on the brim. With a glass she kept flicking off the creaming froth which slid down the polished surface of the vessel into the drainer. Ansty took a tray and set on it the measure of porter, several tumblers, and two small glasses of wine for Johannah and her sister. The tray was overladen.

“Let me help you, Ansty. I’ll take up some of the glasses.” There was an eager note in the suggestion.

“I can manage all right.”

“But I’d like to. Honestly, I would.”

“Come along, then,” she flung at him, laughing.

His mother looked dubious as she saw him go. She had little doubt as to the impulse that had moved him to proffer his help. A strange, puzzling kind of boy in many ways. So unlike Owen and Garry. Some queer, restless urge in him. Some smouldering disquiet. At times moody, unhappy, repressed; why, she could not think. Extravagantly happy at moments, his heart pouring out like the pent waters of the mill dam when the hatch was raised. How did she and Roger come by a son so unlike themselves? Did he derive, she won­dered, from that scholar uncle who was given to making rhymes? She sighed, feeling how little she really knew of his heart and mind.

He followed Ansty upstairs. She pushed the door inwards with the edge of the tray and they entered. His eye tried to take in the scene at a glance. The par­lour seemed to have lost that note of intimacy which belongs to rooms in which one has lived from childhood. In the presence of so many strangers objects had changed their values. The very books had the forlorn aspect of those who feel they do not belong.

Diarmuid Mor was seated on the big easy-chair to the right of the window. His face had not yet lost its flush of resentful anger. His thick, close hair, shiny-black, was ruffled. On the companion chair directly opposite was the boy’s father—a vague, half melancholy type of man, with pale blue eyes. The apple-faced stranger whom they called Morty Dan stood in front of the fireplace, his rounded head with its bush of greying hair reflected in the overmantel. Seated in the rocking-chair was Johannah’s sister, Peg, her sharp face and her fox-red hair contrasting oddly with the dark splendour of her father. Was it that she derived from her mother’s clan? Men of dark breed often favour a mate of fiery plumage. At one end of the sofa sat the young man—shy, awkward, constrained. A discreet distance away from him was Johannah, two hectic spots on the high cheek bones under her eyes.

Ansty laid down the tray.

“Good luck to you, my girl,” said Diarmuid Mór. “Fine and fresh the porter is by you, always.”

“It should be good,” returned Ansty, “’twas only tapped this morning,” and with an expansive smile to the company she bustled away. Morty Dan left his place to fill the glasses which Stephen, playing for time, was ostentatiously arranging on the table. He

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poured out a tumbler and Stephen handed it to Diarmuid.

“Bedad, but you’re the useful garsun," he laughed.

“Have a small sup yourself, my man,” and he tendered him the glass of dark liquor frothing at the brim.

Stephen shook his head. “No, thanks,” he smiled.

“You don’t know what you’re missing, my son.” He pulled Stephen to him. “Tell them how much I weighed the other day,” said he.

Stephen told them.

“Aye, seventeen stone nine pounds,” he repeated, vaingloriously. “My soul, but you’re great to remember it.”

He gripped Stephen’s arm and clamped him between his knees. Drink had kindled his eyes into a jovial bright­ness.

“Bedad, but you’re the nice, clean-faced boy, Master Mangan. I like a lad like you. God’s truth, I do! And the red lips of you fresh as a young girl’s”—and he clapped his mouth smotheringly on Stephen’s and kissed him.

They all laughed outright, glad to shatter the constraint of which they had been so uncomfortably aware. “Damned, but that’s a good one!” said Morty Dan.

“You shouldn’t, Da,” protested the red-haired daughter. “Shame on you to upset the garsun! He’s not used to your rough ways.” And, turning to Stephen, “Don’t mind my father. That’s only his way. Always going on.”

Stephen, overwhelmed by this affront to his manhood, stood for a moment half stupefied. Then, with cheeks ablaze, he tore downstairs and sought refuge in the garden. He was quivering all over. The crush of the

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man’s mouth, with its reek of beer and tobacco, was still on his lips. The contact with the rough fringe of hair on his lip left his young skin smarting with points of fire. Strange tremblings passed over him. Sick with shame, he hid his face in his hand. “Lips fresh as a young girl’s”—that was the last ignominy. Why didn’t he smash his face? Why didn’t he seize one of the fire- irons and with the strength of fury bring it down on his head? Why, why didn’t he do something to vindicate his pride and his manhood?

To his dying day it would remain with him. It was luck, though, that Ansty had left the room. It would kill him that she should witness his degradation. The others of the company, they were all strangers. To them it was fine play-acting. They laughed at his humiliation. Ignorant country clods—all of them! Their souls clay like their bodies. He grew hot and cold in turn. “Christ wither him!” he cried to himself. He had never cursed in that way before, and the words surprised him. They served to cool the hot pain searing his heart.

He could still feel the clutch of the man’s strong hand on his arm. He could see the warm colour on his cheeks, the quickened gleam in his eyes. And then that drown­ing, bewildered sense when the wet mouth crushed on his. The scene would recur to him in his dreams and mix with other sick fancies drugging his soul. He must forget it—he must drive the thought of it back like some filthy beast to its sty. His interest in the matchmaking had waned. That big, compelling figure in the arm­chair, rather than the two sitting at arm’s length on the sofa, now dominated his mind. . . .

The evening was still warm and he felt a sudden urge to go swimming. A plunge always left his head clear,

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his body cool. When he returned he would persuade Ansty to let him know all that had happened in the meantime. He slipped out and made his way along the Auling to the swimming pool. Nature seemed to have designed Poll Gorm—the Blue Pool—for her children. The waters of the river, widening in their course between yielding banks of clay, had here to force their way between masses of rock flanking the pool at either side. However sluggish the water in the upper reaches of the river, it was always deep and cleansing in Poll Gorm. The smooth, shelving rock of red sandstone formed a natural spring for the diver, enabling him to leap from any height pleasing to his fancy.

He stripped himself in a moment, and, standing on a ledge high over the water, blessed himself according to traditional custom. Balancing himself carefully he drew his limbs taut, and, raising his heels slightly, plunged in head foremost. He relished the cold sting of the water on his warm body. As he dived from bank to bank the bed of the river was a golden amber, and the stones and pebbles flung so confusedly together seemed golden too. He rose slowly through the bluish crystal depths, and on coming to the surface shook his head, scattering the bright drops from his hair. He then clambered up the rock, and sitting on a ledge, his arms akimbo, let the grateful sun soak into his young body.

His heart had quickened its action and his mind re­sponded. All his senses were tingling with pleasure. He took a header again, and rose midway in the pool. Here there was a submerged rock on which he could stand, the water rising to his breast. He stood awhile, trailing his hand idly in the stream, and then struck out to swim. The water had now become caressingly warm.

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Using the breast stroke he oared himself along, swimming round and round many times.

As the energy of his limbs began to wane he turned on his back to do “the dead’s man float.” He lay supine, some invisible force in the water sustaining his body, and gazed upward. How high and limpid was the blue sky. How silvery fleeced the clouds. He closed his eyes; there was no darkness—only a vast encompassing space of luminous bronze. When he raised his lids again the sudden radiance made his eyes blink and he kicked out, swimming on his back, slowly, rhythmically, as to the movement of some remembered air. He finally splashed, tossing the water with his drumming feet into fountains of silvery spray. Amid the dazzling whiteness jets of water gleamed like ice crystals. Turning once more on his breast he swam to the bank and clambered up, the water dropping from his body on the sun-warmed rock. He had brought no towel, and dried himself by running in the sun. In a moment he was dressed, and, conscious of a sense of cool cleanliness, began to make his way homeward along the river bank.

He paused occasionally to watch through the clear water the movement of eels as they crawled over the weed-grown rocks in the bed of the river. When they wriggled, the whites of their bellies flashed under the smoky green of their lean backs. He loathed the creatures with their evil eyes, and their cruel mouths, and the slimy feel of their bodies, yet was fascinated by their slow, sinuous movement. At the bend of the river the wide span of arches forming the old bridge came into view. Through its shadowy openings the clumped hills and woods with flecks of blue sky made a lovely confusion. Their dissolving tones seemed to

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weave themselves into shifting patterns like those in a crystal. He longed to be able to dabble in colours to capture a moment of its enchantment.

He turned from the river into the short stretch of roadway leading to the main thoroughfare. As he drew near home he began to wonder if the drama of human destiny being enacted under its roof had yet run its course. And what was its ending? Had the argument resolved itself, as so often happened, into a conflict of unbending forces whose motive power was greed? Or had there been adjustments so that these two, this boy and this girl, flung by fate into that upper room in his father’s house, should leave it pledged to face life together?

IV

When he stepped into the shop he was glad to find it empty of customers.

“Are they gone, mother?” he asked.

“Not yet, Stephen.”

“Oh, bother!”

“Why; what does it matter to you?” she asked in surprise.

“I hate to see them everywhere I turn. The place doesn’t seem one’s own.”

“That can’t be helped. In business you have to be agreeable. Anyway, they’ll be going shortly. They’re just having a parting drink.”

“And what of the match? Did they settle?”

“Indeed they did. Everything’s arranged.”

He dropped into silence for a moment, his brows gathered. It was queer and puzzling.

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“Doesn’t it seem all wrong, mother?” he asked with the serious air of a mature mind.

“Wrong?” she echoed in surprise. At times she found herself talking to Stephen as to an equal.

“I mean this way of arranging a marriage. Higgling and haggling like jobbers at a fair.”

Puzzled by his attitude of mind she looked at him. “What odd notions you have, Stephen.”

“I have not. It’s rotten.”

“Have sense,” she said. “What do you know of such things? Many of the happiest people I know came together in that way.”

He was silent. His mother, of course, knew best, but yet . . .

Further argument was held up by the entrance of a small, slight man, very swarth of countenance. For a countryman he was unusually well groomed. He came in a little hesitantly, and was obviously ill at ease. Stephen wondered why, on his appearance, his mother should have betrayed such obvious surprise.

“Mrs. Mangan,” he said haltingly, “I’ve come to ask a little favour.” There was the lingering trace of the American accent in his intonation.

“The Yank!”—Stephen’s heart leaped at the recogni­tion. The situation intrigued him, and he listened with a greedy ear. Why had he reneagued, as the saying had it? And having reneagued, why had he come now? If the accepted suitor, or Diarmuid Mor, or Johannah chanced to come in, what would happen? It would create a situation such as you’d read of in a story or see in a play.

“What is it I can do for you, Mr. Dorney?” he heard his mother ask without much warmth.

“It’s like this, Mrs. Mangan. I just got wind of what’s happening here. Would it be fair to ask if things have gone too—too far like for me to interfere?”

“I’m afraid they have.”

“They’ve—settled, then?”

“They have indeed. Everything.”

“Pretty quick work, I guess.”

“Well, you could hardly blame them, Mr. Dorney, could you? They were hours waiting, and no word from yourself. You’ll hardly wonder their being upset. However,” she added, with a faint spice of malice, “they’re all so pleased and happy in themselves now that they seem to have forgotten the disappointment.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Mangan,” he said, trying to smile away his discomfiture. “that’s all I wanted to know.” “You might like to see Diarmuid—to explain things like?” she suggested. “I’ll send for him if you wish.” “No, no,” he answered with nervous haste. “He’s a fiery-tempered man, and I see no good in our meeting.” “Well, maybe you’re wise,” she remarked. “Diar­muid has a good share of drink in him, and he’s quarrel­some when roused.”

“Thanks for the word, Mrs. Mangan. I’m sorry the way things happened—but what will be, will be.” Having voiced this fatalistic philosophy he went away, nervously fingering his little moustache.

Stephen had watched the scene, his eyes wide with interest, his ears fearful of losing the faintest syllable.

“Well, if that’s not the funniest thing, “he said, laughing.

“Queer fun if the big man upstairs happened to come in, Stephen,” she answered. “Thankful to God, I am, that nothing happened.”

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Spring Horizon

“What would happen?”

“Heaven only knows with the like of Diarmuid Mor. I remember as if ’twas yesterday the time he hoisted a bailiff on to his shoulders and flung him headly-bodily over the bridge below.”

“He did?”

“He did so. A fair day it was. Never in my life did I see such commotion. People cheering and shouting, and the police running from every direction. They pulled the man out of the river, more dead than alive. It took six o’ them to drag Diarmuid to the lockup. Tom and bleeding he was from head to foot. I saw it all from that door, and I as frightened as if ’twas the end o’ the world.”

“God, that was awful.”

“Two years in Cork jail they gave him. When he came out the people welcomed him with bands and banners and bonfires blazing on all the hills. After a spell he settled down and married a pale little wisp of a woman, quiet as a candle. Diarmuid Mor was the great hero then, though ’tis all but forgotten now.”

“That’s a wonderful story, mother.”

“’Tis the truth anyway. Penny ballads were made about him and sung at the fairs.”

While she was yet speaking the door from the yard sud­denly swung open and Diarmuid, a little uncertain in his steps, lumbered in, followed by his daughters. He was in boisterous humour. In his eyes was a rollicking gleam. His flushed cheeks were moist with sweat. His un­buttoned waistcoat hung loose, and the breeches edge, sharply outlined against the white shirt, revealed his massive girth. “The Drunken God,” thought Stephen,

remembering some crude figure of Bacchus that he once saw engraved on a street ballad.

He gave a slight lurch to the counter, and, steadying himself, carefully held out his hand. It closed like iron on that of Stephen’s mother. “The blessing of God on you, and on this house, Mrs. Mangan,” he said solemnly.

“Thanks, Diarmuid,” she answered, smiling. “I’m glad everything turned out so well.”

“So help me God, I’ll never forget your kindness. Never, ma’am, never.” And each time he wrung her hand as earnest of his good will. “Call himself, and we’ll have a jorum together.”

“I’m sorry he’s not in, Diarmuid. He had to go east to the mill a while ago.”

Stephen felt an impulse to slip away, but some influ­ence radiating from the man’s vigour of personality held him. He stood in the door as if his attention were absorbed by the group of children in the street, who, moving in a ring, were singing “Sally, Sally Water.” Yet he was so tensely conscious of all that was happening in the shop that every moment was being registered by a heart-beat.

Diarmuid let go his mother’s hand, and, leaving the counter, swung unsteadily towards him.

“Master Mangan,” said he, “don’t mind the rough ways of an ould fellow like Diarmuid Mor. I wouldn’t offend your mother’s son for all the world. God, no! The best little woman living. A lady if ever there was one. Shake hands now, my lad?”

The strong grip made his heart beat faster. His mind was all a confusion, his hurt pride struggling with some compelling attraction which the crude splendour of the other’s personality imposed upon him.

Diarmuid released his hand, and Stephen turned to go.

“Wait a minute, my son,” said he, fumbling with his pocket and drawing out a half-crown. “Here’s a bit o’ silver to buy a hurley or whatever you fancy.”

“Oh, no, thanks,” protested Stephen, drawing away.

“By my soul, you will!” and he clutched his hand.

“I can’t—I’m not a child,” he declared, and wrenched himself free.

The other was taken aback. He had never known a lad whose eyes didn’t brighten at the glint of silver. It might be good manners but it hurt his pride.

“You’re too proud, my son,” he said sombrely. He called to Mrs. Mangan, who was deep in conversation with his daughters. “Here’s a lad too grand in himself to take a bit o’ silver from Diarmuid Mór. Now, in the name of God, ma’am, what do you think o’ that?”

“Don’t bother, Diarmuid,” she said. “Their father’s dead against the boys ever taking money.”

“What matter? This is a different story. We had luck in this house, and ’tis only right the boy to have some token of it.”

“Take it,” she nodded to Stephen. He read in her eyes a message to humour the man. He accepted the peace offering.

“Bravo, my son,” he said, smiling broadly. “There’s spirit and breeding in you, if I know anything. I’ll be tackling the horse now,” he announced, turning to his daughters. “’Tis running late, and that mother of yours will be all in a panic wondering what’s happened.”

“Very well, Da,” answered Johannah. “We’ll be waiting for you here.”

He passed out. Stephen watched the titanic figure stagger down the street and lurch into a gateway leading

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to a yard. He turned into the shop. His mother and the two girls were still talking.

“And so you’re pleased?” he heard his mother say.

“I am so. He’s very nice,” smiled Johannah.

”They’re well connected too,” said Peg impressively. “There’s a near cousin high up in the gover’ment—a gauger or something.”

“Curly Kavanagh, the Poor Law Guardian, is another cousin,” added Johannah.

“Well! Well!” exclaimed his mother, with becom­ing surprise. “That’s wonderful. I hope everything will thrive with you. You’ve chosen a comely, decent boy, Johannah.”

Johannah beamed. “I like him in a wonder. God was very good to me.”

The jolt of a farm cart pulling up at the door drew their eyes.

“Here’s my father now with the car,” remarked Peg. “Short delay he made for all the drink in him.”

“Good-bye now, and God bless you, Mrs. Mangan,” said Johannah, preparing to go. “Awful trouble we’ve been to you turning your lovely parlour into a frish- frash of a place. But we’ll never forget your kindness.”

“Yeh; whisht, Johannah,” protested his mother.

“When the time comes, Mrs. Mangan, I’ll have my own match made here,” laughed Peg.

“A hundred thousand welcomes you’ll find before you,” smiled his mother.

**Chapter X**

**SUNDAY MORNING**

I

A RIPPLE of sunshine playing on Stephen’s pillow called him from sleep. His eyes blinked, and he put up his hand for a moment as a shield against the light. The church bell was ringing for early Mass. Sunday morning! In the round of the week it was the morning he liked best. The very words had a rhythm in tune with the bell:

“Ding—dong!

Sunday morning!”

There was gladness and warmth in the words too. Morning and the sun—they seemed to symbolize some resurrection of the spirit from the oppression of the night with its brooding silence and its dreams. And there was no thought of school to cast its shadow on your waking mind.

It was pleasant to be in bed and watch in idle ease the flies on the window-pane. How enraptured with life they were after the night’s drowse. How they flicked their frail, transparent wings. Buzz—buzz! Buzz— buzz! It was nice, too, to see the bits of blue sky through the lightly stirring green leaves outside. . . .

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How soundly Garry slept. His breathing seemed to be one with the beat of the pendulum which could be heard from the next room. With the movement of his breast the light coverlet of the bed rose and fell in gentle undulations. How good to sleep like that with mind and body utterly at rest, waking to the new day with every sense refreshed, every muscle and nerve tingling with energy.

He could hear outside the clatter of shoes on the pave­ment. People were on their way to early Mass. Some­times they passed in small groups, and the hum of voices reached him. This would be followed by silence, and then some solitary wayfarer would go by. There was a vague sense of loneliness in the echo of the uncom­panioned footfall. When the clock struck eight he could hear one or two belated worshippers running at full speed. The spring of youth was in their swift-flying steps. Strange how it was always like that—some one tearing past at the hour when Mass was due to begin, hoping to arrive before the reading of the Gospel.

The acolytes in their black soutanes and linen surplices would now be coming through the sacristy door and moving gravely with folded hands to the high altar followed by the celebrant. The priest would be wear­ing a biretta. If he were Father Keville, the sharp edge of the biretta would sink deep into the cluster of iron- grey hair on the back of his head. When he removed it before intoning the In Nomine Patris there would be a soft furrow where it had pressed down.

He would be robed in splendid vestments. They always made him look like the High Priest in the pictures in the Bible. The chasuble would be silvery white, or pale yellow like a candle flame, or green, or crimson, or

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purple according to the Church calendar. The colours would be shot with gold. When the priest moved the sheen on the surface of the chasuble would keep shifting like waves on sunlit water.

Under the chasuble would be the alb, with its deep hem of lace, fine as gossamer. The lace was the work of some nun’s delicate fingers. Some one had told him that to a nun every stitch was a prayer binding her more closely to God. Its perfection would be the measure of her love. And so the web would be spun, not merely of thread, but of a soul’s overflow.

From his arm would swing the maniple, in colour the same as the chasuble. The priest’s shoes of leather would strike an incongruous note. As he knelt you saw the upturned soles, dust-grey, like the road. They seemed to bring something of the common day into the sanctuary.

Introibo ad altare Dei

Ad Deum qui Iaetfjicat juventutem meam.

The people were on their knees now. Mass had begun. “To God who giveth joy to my youth” He liked the gladness welling up in that response of the server. He should like Mass more if there were no sermons. Sermons were often a dull monotony (though it was wrong to feel like that) and your mind wandered till your conscience jerked you back into the sluggish stream. There were other sermons composed of simple, homely talk with no eloquence but a terrible sincerity. These made you feel queer and uncomfortable. The eyes of the preacher seemed bent on you alone. His words, you thought, were aimed to reach the centre of your being. Had the priest, by some supernatural aid, been made aware of

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your inmost secrets? Did he know of these mysterious quickenings of your nature coming unbidden—you knew not from what source, or how? You were intensely relieved when it all ended, and the people, making a great shuffle of noise, knelt down to pray. . . .

There was a faint odour of meat being fried coming up from the kitchen. Strange how it could penetrate so far—through the doorway—up the stairs—along the passage, and into your bedroom. You knew the sort of meat it was. Always there was fried steak for break­fast on Sunday morning. He liked his small portion done to a dark brown crust. The others should have it rare with a little ooze of blood trickling into the gravy. That made him half sick. He wondered how any one, how­ever hungry, could swallow flesh that had even a hint of blood. Once he had seen a fox run to earth and was revolted at the sight of the dogs devouring chunks of the red, steaming flesh, the blood dripping hot from their muzzles, while ladies on horseback looked on unmoved. This orgy of blood, he thought, would have driven the colour from their cheeks, but there they sat on their saddles, gay, excited, their bright laughter ringing in the clear, frosty air.

It wasn’t yet time to rise. He had still nearly an hour. Yet he felt he should like to dress and go downstairs. Ansty would be at Mass. His mother would be alone, and again they two would have breakfast by themselves. The air of the bedroom was close, too, and he felt un­comfortably warm. The sheet had slipped off during the night and was trailing untidily over the side of the bed. He didn’t like the contact of his body with the fleece of the blanket, nor the faint, sweaty odour which it had after a sultry night. He got out of bed quietly,

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slipped on his clothes, raced downstairs, and entered the kitchen. He found his mother busied in her preparations for the Sunday morning array of meals. That was her life—making easy the way of others. And yet no more than a star circling in its ordained course did she pause to inquire if the round of existence should be always like that. The room with its morning brightness, its order, its fresh cleanliness, reflected something of her personality. Yet he felt he could say nothing either of affection or of praise. It would fall on her ears like the words of some strange tongue. It was the way of them all to accept her service casually, as it was her way to give, and any gesture other than this casual acceptance would be as disconcerting as the introduction of a new note into a time as old as time.

“Up again so early?” she smiled, pausing in her task of setting the table.

“I don’t know what woke me,” he tried to explain; “the sun in my eyes, or something. To lie soaking in bed on a morning like this seemed a pity.”

“And you were wise. Your grandfather, God rest him, used to say to us, ‘there will be sleeping enough in the grave.’ Up at sparrow-chirp he’d be, putting shame on the rest of us drowsy with sleep. Away into the fields he’d go, and not another living soul but himself abroad. Queer, I always think of him and I by myself in the early morning.”

The kettle on the fire began to bubble over, and she turned to make tea.

“Breakfast now, Stephen,” she said. “No one but ourselves.”

He liked the half-implied intimacy in the phrase. Somehow, as on that other morning, he felt very close

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to her as they sat at the table with the rest of the house­hold still asleep. The shop windows, too, were shuttered, and the street doors barred—a signpost to all that for the day home was home, with no avenue of traffic from the outer world to disturb its spell of quietude.

When they had eaten, and while his mother cleared away and reset the table, he made his way to the shop to search out Saturday’s Supplement to the Examiner. The Supplement, with its melange of story, sketch, and rhyme, reprinted mostly from the periodicals of the day, gave a sprinkle of colour on Sunday afternoons to many households in Carberymore. Deep within him, Stephen nursed a secret ambition to see his name on its pages. Some idle word of praise or prophecy from Mr. Wiseman had kindled this aspiration. But he would have his heart torn out rather than let any one know. There is within the mind of each of us some jealously guarded plot into which no one, however close to us in spirit, may enter. Never was fortress so sentinelled as is this hidden privacy of the individual soul.

Stephen was not the only one in Carberymore to feel this creative urge. For the town had a living poet in its midst—a singer who not only fashioned his rhymes, but saw to it that the world should hear them. From a rude printing press he turned out cycle after cycle of broad­sheet and ballad, which he sold to the street singers and the young people of the countryside. His penny ballads were a chronicle of the time. There was no public execution that was not chanted, no feat of daring that was not sung. When the period grew sterile of action, and bred no theme to inspire the tragic or the heroic muse, there was always some aspect of the eternal conflict be­tween the people and the Crown to kindle his imagination.

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Such an interlude had recently set in to challenge the poet’s versatility. His muse, hard set, had taken a satirical twist. For a small-town Juvenal what subject so calculated to display his skill in the exercise of his art as the knavery of a compatriot who accepts service under the Crown?

In the eyes of the town such a man was Billy O’Gorman, who held the ungrateful office of water-bailiff in Carberymore. A man of decent life, all his virtues were but as dust when weighed against the infamy of bringing to justice those who offended the law. For poaching was accepted by most as an adventure to be winked at. Wasn’t it clear that the birds of the air, the fishes in the water, the wild creatures of wood and glen, were created for the good of the many, not of the few? In cheating the law were you not co-operating with an Intelligence infinitely more wise than that which ruled from West­minster?

When the hapless bailiff landed a poacher in the dock is it to be wondered at that his name should be execrated, and that all the passion for ridicule instinct in the Irish temperament should be aroused? On his way to the court should he pass a knot of loafers at a street comer there would be always one ready to troll in mocking numbers:

“Oh, Billy was bad from his cradle;

 Since the Devil first taught him to lisp,

He’s excluded from hell and from heaven
 To ramble with Will o’ the wisp.”

To Stephen this art of the regional ballad-maker made no direct appeal. Something in his mind made protest

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against its crude satire. The verses had none of the magic which he discovered in the miscellany of poems in his school reader—none of the sudden delight which things like this awakened:

“Sound of vernal showers
 On the twinkling grass,

Rain awakened flowers…”

Here were things familiar to him from his childhood— yet how immortally lovely they were when one saw them through a poet’s eyes?

No pennyworth of rhymes, however good, could charm his fancy to a mood such as this imposed:

“O, fellow, come, the song we had last night.

Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;

The spinsters and the knitters in the sun

And the free maids that weave their thread with bones

Do use to chant it.”

If he should ever write a poem that is the magic he would try to capture in his verse. More than once he had struggled to give shape to a mood that seemed to clamour for expression. Thought came crowding on thought, but, like wanton children, they would not move in the measure of the dance but tripped away to the call of some unseen spirit. He felt like a young apprentice in mosaic vainly striving to weave a pattern out of the glitter of coloured fragments strewn on the tray before him.

He had in mind the story of a youth, who, during some recent blasting operations near the town, had been

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suddenly stricken blind. The tragic pity of it haunted him, and he felt an impulse to give voice to the young man’s passionate grief and his sense of loss. “The Youth in his Blindness”—that should be the title of the poem. A quatrain winged its way on to a page, and then, like a bird that is limed, imagination flapped its wings and drooped defeated. Poetry was a torment of the spirit. Better have none of it. And yet, deep within him, he felt some sense of beauty struggling to release itself.

Should he try again to weave the elusive pattern? That would be as idle as chasing a sunbeam across a meadow. All stupid vanity this aspiration to write verse—vanity born of a teacher’s lightly spoken word of praise. He had but a country town education. To write a poem one would need to be college-bred, with a sweep of knowledge far beyond his ken. Making a crush of the pages he stuffed them deep down into his pocket. . . .

The back door to the shop was barred on Sundays and he had to make his way through the meal store. The store seemed to have a personality of its own; it breathed a life distinct from that of the adjoining bar and grocery. It had always a mingling of pleasant smells—the nutlike fragrance of oatmeal, the faint, sweet scent of flour, the warm smell of bran, the half pungent odour of Indian meal. On your way through the store you had to pick your way carefully through the long, narrow passage between the upstanding sacks of flour. If you brushed against them you emerged with the imprint of their powdery whiteness upon you.

Lit only by the oblong of the fanlight and the thin streaks of daylight between the shutters, the bar looked strange on Sundays. Its silence seemed a palpable thing.

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The beat of the clock, always grave, acquired a deeper solemnity. Sometimes you had an uneasy feeling that some presence was lurking, in the shadows watching your movements. To dispel the illusion you hastily pulled open a drawer and shot it in with a bang.

The Supplement was lying folded on one of the chests of tea, and, taking it up, he made his way back to the kitchen. When he opened the door the smell of fresh meat frying in the pan hit his nostrils, dispelling the dry scents of the meal store. Hearing his father’s measured step descending the stairs he made his way to the garden.

II

The last Mass was over and the congregation came pouring out of the church. Stephen had taken a seat at the end of the nave and was one of the first to pass out­side. He had to wait for a companion, and stood idly watching the curiously varied gestures of the wor­shippers as they dipped their fingers in the holy water font in the porch and blessed themselves. Some, pro­foundly aware of the significance of the rite, performed the office slowly and gravely. Others, their minds already drifting away from the contemplation of eternal things, touched the surface of the water in a casual way, making some vague motion with the hand over the breast. Some of the older generation, not content with the mere moistening of the finger-tips, would immerse the hand, and, making a well of the palm, splash a plentiful rain of bright drops into their faces, making the sign of the Cross with slow deliberation. The beards of the old men were jewelled with moisture. At intervals some

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youth, impeded by the press around the font, would pause a moment uncertainly, shrug his shoulders, and impatiently stride away.

Stephen was one of those lads who are slow in forming new friendships. Yet his first meeting with Frank Carolan, for whom he was now waiting, set flowing some communion of spirit before which much of his natural reserve gave way. Frank had come in from the country to attend the Carberymore school, whose urban setting lifted it in the folk mind above the more sparsely attended rural schools. His father was one of the class known as comfortable farmers, his mother mistress of a little country school. John Carolan should have liked his elder son to follow in his footsteps, but nature and the influence of his wife were forces too strong to be overborne. For the boy, as he saw, was all his mother’s, happy only in her world, always something of an alien in his. Thus it was that he assented to his wife’s pro­posal that the boy should stay with an aunt in Carbery­more and continue his studies there.

For Stephen the contact with a new and forceful per­sonality was stimulating. His classfellow had none of his own intense self-consciousness. Each began to dis­cover in the other almost kindred tastes. Both had promptings to write verse, but while Stephen struggled with his rhymes, as if engaged in some dark conspiracy, the other was as open and unabashed about his piping as a bird at its own twittering.

Fresh from the countryside, everything in his new environment struck him sharply. The school was to him a fantastic comedy, and he delighted in its recurring scenes. His sense of the comic tended at first to bewilder his companion. The picture of a schoolmaster in handi-

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grips with his pupil presented itself to Stephen’s mind as something ugly, primitive, bestial. Frank saw it as a roaring farce, and tears of laughter would come into his eyes as he would reconstruct the scene, bringing into play all its wild absurdity. From his vigour of personality Stephen was unconsciously absorbing the elements which his character most needed. As their friendship deepened, he became vaguely conscious of a sense of inward growth and a gradual release from the incubus of his repressions.

On the previous evening Frank had casually suggested that they should borrow books from the convent library, which was open on Sundays after Mass. To Stephen the project was one profoundly significant. To him the convent, with its many-gabled buildings, its high, en­compassing walls, its sunken doorway with its grille, was a place of mystery and holiness. In his mind’s eye he always saw it as a pale reflection of the church at Tenebrae when the windows were muffled and only queer, gutter­ing candles of yellow wax relieved the gloom while priests in the shadows chanted weird lamentations in the Latin tongue.

Nuns were beings who belonged to some world of half spirits rather than to that of men and women of common clay. He sometimes saw them pass through the town, two at a time, to visit the workhouse hospital. They were deeply veiled. In their black, flowing robes they moved gently with downbent heads as if to slow music coming from some source invisible to his senses. You always moved off the pavement as they approached, and you would no more dream of glimpsing their faces through the veil than of lifting your bowed head during the solemn hush that broods on the church at the conse­cration. You felt, somehow, that the physical

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of their being had been dissolved and that their mortal bodies were but shadowy veils for the spirit. Stirred by some divine impulse Nature had preserved their bodies free from the subjection of its grosser functions. Imagina­tion in its most daring flight could not picture these half ethereal shadows eating or drinking, dressing or undressing. He had read somewhere, “breathless as a nun in silent adoration,” and that was how he visioned them—figures in breathing marble, prostrate before a shrine.

Into this mysterious world he was now to penetrate. Would the cloister be all that he had ever imagined it from his childhood—or would it be even more strange, more shadowy, more weirdly impressive?

Frank was among the last of the crowd of worshippers to appear in the porch, and, catching Stephen’s questing eye, smiled. The two passed together through the church gate and made their way to the convent. Stephen knocked gently on the heavy, green door sunk in the boundary wall. There being no immediate response, his companion, seizing the knocker, began to hammer a lively tattoo. The clatter dismayed Stephen. It was like the blare of brass when the motif was one for muted strings.

“You shouldn’t,” he cried in alarm.

Frank laughed. “I always knock like that,” he ex­plained. “It makes people sit up—thinking you’re some one important. Here goes again.”

“Don’t, Frank!” and he clutched the other’s arm. “Some one’s coming.”

They could hear the crunch of footsteps on gravel followed by the sliding of a shutter. Two questioning eyes peered at them through the grille.

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“We’re joining the library” explained Frank, with a disarming smile.

The shutter snapped. The lynx-like eyes of the porteress disappeared. A heavy bolt was drawn and they entered.

The porteress was one of those women whom Nature seems to mark out for the office of lodgekeeper. Her figure was spare as a lath. Her thin greying hair, parted in the middle, was combed severely behind the ears and was twisted into a scanty knot at the back of the head. Out of a pinched face, on which the sallow skin was drawn like parchment, looked two eyes whose little black pupils were like jet-headed pins. There was a wry pucker in the line of the mouth.

“Don’t walk on the grass!” she snapped, and with gathered brows disappeared into the lodge.

“Bitter ould gazebo!” commented Frank. “The look she gave!”

Stephen was reluctant to condemn one whose office obliged her to hover, however obscurely, round the precincts of the cloister, and contented himself by re­marking that old women at lodge gates were always disposed to be hostile.

The cloister garden through which they were moving made him draw a deep breath. Who would have thought that these grey forbidding walls, their coping jig-sawed with broken pieces of bottle glass, hid such enchantment? Here were no shadows but those flung by fluttering leaves. Flowers were everywhere—drifts of snapdragon, burning masses of geraniums, tall lilies, and campanula of the frozen whiteness of snow. Under a tree some distance away sat a group of novices. One of them was very young, and her laughter as it came to them seemed almost hoy-

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denish in its mirth. Sunlight—trees—flowers—young laughter—was reality ever so remote from the dream?

Leaving the garden they passed through a Gothic doorway into the schools. They made their way through a succession of classrooms, each a miracle of comely order. Desks had a rich amber glow, floors were scrubbed to a clean whiteness, the bright colours on the maps shone through a coating of thin, transparent varnish. Framed pictures hung on the walls. You could not help con­trasting it all with the squalid ugliness of that dreary barn in Rubbleton Lane in which you were destined to spend so many hours of your life.

They found themselves at last in the classroom which contained the library. Here, the centre of a flock of girls, was Sister Peter. Into the atmosphere of this room, into which, since the builders left, no man’s foot had ever strayed, the presence of the two boys brought some subtly disturbing element. It was as if a stone had been dropped into a secret pool in the heart of a wood, rippling its surface and wakening into life its hidden depths. Swift questioning glances assailed them. In more than one cheek there was a quickening of colour. There were little titters of secret laughter.

Sister Peter, breaking through the group of girls, came towards them, her lips parted in a smile. As she moved her long, sweeping garments made a faint rustle, and the beads hanging from her girdle knocking against each other made a pebbly sound. She, too, was conscious of a moment of pleased excitement. Her interest in girls had long since waned. Its spark was kept alive only by her sense of duty. The mentality of girlhood was to her as a book so often conned that turning the leaves had become a weariness. Boys were to her still an unexplored

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mystery. Contact with their minds would have some­thing of the tang of adventure in some newly discovered country. Weeks had elapsed since the privilege of borrowing books had been extended to school-going lads, yet not till now had any responded. Few of Mr. Hill’s boys had any interest in reading. Books were too intimately associated in their minds with the round of the day in Rubbleton Lane.

“I’m so glad you’ve come,” she smiled in welcome. In her voice, in her accent, was some tender enchantment. Life was giving Stephen one of its lyrical moments.

“Any decent books, Sister?” inquired Frank.

He was off-hand, as if he had casually dropped into a store.

“Why, of course,” she answered, amused at the implied doubt. “I wonder what kind of books you like? Have you a fancy for any particular author?”

“Dumas,” he answered promptly.

“Dumas? Isn’t he—rather beyond your years?”

“Good Lord, no,” he replied, astonished at the assump­tion. “I’ve read Monte Cristo many times over. Have you The Three Musketeers, Sister? I’ve been longing to read it.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry.”

His face fell. “It doesn’t matter,” he said in a tone that belied his words.

She turned to the shelves to conceal her amusement. “Now, here’s something that you’ll love,” she said, taking down a copy of Midshipman Easy.

He pursed his lips. “I can’t stomach Marryat,” he said.

She started slightly at the strong Elizabethan word still current in the south. “Oh, why?” she asked.

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She was intrigued in discovering some one who scorned her suggestion. No girl had ever questioned her opinion.

“I hardly know. Living so far inland, maybe. The sailor’s lingo is half Greek to me. Can you read him, Sister?” he asked naively.

“Why, of course. But then, unlike you, I grew up in a little seaport town. Now what about Lever? — Charles O'Malley — Harry Lorrequer—Tom Burke of Ours ”

“I’ll have that,” he broke in. “I like Lever—what I’ve read of him, anyway.”

The attitude of mind revealed in the qualifying phrase struck her sharply. If boys were like this half-challeng­ing lad they would bring some touch of colour into the drab routine of book-lending.

Stephen, looking on, felt that he was moving in a new plane of reality. For here was his companion talking to this lady of grace with the unrestrained freedom of a boy to his mother. And she, no whit offended, was accepting him on his own terms—though he wondered if there was not in her mild brown eyes some lurking drollery. All his preconceptions of a nun’s mystic personality were giving way to a new image shaping in his mind.

“Now, Stephen,” she said, turning to him, “what about you?”

“I—I hardly know, Sister,” and he became distress­ingly aware of the sharp contrast with Frank’s eager mind which the hesitant answer suggested.

“I wonder if you’d care for The Lamp?” she inquired, taking down a bound volume of a Catholic periodical.

“Oh, no, Sister,” came from him with obvious dis­taste, and he changed colour at his own audacity. His

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mind always shrank from books of a definitely religious trend. And always his conscience rebuked him—but only like a wind that curls the surface of a stream, leaving its depths unstirred.

“Too preachy?” she asked with a faint, enigmatic smile.

He was startled by her intuition.

“Well, perhaps it is,” she conceded laughingly.

How fine she was—giving no hint of being shocked by his rejection of a volume teeming, he had no doubt, with as many pious maxims as a fig with seeds.

“What about Sir Walter Scott, Stephen? ” she asked, as her eye travelled along the crowded shelves. “Do you like his tales?”

“Not very much, Sister.” And, encouraged by his companion’s frank avowal of his likes and dislikes, he went on, “I tried to read Waverley but couldn’t finish it. I like Gerald Griffin, though. I wonder if you’d have his Collegians?”

“Of course—and I think you’ll love it, Stephen. You’ll bring along some of your friends next Sunday —won’t you?” she pleaded as she handed him the book.

“I’ll be very glad, Sister,” he promised, a very knight in his eagerness to serve.

“And you, Frank?”

“I’ll do my best. I can’t promise, though, that they’ll come.”

“No, of course. You’ll come yourselves, at all events?”

“Oh, yes, Sister.”

As they turned to go some radiance emanating from her personality seemed to enfold Stephen. He felt as if

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he had been living in some rarefied atmosphere. The perfume of her presence was all about him bedewing his senses. They left the convent and made their way down Chapel Hill into the Main Street.

“That was exciting,” he remarked. “Sister Peter, what did you think of her, Frank?”

“Oh, all right.” The reply, with its lack of enthu­siasm, chilled him.

“I thought she was terribly nice,’ he returned warmly. uSo—so friendly like.”

Frank was in a resentful mood. Confident that his passionate longing for Dumas was to be gratified, he felt that he had been cheated. Unsatisfied desire embittered him.

“Her library’s a washout,” he said derisively. “The Lamp—Good Lord! For fellows like you and me.”

“She was only trying to discover what we both liked,” urged Stephen extenuatingly.

“That may be, but she knows as much about books as I do of the stars. I had a squint at the shelves while she was gabbling with you. Awful rubbish, most of it. Puke!”

His contempt blew on Stephen like a bleak wind, freezing him into silence. “It’s only a penny a week, anyway,” he ventured to remark, recovering.

“I wanted that book as I never wanted anything before,” came from his companion petulantly. “Now it’s as far off as ever. Hang it, what’s the good of a library without Dumas? An egg without salt. Let’s chuck it, the two of us, Stephen?”

“Oh, no,” he protested in alarm. “How could we?” ‘Twould look queer. I’d feel just rotten.”

“Very well, if you feel like that.”

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"I do. Honestly.”

“Well, then, let us chance it again next Sunday. We may fish up something decent out of the rubbish heap. If we don’t, I quit. That’s final. Your Sister Peter’s no good so far as books go.”

"I don’t know,” replied Stephen, a shadow crossing his brow. “You know much more about reading than I do, but I think she’s—she’s lovely in herself.”

**Chapter XI**

**WIDENING HORIZON**I

THE passing of Sunday in Carberymore resolved itself into two moods perceptible as the flow and ebb of tidal waters. From an early hour to an hour or two after noon the town presented a picture of alert eagerness. Bells chimed at intervals, the sharp allegro from the little Protestant house of worship shrilling insistently into the slow, deep-toned rhythm which ding-donged from the belfry of the Catholic church. The pavement echoed to the footfall of worshippers going and returning.

Many of the elder women wore the long, dark-hooded cloak of the countryside. Its heavy folds imposed on the wearer a grave movement that had in it a curious dignity and grace. A few of the older men still clung to the black cut-away coat, the knee-breeches, and the worsted stockings of an earlier day. About these elders, men and women, there was some native dignity passing with their generation. The transition to a new Anglo- Irish civilization evident on every side had left them as they were. The mould had become too rigid to be influenced by the new forces operating around them, and the most casual observer could hardly fail to be

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impressed by the contrast which they presented with the bowler-hatted, high-collared generation by which they were being supplanted.

The wives of a few of the more affluent merchants wore bonnets decked with jet ornaments and a wisp of feather. Over dresses of black satin or silk they had dolmans of stamped velvet ornamented with a sprinkle of shiny jet beads. A woman of this class usually accompanied her man to Mass. The cloaked woman followed the older tradition of either going to church alone or in the company of women friends. In the communal mind there was a faint contempt for the man, who, aping genteel manners, paraded to Mass in the company of his mate.

Now and then a sidecar or trap laden with its burden of bucolic churchgoers would swing into the main thoroughfare followed by a general uplift of curious and critical eyes from those on the pavement. Conscious of this scrutiny their faces took on a look of profound gravity, their eyes gazing abstractedly into some imagined point in space.

Where Chapel Hill cut at right angles to the Main Street stood the bellman making sundry announcements, which he always garnished with sprigs of his own homely wit.

“Take notice that the waterworks of the town will be turned off from ten till two o’clock to-morrow.” Then, parenthetically — “Don’t be downhearted. Baymish will be in full tap in all the pubs from the Granuaile to the Angler’s Rest.” Having rung his handbell continously, he would repeat the official notice, bracing it with some fresh distillation of his comic invention.

The last Mass ended at one. Bells dropped into

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silence. The clatter of footsteps slowed down and then ceased. Beyond a few loafers hanging round street comers and a stray dog nosing in the gutters or coiled asleep in the sun, the shuttered town seemed in a moment drained of life. There followed the long, somnolent Sunday afternoon.

In the Mangan home, once the family had dined, each was free to surrender to the promptings of his individual mood. Dinner was to Roger Mangan a Gargantuan repast. He ate with that relish which only men endowed with an immense vigour of health enjoy. All other meals he despised; they were little more than a make- believe in which a man toyed with his food. Always on leaving the table he drew out his tobacco pouch, care­fully filled his pipe, and, yielding to its soothing spell, went away to his room in a contented drowse. His retreating footfall was grateful to Stephen’s ear.

Almost invariably Owen went off to join his friends in a rat-hunting expedition along the banks of the Auling, while Garry, equipped with rod and tackle, set out for the Owenabwee. Stephen buried himself in a book for an hour and then left the house in quest of his com­panions.

As he passed into the street he could always feel happy in the thought that his mother was enjoying the only in­terlude of rest which came to her in the week’s round. Un­consciously she would give a little sigh of content when the untidy litter which a small room presents after a family has eaten had again acquired its air of ordered comeli­ness. Provided with the previous day’s paper she would then make her way upstairs. There, sinking into the arm­chair by the parlour window, she would read the Ex­aminer from the first page to the last. She read the

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news with all the serious interest of simple folk, and the day’s happenings had for her such an intense reality that comment always came from her lips with the ardour which springs from a deeply felt emotion. Though she hated gossip, and was slow to accept at its face value any uncharitable rumour blown her way, she accepted the printed word as Gospel. Most people indeed shared her belief. One could always reduce argument to silence by saying, “I saw it in print.”

Thus London with its daily chronicle of crime was to her a lost city. Unendingly, from day to day, from year to year, it was the same affrighting tale of murder and robbery and of strange passions whose nature she could not divine. In her own country crime was not unknown, but so rare was its occurrence that its effect on the mind was like that which follows some vast upheaval of nature, making it matter for a tragic wonder-tale to be passed on from generation to generation.

Her mind, seeking for an explanation, found one amply satisfying in the knowledge that England was Protestant. Virtuous Protestantism was to her a con­cept beyond the span of reason. Most of the big houses in Munster were in possession of families bred in that faith, and almost from her childhood she had heard of the easy code of morality by which their lives were regulated. It had grown into a tradition (to be told in a shamed whisper) that no young serving woman could emerge from these great houses without having paid the toll of her maidenhood.

And to her thinking, lamentable though it might be, it was inevitable that this should be so. Luther, the father of Protestantism—hadn’t he prevailed upon a consecrated nun to abandon the cloister? And— tres-

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pass beyond redemption—didn’t they two, Luther and the woman, become as man and wife? God’s minister bound in wedlock and begetting children seemed the negation of her austere conception of a man ordained to fill the priestly office. It was not easy to repress the feeling of amused contempt with which you saw the rector passing through the town, his little bespectacled wife trotting beside him, or holding on to his arm.

And, after Luther, there was Henry the Eighth— another sponsor of the usurping Church. Hadn’t he— God save us!—almost as many wives as Bluebeard? That wasn’t hearsay. It was in print for all to read. This pervert king, didn’t he ravage the monasteries and drive forth into the wilderness the gentle souls whose lives were dedicate to the Almighty? The holy vessels of silver and gold—chalice and monstrance, pyx and ciborium—didn’t he lay his hands upon them and use them at his ungodly feasts? That, too, was in print. Wasn’t it natural that a faith thus muddied at the source should breed such moral pestilence as prevailed in every place in which it held sway? Had you asked her why, if Protestantism were so corrupt, did God permit its adherents to prosper out of all reason in comparison with their Catholic neighbours, she would have told you that life didn’t end at the opening of the grave. Rather had it then its true beginning. Here we walked in darkness, groping and stumbling, accepting our share of joy and sorrow as part of some divine plan whose wisdom would be made manifest at the end. She was as sure of that as she was of the sun’s rising.

Stephen often wondered at his mother’s calm accept­ance of the inevitability of death. In the linen chest in her room lay, wrapped in tissue, the blessed candle which

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her frail fingers should clasp when the call came, while those round her recited the Litany for a Soul Departing —that awful prelude to eternity which made him turn so hastily, as if they chilled his fingers, those pages in his prayer book in which it appeared.

In the chest, too, faintly smelling of camphor, was the brown habit with its trimming of ruched ribbon and its inscription “I H S” which would shroud her body when the struggle and the pain had ebbed into a great quiet and the women folded her hands on her breast.

Unlike his mother, he looked on death and all its ritual with a vague, sickening horror. The smell of newly varnished coffins which came to him in passing the undertaker’s shop in the Main Street made him ill. He disliked, too, the yellow tin trunks stacked outside the ironmonger’s. Their strong tang was strangely like that wafted from the undertaker’s. And always the sight of a garment—a man’s coat, a woman’s frock—of the same coffee-brown colour as the shroud evoked in him a sudden feeling of revulsion.

He wished he could shake himself free from this morbid apprehension, and that he could accept the idea of death with his mother’s calm philosophy. But people were made differently, and he realized with something of self- pity that no effort of will, no intensity of longing could make him other than he was. A boy was cast in some predestined mould, and of its own volition a plant cannot become one of another genus. Life—life was a queer puzzle.

II

All the routine of the normal Sunday afternoon in Carberymore was to be disturbed to-day. For the first

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time in its age-long history the grounds of the castle were to be thrown open to the people. It was a diplomatic gesture from the young Earl of Carberymore, who a short time previously had succeeded to the title. Things of ill-omen to his class were happening in the country. The moonlighter was abroad. His sinister shadow—who could tell when it might cross his path? When some Cork benevolent society, seeking a way of adding to its scanty funds, thought of promoting an excursion to Car­berymore and, greatly daring, begged the privilege of being admitted to the demesne, my lord, instead of dis­missing them with a muttered oath, as his fathers would have done, choked down his resentment, and, with as good a grace as he could command, gave ear to the pro­posal.

From his earliest childhood Stephen had looked with a wistful longing on the iron-studded gateway flanked with its grey towers that led into the grounds from the Market Square. He invested the castle with much of the romantic splendour which the poetry of Scott suggests to a boy’s imagination. To-day the sworded angel, who since the birth of time had sentinelled the gate, was to be withdrawn, and he and his kind would enter this paradise from which till now they had been so sternly excluded.

Neither he nor Owen nor Garry thought to engage in their usual Sunday pastimes. Dinner over, they tumbled into the street and ran to the station to meet the incoming train with its crowd of holiday-makers. To the music of “Garryowen” the band came swinging towards them along the Main Street. In the crowd that followed youth was predominant. Already that hoydenish spirit which infects the city worker on finding himself in the country

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possessed them. A surging mass, eager, carefree, they came along in the wake of the band. The gay-hearted tumult set Stephen’s pulses throbbing.

A band in itself was nothing new to Carberymore. For generations the town had bred its own team of musicians. Mostly they employed their art to inspire patriotic fervour when the national cause demanded it. Always on his visit to the town, the heart of his con­stituency, the Member of Parliament was received with a fine blare of brass and cymbals. Once a year, in the cold March dawn, they woke the sleeping town with their gay reveille, “St. Patrick’s Day,” the young res­ponding by rushing half-naked to the front windows, their elders turning over in their beds, giving vent to their feelings in a grunt of profane protest. At midnight, too, once a year, they came swinging under the moon or the stars, or under a sky too thrifty to light its candles, to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne.” Often Stephen wondered if the music was to be interpreted as a requiem for the old year or as a hymn of welcome to the new, or if it was to be taken as serving a dual function. Yet, birth and death being of their nature so widely sundered, he felt that this conjecture was irrational. The problem, dismissed on returning to bed, always returned with the same insistent demand for an answer on the passing of another year.

But this band now marching along the Main Street was different. More impressive in numbers, in bearing, in dress. They wore a smart uniform, while Carbery­more had never aimed higher than green rosettes and a gold embroidered sash tor the drummer. They had piccolo and clarinet and instruments that seemed to be wrought of silver newly minted, all strange to the little

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company of Orpheans in Carberymore. And, as became a prize band, they marched with the dignity born of con­quest.

As they reached the Square the ponderous gateway leading into the Castle grounds began to swing open, revealing endless vistas of sunshot greens and misty blues. Stephen felt some responsive movement in his own being—the opening of some door into a world of widen­ing horizons. He was swept along in the crowd, strugg­ling through the gate, and then found himself in one of the lesser streams into which the human tide parted as it reached the open space within the walls.

Here at last in all its impressive grandeur was the castle of Carberymore. He had been born almost under its shadow, but till now had only glimpsed its parapets showing obscurely through a drift of trees ancient as its walls. Mr. Wiseman had told them of the dungeoned Castle of Chillon in which, for most part of a lifetime, some ill-starred prisoner had been chained. “Take it from me, boys,” he had said, “famous as is this castle on the lake of Geneva, it is in itself only a poor thing compared to your own castle of Carberymore. Only the accident of a poet’s genius has given it immortality. Some day perhaps—who can tell? — one of you . .

He had looked at Stephen, who felt a queer confusion sweep over him, and, leaving the thought suspended, had turned to something else. And here it stood, wrapped in its mantle of living verdure, noble, unde­feated, challenging, after the tumult of the centuries. How fine was the instinct which prompted these ancient Irish builders to choose a setting so much in harmony with the stronghold of the McCarthy Mór. A broad river, deep woods, pasture and ploughland, fold on fold,

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and, prone against the west, the everlasting hills. The ivied fortress and the old bridge blended with the land­scape as if they formed an integral part of Nature’s design. Stephen gazed upon it all as if he would draw something of its enduring strength and beauty into his soul.

The sound of music broke the spell. Under the eye of the conductor the band had assembled on the lawn and figures were already circling over the short grass as he drew near. This vision of youth moving in the measure of a dance was new to him. The gaiety of spirit, the grace of the rhythmic movement, the pleasant flow of musical sound blending with the motion of the dancers under the trees were all lovely to his senses. It was like the pouring of wine into a glass producing an upward stream of bright bubbles. His heart was singing. There was a sparkle of laughter in his eyes.

A hand was laid on his arm.

“Penny for your thoughts.” There was that ever amused twinkle in Frank’s eyes.

“Hardly worth it,” he laughed, “they’re all a mix- up,” and grew a little self-conscious. To arrange the jig-saw of one’s impressions into a pattern intelligible to others is never easy.

“When did you come?” he asked, to check the other’s probing into the movement of his mind.

“Only now. Look, Stephen,” he said eagerly, “I want to see everything. We may never have such an opportunity of exploring this place again. Come along.”

They turned into a walk winding through a high growth of shrubbery overhung with pine trees. Withered blooms of rhododendrons, like blobs of rust, clung to their stems. The path was strewn with the fibre of pine

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needles. At intervals rudely-fashioned arbours had been cut crescent-wise into the dense growth of evergreen, the embracing foliage overhead serving as a roof. The only furnishing was a rustic seat. For one in quest of solitude it was a pleasantly secluded resting-place. The only sounds to disturb a mood of thought were the stir of birds in the branches and the undertone of the Auling.

In one of those arbours they came suddenly on a pair of young lovers who, tired of the dance, had idly wandered here. The carpet of pine needles had dulled the boys’ footsteps. The girl, very young and pretty, was on her lover’s knees. Each with a slow, deep content was savouring the other’s kisses. The girl’s hat had fallen to the ground, and her bright hair had partly come unbound. The man was bareheaded. His cheeks were ruddy and his moist lips showed vividly red under the coal-black fringe of moustache.

Stephen was painfully embarrassed. Never before had chance led him to intrude on the privacy of lovers. Stark surprise held his steps for a moment, then, recover­ing, he passed on. The man and the girl were as little disturbed as if he and Frank were but cloud shadows crossing their path. He could not resist the impulse to give a half-backward glance. The lovers’ lips were sealed.

Out of earshot Frank’s pent-up laughter overflowed. Stephen chimed in—but it was a queer, uneasy laugh. His mind was in a tumult, and he felt hot and cold in turn. He wondered if this strange passion, the theme of almost every song and story, always expressed itself in gestures which seemed to have no affinity with the spiritual ecstasy of which he thought love was compact. He felt disturbed at his own ignorance of life. Frank’s voice

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broke into the whirl of thought and sensation sweeping over him.

“Did you see?” he asked, his eyes merry with fun. Stephen nodded. He wished somehow that Frank would not pursue the subject. Yet, though ill at ease, some vague longing to learn something of this mystery of human passion possessed his mind.

“Funny, wasn’t it?” Frank went on. “Ever watched two birds mating, Stephen?”

Stephen shook his head.

“Ihave. Every spring in our garden. Just the same funny antics—nearly the same, anyway. It’s comical to watch them rubbing their bills together—and all the time ‘chirp, chirp.’ You never had a sweetheart—had you?” he suddenly asked with a quizzical smile.

“Lord, no,” Stephen gasped, and he tried to subdue the colour mounting into his cheek. “Had you, Frank?” The other paused. “Once, Stephen.”

The tone of his voice was serious.

“You’re joking?”

Frank shook his head.

“Honest?”

“On my honour.”

Stephen burned with curiosity. “Who—who was she, Frank?” he stammered.

“Nancy was her name—Nancy Hynes. She came from Dublin to spend the holidays with her cousins. They live in the next farmhouse to ours.”

“She must be nice—coming from the city?” Stephen’s imagination invested city folk with delicate qualities alien to the countryside.

“I don’t know”—and he smiled a little bleakly. “With her two cousins she used to call in to our place

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of an evening—-just in the friendly way of neighbours in the country. I had never in my life thought of girls.

I was too young to bother. Fellows courting always made me laugh. They seemed to look such awful clowns somehow. And when you stared at them passing they seemed to feel that way themselves.”

Stephen nodded. He feared to break the thread of the other’s narrative.

“They dropped in one evening when my mother was busy making the season’s jam. She told them I was in the garden picking currants. All in a bunch the three rushed out offering to help me. The basket was soon brimming and the cousins raced with it into the house, leaving Nancy and myself alone among the clumps of currant bushes.

‘Frank,’ she said, ‘you’re one of the nicest boys I’ve ever met. I’m—I’m terribly fond of you. Do you like me at all?’

“Her words took my breath away. I looked at her dumbfounded. ’I—I like you all right,’ I half-stam­mered at last.

You—you love me like?’ she smiled encouragingly, slipping her hand into mine.

“I was all confusion. ‘I do, Nancy,’ I said.”

“But you—you didn’t really feel—that way—to­wards her?”

He laughed. There was a piece of flint half-embedded in the wood drift at their feet. He swung his foot and sent the stone hurtling in a cloud of dust and pine needles into the air. “Now you know how much I cared. But a fellow has his pride. I didn’t wish to be set down as a country gom.”

“I know. Go on, Frank.”

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“She looked around cautiously. There was no one in sight. ‘I don’t mind being kissed, Frank,’ she said, tilting her chin in the coaxing way you’d see a child hold up her lips.”

“And you—you ”

“Kissed her. Full in the mouth.”

Stephen felt his heart go pounding. “How did you feel?” The words came huskily.

“How?” Frank laughed. “I hardly know. Queer- ish. Anyway my mother came out just then calling us in to tea. ‘You’ll write to me, Frank?’ she whispered, ‘won’t you?’

“‘Every day, Nancy,’ I promised.”

“And you did?”

“Faithfully. I knew of course that it was all absurd make-believe, but I wanted to shine as a fine romantic fellow in her eyes. I used to write the wildest nonsense —cribbing bits of it from books—and place the letters in a secret place—her idea—under a blackthorn. She was ever wanting more and more correspondence, and was hurt-like if a day slipped by without a message. The jade!” he muttered, his brow darkening.

“You—you fell out, Frank?” He felt a twinge of conscience as the words escaped him. Always he dis­liked those who would burrow into his own heart, yet here was he tearing down veil after veil from the chamber of a friend’s most intimate feelings. Yet was the fault entirely his? Step by step hadn’t Frank led him on? A silence fell between them. All in a moment Frank seemed to have become moody and taciturn. Stephen had never found him quite like that before. Had he hurt him by going too far in his inquisition? In the silence he became aware of the dry crackling of pine needles

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under their feet. The flow of the river droned into his consciousness. He felt constrained, unhappy. Suddenly Frank stopped dead. He turned to Stephen, looking steadily into his eyes.

“The rest of the story is for yourself alone. You’ll never let it go further?”

“I’m not like that, Frank.”

“I know.” He paused a little and went on. “It was like this. My father ordered me to saddle the mare and ride to Carberymore on some errand. Just then who should chance to come past the road, driving to town, but Nancy’s uncle, Mehaul. He stopped to bid us the time of day, and seeing how it was, offered me a lift. To spare the little mare—she was in foal—and for the sake of Mehaul’s company, I was glad to go with him. Halfway to Carberymore we drew up at a small stream by the side of the road to let the horse drink. We got off the car for a minute to stretch our legs.

“‘Frank, my boy,’ said Mehaul, putting his hand on my shoulder—very friendly-like— I’ve something to say to you.’

“I looked up into his eyes, wondering. He seemed to be turning something over in his mind. My pulse began to quicken. In the silence I could hear the horse sucking up the water in the stream.

“‘You’ve been writing letters—love-letters—to Nancy?’ he said at last.

“I felt turned to stone. My face, I knew, had gone dead white. I couldn’t speak.

“‘Now haven’t you? Honest?’ he said good- humouredly.

“‘I have, Mehaul,’ I stuttered, sick with shame.

‘“You’re a very simple boy, Frank Carolan. And

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Nancy—she’s a limb. My soul, but she is. Do you know that, night after night, she puts us all into stitches reading out your poetry talk and the like?’

“‘Oh, no,’ I cried in torment,‘ she wouldn’t do that?’

“‘Bedad, my son, that’s what she does. And a fine gift o’ words you have by the same token. I never heard the like coming from a garsun of your age. But sure ’tis kind for you to be a scholar and the mother teaching.’

“Every word, if he only knew, was a stabbing pain.

I saw in my mind the whole family gathered round listening to the mad things I had written. I could hear their yells of mocking laughter. And she—the jade!— laughing loudest.

“‘How could she, Mehaul? How could she?’ I asked, striving to choke down my feelings.

Pure divilment, my son. There was never a boy, she bragged, that she couldn’t fool up to the eyes. The cousins dared her. They said you were too wise and knowing—that though country bred you hadn’t our ways like. “Wait an’ see,” she says, ‘wait an’ see,” the divil o’ mischief in her eyes.’

“I was in torment. I tried to laugh—to pass it off as a fine joke. I couldn’t. Something in my throat seemed to strangle me.

“‘Maybe I wouldn’t mind,’ went on Mehaul, ‘if all this play-acting was kept to ourselves. But it wasn’t. Nancy must be sharing it with the neighbours—calling in this one and that one to listen to the tale of your romancing.’

“’This must stop, Nancy,’ I says to her last evening. “’Tisn’t fair. A nice decent lad like Frank Carolan. I won’t have it.’

“‘Mind your own business, Uncle Mehaul,’ she

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answers back, saucy as you please. ‘I’m here to enjoy myself. If you’re going to be a spoil-sport I’m for home in the morning.’ And with that off she hises into her room, slamming the door behind her. So now, my lad, give that scholar’s pen of yours a rest—and have the wit to do it without giving myself away.’

“I tried to mumble some word of thanks. I was smarting as if I had been whipped naked. I kept calling her in my mind things strange to myself. Horrible things. To hide the tears stinging my eyes I made my way to the car and struggled on to the seat on the offside from Mehaul. All the way into town I kept brooding, and Mehaul, troubled, throwing sidelong glances at me.”

Stephen was silent. He was too moved by the recital to make any comment. When a fir-cone dropped at his feet the little thud which it made startled him. Frank bent down, picked up the cone, and with an air of abstrac­tion kept idly spinning it in the air. Stephen watched the play. . . . Frank—how could he reveal all the workings of his mind as he had done? Had such things befallen him he would have acted like that Greek schoolboy who, rather than betray his torturing secret, suffered his breast to be gnawed away by the stolen fox-cub beneath his tunic. Was it, he wondered, that the telling of the tale to so absorbed a listener satisfied some need of his spirit? Did he find in it something of that blessed relief which always came when, your sins confessed, the priest mur­mured the absolution? How he envied Frank his free­dom of disposition. Around his own soul why was there that impenetrable wall of reserve? If he struggled with all the force of his will could he hope one day to batter it down? . . .

The spinning fir-cone fell among the laurels.

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uAnd now the end of my story,” Frank resumed, as if there had been no pause.

“Yes—what—what happened, Frank?” inquired Stephen, his mind half-suspended between the urge of curiosity and the reluctance to probe further into affairs so intensely personal to his companion.

“I spent a woeful night. Twisting and turning till dawn. Brooding on her treachery. Rubbing the wound: making it more and more angry. The journey to town in Mehaul’s company was on Saturday. Sunday followed. I knew that it was the custom of our neigh­bour’s family to go to late Mass. All but Mehaul. I waited till I saw them go by in their trap—she among them—and then made my way to a field where their cows were grazing. In the next field was a crop of turnip.

I flung open the gate between the two fields. Helter- skelter in they rushed, trampling the young crop under their hooves. I ran to the house as if in a panic, shouting,

‘The cows, the cows, Mehaul! They’re in the turnip field.’ Out he darted with an almighty curse and began chasing them back to their pasture. I slipped into the empty house, intent on searching every nook and cranny for my letters. There was no need. There they were on the window-sill—open to every eye.

“Snatching them up I raced through fields and over ditches till I came to the old fort on the western side of our farm. There I set them ablaze, looking on till there was only a crinkling mass of charred paper. I kicked the ashes of my folly into the air. In the light wind the fragments kept whirling and floating like falling snow. I sat down—thinking—scheming—planning—flecks of burned paper settling on the grass around me to mock me for my foolishness.

“I had only one thought. Revenge. An eye for an eye. If I told you the wild bloody things that shot into my mind as I sat there on the grass that Sunday morning you’d say I was inventing. But the mood passed. How it was I don’t know. Maybe the sound of the Mass bell coming over the fields. Then it came to my mind that in the old days if there was anything the people feared it was to draw down upon them the anger of the Gaelic poets. With their gift of rhyming they could make any man or any woman who offended them the mock of the countryside for ever. ‘I’ll put her into a rhyme,’ I said, ‘a rhyme of such bitterness that the venom of it will eat into her soul.’ ”

“And you did?”

For answer he thrust a ragged notebook into Stephen’s hand. “There. It’s as far from what I wanted as the North Pole from the South.”

Stephen read:

By every star in heaven that shines
This is the truth of Nancy Hynes.

Tricked in her gaudy finery
She came to dazzle Rossnalee.

Though all of us be country-made
Beneath the mask we saw the jade.

Nothing of honour’s code she knew,

 This silly, chattering cockatoo.

Truth was a stranger to her breast,

 And Falsehood there the honoured guest.

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Widening Horizon

Her smile, ’twas fungous on a grave,

Her kiss, the kiss that Judas gave.

O, never was Nature so unkind
As when she fashioned Nancy’s mind—

Except when she—to her disgrace—

Set out to fashion Nancy’s face.

Our colleens’ cheeks with roses glow,

On hers the dandelions blow.

(“Bedad, you’d swear,” said Pat McCann,

“She strayed from China or Japan.”)

Their lips are dew-wet strawberries,

Hers bitter-tanged as winter seas.

Within their eyes the blue of spring,

In hers the cat’s green flickering.

The stars take fright, the moon declines,

When they look down on Nancy Hynes.

“You—you never sent her this?”
“I did.”

“She’ll never forgive you. She’ll hate you all her life.” “Who wants her forgiveness?”

”I know, but….”

”Have you any idea of what I suffered?”

“I can well imagine.”

“You can’t—you or any one else. There was I— a laughing stock for all who knew. Look at me slinking

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through by-ways to Mass. See me all hours shut up in the house, fearful of meeting some grinning yahoo and daring to venture out only after nightfall.”

“I understand. I’d feel like you. More desperate if anything. Your own people, Frank—did they ever come to know?”

“Only my mother. She felt there was something wrong. Bit by bit she drew the story from me. I told her everything. She laughed me out of my misery, telling me of the many foolish things she herself had done in her time, and hammered it into me that there was never a boy went through life without blundering. In the end, do you know, I was almost glad of the ex­perience? It left me changed. Hardened. Devil-may- care-like. When friends joked about it I could laugh with the loudest. And I never saw Nancy again.”

“You didn’t?”

“Never. She took to mocking her young cousins for their country ways. They slung back at her—

‘“Bedad, you’d swear,” said Pat McCann,

“She strayed from China or Japan.”‘

“That was too much for her. In a blaze of temper she snatched up her fal-lals, swept out of the house, and— without a word of parting—went back to Dublin.”

III

They emerged from the shrubbery and turned into a path that followed the course of the river. Near the weirs it twisted abruptly, and straggling up a sloping

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bank passed through a belt of pines and thence into the broad carriage drive which ran through the demesne. Boys less sensitive than these two would have suddenly paused at this point of vantage. The sky above them was of that limpid blue so rare in southern Ireland. Under its transfiguring light silver birch, beech, and elm had become dream trees, their foliage having some unreal, translucent quality such as one sees in coloured glass. Where the Auling tumbled over the weir its jets of foam became a showery iridescence. Half-glimpsed through the screen of trees, the old bridge seemed to mingle in the confusion of light and colour as if Nature herself had made man’s handiwork incorporate in her design. The blue of the hills was deepening into purple.

“Think of it,” observed Frank, “all this for one man’s pleasure only.”

“I’ve often felt that way about it. They were ever a stingy crew—all those lords of Carberymore. If this were mine I think I’d love to share it with the people.”

“They may have to—some day.”

“Who could force them?”

“I don’t know, but ’tis often said. It’s a kind of belief. My father had an old herdsman—Andreesh. A queer half-blind old fellow doubled up with the years. ’Twas common talk that he had the second sight. He was forever prophesying. More than once I’ve heard him say that a day would come when the lords of Carbery­more wouldn’t hold as much of this land as would sod a lark,”

“But his sayings—did they ever come true?”

“Often. Long before it came to pass he foretold the day and the hour of his own death.”

“He did?”

“I heard him myself. When his time came— ‘twas St. John’s Eve—he seemed no worse in health than he had been for years. ‘Send for the priest, woman of the house,’ he said to my mother. ‘I want to make my peace with the Almighty before I depart.’

“‘Have sense, Andreesh,’ said my mother. ‘You’re as well as ever you were. Bringing the priest on a fool’s errand. He’d be wild with me.’

“‘No, good woman,’ said he, ‘he won’t. He’ll know.’ The way he spoke gave her a queer feeling. She turned to myself—'Saddle the horse, Frank,’ said she ‘and ride over to Templemichael. Tell Father Morrissey that Andreesh wishes to see him.’

Ride fast, boy,’ said Andreesh, as I was going out the door, ‘and bid him bring the holy oils.’ I never felt so strange as on that journey. I could see no change in the old man, yet he spoke as if he had some hidden knowledge.”

“What happened?”

“The priest came and gave him the sacraments. As the clock struck six he drew the last breath—the very day and hour he had in his mind.”

“That was strange surely.”

“Yet it was only one of the many sayings of his that had come to pass. The old man had some queer gift.”

A light breeze sprang up. They liked its cool breath on their faces. At the same moment the leaves, hitherto still as if painted on the ether, began a frolic dance—all but those of the chestnut, which swayed with a pendulous gravity. The wind brought the distant sound of music to their ears.

“Come, let’s go back and look on at the dancing,” suggested Frank, quickening his pace. As they returned

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along the drive Stephen was conscious of a rare exhilara­tion of spirit. There was joy in the very act of moving freely through this so jealously guarded Paradise. Often within himself he had felt a desperate longing to scale its high walls, but the thought of the sinister figure of the gamekeeper, and of his underlings—hardly less menacing—brought a sudden tightening of the heart. To-day these prowling watchdogs were muzzled, and should they come slinking by he could return their sullen glances without the quickening of a nerve. On their way they frequently came on youthful lovers resting on the sun-warmed grass, or under branchy trees, whose leaves, as if in tune with their mood, flung playful shadows upon them. Already those disturbing sensations which the first glimpse of their unabashed endearments produced on him had ebbed. Only a vague unsatisfied curiosity lay in the background of his mind.

As they re-emerged on the lawn the merrymakers were tripping to the measure of a country dance. The frolic spirit of the music, the sense of holiday freedom and gay companionship, quickened the dancers’ feet to such delighted motion that for a moment the onlooker might well wonder if in this carefree spontaneity we had not the true purpose of life. Stephen, watching the scene, wished that by some enchantment he could overleap the span of years that still lay between him and that transport of the senses which, he thought, must be theirs who participated in the jocund revel. Frank’s reaction to the lyrical gaiety of the scene was more tempered. For his years he was oddly self-controlled. Too often the twinkle in his eye was one of amused toleration rather than of whole-hearted pleasure. One felt that

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with the passing of the years his slightly-detached way of looking at things would harden into cynicism. . . .

The imperious clang of the castle bell, followed by the reluctant trooping of crowds to the gate, was for Stephen a plunging back from a world of fantasy into the drab routine of every day.

“Pity ’tis all over,” he remarked a little wistfully as they passed out into the Market Square.

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**Chapter XII**

**LAURENCE**

AS Stephen made his way home the happenings of the day passed in a flicker through his mind. He could see himself—unimaginably small—gazing up at the vast pile of the castle whose arrogant strength was a symbol of that human quality which he so admired. Entranced he was watching now the groups of dancers circling on the grass and weaving themselves into a tapestry of swaying forms in a mist of green light and shade. A moment later he was in the shrubbery stealing a sidelong glance at the gamesome lovers—all that queer emotional surge of mind and sense again engulfing him. Frank Cardan’s voice was again in his ear. He was listening to the tale of his unromantic adventure and found himself repeating:

“Nothing of honour’s code she knew,

This silly, chattering cockatoo.”

The swift succession of images faded out as he found himself standing in front of his own door.

His mother came in answer to his knock. The table was laid for the evening tea. He was hardly conscious till now that he needed food. The smell of new bread had quickened his appetite. Often on Sunday evenings

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his mother would devote part of her short spell of leisure to the making of quaintly-fashioned rolls as an agreeable surprise for her sons on their return. The bread which she baked had always some delicate flavour that Ansty’s, good as it was, seemed to lack. She had “a light hand,” as the saying went, in mixing the flour. Piled on the centre of the table, just hot from the oven, he saw them now, on their crisp, brown surface the glossy sheen made by the melted butter with which they had been lightly brushed. Their fanciful shapes—little chubby buns, golden crescents, twists—made the bread the more enticing. Beside them the baker's loaf looked stodgy and prosaic.

On small plates were slices of cold roast veal sprinkled with honey-coloured dabs of their own jelly. Stephen feasted his eyes on the inviting repast. He was never a lusty feeder, but this light fare he always relished. He was glad when Owen and Garry came in, and his mother set the tea to draw. His father was still in his room, so there was nothing to check the eager zest with which he sat down to eat the meal. All three boys were in high spirits, and they ate with the greedy satisfaction of young growing animals, seasoning the repast with lively com­ment on their afternoon’s experience and leaving the table lapped in the content which comes when the body’s primal need has been gratified.

When they heard their father’s step descending the stairs the jangle of their high-pitched voices dropped a semitone. Always that shrill assertiveness of youth, so impatient of contradiction, vexed their father’s soul, and he would reduce them to silence with a growl followed by a flick of his favourite text from St. Paul: “Beware the tongue—that dangerous member of the body.”

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Stephen was never wholly at ease in his father’s pres­ence. His sense of filial regard, however, was sufficient to check any manifestation of this feeling. This evening he lingered on for a little time and then unobtrusively withdrew upstairs to prepare his home lessons. He sat at his desk in the back bedroom. The desk was one which had been made to his father’s orders. It was designed so that the three boys could sit working to­gether as in a classroom. It would tend to create, their father piously hoped, a studious atmosphere in the way that church windows subdue the mind to prayer. The plan, admirable in theory, proved less admirable in practice. Each of the boys, irked by the too close proximity of the other, took to elbowing his neighbour and, resentment growing, the study hour began to resolve itself into an interlude of jangled nerves and rasping interchanges of argument. With the passing of the years Owen and Garry had gradually taken to doing their work elsewhere, and the desk had long become recog­nized as part of Stephen’s personal property. Stored in it with his books was something of his secret life—frag­ments of a diary, bits of verse, crude drawings, flotsam and jetsam gathered from periodicals—all flung together in incredible disorder. He was forever promising himself to sort and arrange its contents, but it continued from day to day to present such a clutter of objects that those who lifted the lid dropped it with a sudden distaste.

He had a queer half-personal affection for this desk. He could recall the excitement when on a warm summer evening many years ago the carpenter and his apprentice brought it in, its varnish still moist and sticky, the wood smelling of pine, and the bright-headed screws gleaming like little silver discs in the dull metal hinges. It had been

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left for the night under the shed, and he and Owen and Garry longed to achieve the glory of being the first to write on its sloping lid. Always a light sleeper, Stephen had awakened soon after daybreak. Slipping out of bed he hastily pulled on his trousers, and with braces flapping stole barefooted downstairs and into the silent kitchen. He opened the door and passed out into the grey light of morning. The flagged surface of the yard moist with dew chilled his feet and sent a shiver through his blood. A snail was crawling up the lime-washed wall enclosing the yard. Its slimy body showed black against the whiteness of the wall. Its horns were reached out searchingly. On the flagstones and along the wall it had left a glistening trail of phosphorescence. In some distant yard a cock was crowing. The tang of the newly- painted wood came to him as he lifted the lid of the desk. On the clean, smoothly-planed wood inside he inscribed:

Mine is the first hand
to write on this desk.
STEPHEN MANGAN.
June 12 th, 1885.

At breakfast, flaunting his triumph, he provoked the jeers of his brothers. What matter? Let them jeer. He had had his hour of triumph. The desk would pass on from generation to generation—his name, and his only, linked with it. He could laugh now at the childish recollection. How far away all that seemed. Looking back through the years things always seemed to recede and dwindle in stature. You had a kind of feeling some-

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how that you were viewing them through the wrong end of a telescope.

Scarcely had he returned to join the others in the living room than a visitor was announced. Often on the eve of a monthly fair country friends come to stay overnight in town would seek to bridge the hours to bedtime by drifting in among them. Stephen liked most of these casual guests. They were simple, warm­hearted farming folk whose vivid speech and gesture, tempered with some native courtesy of manner, appealed to his instincts.

He felt none of this sense of human kinship with the visitor who had now come in. Always something within him protested against the faint suspicion of patron­age in the bearing of his cousin, Laurence Scriven. Laurence was a tall spare man with narrow square shoulders. He was in the middle forties, though he looked older than his years. His pale blue eyes looked out from small, almost pinched features. The thin, querulous mouth was fringed with a close-cropped biscuit-coloured moustache in which the grey had begun to struggle for mastery. Everything about him was bleak. His very smile seemed to Stephen to have a wintry bitterness, and his laugh was short and dry. He was more carefully dressed than most men of his class, and the slate-grey suit he had on was in keeping with the lack of warmth in his manner.

Laurence Scriven had made a success of the business of life, and looked with veiled contempt on those who had either bungled the experiment or who had achieved merely half a success. Every acre of his extensive farm was in good heart. The land was well stocked. Its fences of mortared stone were in marked contrast to

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those straggling wasteful lines of earthbanks, scrubby with furze and thorn which divided his neighbours’ fields. His credit in the Munster Bank stood high, and the manager greeted him with the expansive smile dis­pensed only to important customers.

Two of his sons he intended for professions. Michael was to be a priest. Sylvester, a doctor. Though the two were little more than lads of Stephen’s age he would often in pretended jest speak of the future “Father Michael!” and “Doctor Sylvester.” He had a sprinkle of learning—-or of what he believed was learning—and aroused the deep resentment of Stephen and his brothers by playing the schoolmaster while their father was by.

“Can you answer this, Stephen?” he would begin. Or, “how would you set about solving this problem?” “How many books of Euclid have you done?” (“What, only one? Michael and Sylvester have done three”) “Do you know the signs of the Zodiac?” (“No? Strange now.”) “How do you account for the tides? all of which problems he let you know were but child’s play to Michael and Sylvester. When you sang dumb, betraying your ignorance, he would give a pained look that secretly stung you like the flick of a lash. You were being stripped naked in the presence of your father, who would look at you wondering that he should be the progenitor of a son so dull-witted as yourself.

Stephen had never met those young paragons of learning, Michael and Sylvester, but at such moments sadistic impulses shot through his soul and he longed to throttle the pair and taste the last extravagance of joy in hearing their gasping cries.

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However contemptuous he and his brothers might be of Laurence’s personality, their parents, they knew, admired him whole-heartedly. Did he not stand out from the ruck of farm folk living from hand to mouth? Was he not hail-fellow with his parish priest? When he came in now, their mother, always warm in her welcome, drew a chair to the fire and set about brewing hot punch for her guest. The very way in which Laurence held the glass and sipped the steaming liquor offended Stephen. There was in his manner of drinking none of that fine gusto, that deep sense of enjoyment, which the flavour of good liquor should always inspire. His meagre sips suggested more the precise pecking of a thin-beaked bird rather than the slow rich gulp of a man’s warm­blooded lips.

As Laurence entered the room Owen and Garry were playing cards. They merely nodded in reply to his greeting, and went on with their play. Alarmed lest any circumstance should arise that might prompt the visitor to indulge in one of his hateful inquisitions, Stephen joined his brothers at the table. In the presence of their parents the boys could not openly betray their hostility, and they were driven to enact in dumb show a comedy of covert grins and wry gestures to express their common feeling of protest against the intrusion of the unwelcome guest.

“The boys now—are they good at the cards, Roger?” they heard him inquire in his thin cold voice as he stirred his punch.

“They should be better. They don’t think enough. Rushing headlong at things.”

“Well, now. It takes me all my wits to hold my own against my two.”

“No bad sign of their understanding. You’re send­ing them to college soon, I hear?”

“Yes. Michael’s off to St. Colman’s in September. He’s to be the priest. Sylvester will join him a year later.”

“A fine chance you’re giving them, Laurence.”

“Well, the way it is, I feel that it’s money wisely invested. They’ve brains, both of them, and they should make their mark. They’re all for learning. ’Twould astonish you the way they eat up their books.”

Roger Mangan was deeply impressed. “They’ve good sense,” he remarked.

“They have. All hours you’ll see them puzzling at figures, reading and memorizing. No wish for idle sport or nonsense.”

The three boys, only half intent on the game, were listening. Stephen gave a scornful smile. “Pair of old Jennies,” commented Owen under his breath, and he frowned as he saw his father drink in every bragging word. Young Garry in derision covertly stuck out his tongue.

“You have great comfort in your boys, Laurence,” observed their father. The card-players felt that the words conveyed an oblique reproach.

“They’re good boys, thank God,” affirmed Laurence.

Mockingly pious, Garry joined his hands, turning his eyes to heaven. The ironic gesture made Owen splutter. Stephen felt too bitter to smile. Laying down his half- drained rummer of punch, Laurence left his place and came to the table to look on at the game. The boys exchanged glances, Garry winking slyly at the others. Laurence stood behind Stephen, scrutinizing his hand. Stephen felt the cold blue eyes studying his cards, and

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realized that Laurence would measure his intelligence according to the skill with which he played. His mind ceased to function in the way it did ordinarily. He threw his cards haphazardly.

“Poor play, Stephen,” commented Laurence as the game ended.

“I wasn’t bothering,” replied Stephen indifferently.

“One shouldn’t play cards in that spirit,” he said censoriously.

Stephen muttered under his breath.

The other went on, “You must come and stay with us sometime for a week or two. You’d like the country. Michael and Sylvester, they’ll teach you how to make the best of a hand of cards. There isn’t a move they haven’t mastered.”

“Thanks,” he mumbled, and, conscious that his father was a witness of the scene, an agonized “My God!” escaped him. He could see Garry’s mouth twist in the effort to keep down his laughter.

To his relief Laurence turned to his elder brother. “Would you like to see a good card trick, Owen?” he inquired.

“I’d love to,” came from Owen, with a well simu­lated air of curiosity.

He took the pack from the table.

“Ever seen the three card trick?” he inquired.

“Yes—at the fair. But I could never see how the trick was done,” he added. “Can you really do it, Laurence?”

“I believe so,” he answered dryly.

He selected the three cards. “See here,” he said, laying them face uppermost on the table, the Queen of Clubs flanked on either side by a red card. “ The prob­-

lem, as you know, is to find the Queen.” He turned down their faces and began deftly to manoeuvre the cards from one position to another, and then came to a dead pause. Gravely he invited Owen to find the Queen. With a confident smile Owen picked up a card. He had followed with keenly pursuing eyes the swift interchange of movement. The card was one of the two that had gone to form the scarlet bodyguard of the dark lady.

“I—I could almost swear ’twas the Queen” he stam­mered. “You’re wonderful, Laurence,” he added, moved to admiration for a moment. Beyond the professional cardsharpers at the fairs, Owen had never known any one versed in this wizardry.

Self-satisfied, Laurence smiled.

Garry and Stephen adventured in turn but each was no more successful than Owen in his pursuit of the elusive Queen. “Some devilment in this,” thought Garry.

Their father, having drained his glass, stood up and came to the table. “I’ll have a try, Laurence,” he said.

The boys were thrilled. That their father could blunder was impossible. His play had always something of divination. They hugged themselves, foreseeing the other’s inevitable defeat.

Laurence smiled and began to toss the cards. Their father’s attention grew suddenly taut as a fiddle-string. The swift subtle motions of the other’s hands held him fascin­ated. But for the keenly watching eye he might have been a figure in still life. The boys looked on with slightly drawn breath. In the suspended silence their mother had left her place to look on. Never before had she been moved to come to the card table, and her gesture gave the scene a sharper intensity. She felt as sure as that her heart-beat had slowed down that no art

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of camouflage, however cunningly employed, could deceive her husband.

Laurence, aware of the shrewd penetrating intelli­gence with which he had to deal, took infinite pains to ensure a triumph. Never had he made his passes with such accomplished skill. The cards, as if under mesmeric control, responded to his will. “Now, Roger,” he said, with a little ironic gesture.

Roger Mangan paused for an instant. Then, with a bang, he brought his heavy hand down on the table. “There she is!” he said with an assured smile and turned the card.

In the strained laughter of wife and children there was something of dismay. Only a moment ago it seemed beyond belief that the art of Laurence Scriven, or of a thousand Laurence Scrivens, could baffle the eye and mind of this dark god who ruled their destinies. Yet it was Laurence who had triumphed and who was now looking on at their discomfiture with a smile that hurt each of them.

Their father merely shrugged his shoulders and re­turned to his chair by the fire. He sat there with knitted brows, silent, pondering, wrestling with this challenging mystery. His pride had been humbled. His wife, his children, had witnessed his defeat. He was like a school­master who, bungling some demonstration, encounters on every side the astonished gaze of his class. If by mortal power one could reach a solution he would find it. He would. Only give him time to ponder. Time. Time!

“Let me try, Laurence,” said Mrs. Mangan quietly. They all looked at her in amazed surprise. None of them could ever remember her having handled a card.

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Cards were for menfolk. She only knew that they were of two colours, and that some had oddly designed figures supposed to represent kings and queens. Un­like the photographs on the mantelpiece these strange kings and queens looked the same to your eyes when turned upside down. One by one she took up the three cards lying flat on the table and studied them closely. “Now, tell me, Laurence, what I’m to do,” she in­quired.

“Only to pick out that picture card,” he said, indicat­ing the queen.

“That should be easy,” she remarked naively.

“Roger didn't find it so,” he remarked with a little dry laugh.

They were all vastly amused at her assured air of confidence. She would not mind being laughed at. Knowing as little as a child about cards, she, in adven­turing, had no dignity at stake. Laurence, smiling tolerantly at her playfulness, began once more to exhibit his sleight of hand.

“Now, have a go, Mrs. Mangan,” he said.

She paused, knit her small brow, and unhesitatingly lifted a card. Roger was dumb with surprise. The boys looked at her in questioning wonder. Laurence was visibly annoyed. A network of lines appeared on his forehead. Never had he failed in his art till now. What fortuitous chance had guided that fine, small hand to lift the card? The delighted laughter of the boys hid, he knew, a faint mockery. Two spots of colour appeared on his cheek-bones.

“Would you mind trying again, Mrs. Mangan?” he inquired of her.

She assented readily. He exercised his art with more

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accomplished finesse than before. These people—they should see!

“Now, Mrs. Mangan,” he said, smiling blandly.

She considered for a little time and then hazarded. The marriage ring on her slender finger shone in the lamplight. She lifted a card. The Queen!

Laurence looked at her questioningly. What was wrong? Was he losing his skill? Only a moment since he had been able to trick the shrewd intelligence of her husband. A week ago Father Barton, who had made repeated attempts to explore the mystery, had to confess his defeat. “Extraordinary,” he remarked. Ponder­ing, he returned to his seat, took up his drink which had now become tepid, and began mechanically to stir the lemon slice with his spoon.

Roger Mangan looked at his wife in puzzled amuse­ment. She was quietly laughing. The boys exulted openly. “Bravo, mother! Bravo!” they shouted in chorus, and began to pat her playfully on the back, while she, sensing Laurence’s annoyance, signed to them covertly to desist.

When at ten o’clock their guest departed all three boys turned as one to their mother. “How under Heaven did you do it, mother?” they asked eagerly. “How did you know? Tell us!”

She could only laugh—laugh till bright drops came into her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. They were burning with curiosity but had to wait till the mood had expended itself.

“I’ll tell you,” she said, brushing the moisture from her eyes. “It was the simplest thing imaginable. I just ….

A little gust of laughter took her again.

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“Do go on, mother!” they implored.

“’Twas like this,” she said, striving to hold in her bubbling merriment, and showed them how with the edge of her finger-nail she had made a slight dint on the reverse side of the card.

The boys yelled with laughter, and moved by a single impulse the three circled round her hand in hand, she in the centre like a little girl at play. For once their boisterous fun brought no protest from their father. He was chuckling to himself quietly. And every now and then, a droll twinkle in his eye, he glanced at their mother. Never before had they seen his eyes shine like that.

The comedy over, she turned to prepare their father’s supper—a signal for the boys to retire. As they straggled upstairs to bed the sound of their light-hearted voices came in a gradually lessening stream to their elders below.

Some time later their mother slipped quietly into their room. They were just dozing off. She called to them in a whisper. On waking their eyes blinked in the candle­light. In her hand was a jug brimming with hot tea.

And again, as she left the room, came the boys’ voices:

“You’re a trump, mother.”

“Thanks, mother.”

“Thanks very, very much, mother.”

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**Chapter XIII**

**THE FAIR**
I

STEPHEN lay in bed listening to the jolting of farm carts, the loudly pitched voices of men and women, the bleating of sheep penned in creels, and the lowing of cattle frightened in being swept from their quiet pastures to be driven for miles along flinty roads under the dim light of stars—stars that were paling now as the beasts were being goaded through narrow streets in the grey half-light of dawn. It was only five o’clock, and the light in his room was still but a grey invading mist. But in daybreak, however dim, there was always comfort. In that confusion of voices coming to him from the streets outside there was comfort too. The rising tide of light and sound breaking on his mind drew it from its own brooding and dispelled the fantasies with which darkness and silence were wont to torture his imagination.

The fair meant a school holiday. To-day there was to be no sitting in those battered desks, no looking into the glowering face of Mr. Hill, no listening to that harsh voice always keyed to the same rasping note of intoler­ance. The thought distilled its drowsy spell on his spirit, and with a sigh of content he dropped into a deep refresh­ing slumber.

He awoke as the clock in the next room was striking

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nine. He had had four hours of dreamless sleep and felt a pleasant sense of invigoration. The room was full of the warm radiance of a July morning. It was good to feel that the long day stretching before him was his to use as he would. Owen, he knew, would be busy in the shop. His brother had that quality of easy fellow­ship that in a small town goes to the making of the business man. Stephen was different. He sought to be as friendly and pleasant as Owen, but there was always some inhibiting force that made him ill at ease and constrained. The women, speaking in Irish, would say to his mother, “Stephen now—isn’t he a bit distant in himself? Owen’s so friendly-like.” “Indeed you’re wronging the boy,” she’d say in his defence. “He’s a bit shy with people—he can’t help it—that’s all.” So it happened that he, unlike his elder brother, was seldom called upon to lend a hand in the business. Now as he lay in bed he could hear against the noisy traffic of the street outside the dull, confused murmur from the shop below. He got up and made his way downstairs. Ansty, giving him short shrift, planked a cup and saucer before him and poured out his tea.

“Hurry up with you now,” she snapped impatiently, “’tis hours since the rest of us had breakfast. This is no morning to be delaying a meal. People in and out and your mother wanting me in the shop.”

“Well, why didn’t you call me?”

“Call you?—and enough clamper in the street to waken the dead.”

“I heard it, but it was then only daybreak and I dozed off again. Look, Ansty, I’d like a bit of toast.” he said insinuatingly.

“Would you? Make it yourself then.”

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“Just a small bit?”

“Oh, don’t bother me”—and straightway she speared a generous slice of bread on the fork and held it to the bars at a spot where the fire was a steady flameless glow. She thickly buttered the hot crisp surface and tossed it steaming on to his plate.

“Thanks. You’re a trump, Ansty,” he smiled, as his teeth sank in the warm mellow crust.

“Ah, go along,” she protested. “Queer fancies you have. Toast, no less, on a hot summer morning. Hurry, and be off with yourself. Any one to stroll in here I’d have to ask them to join you, and God only knows how long I’d be kept going.”

“Half a minute,” he pleaded, and he gulped down his tea and swallowed the last morsel of toast. “Was I long?” he asked as he jumped up, overturning his chair.

“No,” she smiled. “I’m sorry I had to rush you,” she added with a touch of compunction, “but you see how it was with me.”

“It’s all right. You’re a good old thing, Ansty,” he laughed. “I’m off.”

He made his way through the crowded shop, ex­changed a smile with his mother, and passed into the street on whose far side close to the kerb was a long row of carts tilted on their ends, their shafts in the air like trussed fowl.

Having crossed the bridge he turned into Rock Street. Drifts of sheep close-herded blocked the pavement, and he had to pick his way through the steep thoroughfare between horses and carts and wild-eyed cattle ready at any moment to stampede. He emerged into the densely- crowded Market Square, into which, as into a swirling pool, streams of life still kept pouring from every side.

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He found himself at the pitch where the trick o’ the loop men, the thimble-riggers, and the cardsharpers were exercising all their subtleties of speech and gesture to beguile the soft gomals of country boys to hazard their scanty bits of silver. Though Stephen had been long tutored in the ways of those who live on their wits, and could instinctively spot the confederate whose ease in winning lured the unsuspecting to disaster, the scene had never lost its power to excite his interest. He had the feeling of a spectator in the theatre listening to a familiar play and watching the movement of the drama to its inevitable ending. He could read as in a book the sequence of emotion mirrored so clearly in the faces of those who surrendered to the sharper’s spell.

Always the attitude of each new-comer was one of cautious aloofness. “I’ve come idly to look on,” he seemed to proclaim; “by no mortal power can I be drawn.” Yet as the trickster’s voice, bright and un­ceasing in its flow, went on, it began like the fumes of some heady wine to excite his imagination. Uncon­sciously he would press nearer. Promptings of hope or avarice would begin to ply their forces on his reason. He was like the trout which, sensing danger, yet is held by the fascinating play of the angler’s fly on the surface of a stream. Then would come the sudden yielding to desire.

To Stephen it was tragi-comedy to observe the rueful air of bewilderment which inevitably succeeded. An incredulous stare would hold the victim’s eyes, the lips would part in stupid wonder and a sense of shamed defeat settle on the oafish figure as it slowly moved away and melted in the crowd.

He was drawn to a circle of countryfolk who stood

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to watch the performance of the blind fiddler and his dancing daughter. In its pallid stillness the old man’s face was like an ivory mask. The girl, with her freckled skin, her red, glinting hair, and her lithe body, had a brazen air of vagabondage. Twisted round her shoulders was a bright-coloured shawl, and as the fiddle strings began to shape some rhythmic pattern, she tossed it from her and, like a creature of fire and flame, darted and spun over the ravelled strip of carpet under her feet. Stephen’s eyes kept wandering from dancer to fiddler, and he thought how strange it was that while the bright­winged music flew from the fiddle strings the face of the old man should maintain its waxen immobility.

Dance and tune having ended the girl took her father’s caubeen to make her collection, whereupon most of the assembled crowd miraculously dissolved. As she took stock of her lean harvest a withered smile settled on her lips, and whipping up her shawl and the carpet she took the blind man’s arm and led him to another pitch in the Square. As he watched them move away they seemed to him forlorn and outcast: wanderers in a strange land. Their loneliness plucked at some chord of tenderness in his nature and momentarily set it vibrating.

The mood was broken by the sudden cry of “prisoner” followed by a general straining of the crowd to a central point of interest. The arrest of some drink-crazed peas­ant was but one of the normal accidents of the monthly fair, yet the scene, ministering to that passion for crude excitement inherent in masses of men, drew every soul irresistibly towards it. Avid of curiosity, Stephen hurried in the direction of the tumult and skilfully manoeuvred his way through the excited throng. Lusty with drunken rage a broad-shouldered giant was stub-

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bornly contesting every foot of his way to the lock-up. Three police officers, one with his helmet fouled green with the cow dung from which he had just retrieved it, another with his tunic wrenched loose, the third with a little foam of blood on his lips, were grappling with a powerful figure that struggled fiercely as a tiger caught in the meshes of a net. As Stephen looked on in fasci­nated horror, one of the officers, goaded to fury, released his truncheon, and amid the execration of the crowd brought it down on the prisoner’s head. He reeled, a gush of blood pouring hot down his cheeks, and hatless and coatless, his shirt sleeves in ribbons, dust and blood on his matted hair, a lava stream of curses pouring from his mouth, he was dragged to the bride­well.

All Stephen’s sympathies were on the side of the law­breaker. Antagonism to the Crown, of which the policeman was a symbol, was the fundamental principle in his vague political faith. Again before sunset he was to hear that cry of “prisoner” flung from mouth to mouth. The man was a big-paunched, jovial Bacchus, round and flushed of face as the harvest moon. Seated on a cask in the crowded bar of the Granuaile he had in his roystering way pulled a young girl on to his knees. Her father, taking offence, had swung at him like a jungle beast whose cub is being threatened, and, struggling with each other, the two, mid the crash of glass and the cries of women, swirled through the open door of the tavern into the broad arms of the law. Looking upon his helmeted bodyguard as satellites, he welcomed the relief of their sustaining arms and made merry all the crowded way down Rock Street and across the bridge by bawling snatches of old country songs.

A vague desire for food led Stephen to the open-air tents, where blowsy women and slatternly girls, old be­yond their years, presided over their mottled display of cheap comestibles. Instinctively he stood aloof, assuming the air of a casual looker-on rather than of a potential customer. Nothing in the stalls might tempt him, yet if some bold-faced beldame caught his eye she would call to him possessively—and how could he muster up sufficient moral courage to protest that among her wares there was nothing that hit his fancy? Houseflies and bluebottles were gorging on the food. A wasp was trying to extricate its gleaming body from a sticky dab of jam that formed the centre of a mouldy fruit tart. When at intervals the swarm was disturbed it rose in a buzz of cloudy wings, leaving the wasp still struggling to release itself.

Standing by the booth were two big, raw country fellows. With luscious satisfaction they were munching crubeens. Grease dribbled from their mouths and trickled in an oily glister down their chins. Stephen half-sickened. His too vivid imagination saw the living beast wallowing in muck or foraging in the stinking garbage on which swine are wont to batten. “How,” he asked himself, “how could even a starving man sink his teeth in flesh that had once been in contact with almost unimaginable things?” No such disturbing image, however, arose to spoil the rich gusto with which the two youths gnawed their knuckled joints bare to the bone. He shied at the thought of buying Chester cake. Current among the boys were strange theories of its dubious composition. The square-cut slices of ginger­bread, dry as snuff, held no temptation either. He thought of Mrs. Martin’s stall. Mrs. Martin was different

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somehow. She was always clean and glossy as the white cloth spread over the small table upon which she assembled her wares. At the end of the bridge, remote from the clutter of tents, he would find her solitary little stand. She lived on the edge of the town, her thatched cottage open to the fields. Passing by you always got the fresh clean smell of limewash. Once, while on a visit home, her son, David, who was married in New York, had persuaded her to venture overseas to share his home and be happy with her grandchildren. The new world into which she was ushered bewildered her. Life, spinning like an axle before her eyes, filled her with dismay. Here was no rest, no peace. One could hardly pray. David and his wife were kind. The children too. But old memories kept tugging at her heart-strings. She never ceased to pine for the little thatched cottage on the edge of the town. The tendrils of her life were still entwined with the place as the root and the sod. In less than a year the astonished neighbours saw the little woman arrive back among them. Straightway she took up the dropped threads of her life as if all that had hap­pened had been but a perplexing dream from which she had been awakened.

There she was now, seated on her low stool, and smiling a friendly welcome as Stephen drew near. He stowed his pennyworth of cake in his pocket and was returning by Rock Street into the Square when the cry, “runaway horse!” reached him. People rushed for shelter, and he was swept as on a wave into Gilligan’s Lane. The lane which opened under a tavern led directly to a stabling establishment. The gate was open and he stumbled into the cobbled yard. In a moment, the danger past, the crowd began to pour back into the

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Market Square, leaving the laneway like a piece of shelving strand from which the tide has receded.

For all his years in the little town Gilligan’s stables were new to Stephen. Some excitement in the air aroused his curiosity and prompted him to linger a little while. In the open yard were some half-dozen mares, each in charge of her owner. Among the men there was much noisy argument, the matter of which he was unable to grasp. His attention was diverted from the group by a lusty neigh coming from one of the horse-boxes looking on the yard. A powerful black stallion, his mane a thick frizzle, his coat a shining jet, looked across the barred half door. He kept tossing his head and pawing the ground impatiently. The dark eyes burned with a rest­less flame.

From the group of animals in the centre of the yard a young mare, shy and timid as a fawn, was led forward by her owner. At her approach the sire, his restless head thrust well forward over the barrier, snuffed and neighed. The gush of hot breath from his nostrils set the sensitive creature trembling, and in a panic she backed away from the sire. With caressings and words of gentle encourage­ment the owner lured her forward again. The splendid snuffling savage nipped the quivering creature on the neck. Stung by the pain the little animal kicked and reared, sending up a shower of sparks from the cobbles. Gradually the first quivering terror of the poor beast began to subside. The two animals now nuzzled each other understandingly. The barrier was withdrawn and the masterful sire, prancing hotly, foam dripping from his champing mouth, was led to his mate.

To Stephen the wonder and terror of this process of mating came with the blinding force of a physical blow.

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He was dazed and shaken. As he left the yard and mixed again with the crowd he felt as if some horrible convul­sion had passed through his body. Haunted by this strange manifestation of life in the animal world he made his way home. He felt a craving for tea—tea hot and stimulating—to tone the sickly, disorder of his senses.

II

There were no regular meals on fair days. The most one could hope for was a hasty snack, hurriedly prepared during some momentary lull when Ansty could be spared from the shop. Often during the press of business his mother had to deny herself even that slight repast. An occasional dram of spirits or a tankard of beer sus­tained his father’s energies. During the fair the work of the store demanded his continuous presence. His customers having sold their stock, came to settle their accounts and to load their carts with further supplies of feeding stuffs. His day was consumed in jotting down entries in the day-book, in going from index to ledger, in giving directions to the two workmen whose task it was to hoist the sacks on their shoulders and heave them on to the waiting carts drawn up beside the kerb.

When a customer paid his account, whole or in part, it was an accepted tenet of business that he should be offered a drink, and custom demanded that the merchant should impart to the deal something of the grace of a social rite by joining with him in good fellowship. The day’s long fast and the tension of business heightened the effect of the stimulant and left his father when the day came to an end uncertain in his humour, and often

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morose and sombre. At such times Stephen had the sensation of being on the edge of a crater from which ominous rumblings might come at any moment. But it was yet too early in the afternoon to anticipate the evening’s eclipse.

Fortune favoured him, for he came on Ansty just as she was about to stow away after providing a hasty cup of tea for his mother and Owen.

“Anything wrong with you?” she inquired as she set a cup for him and poured out the tea.

“No” he answered defensively. “Why?”

“I thought you looked upset somehow coming in the door. A kind o’ shiver came over you too as you sat down.”

“You imagine things. How could I shiver and the day burning?” he asked, a hidden note of protest in his voice.

“You needn’t take me up like that. I was only afraid you might be sickening for something. Hurry yourself now,” she urged.

“All right,” he answered shortly.

Ansty looked at him curiously, but refrained from further comment. “Something’s upset him,” she thought, but there was no leisure to indulge in idle speculation. He gulped the strong tea between mouth­fuls of buttered bread. Rising from the table he had a sense of restored ease. “The tea was fine and hot,” he remarked to Ansty, eager to atone for his churlish attitude a moment since. “I seldom enjoyed a cup so much.”

Guided by no sense of definite purpose he made his way upstairs. At the parlour door he hesitated, his mind held for a moment by the thought of going in to read.

The notion passed and he went along the passage and made his way to his desk in the bedroom. The right end of the desk was flush with the window and he sat down looking aimlessly into the yard. The room, in contrast to the blinding sun beating down on the flagged surface outside, seemed a pool of quiet shadow. Under the corrugated iron shed four or five horses stood haltered. Their glossy flanks were unprotected from the glare and they kept flicking their tails to beat off the flies that buzzed around them incessantly. He could hear the cool drip-drip of the water tap. The sounds from the shop came to him like the drone of a hive. His mood was fitful, his mind leaping capriciously from one fancy to another.

He thought for a moment to make a poem about the blind fiddler in the Market Square. The worn face, unutterably still, floated before his mind. He saw the hand so sensitively holding the bow. He heard again the bright sparkle of sound like sunlight on water.

What of the mind hidden behind the mask? Shut in on itself, what visions did it create? His own visions, he perceived, were spun for the most part out of the world visible to his senses—the sky above him, sunrise and sunset, night with its mysterious beauty, wild things in the air, in wood, and in river, the season’s changes, hill and glen and running water. All this glory of the earth which kept pouring on the senses from season to season was but a web of nothingness to the dark fiddler.

Did he create within himself some world of fancy that held no kinship with this world of nature and man which nourished our imagination? In its intense absorption, what strange images did his mind weave for itself? All this mood he would now like to crystalize in a poet’s

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lovely words, but, realizing that he was only a hodman, not a builder, the thought turned to bitterness. His face set in a frown and he turned impatiently to the confused litter of things in his desk. There was nothing to hold his interest, and, letting the lid fall with a bang, he sat ruminating. He was vaguely conscious of the dripping water, the buzzing of flies, the dry flicking of horses’ tails, the continuous drone of voices muted in their passage to his ear.

The latch of the door opening into the yard rattled. A man’s figure, a Hercules in build, emerged into the sunlight. All that tumult of sensation which had shaken Stephen on the day of the matchmaking swept back into his memory when he recognized Diarmuid Mor. What a sensitive fool he had been on that occasion! All topsy­turvy, anger against this man burning in his heart and flaming in his cheeks. His mind—how it had grown since. Now he could laugh at it all as at a tipsy man’s joke.

Fascinated he watched his every movement. Whist­ling to himself, Diarmuid went into the shed to tend his mare. With his broad hand he slapped her with good-humoured heartiness, calling her “good little woman,” and tossed up the hay freshly in the rack. He took off his coat and hung it on an old crook in the wall. Rolling up his shirt sleeves to the elbow, he turned to relieve the mare of her overstraining burden of milk. His arms were firm and muscular and a clean-cut line of tan showed at the wrist.

Never till now had Stephen seen a mare being milked. It did not strike him that Nature providently supplies the dam with the means of fostering her young. He felt a slight repugnance as he saw the grey-white liquid

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squirt in foam on the cobbled surface and flow down the slight incline to the channel. Diarmuid Mór’s hands were dripping. Spatters of milk flecked his trousers and channelled through the pad of dust thick on his shoes. He dried his hands on the animal’s shaggy mane and on her sleek flanks. Having turned down his shirt sleeves he reached for his coat and slung it on. Then, with a last affectionate pat and an understanding whinny from the mare, he returned to the bar.

Stephen’s mood was still fitful, and, seeking for some means of allaying his unrest, he again half-mechanically lifted the lid of his desk. From its hidden place at the bottom he drew out a ragged diary, and dubiously began to turn over its pencilled jottings. How could he have been so weak as to make a record of all these childish vapourings? What was there in his life, anyway, to write about? Nothing ever happened. One day was but the repetition of another. The same stupid time played over and over. If Owen and Garry ever chanced on the diary they’d make a hare of him. Their mockery would release some devil lurking in some dark comer of his being. He would blaze up and in blind passion go for them. There would be a scene of crude savagery and in his insensate rage he would act like one possessed. After­wards his soul would be sick—sick of its own lack of balance. There was but one thing to do. He tore the tattered notebook into fragments and stuffed the pieces into his pocket.

He left the room and made his way to the parlour. From a small store of books he took a volume, and, hastening downstairs, entered the kitchen. From his pocket he drew out the torn pages of the diary, and, squeezing them into a rough ball, forced it between the

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bars of the fire-grate. He watched it leap into flame, and stayed on till there was nothing left but a few crinkled flakes threaded at the end with wavering points of light. The gesture made him feel that his mind was emerging from the chrysalis stage, that he was shedding from hour to hour the follies and illusions of childhood.

He went into the yard, and, stepping from the glare into the shadow of the lumber shed, unlatched the gate and mounted the steps to the garden. The place always exercised some gentle spell on his spirit. A high hedge of clipped whitethorn separated it on either side from the neighbouring gardens, and created that sense of privacy without which a garden loses so much of its charm. At one end a high, sunny wall, branchy with ivy in which sparrows kept up their ceaseless chatter, divided the garden from the barrack yard. Against this wall was the garden seat.

Hardly had he sat down and opened his book than the pleasant quiet was shattered by a violent hammering on the gate of the bridewell. It was some prisoner’s drunken protest. Always on fair days this stormy outburst came hotly on some offender’s being flung into the lock-up. Bang—bang—bang, measured as a hammer beat on the anvil, it now went on making the printed page on which Stephen’s eyes were bent a mere drift of words that held no meaning for his mind. Closing his book he strained his ears to listen to the torrent of invective coming from the prisoner, but the sound came to him like that of a voice half drowned in the conflict of wind and wave. He re-opened the book and endeavoured vainly to shut out the disturbing clamour. Like a drowsy bird shaken out of its dreams by the cry of a hawk in the air, the spirit of peace brooding over the garden had taken wing.

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Stuffing the book into his pocket he left the garden to mix again with the crowd. While the fair lasted there was always some excitement to draw the mind away from itself.

As he made his way through the streets the heavy reek of human sweat, mingling with the sour stench of beer, came to him from the open doors of pubs. Bars and taprooms were crowded, and at times he could hear amid the babel the long melancholy quaver of some traditional song. Men were hanging on each other, or holding hands with the slobbering affection which drink engenders, while their wives and daughters, patient beyond thought, looked at each other forlornly and en­dured the maudlin spectacle. Away from home, how­ever foolish their men might be, it was the woman’s place to hide her revulsion and sing dumb. Within the privacy of their own four walls let her upbraid her man as she will, but to challenge his dignity here would be to his manhood an affront beyond redemption. And so, while their menfolk slobbered and swilled and swore how each respected the other, these peasant women imposed on themselves an immense restraint, and prayed that the sorry spectacle would soon exhaust itself.

Already there were signs that the long trek for home had begun. A few of the more worldly wise, troubled by the consciousness of the hold-up in the day’s round of work on the farm, were setting out on their heavily- laden carts. Perched high on the sacks of feeding stuffs, their backs to the driver, sat the women, their hand- baskets brimmed with household needs. More than once on the way home they would fish out from the contents some small parcel, and with almost childish abandon feast their eyes on the coloured wonder of a ribbon, the

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sprigs of blossom on a piece of muslin, the intricate pattern in a finger or two of lace, or the more formal design in a piece of embroidery. This was a world from which the man holding the reins was shut out, and it derived something of its enchantment from his exclusion. Too often he poked his nose into affairs that were strictly the women’s concern, but some instinct warned him to hold aloof when it came to that mysterious trafficking in gee-gaws which took place when his womenfolk dis­appeared into one of the drapery stores.

The Square was still brimming with life, and hawkers were offering their remaining stocks at prices which made earlier purchasers endure secret agonies at their own lack of prescience.

“My grief! why hadn’t I the patience to wait?” Stephen heard a full-faced, buxom woman say to a younger companion ruefully. “Double the price that he’s asking now I paid the rogue this morning.”

“The muslin, it mightn’t be the same, Ellen,” urged the other consolingly.

“But it is, Mary. I’m not blind. Blue and yellow spots and pink posies.”

“You can never trust them cheap-jacks. They’d fool the wisest. I know it to my cost. I’d be hard set now, Ellen, before I’d be tempted to bargain with their like again.”

“Look at this, ladies,” came the saleman’s voice, as he unfolded a neckerchief of imitation silk shot with bright tints. Holding it delicately between forefinger and thumb, he shook it so that the colours rippled like a butterfly on the wing. A fresh sparkle of interest lit up the women’s eyes. “Here it goes—a thing of beauty— at half a crown to the first that offers.”

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“Isn’t it elegant, Mary?” The elder woman spoke.

“Lovely, Ellen. A wonderful bargain, too.” Mary’s voice had the note of assured conviction. “I dunno now would I buy it, Ellen? The young sister, Bridie, she’ll be going to Boston in the spring. I’d like her to look genteel-like over there.”

" ’Twould be very becoming.”

The burly salesman mopped his brow and dangled and tossed the pretty gaud with its shimmer of rainbow dyes. “Ladies, ladies,” he cried, “what’s come over you? Have you no fine taste at all?”

The young woman hesitated for a moment, then left her place.”l’ll take it,” she said, tendering a coin and, blushing slightly, returned to her companion.

Stephen looked on at the two women as with down- bent heads they fingered the kerchief appraisingly. “Somehow I thought it looked much nicer—up there,” remarked the elder woman, a little pucker of doubt gathering under her brow.

“Queer now, the same thought was in my own mind.” There was a catch in Mary’s voice. The brightness of her eyes had dimmed.

“Only one left, ladies,” came the voice of the sales­man. “Half a crown again and ’tis yours.”

“I’ll give you one-and-six,” laughed a bold-faced, rather handsome young woman in a shawl, nudging her companion.

“Joking you are, young lady?”

“Faith, then, I’m not. ’Tis all I have at the heel o’ the day. Take it or lave it. . .” and she boldly tendered the coins.

Sidelong glances passed among the crowd. “A for­ward hussy—that one,” most of them thought.

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“Who’s that whipster, Mary?” inquired the elder woman.

“Maura Dan—Dan the Poacher’s daughter, west from the Glen. A bold strap. No shame.”

The dealer pushed his bowler hat back on his poll and scratched his forelock irresolutely.

“The light o’ God to you, my dacent man, and throw it here?” she appealed.

As he looked down from his high perch on the impor­tuning face the elemental man in him wrestled with the moneymonger. With a laugh he tossed her the coveted piece of finery. As he took the coins he made play with her hand. She flashed him a look of scorn, shrugged her shoulders, and stalked away like an offended Juno.

"Glory be!” exclaimed Mary, “did you see that? With her fine palaver she gets it for one-and-six. Wasn’t myself the fool—landing out my fine half-crown? Such roguery!” Her lips were quivering.

“God’s sake, come away,” said the other. “We’re a pair of onseuchs,\* the two of us. If our men only knew they’d make a show of us for ever.”

As they moved away their eyes had a glint of bitter protest. Stephen watched them with a droll smile of amusement. Not a move in the little comedy of disen­chantment had escaped him.

From a pitch in front of the Hibernian Tavern voices raised in high anger reached him. In the midst of a press of onlookers were two stormy figures, a man and a woman. Tinkers obviously, for their stock of tins made a glitter of silver on the roadway. The man was a big, raw-boned fellow, with a tousle of fox-red hair

tumbling into his eyes. A thin scratch like a thread of crimson showed on his cheek. He had wiped it with his hand leaving a smear of iron-red on his face.

His wife had the swarth tan of a gipsy. Her hair had tumbled down. A shawl dragged from her shoulder and trailed in the dust. She was wiping a trickle of blood from her lips. When she spat on the ground the spittle had a tinge of red. Each in drunken fury had torn at the other and had just fallen apart. Now they slanged in a tempest of obscene words. Some of these obscenities were familiar to Stephen. No boy can be so sheltered as to escape them. Others new and gross, jagged like a gapped blade through his mind. Yet he stood, rooted as if by some macabre horror. At the warning cry “peelers” the two as one snatched up their tins and went away companionably. The crowd laughed.

“Divil, such a pair!” Stephen heard one remark to another. “Honest to God, I was afeard they’d brain each other.”

“That’s their life,” observed his companion. “Look at them now rolling along to Moll Cassidy’s as if nothing had happened.”

“Aye. Tinkers—they’re a quare lot, surely. How the divil do Moll stow them all away in her old bohan— tinkers, tramps, and ballad singers?”

“Heads and points, they say, the men at one end of a bed, their women at the other.”

“Go on!”

“That’s the story they tell,” replied the other laugh­ing. “I won’t swear to it.”

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III

Night had fallen on the town—a night of velvety darkness, the sky showing only a few stars. Stephen stood idly at the shop door looking into the street. It was drawing near closing time—ten o’clock. The clamour of the long day was over, and the quiet flow of the river which had been drowned in the turbulent tide of traffic was again in his ears. Far out in the country home-going cribs and carts were trundling along the winding roads that showed faintly white in the darkness. They were accustomed to travel without fights, and, as the man holding the reins was often drowsed from drink, or lack of sleep, or from both, it was ever a cause of wonder to Stephen how the travellers reached home without mischance. Remembering all those rugged boreens, barely cart-wide, twisting from the high roads to the farm houses in the fields, he felt that it was only some protective providence could save the horse from stumb­ling in the deep, rutted by-way.

The roadway was empty save for a horse and cart drawn up at a public house a little way down the far side of the street. They stood full in the light from the tavern window, and the rows of bottles threw queer reflections on the animal’s back. A woman with her hood down and a young girl wearing a shawl on her shoulders were standing by the cart wheel dejectedly. The hour was so late he knew they must be longing to be on the road. Most of their neighbours were far on their way home. Already some would have reached the kindly shelter of the farmhouses.

The voice of a man singing drunkenly came through

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the open door of the public house. More than once the cloaked woman left her place by the cart, and, moving to the threshold, wistfully looked in. In the stream of lamplight Stephen caught a moment’s glimpse of a pale, tired face, the brow furrowed with anxiety.

“Come home, Barty?” he heard her entreat. “’Tis very late. There isn’t a soul in town but ourselves.” The singer paid no heed. The lugubrious ballad with its broken rhythm went on. Brushing her hand across her eyes the woman returned to her place disconsolately. The girl, stung into action by her mother’s distress, gathered her shawl tightly round her shoulders and went directly to the door. Her slender figure stood outlined in the lamplight that filled the doorway.

“Da! Da! Come home, for God’s sake!” Stephen heard her call with tense earnestness. “Mother is dead tired. She’s—she’s crying, Da.”

There was a sudden pause in the hiccoughed attempt at singing. Some glimmer of meaning had penetrated to the fuddled brain. The figure of a lumpish old man came staggering out of the tavern. Leaning against the shaft he steadied himself, and fumbling with the reins, struggled to get on to the driver’s seat. In the effort he lost his balance and fell sprawling under the horse. With low cries of alarm the women dragged him on to the pavement. Stephen would have rushed to assist them but his quick instinct taught him that they would be the more deeply distressed by having their humiliation laid bare to a stranger. Big Dan Murnaghan, the publican, hearing the women’s cry, hastened out and, hoisting the old man on to his seat in the cart, put the reins in his hands.

"In with ye, now,” he said, addressing the women.

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Scrambling in from the heel of the cart, wife and daughter took their places on the sacks of meal with which the cart was laden.

“Safe home now, Barty,” called Dan in his big, hearty voice. “Don’t ye be troubling at all,” he said reassur­ingly to the other travellers. “He’ll be all right in no time. Good-night, and God direct ye.”

Long familiar with every phase of this nocturnal setting out, the horse strained momentarily at his traces and, conscious that he was facing homewards, plunged forward with zest to take the road to the open country.

A voice from within the shop made Stephen turn round. “Come, give us a hand here.” It was Owen calling in his downright way. Holding a long-handled brush he was standing in the doorway that led into the yard. Stephen knew the task that awaited him. From the overflowing water-tub he drew a bucketful and sloshed it along the floor—grey and dusty as the surface of the roadway outside. Lusty of vigour Owen urged the coarse-fibred brush to and fro over the surface, while Stephen kept splashing bucket after bucket as it was needed. The water, bearing on its surface corks, and straws, and burnt matches, flowed in a muddy stream down the slight incline to the street door and slopped over the pavement on to the channel. When the surface of the flooring began to reveal something of its essential grain, Ansty appeared equipped with a vessel of steaming water whose cloud of vapour impregnated the air with the tang of soap and soda. Going on her knees she scoured and mopped the boards to the freshness of wood newly planed. Meantime, Stephen’s mother had been labour­ing to reduce to seemly order the chaos of pewter and glass and empty bottles strewn on the counter and within

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the bar. At ten the shop had acquired an aspect of moist cleanliness and the heavy street door was swung to and bolted.

Turning off the lights they made their way to the kitchen. Garry, who had spent the day fishing, had already gone to his room. Seated by the fire, stirring his rummer of punch, was Stephen’s father. His mother, making some remark in Irish, handed him a thick wad of bank notes and cheques, the day’s takings, which he discreetly thrust into his trousers pocket. His boys had their own world, and the financial concerns of their elders had no part in it.

Stephen knew that his father on retiring to his room would open the dark green chest, always so carefully locked, and deposit the money therein. The green chest was to Stephen Pandora’s Box, and he would have given much to see its lid raised. He divined that things of grave significance lay within—deeds concerning the house, his father’s will, those Gaelic poems written by his scholar uncle who had died so young—all the flotsam of personal treasures which time gathers in its flow.

He and his brothers rarely entered their parents’ bedroom. There was about it something different from the other rooms. Always you went in there a little hesitantly—as into a sacred place. The air seemed to be charged with their presence. You felt as if you had ventured where you didn’t belong. It was a solemn place, dominated by the great mahogany bed which had been acquired at an auction in some big house in the district. Flowing from the canopy were faded damask curtains patterned with sprays of white flowers on a wine-coloured ground. The old-fashioned clock on the wall had a long pendulum which, as if aware of the burden of

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man’s mortality implied in its message, swung to and fro with a ponderous gravity. On the mantel was a picture of the Sacred Heart, under which was the inscription, “Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine.”

On winter nights, some hours before bedtime, a fire was usually kindled in the room. The three boys, unable to resist its comforting glow, would wander in from their own unheated bedroom and, clad only in their shirts, would stand around it quietly talking. The room would be full of leaping shadows. Sometimes the shifting light would fall on the gaunt figure of John the Baptist looking down from the wall, and as you met his bitter searching eyes the uncertain flame would skip to another point leaving the prophet shrouded in darkness. At times the mother-of-pearl crucifix hanging on the wall at the foot of the bed would suddenly gleam iridescent in the firelight. On its back, set in some kind of mosaic, were the Stations of the Cross. It was a gift from a girl who had been in the service of the family for seven years. She had gone to America and, cherishing the memory of her one-time mistress, had begged those who attended her in her last illness to have it sent to Stephen’s mother with her dying regard. In its wayward movement the flame would sometimes cast its glow on the porcelain stoup of holy water suspended on the wall facing the door. The winged angel, tinted in gold, holding in his hands the cupped shell for the water, would suddenly be transfigured and then, like the Angel of the Annun­ciation, as swiftly vanish.

It was pleasant the feel of the fire on your naked shins and you loved its caressing warmth floating upward inside your loose-hanging shirt. When the door at the

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foot of the staircase was heard to open you stole from the room and slipped between the cold sheets of your bed, pretending to breathe deeply when your father and mother passed through.

To-night Owen and Stephen, sensing their father’s sombre mood, sat silent in the kitchen or spoke to each other in half-whispers. They could only be themselves at the risk of being glowered at. If their voices quickened in argument that text from St. Paul would indubitably be slung at them. Should they blunder in speech, they would be derided for their ignorance. If, absent-minded, they should whistle they would be snapped at for their ill manners. Having no wish to live dangerously they quietly withdrew. Stephen hated this uncertain atmos­phere that seemed to mark almost inevitably the close of a fair day. Moodiness acted on his spirit like a corrosive. Why, why, couldn’t people be always easy and pleasant in their ways?

The night had become oppressively warm. Ansty, who was always so weather-wise, had said there was thunder in the air. She felt it in her blood just as she felt the approach of rain by the shooting of her corns. As the two boys made their way upstairs there was a vivid flash followed instantly by a roll of thunder. Both blessed themselves. Stephen’s first impulse was to return to the living-room. There was always a sense of security in the company of one’s elders. His father knew no fear and looked with something of scorn on those who lacked his own fibre. If others showed signs of distress he would cry impatiently “Have faith!” Stephen was now too old to show fear however much he might feel it. To return to the kitchen while on his way to bed would be a confession of weakness.

When he was a small child he used to be told that thunder was the voice of God, angry with sinners. That used to make his heart tighten. Passionately he used to tell God that if He only wouldn’t destroy him he would never offend against His law again. He had, of course, long ceased to believe that. Books explained the pheno­menon. Clouds charged with electric fluid banged into each other—it was something like that. Yet some vague shadow of that early childish belief survived in him.

When he reached his room he and Owen at once sprinkled themselves with holy water. Then he dropped on his knees, his face pressed deep into the bed. He prayed with fervour. In a moment he was lying beside Garry, who was fast asleep. Wide-eyed, expectant, he lay waiting for each blinding flash, each solemn roll and reverberation. At every rumble he crossed himself. Mercifully now there was a splutter of rain. That meant an ebb in the storm. It made a patter at first. Then came a deluge. He listened to it whipping the flagged yard. It made a hollow drumming sound on the corrugated iron roofing of the shed. In the street he could hear the water chugging as it raced along the channel.

He thought of the carts still labouring homewards along the lonely country roads. Around them would be a vast, encompassing darkness. The lightning—a streak of jagged blue flame—would suddenly cleave through the void, and for a moment hedges and trees and fields and bogs would stand out nakedly. Then in a breath they would be swallowed up in a black gulf. The horse would tremble. His eyes would have a glint of fear. The driver, holding the reins taut, fearful lest he should bolt, would keep calling to him reassuringly. The younger animals would become restive and plunge

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madly. They would back into the ditch, and their drivers would have to jump off and lead them by the head. As the light flashed witheringly into the women’s eyes they would bless themselves and cry “God save us!” When the storm would give place to blinding rain the cart would still go jolting on. The rain would soak into their garments till their clothing would cling to them in a clammy mass. But Heaven, ’twas said, fitted the back to the burden, and these women of the fields, he knew, accepted with patient fortitude the mischances of life.

He was still awake when his father passed silently through the room on his way to bed. His mother soon followed. In the pallid light of the candle which she held, her small face looked spent. She caught his ques­tioning eye and, pausing a moment, came to him.

“The thunder—did you hear it, mother?” He spoke in a half whisper. His father would not understand his still being wideawake.

“I did, indeed,” she nodded. “’Twas terribly sudden. But, thank God, it passed so quickly. You weren’t frightened?”

“Oh no,” he smiled as if amused at such an assumption. “What fearful rain outside.”

“Awful, glory be to God. Try and sleep now,” and she tucked the clothes comfortably under him. “’Tis very late. Good-night.”

“Good-night, mother.”

**Chapter XIV**

**THE ARCHDEACON COMES IN**

I

A slatternly woman, her skirts a-draggle, her shoes slopping, strands of hair straying across her face—that was the uncomely image which the town always suggested to Stephen's imagination on the morn­ing after a fair. Wisps of straw littered the streets, and handbills, pink and yellow and green, made blotches of soiled colour on the roadways and in the gutters. The wide space of the Market Square, islanded with blobs of animal dung, looked like a grimy archipelago. On all the pavements sheep-droppings had been trodden into a dark green wax by the press of rough-shod feet. Passing by alleys and the covered openings of laneways, such rancid smells hit the nostrils that boys on their way to school held their noses and made wry gestures at one another.
But this morning was different. Torrents of rain had swept the town clear of pollution. The air had the clean smell of the country—you sniffed the wet scent of rye, and grass, and clover. Overhead the sky had the limpid freshness of rain-washed flowers.
As Stephen was crossing the bridge on his way to school, he came on a knot of companions leaned on the

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parapet watching the rush of the swollen river. It came tumbling along in a flood, its dark brown waters churn­ing into amber foam at the breakwater. Rolling on its surface, making a fine excitement, were branches of trees and cocks of hay which it had dragged into its current from the low-lying inches and meadow lands on its banks.

It was entrancing to look down on the turbulent flood. One could hang for hours over the battlement, half- heady with the joy of the tumult, darting at odd times across to the off-side of the bridge to watch the green dripping branches being shot through the arches and over the fall. Sometimes your eye might be diverted for a moment by the little shining pools of water dotting the level fields: or by the ivy on the castle tower, still wet and glistening and all a-quiver with birds intoxicated with the cool sweet air, but always you were held again by the flooded Auling rushing headlong towards you between its green banks.

A pity one had to leave it all, and to hasten up Rock Street, across the Square, along the Main Street, and down Rubbleton Lane into the frowsy school. Too often a boy’s life was like that. How seldom were things arranged as you would have them. When one grew up it would, of course, be different. For one’s elders life was freer. They did almost as they pleased. Anyway, they hadn’t to turn willy-nilly, sun or shine, from things that called to you, tugging at your heart, to things that withered up your soul and drained it of its sweetness. To be grown-up, and strong, and masterful, and brave— how splendid that must be. But one had to wait—and waiting was such a tedious business.

He had been in the Senior School long enough now to

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become absorbed into its atmosphere. Yet deep within him was a vague but ever-present discontent. With Mr. Wiseman he had been happy. Contact with him had been a spiritual quickening. He nourished whatever was fine in you. He gave eyes to your mind. Mr. Hill was different. Education was to Mr. Hill the ramming in of facts in the true spirit of Mr. Gradgrind. Reading was the art of reciting words without any reference to the thought of which they were the expression. If asked what you had been learning you could always answer “words—words—words.” When little altar-boys sing­songed the Latin responses during the Mass they hadn’t even a dim perception of the meaning of what they gabbled. It was enough that at the right moment they could chime together in their shrill trebles Et cum spiritu tuo or sed libera nos a malo. That was how you were taught to read “With thee conversing I forget all time,” “An endless fountain of immortal drink,” “The glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.” They were just words having the same meaning for your mind read forwards as backwards. Never for an instant did any one attempt to interpret the writer’s message, or even to hint that the printed page could be a talisman to set the mind soaring. Learning that had been so good had lost its savour. He was wilting like a plant when the east wind comes to put an end to a long spell of warm sun and rain.

Archdeacon Gordon, the manager of the school, called to-day. His visits were so rare that when his vast figure darkened the doorway the hum of voices that all day went on like the steady drone of a winnowing machine dropped into a sudden hush.

The Archdeacon was to Stephen, as to most of his

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companions, a terrifying personage. His huge propor­tions, his seventy years of life, his sacred office—every­thing about him—went to inspire this awe. In his sombre presence they had the feeling of being under the shadow of a mountain, which might at any moment come crashing down upon them. His complexion was of that mottle of purplish-red that so often marks the apoplectic. A little tuft of hair sprouted from a warty excrescence under the lobe of the ear. The shaggy fringe of bristle on the projecting eyebrows gave the eyes an aspect of truculence. Stephen often thought that he bore a curious resemblance to Dr. Johnson, of whom there was a woodcut in his reader.

Little wonder the Archdeacon had but few penitents. It was odd to see in church the long rows of people waiting outside the other confessionals, the scanty few at his. It was like his father, Stephen thought, to choose the stern Archdeacon as confessor. His father was a man who had no use for those who dealt too gently with human weakness. If he had sinned he was prepared to pay the toll. So it was that he sought out the priest who turned your eyes into your soul, who revealed you nakedly to yourself, who made you squirm like a salmon on the gaff, and who, the spiritual conflict over, left you humble and remorseful, yet marvellously strengthened, by all this pain of expiation.

To enter the Archdeacon’s box would have been for Stephen the ultimate terror. Rather than undergo such a devastating spiritual experience he would prefer to go unshriven and hope that God would understand. But, mercifully, he was spared so profound a trial of his strength, for there were the three curates, Father Maguire, Father Ronan, and Father Keville, each exquisitely skilled

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in the art of tuning up the jangled strings of the human spirit.

The Archdeacon preached in Irish at the early Mass on alternate Sunday mornings. Among his flock were many to whom Irish was the natural medium of expres­sion, and who, when driven “to use the English,” struggled and spluttered like one who, losing his footing on a rock, flops into the tide. Stephen rather welcomed these Irish sermons. During the discourse his mind could wander at will. God, he reasoned, would never expect you to listen to speech that held no meaning for your mind. You could study in detail the figures in the stained- glass windows over the high altar, wondering why the artist had given robes of crimson to one, of purple to a second, of green to a third, and why the virgin who held a shining lily in her hand had always a cloak of blue. You tried to puzzle out, too, why every saint had that nimbus of jewelled light round the head, and vaguely felt that it had something to do with the idea of being “crowned for all eternity”—the welcome phrase which told you so often that a sermon had ended. You could blink your eyes to set the luminous colours shifting and dissolving into strange patterns like the splintered glass in a kaleidoscope.

Or, tired of this dance of colour, you could look at the confessionals and let all kinds of thoughts drift in and out of your mind. These veiled sanctuaries—what strange stories they must have heard from day to day, from year to year—sins of pride, of covetousness, of lust, of anger, of gluttony, envy, and sloth—thus the catechism numbered them—these seven submerged rocks through which the pilot must steer if he would bring his craft into safe anchorage.

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What kind of a pilot was he, Stephen Mangan? Was he vigilant in his look-out? Was he quick to sense the hidden danger? He was confident at all events that he wasn’t proud or covetous. Nor was he a glutton. But with a stab of conscience he owned to himself that he was quick to anger, that he was something slothful, and that, like an inward pain, envy—envy of another’s courage or strength—could gnaw at his heart. Lust? How could he say—being ignorant of its nature? Queer that no one—priest or teacher—had ever been prompted to explain. There was some vague mystery surrounding it. While they discoursed freely on the other deadly sins they were silent on this. Why this conspiracy of silence on the part of his elders? What dark unimaginable sin lay behind this stark one-syllabled word? Perhaps it wasn’t right to ponder on such a matter? Yet it was in the catechism, and how could a boy help being curious?

What a strange experience, he reflected, must be that of the young confessor listening for the first time to the whispered shame dragged up from the depths of a human soul. Did it tend to make him look upon men in the mass as vile—or did it move him only to pity man’s fallen nature?

Stephen wouldn’t fancy being a priest. How could one live up to that ideal of perfection implied by the priestly office? Everything in his make-up was out of tune with the idea. It would be nice, of course, to have a lovely house and a garden with a green shaven plot, and apple and cherry trees, and to be looked up to by all the world. Yet, cut away from the rough and tumble of life, how could one find joy in these? For half the pleasure in life was in sharing it with others. Some­times, of course, it was good to be utterly by oneself to

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ponder on things—to dream—to let one’s fancy play at will—but only for a short spell. A priest, too, must he not always keep his passions under stern control even though like savage dogs they strain the leash? Stephen could never see himself do that. But maybe all priests were created passionless as the cold marble of the pillar against which he was leaning? . . .

Mr. Hill turned pale when the Archdeacon lumbered into the schoolroom. Strange how in the Archdeacon’s presence he seemed to dwindle in stature. His arrogant domination, too—how was it that it seemed no longer a palpable thing? Some irreverent trick of fancy made you see a small dog suddenly confronted with a mastiff.

The Archdeacon had come with some official docu­ments. On the big envelope of cartridge paper the words “On Her Majesty’s Service,” in black letter, caught Stephen’s eye. Having grunted a few remarks to Mr. Hill, and signed his name in the Report Book he turned round and raked the desks with those eyes before which all other eyes fell. Standing alone at the coal-box, the altar of expiation, was Paddy Deasy. The Archdeacon motioned to him to come forward.

“Well, my fine fellow, what have you been up to?” “I—I missed my catechism, Father,” he stammered.

“You shouldn’t! What chapter?”

“The Precepts of the Church, Father.”

“Very well.” He took the grimy dog’s-eared cate­chism from the boy and glanced at a page. “Um—say the fifth precept of the Church.”

“Fifth, to contribute to the sport of our pastors.”

“Support, you donkey—not sport.”

“Fifth, to contribute to the support of our pastors.”

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That’s better. ‘Are we bound in conscience and justice to contribute to the support of our pastors?’”

“By no means, for they have neither life, nor sense, nor power to hear or help us.”

For a moment the Archdeacon’s brow darkened. Then he laughed—laughed till the rolling organ of his voice set the marionettes in the ceiling dancing to its vibrations. The boy looked up at the catechist with dumb, open mouth and eyes of stupid bewilderment.

“Bravo! my boy, bravo!” bellowed the Arch­deacon, clapping him soundly on the back, “you’re a born theologian! Aquinas, Mr. Hill, will have to look to his laurels,” and, his huge bulk shaking with Homeric laughter, he passed out.

Mr. Hill had listened in dismay. As he looked at the boy his teeth gritted in annoyance. The boy’s head hung in shame. He realized that he had said something foolish, but what it was he hadn’t the wit to perceive, and its unconscious irony was a long way beyond his grasp.

“Come here, sir,” said Mr. Hill grimly. He came forward with downbent head.

“Hold up your head, you fellow, you! Do you know that the words you uttered were blasphemous? Do you? Do you? ”

“No, sir.”

“‘No, sir.’ Ignoramus! You’ve disgraced the school. You’ve insulted a priest of God. ‘By no means, by no means,’” he repeated, in mimicry of the boy’s manner, and with flicks of the cane drove him back ignominiously to his post by the coal-box.

The boys, with the natural cruelty of their kind, seized on the epithet and straightway dubbed their com­panion “By no means.” The name stuck to him like a

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burr. The sound of it always made him wince and filled his soul with a dull resentment against Mr. Hill and the Archdeacon, twin sources of his humiliation.

He was a silent, oafish boy—one of those types of whose existence his schoolfellows are hardly aware till some accident swings him into the foreground of the day’s happenings—yet his plight moved Stephen to a deep compassion, through which kept pulsing some inward protest against the cruelty of life. Imaginatively, as was his wont, he saw himself in the other’s place, tortured by the Archdeacon’s laughter, the derision of the teacher, the jeers of his companions. In such a crisis he felt he should do something desperate—something crude, or violent, or savage—to release the torment de­vouring his soul. How—how could Deasy stand there by the coal-box so mute and unprotesting?

For Stephen the schoolday was to be made still more exciting by his initiation into a new and peculiarly subtle art of wounding an enemy. Mr. Hill, with a view to measuring the progress of the class in their study of English derivation, called on each boy in turn to come forward for a “round of roots.” The boy had to give the Latin or Greek origin of the English words put to him in turn by each of his classfellows. Had you among your fellows one with whom you were at odds you searched your mind for a word which, by hitting off some unflattering personal or family characteristic, would pierce him to the quick. The exercise thus resolved itself into a tournament of malice, during which verbal darts winged the air and spread unerringly to their quiver­ing centre in a boy’s breast.

Thus by the sickly pallor of his complexion Alec Dinan stood out strangely from the rest of his red-

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cheeked companions. Had you quarrelled with Alec you snatched at the opportunity of releasing a venomed dart by asking with an assumption of innocence “the root of cadaverous.” “Cadaver, a dead body,” would come from the boy under fire, whereupon a hectic spot would burn on Alec’s cheekbone. So with Malachy Drennan, whose ill-shaped nose revealed how clumsy Nature can sometimes be in her workmanship. To taste the fruit of some long cherished hope of revenge was to ask the root of rhinoceros, and to observe Malachy’s discomfiture when—swifter than the throw of a javelin— “rhino, the nose,” came flashing through the air. Did you feel like giving one in the eye to Sammy Woods, whose father was a redcoat serving in the British army (and who was therefore a political renegade), you asked “the root of militia.” With the answer “miles a soldier,” Sammy’s cheek would burn a deeper red than that of his father’s tunic. There was Sean Logan. That his father had long been dubbed “The Goat” implied no moral reproach in the scriptural sense of the word. The epithet had its origin in some odd resemblance which the man bore to that nimble-footed beast. He was tall and lean, and the outline of his face suggested an isosceles triangle of which the chin formed the vertex. A long, scraggy beard of iron-grey straggled downward over his breast. Did you harbour resentment against young Seán you touched him on the raw by asking the root of tragedy. In the clouding of his brow and the quiver of his lip as the answer “tragos, a goat ” came in response, you sensed how your shaft had found the central nerve of his being.

Mr. Hill was serenely unconscious of this joust of satirical wit which his “round of roots ” called into

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action. It would have gone ill with the offenders had he divined what was beating under the surface. On Stephen it produced an unpleasant excitement. Some instinct told him that this deliberate wounding of another’s sensibilities was at best a cruel game, yet at every sally he had to smile covertly with the crowd or run the risk of being set down as a prig. This art of baiting an enemy was an old school tradition and you conformed to the customs of your school as you did to those of your church. Yet he felt that it was only a perverted sense of humour could see matter for jest in the obvious ill-health of one, in Nature’s disfigurement of another, and, more than all, in the accident of life which makes one boy son to a red­coat, another to a Pan-like father.

On his release from school he was to see the surging over of all that pent-up fury which this deadly inter­change of splenetic wit had aroused. Savagely half a dozen of his classfellows flung at each other and in a paroxysm of rage, mauled, and clawed, and kicked; the cheers and countercheers of their respective followers shrilling on their ears like a mad orchestra, till the alarmed cottagers, throwing down hammer and chisel and awl, hastened out into the lane to drag apart the blood-be­spattered antagonists.

As he reached Rock Street on his way home he came on a funeral procession entering the churchyard. With a knot of companions he joined the crowd of mourners. In a burial there was always some morbid excitement. You were held by the bearing of the family mourners: the accident of death invested them for a moment with a strange dignity. All their actions seemed significant as those of figures on a stage.

The service, too, though you had heard it more than

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once, never became casual. In so solemn a ritual words and phrases seemed to acquire a profounder meaning. Most prayers through eternal repetition became pallid, shedding on the mind only a spent radiance. When you stood by the open grave every word came to you charged with some intense force. The priest wore a purple stole edged with gold, and a “cypress” of fine white linen which passed in a broad band over the shoulder and across his breast. He intoned part of the office in Latin. When he came to the last prayers, reciting them in English, and sprinkled the coffin with holy water, you felt a little shiver pass down your back. It was as if something unseen had touched you with icy fingers.

When the priest signed to all to kneel down and repeat in silence the Paternoster and the Ave, you felt the grass chill and damp under your bare knees. There was always a queer excitement in the lowering of the coffin into the earth. It hurt you to hear voices in rough comment;—“Lower the head a bit, Donal”; “No— no—more to the east, Michael”; “Aise it a little at that side, Diarmuid.” And all the time, at long-drawn-out intervals, you were conscious of a bell tolling. “Dead and gone” it ullagoned, according to the children. “Dead and gone.”

They took the gathered bones of the last tenant and laid them carefully on the coffin lid. The workmen’s hands were earth-stained, and they handled the moulder­ing remains with as little repulsion as they would a pile of road metal. Stephen looked on, a sick feeling inside him. The hollow thud of the first shovelful of clay on the lid always gave him a queer, stifling pain, but as the clods of earth were pitched in faster and faster, producing only a muffled sound, the feeling subsided.

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Sometimes during this closing in of the grave you wandered round to the back of the little church. The stunted trees furred with grey moss made this narrow space between the church and the boundary wall damp and dim with shadow. The few graves here were those of Protestants. That made you feel different—you couldn’t tell why—approaching them. Slung crosswise, about a foot high over each plot, were protective chains. Always they struck you as queer and ugly. In your childhood you associated the Devil with the clanking of chains, and as there was some vague connection between the religion of Luther and the Prince of Darkness, you thought that possibly there was here some natural sym­bolism. You were much too old, of course, to think that way now, but so real is a child’s faith that bits of it will be hidden somewhere within you long after its framework has been shattered.

When you returned the grave would have been filled in, the mound made shapely with a great piece of sward cut from some green field by the riverside, and the group of mourners and friends kneeling under the trees murmuring a last Paternoster. It seemed a little heart­less, you thought, when they all rose and went away, leaving the sleeper alone, housed in darkness, companioned only by the twitter of birds, the sigh of the leaves, the drone of the river. There was, to be sure, no other way, but in this blank desertion of one whose life mingled so warmly with yours only a little time since there seemed, somehow, a gesture of betrayal. “Dead and gone” the children chimed with the bell.

The children were wise.

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II

Re-crossing the old bridge the boys, as was their wont, loitered. The flooded Auling had subsided. Its strength and fury spent, they no longer found it exciting. The turgid water had taken on a clear honey tinge through which the bed of the river showed like a shower of golden pebbles. The ivy on the castle walls had lost its wet shine, and the thirsty fields had absorbed every rain-pool to its last drop.

When Stephen arrived home he found Owen in charge of the shop. His brother had gone home from school directly. Owen was never a loiterer.

“Where’s mother?” Stephen asked in some surprise. Without her accustomed presence inside the counter the place seemed to lack something.

“Upstairs—herself and Aunt Catherine.”

“Aunt Catherine?”

The other nodded. “There’s something the matter, Stephen,” he said after a moment. “Aunt Catherine— she seemed upset.”

Stephen’s face fell. He shrank from trouble, and there was something ominous in his mother’s quitting the shop to go upstairs.

“What’s wrong, I wonder?” he asked.

“I can’t say. There were people in the shop when she came in. She just whispered a word to mother and they went straight upstairs. I’ve heard nothing since. You’re very late. What kept you?”

“There was a funeral. A couple of us strolled in with the crowd.”

“You would! Ansty won’t be too thankful, I bet.”

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“That won’t worry me,” he flung back, as he left to go into the kitchen. Ansty, laden with a tray, was about to go upstairs. “Huh! Nice time to be coming home,” she flung at him and went off.

His dinner was on a plate by the fire. He had little desire for food and none for this overladen plate of meat and vegetables. The smell of mortality was still in his nostrils. He made a gesture of distaste, and was rising from the table as Ansty returned.

“You’re not finished, surely?” she asked in surprise, seeing the untouched food on his plate.

“I wasn’t hungry. I’ll manage with a currant bun, or something.”

“What kind o’ dinner is that for a boy after his day at school? I’ll get you a nice cup o’ tea when they’re finished above.”

“Oh, I’d love that,” he said eagerly. “By the way, Ansty, what’s the matter with Aunt Catherine?” In his voice was a note of concern.

“Who said there was anything the matter?”

"Owen thought she was upset about something.”

“She is—but I know as little as yourself about it. Some trouble about Charley—that’s all I know. It wasn’t my place to ask. You’ll hear soon enough. Bad news travels fast,” and with that tag of wisdom she turned to clear the table.

“Some trouble about Charley.” The words struck him cold. His cousin, Charley Dalton, Aunt Catherine’s only son, was the proudest feather in Stephen’s cap. Charley’s arresting figure was prominent in the athletic fields of Munster. Finely proportioned, lithe in move­ment, he was the embodiment of Stephen’s idea of a hero of an earlier Gaelic world. When his turn came

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to swing the hammer, or throw the discus, the crowd always thrilled with expectancy. It was pure joy to watch the easy grace with which he swung it round and sent it sailing on its clean flight through the air. He seemed born to shine wherever strength and poise were elements in the game. Stephen sunned himself in the reflected glory of his conquests. In his desk he had a file of news-cuttings which recorded Charley’s triumphs at the various athletic tournaments held throughout the country. Only a few weeks since he had been chosen as one of the gallant little company of young Gaels who were to represent their country in a forthcoming contest against the flower of the American sport world in New York, and already Aunt Catherine was busily storing his trunk with newly made linen shirts, and socks of fine Blarney fingering to ensure his comfort while away.

Stephen always remembered his aunt’s farmhouse as a kind of glittering wonder. Charley’s prizes were every­where. Shining salvers in which you saw yourself reflected; a mounted horn resting on a ebony stand black as a beetle; silver jugs, and cruets, and biscuit barrels; cups all gold inside like the ciborium and chalice; epergnes with their branches of crystal and silver; mantel clocks, some of the green marble of Connemara, others of the lovely flushed marble of Cork, and one that marked the hour by a rich, golden chime, fashioned from the dark, gleam­ing marble of Kilkenny. Each of the trophies was gay with a coloured ribbon to which was attached a card bearing such an inscription as, “Queen’s College Sports, Cork—Throwing the discus: First Prize”; or “Fermoy Athletic Tournament—Throwing the Sixteen Pounds Shot: First Prize.” Silver and gold and crystal where-ever you turned in Aunt Catherine’s farmhouse. And

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in the midst of all these tributes to his greatness—Charley. Charley so friendly and pleasant in his way, so simple, so modest, taking all his honours as a matter of course. What human boy could do other than set him high enthroned in his heart?

“Some trouble about Charley”? Had he been— dear God, that would be terrible!— struck down by some sudden illness? Had he done something shameful?— but that was unthinkable. Had he quarrelled with his people, flung out, and left them to work the farm by themselves? Charley would never do that. He was too decent. Or was it poaching on the river at night, and long months in the county jail? More than once —Stephen recalled uneasily—he had made them the gift of a salmon.

He felt prompted to make his way into the parlour and learn the truth. He could let on he was in search of a book or something. Anything was better than this uncertainty. Hesitantly he made his way upstairs, his heart gripped by the fear of some impending disaster. Wavering in his mind he paused at the door and then turned the handle. His mother and Aunt Catherine raised their eyes.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he said, as if in surprise at finding them there. “I just wanted a book. How—how are you, Aunt Catherine?” he asked uncertainly, disturbed by the pitiful look in her face.

“Oh, Stephen, Stephen,” she said chokingly, “poor Charley.”

“What—what happened?” he gasped.

“He’s hurt himself, Stephen,” interposed his mother. “Throwing the weight over the bar. It came down on his back, poor fellow.”

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“O God, that was awful. I’m terribly sorry, Aunt.”

“I know, Stephen. Never again, God help us, will you see him at the games. Broken his strength is now —broken for ever.”

He was dumb before her grief. He could offer no consolation. What use were a boy’s words at such a moment? His mother signed to him, and he slipped away and sat at his desk looking out into the empty yard with unseeing eyes. Charley, so fine, so lovable, to be struck down in the heyday of his young manhood. The splendid frame shattered. The supple limbs, the pliant body no longer responsive to the will. The finely tempered instrument so exquisitely attuned in all its parts now a ravel of strings.

He heard his mother and Aunt Catherine after their vain pretence of eating go downstairs. He was moved to rejoin them in the kitchen.

“’Tis the bitter blow, God help you,” he heard Ansty say as he opened the door. “To be struck down like that, and he a wonder to all for his strength. I’m awful sorry.”

“I know, Ansty.”

“A wonder God Almighty let such a cruel thing to happen!”

“God has his own wise ends in everything, Ansty,” said his mother in mild reproof.

"All the same, now, you’d think -----"

“Don’t, Ansty. It’s not right to talk that way.”

Ansty was silent.

“I’m not complaining,” said Aunt Catherine re­signedly. “The way it was I didn’t know for a time, God forgive me, what I was saying or doing. It’s a terrible thing to see a fine man, and he your own son,

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lying helpless as a log. But sure welcome be the will o’ God.”

Stephen’s father came in. He was Catherine’s brother, yet it was not to him but to his wife she had turned in her distress. Roger, she knew, would be sorry for her, but he had always regarded with indifference, if not with a slight contempt, those achievements which had made her son a hero to most of the youth of Munster. That feeling would render his sympathy imperfect. He would realize, to be sure, something of the force of the shattering blow that Fortune had dealt them in crippling this only son, the future prop of their house, but he would never understand as his wife would, the no less overwhelming loss which the eclipse of his glory brought with it. Charley was of their blood and their bone, and his glory was theirs, and in one swoop darkness had rushed down upon them. Feats of learning, triumphs in the examination hall—these, she knew, were the only achievements which her brother held worthy of admiration. Himself a man of iron strength, he could see nothing of personal merit in a condition of physical well-being for which Nature alone was responsible. One didn’t ascribe virtue to a man because of his good fortune in drawing a prize in a lottery. Scholarship was a different matter. It was won only by austere discipline, by profound absorption, by wrestling with the powers of darkness within you.

“It’s hard luck, Catherine,” he said, on entering the kitchen, “but things may turn out better than the doctors led you to suppose.”

“They know,” she said despondently.

“They don’t. They’re only groping half the time. I never had much faith in them. Charley is young, and

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the young have a thousand chances to one that others haven’t. It may take some time, but I've a feeling in my bones that you’ll see him rambling round the fields before many months have passed.”

She shook her head dubiously and sighed.

“Oh, what’s the use of lamenting? It can do no good to Charley or to any one else. Have faith, Cath­erine, have faith!” and with that he returned to his business.

With his father’s coming Stephen was conscious of some subtle change in the atmosphere. The women responded to the masculine force which he seemed to radiate. Under his downright manner there was a core of kindness. If he had not dispersed the clouds which hung heavily on their spirits, it was obvious that he had changed their aspect, imparting to them some ray of light and colour. When Aunt Catherine stood up to go she had recovered something of her natural serenity.

“I think I’d better be going now,” she said. “I’ve to get some things east at the apothecary’s. The bit o’ talk with yourself and Roger did me all the good in the world. The neighbours are kind, but you can’t talk to them the way you do to your own.”

“The pity of it, Catherine, that we can do so little. Stephen and myself, we’ll take a turn west in the course of the week.”

“Great welcome he’ll have before ye. After his own there’s no one in the world he’s fonder of than Stephen. ’Tis often we say,” she smiled wistfully, turning to him, “that you might be his young brother.”

A tender wave of feeling passed over Stephen.

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**Chapter XV**

**THE MADONNA OF THE CROSS-ROADS**

I

A week later Stephen and his mother went on their promised visit to Aunt Catherine’s. They hired a car at Kinsella’s Posting and Carting Establishment at the end of Carrick Street. Stephen hoped that Danny Moran would be told off as their driver. Mort Kinsella’s men were all friendly and pleasant, but he felt somehow —he couldn’t tell why—that there was something differ­ent—some gentleness of nature maybe—about Danny.

He smiled expansively when the car drove up to the door with Danny in his Sunday clothes perched high on the driver’s seat. Their outing to-day had sprung from unhappy circumstance, yet the bright afternoon, the company of his mother within the car, and Danny driving outside, made his spirits glow, and with an effort of will he shut out the tragic picture at the journey’s end, which had painted itself on his imagination.

They were soon clear of the town and driving at a leisured pace westward along the quiet country road. Furze, whose bloom had turned to tarnished gold, straggled along the fences. In dim-shaded corners long spikes of fairy fingers still lingered. For all their up­standing bravery their freckled magenta looked sickly

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against the vivid flame of the poppies and the drifts of yellow charlock in the cornfields. A wilderness of briars, studded with the beaded jet of the unregarded harvest of blackberries, trailed over the high stony banks on either side of the road. Sloes had begun to take on the first ripening tinge of purple, haws were reddening, the swollen hips of the dogrose were brushed with vermilion. Spurge and thistle, nettle and groundsel and dock, grew rank in the dykes.

Women in the fields shaded their eyes in the effort to glimpse the passengers as the horse trotted along. Men, pausing a moment in their reaping, raised their heads in vague curiosity. Little barefooted children playing round the doors of wayside cottages kept gazing after the solitary car till, in a little cloud of dust, it disappeared round the bend of the road.

It was a lovely experience, this journey with his mother into the country. The covered car of the South of Ireland was made for friendly intimacy. It was a two-wheeled spring vehicle, designed to seat four passengers. You got in from the back and sat on cushioned seats facing your companion. Curtains of heavy oil-cloth shut out the invading wind and rain in season. On fine days such as this you drew the curtains wide apart and looped them tightly, thus giving you a full view of the white road rolling away behind. Through two small square windows in front you had a partial view of the driver on his perch and of the stretch of road ahead.

In the pleasant intimacy of the covered car the talk drifted to his mother's childhood in the country. She pointed out to him a great shoulder of hill hunched against the sky, and recalled how as a child she had in all weathers to cross over that ridge to reach the school,

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which was five miles distant from her home. As she spoke he saw her vividly—a little girl with her satchel setting out on the long road and climbing with her child steps up the twisted hill-path and down on the other side to the schoolhouse sheltering at its foot. It was a heavy toll, he thought, to pay for her bit of figuring, her reading, and her writing.

“Often in the winter,” she said a little wistfully, “I used to cry with the cold and the lashing rain, and when I reached home my mother, making great pity for me, used to rub my hands and bathe my feet, and I sitting on a little stool in front of the fire. And for days my hands would be dead, with no feeling at all, so that I could hardly write on my slate or put down my little sums. Times are different now, Stephen,” she smiled, “with schools everywhere and the learning at your door.”

“Your mother—strange I’ve no memory of her,” he remarked.

“No wonder, and you only a child in the cradle when she died. She was with me the night you came into the world. And ’tis you that gave us the fright that time, Stephen. Indeed the women had but little hope that you would live. They thought at one time that you were gone. But your grandmother, God rest her, dropped a tint of brandy—just as much as would wet the head of a pin—on your lips, and opening your mouth, just like a little bird, you came to again. ‘He’ll be the best o’ them yet maybe,’ said she, as she put you close to my breast.”

Stephen laughed. He was rapt in the story. Youth is always intrigued by the recital of its own childish history.

“Your mother,” he asked, “was she small like you?”

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"Oh, no,” she protested, “your grandmother was tall and handsome. All her life she used to look upon myself with a kind of pity.”

“Oh! why should she?”

“Well, I looked so trifling compared with all those big aunts and uncles of yours—every one o’ them like the side of a house.”

“Lord, I wouldn’t have you like that, mother,” he said with a laugh, “not for all the world. You’re a thou­sand times nicer as you are.”

“Funny things you say, Stephen.”

“But, honestly, you are, mother,” he said earnestly.

“Oh! whisht for goodness’ sake and have a bit o’ sense.”

“Tell me more,” he went on, eager to delve further into the family history. Is it really true—I was never sure—that some one of you married a Protestant?”

“Yes. A stepsister. Anne. We never cared to talk of it. She married one Henry Tallon, who had a nice farm and orchard at Slievenanore. ’Twas a love match, as they say. She went dead against her father and every one. She was so wild about Henry Tallon that I don’t think God or man could make her change her mind.”

“It must have been terrible for you all.”

“Indeed it was, though I was too young to understand it in the way the others did. But one thing remains clear in my mind as if it happened yesterday. I see my father—God be merciful to him—on the day of the wedding, a dark look in his face, and he walking up and down for hours in the haggard—and my mother crying to herself all the time as if Anne was dead. The shame of it nearly killed them.”

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Stephen was absorbed in the story. His quick imagina­tion sensed all the passionate conflict implicit in the tale. He realized that in a peasant household the announcement of a daughter’s marriage to a non-Catholic would sound like a note of doom.

His mother went on.

“However, the hand of God was in it all, for when Henry Tallon fell sick, long years after, didn’t he ask Anne to bring him the priest.”

“He did?”

“He did indeed, Stephen, praise be to God.”

“That was wonderful.”

“There was a terrible scene the night he was dying. A wild night, too, windy and dark. The priest had left after the anointing when who should appear on the doorstep but the minister. The friends told him civilly that the sick man had no wish to see him. Well, if he didn’t lose control of himself and try to force his way into the room. Anne herself and a neighbour or two had to hold him back. In the end they had to push him through the door into the night, and he threatening to have the law.”

“That was awful.”

“Indeed it was. The people said ’twas like as if the devil was wrestling for Henry Tallon’s soul, but that God had the victory. They’re long dead now—poor Anne and Henry—and they lying side by side west at Curraghmore.”

“And how did they get on, the two of them? Were they—happy like?”

 “Indeed they were. Happier than most.”

“And he a black Protestant?”

“You couldn’t say that of Henry Tallon, Stephen,”

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she answered, faintly reproachful. “He was different— more like our own people somehow. Always pleasant in his ways. No way bitter. Never a word against Anne bringing up the children in her own faith. I don’t think there was ever a cross word between them. Great love they had to the last—God be merciful to them now.”

On coming to the “Fox and Hounds” at the cross-roads his mother signed to Danny to draw up. She was always full of concern for those whose way of life seemed harder than her own. All the time while she and Stephen were being borne along so pleasantly in the cool well of the covered car she was uncomfortably aware of the hot sun burning on Danny’s face. His clothes were already powdered with the white dust flung up by the horse’s hooves and the friction of the wheels. His throat, she knew, would be as parched as the shrivelled leaves on the roadside hedges. When he came round to the back of the car to help her out his blue eyes smiled from under lashes sprayed with dust, and his fair moustache had be­come a fringe of chalky white.

“You’re like a baker, Danny,” laughed Stephen.

“I know, Stephen,” he smiled back; “there’s a power o’ dust on the road to-day.” Drawing out a red-spotted handkerchief he mopped his face and, taking his whip handle, began to beat the dust from his clothes.

“Come along, Danny, you must be killed with the drouth,” said Stephen’s mother, turning towards the inn.

They went in, all three. There was no one in the bar. The door to the yard was open. Outside in the sun, her flanks heaving, a pig lay asleep on the straw. The heavy odour of animal litter mingled with the smell of stale beer in the shop. They could hear through the open

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door the swish of scythes in a near-by cornfield. When they knocked a young girl hastened in from the yard.

“Glory be to God, is it yourself?” she exclaimed, her eyes brightening with excitement as she recognized Stephen’s mother. “Welcome a thousand times. And Stephen too? Goodness, Mrs. Mangan, how he’s shooting up. Come on straight into the parlour,” she went on with bustling warmth, “and have a cup o’ tea. And how are you, Danny?” she smiled. “You’re destroyed with the heat.”

Stephen was gasping with surprise. His eyes had followed her every movement as a child watches a dancing sunbeam. In the setting of this farmhouse inn he expected to see a big, sonsy lump of a woman. Anne Kirwan seemed to him one of the loveliest creatures under the sun. The misty gold of her hair enchanted him. The Mangans were mostly dark and swarth of skin. A faint dew of sweat gave her cheeks the fresh gleam of apple blossom. He glowed with the consciousness that she was his cousin. Kinship with any one like Anne Kirwan was a just cause of pride.

“Don’t bother, Anne,” said his mother. “We’re going west to see Charley Dalton, and we haven’t a minute. I only wanted to get Danny a drink.”

“Oh, nonsense,” she protested. “The tea won’t take a second. Look, I’ll call my mother. She’d love to see you. She’s east in the fields watching the men reaping,” and she turned to go.

“No, no, Anne,” said his mother, laying her hand on the other’s arm restrainingly. “They’ll be tired out west expecting us. Thanks, but we can’t delay.”

“But mother will be wild letting you go like this.

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Woman, dear, sure ’tis one of the seven wonders of the world to see you here.”

“I’m sorry, Anne, but she’ll understand. If we’re not too late returning we’ll give a call. Fill a fresh pint for Danny. Stephen, you might like a bottle of lemonade?” He nodded. He was still spellbound by this lovely apparition. If he lived to grow up he would marry some one like Anne Kirwan. He would. She mightn’t care for him, though. But one never knew. Many a time hadn’t he seen a beautiful woman mated with a rough, common-looking fellow. How conscious he would be of her beauty and they walking side by side. Strangers would turn to look after her. In the church people would not be able to resist lifting their eyes from their Prayer Books, and they’d say to themselves…

The popping of a cork switched him back to earth. He coloured in the consciousness of his thoughts. What a fearful thing, he reflected as he so often did, if people could know—as God knows—what passes through your mind.

Danny had already gulped down most of his pint and was wiping away the flecks of froth tangled in his mous­tache. Stephen drank his lemonade, and, standing so comradely, glass in hand, with Danny at the bar, was conscious of a pleased feeling of being grown-up. At the far end of the counter he could hear Anne making pitiful comment to his mother on the tragic fate of Charley Dalton. She came out to see them into the car, and stood smiling and waving her hand till they dis­appeared. He was silent for a moment.

“Mother, isn’t she lovely?” he remarked.

“Is it Anne?”

He nodded.

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“Anne Kirwan’s as good as she’s graceful.”

“She’s a cousin of ours—isn’t she?” he asked eagerly. “Indeed she is—and near enough too.”

He was too self-conscious to say more. He felt that this unexpected vision at the cross-roads would remain a living memory. But you kept silent about things that went deep down into your being.

II

The pleasant interlude had freshened the spirits of man and horse, and they bowled along at a smart gallop. Behind them, like a great band in a revolving wheel, the broad ribbon of the road rolled away. Stephen never felt as he did now the quiet of the countryside. Un­endingly before his eyes rolled the little stony fields with their straggling, unkempt fences, the small patches of yellowing corn, the ridges of potatoes, their sprayed leaves the bluish-green of verdigris, drills of turnips and mangels side by side, the cold grey-green, of one con­trasting vividly with the olive richness of the other, barren stretches of black bog, grey rock, and purple heather. High above was a blue heaven of silence. At long intervals he saw a man with a scythe, or a woman digging a meal of potatoes, or some barefooted herdboy grazing a lean cow on the grass by the roadside. Birds were silent, though a rush of silver rain once fell on his ears. The lark, only a quivering speck in the air, was high over a meadow.

He wondered how people could be content to live their lives in those lonely little farmhouses, half hidden away in the fields. Even in this season of high summer

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most of them had that forlorn air which settles inevitably on houses as on those who shelter in them when heart­breaking struggle has given way to a torpid resignation. One would think that for shame of their poverty most of the dwellings had withdrawn from the highroad to shelter behind the screen of scraggily growing trees which served as a breakwind.

“Isn’t it a wonder,” he remarked, passing a farmhouse whose rotting thatch was cropped with weeds, a cloud of turf smoke issuing from the half door, “isn’t it a wonder that country people so seldom try to make things better?”

“They get little encouragement, Stephen,” she promptly answered. “Up goes the rent with every improvement that’s made in the house or in the land.”

“But isn’t that all wrong?”

“Right or wrong, it’s the law, and you have to abide by it. I can still remember how my father, finding the family growing out of all bounds, added a couple of rooms to the old farmhouse. The land agent came to see it. Though he was only a little ball of a man with puffy red cheeks, and speaking in an Englified accent, we were all as frightened before him as if ’twas doomsday.”

“Father should have been there. A different story you’d have to tell.”

“I know. But my own people were ever quiet and gentle in their ways.

“And what happened, mother?”

“Ten pounds a year he clapped on the rent, and the burden heavy enough before.”

“He did?”

“He did so. ’Twas hard on us, but there was no cure for it. But, thank God, times are changing. With

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the Land Courts fixing fair rents people won’t be so hard set from this out. Here we are at last,” she said, as the car slowed down and turned into a rugged by-way leading to the farmhouse.

Stephen’s heart sank. He had that feeling of discom­fort with which he always approached a house where some one was lying dead. He shrank from the meeting with Charley. What to say—how to act—troubled him. It wouldn’t be easy. He’d feel horribly uncom­fortable seeing him lying helpless on his bed. Still, he reflected, his mother would be with him. She’d make things easy. She had always a natural instinct for saying the right thing.

Diarmuid, Aunt Catherine’s husband, was engaged in making a hayrick in the haggard. Throwing down his fork he came to meet them. He was a heavily-built, dark-bearded man, with velvety brown eyes—eyes that had the mute appealing look of affection which one sees so often in a dog. He had a soft voice and usually spoke little, looking to his wife, who had an easy flow of words, to infuse life and colour into a conversation. As he came forward he smiled in welcome.

“How is he, Diarmuid?” inquired Stephen’s mother anxiously.

“He says himself that he feels more comfortable to-day.”

“Thank God for that.”

“Come in, let ye. Catherine’s expecting ye. Un­tackle the horse, Danny. She’ll be wanting a rub down and a mouthful of oats and hay. When you’re done come in and have a bit to ate.”

As he was speaking Aunt Catherine came running into the yard. “Wisha, welcome an’ welcome,” she

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greeted them. “’Twas awful kind of ye to come, but there’s nothing could hearten him more than to see yourself and Stephen. Come upstairs now for a bit and I’ll hurry the tea. Ye must be killed with the hunger.”

“He’s bearing his trouble well, Catherine, Diarmuid tells me.”

“He is surely. Never a word of complaint, and he stretched there on his bed all the length of the summer day.”

They entered the room. They had made their way upstairs so quietly that for a moment he was unconscious of their presence. He lay prone on the bed, his face so drained of colour that they could hardly suppress the cry of alarm that rose to their lips. His hands, resting on the coverlet, had bleached to a dead pallor. The veins in their blue pencilling made a network of wavering lines. His eyes were closed as if he were dozing. On their approach he turned his head on the pillow and, smiling a little wistfully, held out his hand.

“Oh, Charley, how sorry I am,” broke from Stephen’s mother.

“I know, Aunt. But the worst is over—I’ve no pain now—so what matter? It’s great to see yourself and Stephen,” he said smiling;“ but ‘twas too much coming all this way.”

She smoothed his pillow. "We’d go many a mile farther, the two of us, to see you. It lifts my heart, Charley, to find you so brave.”

“Why should this cast me down? I’m not the first to be flung on his back—and I won’t be the last. ’Tis all set out for a man, I suppose, and one must be satisfied.”

“I’m—I’m terribly sorry, Charley,” stammered Stephen.

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“Sure I know, lad. Things like this will happen—but ’twill be all the same in a hundred years. We were great comrades, the two of us,” he said, turning to Stephen’s mother. “Always when I’d strip he’d mind my clothes and my watch, and my bit of money like a trusty watch­dog. And he’d die or be the first to shake my fist whenever I won. Well, that’s all at an end—but it’s pleasant to remember.”

Aunt Catherine was too moved to speak. Troubled lest at any moment the rising tide of emotion would overflow, she slipped downstairs.

In a little time she called them down to tea. Stephen was almost happy. Everything seemed to belie his fears. He was acutely aware that under all the casualness of speech a pulse of deeply felt emotion was throbbing; but there had been no tears—no gesture of despair—no cry of impassioned grief to wring his heart.

And he loved this farmhouse meal. There was bread hot from the oven—just as he liked it—fresh butter, cool and moist out of the crock of spring water under the window, cream just skimmed from a cooler, a cold chicken with a flavour of thyme in the stuffing, and, to honour their coming by giving an air of elegance to the table, Aunt Catherine had put on a silver tea-service— one of Charley’s prizes.

”Wisha, glory be to God, Catherine,” protested his mother as they sat down, “where was the need for all this grandeur? You’d think ’twas the morning of a station and the priest at the table.”

“Yeh, nonsense. Charley likes to see them on the table. “What’s the good of hoarding them?’ says he. “Rust and dust will ate them up if you let them lying idle.’”

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“It’s a pity all the same—such lovely things.”

Stephen thought they were lovely too, yet he felt that Charley’s instinct was right. He had a queer hunger for beautiful things, and Ansty’s way of slapping food at him often made him ill. Aunt Catherine’s talk drifted to the fateful evening of the accident.

“The servant boy saddled the mare,” she said, “and rode over to Carrigbawn for Dr. Moore. ’Twas God’s luck he to be at home, for he’s half his time out hunting or fishing. In less time than it takes me to tell you he had him easy and comfortable. ‘If you wouldn’t mind,’ said he to Diarmuid, ‘I’ll send a telegram to Cork for Dr. Redmond. In a case like this it’s the usual practice to have a second opinion.’”

“‘Whatever you think best, Doctor,’ said Diarmuid.

‘Nothing matters to me but my son.’

“How long the two doctors were in that room up­stairs I don’t know. To myself and Diarmuid it seemed a lifetime. A terrible fear was on us. Like two frozen images we were—himself standing over there by the window and I on the settle. When I heard their steps coming down the stairs my heart stopped dead.

“’Well, Doctor?’ said I.

“’Your son is likely to live as long as any of us, Mrs. Dalton,’ says he.

“’God bless you for that word, Doctor’ said Diarmuid.

“’It’s right, however,’ says he—very solemn like— ‘that his parents should know the real truth.’ At that something caught me here. ‘At best, poor fellow,’ he went on, ‘he’ll never be able to do more than drag himself around.’”

“God help us.”

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“Very kind and feeling he was, though. No one could be nicer. A fine man to look at too. Big and handsome.”

“There was a Dr. Redmond who used to be a great athlete one time,” remarked Stephen. “Could it be he, by any chance?”

“The very same, Stephen,” she smiled. “Great knowledge you have. He told us himself he used to throw the weights. ‘Fine conceit I had of myself’ says he to Charley, ‘till I saw yourself swing the hammer at the College Sports in Cork. Honest to God’ says he, ‘that knocked all the pride out o’ me’”

“Well, now, that was nice of him,” commented Stephen’s mother. “I hope he won’t be too unreasonable, though, when the time comes to pay. Heaven knows there’s trouble enough on ye, Catherine, without that.”

“What would you say if I told you that not as much as a brown penny would he take?”

“You’re not in earnest, Catherine?”

“It’s God’s truth.”

“Glory!”

“All he’d have is a couple o’ fancy ribbons—club colours or something he called them—that were fastened to the cup he saw Charley win in Cork. ‘If I’m ever tempted to brag of my feats’ says he, laughing, ‘these colours will make me hold my tongue.’ ‘Take the cup as well, Doctor’ said Diarmuid, ‘or anything at all you’d fancy’ ‘Do, Doctor’ said I. ‘We’d be proud of the honour—all of us.’ ‘No, no, my good woman’ says he, shaking his head. And with that he left us.”

“Well, glory be to God, that was wonderful. I never heard the like. You’d travel the world before meeting another of his kind.”

Danny, with his shy, wistful smile, came in.

"Sit down, Danny. You must be famished with the hunger,” said Aunt Catherine with bustling cordiality while Stephen and his mother returned to the bedroom. To the measure of a ploughman’s appetite she heaped food before him and then, silencing his half-shy protest in her kindly way, she went upstairs to join the others.

The talk of simple country folk flows as naturally as a running brook. It strays at will, and is as free from those moments of self-consciousness which afflict the sophisti­cated as the piping of birds in springtime. Each wondered, when the Angelus rang, imposing its interlude of silence on the group, how the time had flown. Charley had a healthy dislike of that display of compassion for which other natures crave. Any gesture more than a hand­clasp, and an understanding word jarred his feelings. If his body was shattered his spirit was unbroken. So, instinctively, they all used threads of pleasant colour rather than of sombre dye in weaving the warp and woof of those hours of conversation in the little bedroom with its window looking into the west.

To Stephen, who always wilted in the strained atmos­phere of sickness or death, the pleasant homely talk was grateful, and he was drawn more than ever to this friend who, in order that no shadow should be cast on the spirit of those around him, turned his mind so resolutely from brooding on his own tragic destiny.

When they were about to leave, and Aunt Catherine had gone to bid Danny tackle the horse, Charley called Stephen’s mother to his side.

“Look, Aunt,” he said, “there’s something I wish to give Stephen as a keepsake. You’ll find it over there under the horn.”

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She went to a table littered with his trophies.

“Not this, surely?” she asked in surprise.

“What else?” he laughed. “It’s useless to me. I was always clumsy with the pen.”

“Oh, no,” she protested in obvious distress. “’Twould be a shame. Such a lovely thing.”

“I couldn’t take it—honestly I couldn’t, said Stephen earnestly.

“Why so?” he asked.

“’Twouldn’t be fair. ’Tis your prize, Charley, not mine. I’d—I’d feel like a thief somehow.”

“You wouldn’t hurt me, Stephen—would you?”

"Oh, no—not for anything.”

“You will—very much—if you refuse to have it,” he said. “I always meant it for you.”

How could he do other than accept the gift? Besides— though he would have passionately denied the accusation —his eyes in admiring it always lit up with a possessive hunger. For the ink-stand, as his mother had said, was a lovely thing, a jewel of the silversmith’s craft. Of chased silver, it had for ornament between its two crystal wells a finely wrought figure of the Discobolus in the same shining metal.

“If I live to be a hundred, Charley,” said he, his heart glowing, “I’ll never part with it.”

“I know, Stephen, Charley smiled. “I felt that. A grand talk we all had, so good-bye now and good luck. I begin to feel a bit drowsy. I think I’ll try to sleep.” Very quietly they went downstairs.

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Chapter XVI

STORM CENTRE

I

All through the summer days the Auling was for Stephen an attraction hardly less constant than the pleasant flow of its waters. The August holidays seemed but one long dreamy day by the river. During this time he was mostly by himself, Owen and Garry and most of his school friends having gone to spend the month in the country.

His brothers responded to the healthy vigour of life on the farm at harvest-tide. They threw themselves with zest into the work of drying the turf, of building the hayrick, of binding the long slender oat-stalks into sheaves, glowing in the consciousness that they were one in their young manhood with the workers around them. Work such as this—work that called into action all the slumbering energy in your body—was fine, and fine too was that lusty relish with which you ate the whole­some country fare so plentifully heaped on the board from day to day. At home you often took your place at the table only because it was meal-time. Here some­thing within you clamoured for food.

Their country holiday made no appeal to Stephen. Only once had they persuaded him to share the ex-

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perience. Being a guest he had made a pretence of liking everything, but within himself he was strangely uncomfortable. He could find no delight in field labour. It left him hot and sweaty. His clothes seemed a clammy burden, and all hours he longed to plunge into the clean depths of some river pool. He felt so tired in the even­ings that speech was an effort. The talk, too—mostly of humdrum affairs on the farm—seemed dull as ditch water.

The one interlude of sheer pleasure which he knew was that on which he found himself astride the farm horse, riding across the stretch of fields towards the well. Always as he mounted and felt the warmth of the animal in his loins a little quiver of delight, like the movement of quicksilver, ran through his body. He felt exultant holding the rein, and the animal’s sensitive response to his will gave him a sense of mastery.

But nothing else seemed good. The mucky yard, the byres, the stables foul with animal dung and decaying litter half-sickened him. On wet days he wondered if there could be anything more dismal than the sight of the farm through the blurred window panes. He could see the little colony of fowls, their feathers dragging, looking lost and miserable under the dripping bushes. At odd moments one would give a thin pip of complaint. The red cock in their midst seemed forlorn and sick-eyed as a general in defeat. From the dung-heap in the yard oozed a thick black liquid which trickled slowly in and out between the cobbles into the channel. The rickety outhouses leaned in a desolate huddle against each other. Under the steady downpour the silvery grey sheen on the surface of the hayrick turned to a sodden tarnish. Grimly the farm-folk watched the stooks of corn in the field being ruined. They had ploughed, and grubbed,

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and harrowed; they had scattered the seed and thrilled to the breaking through of the first green spears; pos­sessively, almost lovingly, they had watched the crop mature from day to day—and now this rotting desola­tion.

The farmhouse itself, too. Try as he would, never in the way of Garry and Owen could he become native to its atmosphere. Always when he stepped inside the door there was the unfamiliar reek of turf. It seemed to impregnate everything. When he lay down at night he sniffed it from the bedclothes. He awoke in the morning to the queer dry tang of it in his nostrils. The very food, he imagined, was not without a hint of its mustiness.

He wished he were not so acutely conscious of the change of environment, that he could surrender to the round of life, the kindly ways, of these hospitable farm people completely as his brothers. But what was the use of wishing. He wasn’t made that way, and he would have to grin and go through it. For once he had none of that sense of loss which used to weigh down his soul with the waning of the holidays. He was conscious, indeed, of a secret satisfaction in the thought that he would soon be setting out on the return journey. Never, he vowed to himself, never again would he be persuaded to squander his holiday freedom in a fashion so out of tune with his spirit, and year after year, resolute in his vow, feeling no pang, he saw his brothers, gay with anticipation, being driven away into the country, leaving him to moon away the time as he would.

He would stuff a book into his pocket, slip from the house, seek out a sheltered place by the sally trees, throw himself on the short grass and, according to the

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tune of his mood, turn the pages of his book or sit idly dreaming.

Sometimes, leaning over the bank, his eye would be held by the play of life in the river pool beneath. Often a pike, its lean body taut as a bowstring, could be seen lurking in the shadows. At the gleam of a silver body it smote like a lightning flash, and in an instant some little creature, a moment since enraptured with life, was lying a crush of dead matter in its hungry maw.

He regarded this river shark with something of repugnance, and always felt a little ill at ease when swimming in the haunts which it favoured. He could see in his mind’s eye the punctured wound in his breast and the ooze of blood crimsoning the water. All Carberymore held the pike as unclean. The town would starve to the last man rather than savour its coarse grain. For who would eat of a fish in whose belly the carcass of a young water rat had not infrequently been found? Rumour had it, however, that Sam Hussey, the post­master, regarded the fish as a delicacy. But Sam was a Protestant. That was different. Rank desires were not incompatible with the creed of Luther.

Sometimes Stephen would sit still watching the flies dart perilously to and fro, shaking their light wings over the surface of the water. Swifter than thought a crescent of living silver would flash in their midst, and as swiftly disappear with its pillage into the depths of the stream. It was strange how all living things seemed to prey on each other. The trout snapped up the fly only to be gobbled in its turn by the voracious pike. Nations were like that, the stronger preying on the weaker, as the English on his own country. He knew but little of history, and that confusedly, his scant knowledge being

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derived from the romantic tales of Mrs. Pender and in some degree from those political slogans in which young Ireland was urged to remember the insurrectional movements of Ninety-Eight, Forty-Eight, and Sixty-Seven.

His father used to speak with bitter scorn of the ill- starred attempt at a rising which he had witnessed in his own day.

“A handful of corner boys with a few rifles—and they call that an insurrection! Pit themselves against John Bull with his battalions of trained soldiers, his almighty guns, his men-of-war. Huh! bring down that castle over with a battery of popguns.”

That used to hurt Stephen. The rising may have been folly, he thought, but it wasn’t ignoble folly. Once he was goaded into a protest.

“Whatever you say, father,” he said chokingly, “they themselves had nothing to gain and everything to lose.”

His mother looked at him in dumb surprise. It was a startling phase in his evolution to find him thus beginning to challenge his father’s doctrines.

“What could they lose?” demanded his father angrily, “the ragtag and bobtail of the country. Was there one of them had position, or land, or business? You weren’t born then, so you don’t know what you’re talking about. A parcel of half-illiterates.”

“Their life—wasn’t it as dear to them as our lives to us?”

“Blatherskite!” returned his father. “I can admire honest courage but I can’t stomach the ways of fools. Do you see that sparrow on the wall outside?” he asked, pointing through the window.

Stephen nodded.

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“Well, there’s more intelligence in his little cranium than there was in the whole pack and dice of the Fenians. He fears the hawk—and with good reason—but he’s never so blind as to hope to destroy him. Insurrection —God help us!” and he snapped his fingers impatiently as an end to the argument.

Stephen’s lips quivered. It hurt him that his father should be so ruthless. Why did he shatter every illusion with the hammer stroke of his common sense? . . .

II

Far below where the river broadened, a waterhen swam from bank to bank. In its wake the broken water made a trembling chain of brightness on the surface of the stream. In the demesne on the other side of the river rabbits were playing in the sun. When Stephen clapped his hands they scampered awkwardly to their burrows, their stumpy tails showing like flecks of blown bog cotton as they disappeared. Insistently a little willow wren kept singing, the reeds nodding time to its pretty song. A wagtail hopped on a stone on the edge of the water. Somewhere hidden in the grass he could hear the click-clack of a grasshopper. A small butterfly, dabs of peacock blue on its pheasant-coloured wings, brushed his cheek, and then alighted on a flower. As he crawled along the grass to view it more closely it fluttered into the air questing farther afield.

He had the sudden consciousness of some one ap­proaching. Father Devereux was coming slowly along the winding river path. The priest had the air of one profoundly absorbed in his own thoughts. Stephen

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was seized with a sudden self-consciousness, and, in his desire to avoid an encounter, was prompted to slip away unobserved, but, realizing in a moment that that would be impossible, remained sitting on the bank.

Few figures in the town held his imagination so absorbingly as did this priest. Father Devereux had been “silenced,” as the saying went. What his trespass was no one knew. From whence he came the town was no less ignorant.

To the mind of a small community accustomed to regard the lives of those around them as an open book, the clasped page of this man’s history was a constant challenge. The accident of his name—one alien to the south—made the mystery more baffling. Had it been McCarthy or Carroll or Doyle it might have provided a clue, for Carberymore abounded in such family names. But Devereux seemed different—a high-up kind of name somehow.

A year ago he had drifted into the town imperceptibly as a breath of summer cloud into the sky. The Misses Kilmartin, two maiden ladies who lived in Rock Street, gave him rooms. How he had discovered so secluded a retreat was in itself matter for wonder. As long as any one could remember the Misses Kilmartin had lived alone. Had the young Earl of Carberymore been moved to receive paying guests at the Castle it could hardly have excited more surprise than the news that Miss Joan and Miss Sara had deigned to take in Father Devereux as a lodger.

Their house had an air of modest gentility. Like some timid old gentlewoman whom chance has flung between two loud-voiced, sonsy marketwomen in a public car, it seemed to withdraw into itself from the shops flanking

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it on either side. Its halldoor with its brass knocker and its bell-pull indicated a social grade distinct from that of its trafficking neighbours. And with a sense of caste jealous as that of the East, Miss Joan and Miss Sara cherished their aloofness. In their evening walks, and in their going and coming from Mass, they seemed to move remote from the crowd as two nuns.

Always on winter evenings it was their custom to keep the parlour blinds raised and the lace curtains sufficiently parted to enable the most casual passer-by to glimpse its refinement. For Stephen, the lamp-lit room held something of the magic of a peepshow. He could see every object in clear outline. The piano—then a high- water mark of social prestige—was always open. He could see the keyboard with its shining row of flat ivory keys broken by the recurrent ebony of the sharps. Its panel of cherry-coloured satin glowed warmly through a maze of fretwork. A piece of music lay open on the stand. In the effort to read the title he used to press his forehead against the cold window pane. The letters at first would seem a blur, but imperceptibly would begin to resolve themselves into distinct characters. Warblings at Eve. That suggested lovely things to his imagination.

In a corner of the room was a whatnot, its shelves a glitter of miniature ornaments. A flower-stand of bamboo cane, holding a pot of wandering Jew, stood in the window recess. Suspended on slender chains from its branches were three smaller pots of moss and ferns. Under a crystal dome on a small occasional table was a cluster of wax fruit. Gazing on the rich purple grapes and peaches and cherries, Stephen often wondered by what miracle Art had been made to counterfeit Nature so cunningly. Lustres and photographs in plush frames

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decorated the mantel from which hung a fringed drape of macrame-work. Antimacassars in crochet lace made a thin spatter of foam on the backs of the chairs.

Stephen thought it all enchanting. No wonder the Misses Kilmartin were so proud and scorned the herd of common folk like himself. To live from day to day in an atmosphere of such exquisite refinement must create in one a natural shrinking from the ways and manners of those bred less delicately. At his own home the furniture was only mahogany—big, solid stuff. The room, except for its pictures, was spare of decoration. There was no whatnot, no bric-a-brac, no wax fruit (though there was Owen’s stuffed otter) under a glass shade. He thought it reflected something of his father’s uncompromising sternness.

To mock at the Misses Kilmartin, as the town was wont to do, aroused in him a secret anger. He felt that it was unjust. “Tuppence ha’penny, bedad, looking down on tuppence,” they used to say. “They’d look on both sides of a trepenny bit before parting with it. And for all their fine airs, wasn’t it their way to make twenty cuts out of a baker’s loaf? Peg Flynn, their washer­woman, could tell you so. ‘Miss Joan and Miss Sara!’ God, they’d make you sick!”

These two were the tenants, and this was the abode in which Father Devereux had found a refuge. Some happy instinct must have guided him there. Whatever of mystery shadowed his life would here be inviolate. It would be as idle to question the Misses Kilmartin as to beg the tombs in the churchyard nearby to disclose their secrets. Always they had kept the knowledge of their own affairs close as a nut does its kernel. Gossip-mongers, setting out to glean something of Father Devereux’s past,

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were thus driven to invent theories of their own to explain the presence of this strange, dishonoured priest among them.

He had been silenced, some held, because, God help him, he had been overfond of drink. Others derided this theory. Had he stumbled in that way wouldn’t his weakness have betrayed itself during his time in the town? A moment’s glance, they held, and you could see that the unhappy man was austere in body and spirit as any of the poor monks in Melleray. No red wine, no quickening spirits, could ever have coursed through such a man’s veins.

Another story, braced with a fine dash of excitement, was more popular. There were many variants of the tale, but Mrs. Foran’s was as good as the next. Cauth Foran was a great one at a story. So avid of knowledge was she, and so skilled in the art of acquiring it, that there was never a customer left her shop without puzzling as to why he had let his tongue wag so incontinently. “Cauth’s the divil,” they would say. “God forgive her, but she’d wind you up and set you going like any eight-day clock.”

“Now, this was the way of it,” said Mrs. Foran to a knot of cronies gathered together in her small parlour for ‘a cup o’ tea and a bit o’ talk’ after Sunday evening Benediction in the church. “I had it from one whose word is Gospel. How she came by it she didn’t say, and it wasn’t for me to ask. ’Tis my way to listen to people —God gave us ears for that—but I’m not inquisitive.”

“Indeed, we know that, Cauth,” they assured her, nudging one another.

“A kind of saint he was,” she began. “Fasting and praying all hours till he grew thin as a rush.”

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“The creature,” they murmured sympathetically.

“He was that holy in himself that he couldn’t abide the thought o’ wickedness in others. He had no under­standing of the way the good and the bad do be mixed up in all of us in spite of ourselves. ’Tis said he had a great gift o’ words—putting the fear o’ God into the hearts of the people. The patience of the Almighty, he used to warn them, was wearing out fast, and the day of Doom—God save us! — was nearer than any one supposed. Severe and all as he was, every one was drawn to him somehow. They couldn’t tell why. Some queer power he had. Far into the night people would be on their knees to him in confession.

“Well, things went on like that for a good while. And by all accounts a power o’ good he done—putting down drinking and cardplaying and every other kind of divilment. And then, my grief! the trouble came.”

She paused for a moment and moistened her lips. The women sat still, expectant. In the silence the tick- tick of the clock became audible. A coal dropped with a clink on the fender, sending up a twist of grey smoke. Cauth replaced it and took up the suspended thread of her story.

“It so happened that some young fellow, listening to his words Sunday after Sunday, got to be tormented in his conscience. Clawing him like a rat it was, giving him no peace night or day. And, indeed, small wonder. ’Tisn’t a thing a woman likes to talk about maybe, but ’tis said he was the means of bringing some poor little bit of a girl to shame.”

“God help us,” they sighed compassionately.

"Well, by the grace o’ God, he turned to Father Devereux to make his soul. Listening to his story a

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terrible anger came on the priest. Something to snap in his mind, they say. All of a sudden he throws him­self on the boy, and, pale with rage, drags him down the aisle before the eyes of all the people. Then calling down on him the vengeance o' God, he flings him headily- bodily through the church door.”

“Preserve us!” they prayed in a breath.

“Would you believe that not one of all the crowd looking on made a stir? Stiff with fright they were. Frozen dumb.”

“God, no wonder!” gasped one of the listeners. “I'd have dropped down dead myself and I to be there. What happened then, Cauth?” she asked, her voice urgent with curiosity.

“Oh, fearful clamper there was. Every one in the parish taking sides—but most o' them strong against the priest.”

“Maybe Father Devereux was within his rights.” ventured one.

“I wouldn’t hold with that,” protested another. “It isn't for the like of us to judge, I suppose, but in doing that wasn't he going beyond the beyonds?”

“He was so,” assented a third gravely. “No priest of God, and he to be in his right mind, would do the like.”

“Lord’s sake, Cauth,” broke in another, impatient of interruption, “tell us how it all ended.”

“I will so,” she assented, pleased to observe the tide of emotion which her story had set flowing.

Again they composed themselves to listen.

“The story, my dear,” she went on, “if it wasn't carried straight to the bishop. Terrible upset he was.
‘May God and His Blessed Mother direct me to do what

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is best in this’ says he, falling on his knees. To hold an inquiry, he did. Very solemn it was, with the priest, and the boy, and a good share o’ witnesses all gathered together in the vestry. Question after question his lordship put on this one and that one till he could see plain as black from white the rights and wrongs of the case. All the time the priest, ’tis said, never opened his lips, or made any excuse, but sat there dark and silent in himself.”

She paused, taking a long breath. The measured beat of the clock again fell on their ears. Pushing back a strand of hair from her forehead Cauth went on:

“When all was over his lordship turned to the priest.

‘Foolish, unhappy man’ says he, ‘quit my sight for ever’ Father Devereux, God help him, he bowed his head and went away.”

They were so deeply moved that for a perceptible pause no one spoke.

“’Twas hard on the poor man,” said one at last, a gulp of emotion in her voice.

“If he done wrong,” observed another, “’tis the heavy toll he had to pay. Silenced all his days, the creature.”

“’Twas a pity,” said Cauth, “but the Church have its laws. High and low we must all abide by them. If we don’t we suffer” — and she called to Maggie, the little serving girl, to bring in the tea.

The small group composed of professional men and well-to-do merchants who used to stroll in nightly to the smoking-room of the Royal Hotel scoffed at this story, attributing it to the nimble fancy of one of those fine playboys of whom the town was so prodigal. To invent a plausible tale and follow its wonderful variations as it

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circled in its orbit round Carberymore was no uncommon form of diversion. The smoking-room sponsored a theory befitting its more elevated sphere of thought. Father Devereux had written some work whose ethical trend had brought on him the censure of Rome. Too proud to retract, he was deprived of his priestly faculties. Like some soldier who had been degraded he fled from the scene of his humiliation and had sought a refuge here, where, unknown and undisturbed, he could go his solitary way.

Ill

All these conflicting tales, spun out of that consuming desire to divest the stranger of his cloak and see him naked, were familiar to Stephen’s mind. He rejected the theory that the priest’s downfall was due to intemperance. It was too drab and commonplace a tale. And he couldn’t grasp with sufficient intelligence the idea of a conflict with Rome on a question of religious ethics. Cauth Foran’s tale, with its elements of pity and terror, appealed overwhelmingly to his imagination. So tragic a story, he felt, could not be sheer invention. Who was there cunning enough to forge a tale so consistent in its chain of circumstance?

Approaching him now was this solitary man, the storm centre of so much controversy. A tall, spare figure, with strongly marked features, the sunken eyes lit with sombre fire. Stephen was conscious that they two, the dark-robed priest and himself, were the only human figures in the landscape. He had a momentary illusion that things around him shared the tension of his

mood. The twitter of the wren dropped into silence in the reeds.

An uneasy doubt suddenly invaded his mind. Was it lawful to lift one's cap to a priest under censure? He had heard schoolfellows declare it was wrong. To do so, they held, would be in effect a protest against the judgment of those who had silenced him. “Once a priest a priest for ever." The familiar saying came like a flash of revealing light. However he had stumbled, Father Devereux was still a priest of God.

Sitting on the bank, his knees drawn up, his shoulders hunched, he pretended to be deep in his book till the priest's shadow fell on the open page. Looking up, he raised his cap.

“Good-evening," came the priest’s voice in greeting.

Stephen’s heart tightened.

“Good-evening, Father,’’ he answered, and prayed that he would pass on.

The priest paused. “Reading, my son?’’ he asked.

“Yes, Father.’’

“May I see your book?’’

Stephen rose and, turning pale, handed him the dog’s- eared volume loaned to him by a friend.

The Romance of a Poor Young Man, he read. He seemed to reflect for a moment. “I remember the story. Not very well though. It’s such a long time ago. You like the book?”

“Yes, Father. Very much.’’

“Why not read it in the original? It’s told very simply. They teach you French, of course?’’

“No, Father,’’ he confessed a little shamefacedly.

“A pity. You’ll study it some day perhaps.’’

“I hope to, Father.’’

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“That’s well. You’ll discover then, my young friend, how much you miss in a mere translation. All the fine flavour of the original—or nearly all—is lost. It’s just dried fruit.”

He handed back the book, hesitated a moment as if to speak further, then with a “God bless you” resumed his walk.

Stephen’s eyes followed the gaunt figure in its faded clerical garb till at the bend of the river it passed out of his line of vision. He half wondered if he had been day­dreaming. It was as if some phantom had taken mortal mould and spoken. His voice—strange how it had made common words seem beautiful. How flat and tuneless sounded his own speech. “Countrified” somehow. And there was no harshness, no hint of severity in the eyes that looked into his. A shade of wistfulness rather, as if remembering his own boyhood. What was his real story? How could one so gentle-spoken—didn’t he call him his young friend? — become the frenzied priest of Cauth Foran’s tale? Yet how often, stung by some imagined insult, hadn’t he himself been like some one possessed. It was all a disturbing mystery.

A queer excitement filled him. He felt the need of talking to some one — of releasing the overflow of emo­tion which brimmed his heart and mind. Never before had the priest been known to address himself to another. Always in his solitary wanderings by the river or over the hills he passed you by so absorbed in his own thoughts as to be unaware, people said, of the life beating around him. Why had he been moved to speak to himself, Stephen Mangan, of all people? What would his mother think? How would she feel? Puzzled a little, no doubt, at first. He could picture her look of question-

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ing astonishment, and then the pucker of doubt between her eyes. She would be a little proud maybe — proud that her son should have dissolved for a moment that brooding shadow which always enfolded the stricken man.

He set out for home, his eager steps responding to his quickened mood. His mother was alone in the shop, her head bent over a stocking heel which she was darning. As he stepped in she looked up.

“Mother!” he said, his eyes kindling.

Something in his voice arrested her. “Why, what’s the matter?” she asked, rising from her seat.

“I’ve been speaking to Father Devereux,” he blurted out.

“Father—Devereux?” she gasped.

“Yes. I was up the river when he chanced to come along the bank. He stopped to speak to me.”

“You’re in earnest, Stephen?”

“Honest, mother!”

“Well, if that isn’t a surprise! What on earth had he to say?”

“He was just curious to know what book I was reading. I was in a cold sweat as I handed it to him and saw him turn the page.”

“But why? There’s nothing bad in it, surely—is there?” she inquired anxiously.

“Oh, no—but how could one tell what he might think? The kind he is, you know. I was all in a panic.”

“That was foolish, Stephen.”

“I know—but look at those queer stories about him.”

“All made up—every one of them. Not one word of truth.”

“But how can you tell?”

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"My mind tells me to. That’s enough. When you’re as old as I am you’ll believe less and less of the things you hear. Your father, too — he says they're only hearsay. Pay no heed to them, Stephen. What did the priest say?

“Only that it was a pleasant tale — or something like that—and that he was sorry I couldn't read it in French."

“In French! Why so?"

“That's how the story was written first This is only a translation."

"Well, he should know. A priest has always great knowledge. And was that all, Stephen?"

“Yes. He just handed me the book and saying ‘God bless you’ went on his way along the path towards the weirs. You wouldn't believe how—how nice he was. Friendly like."

"Well 'twas wonderful he to single you out like that, Stephen. A man always so dark and silent in himself. ‘Tis something to remember. Something to be proud of, too. Run and have your tea now. Ansty's made a cake."

“Oh, that’s glorious," he said, his eyes hungry with anticipation. “I’m just in fine humour for it.”

He hastened to the back door, and making a clatter with the latch, flung it open and disappeared.

His mother smiled thoughtfully.

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**Chapter XVII**

**CONSPIRACY**

I

“There’s something I want to talk to you about Stephen.” The two friends had run into each other crossing the bridge. Mutually they turned to lean on the parapet away from the passers-by.

“It’s like this,” he went on. “That idea of the Young Liberators, as you know, came to nothing. Fine as it was the fellows seemed to regard it as tomfoolery. They’re no good, Stephen. They make me sick. They’re still in their swaddling clothes,” he added bitterly.

“Blame Charley Hyland. His laughing upset them.” “Why should it? Hyland would laugh at his mother’s funeral. If they were in earnest his clowning wouldn’t upset them. Did it upset you or me? We blundered bringing in so many. I know better now.”

He paused, and strangely earnest looked into Stephen’s eyes. “Listen, Stephen, I want three men—fellows who can be trusted. Already there are two. Will you make the third?”

Stephen nodded.

“I knew. But understand, I’ll have no one in this against his will. If you feel like saying no—say it. It may mean danger.”

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“What matter?”

Even as he spoke a shadow fell on his mind. What did this ominous prelude portend? Into what dark, troubled waters was he being piloted? Danger was for Tom, he knew, the salt of life. For him it was different. He would not shirk, nor had he ever shirked, any test how­ever soul searching—his honour was as dear to him as to a soldier in the field—but always in his secret soul what an agony he had to endure.

“Tell me, Tom ”

“Ssh!” The figure of a policeman could be seen making his way across the bridge. “Here’s Mad Glynn.”

In spite of the startling soubriquet there was little of madness in Constable Glynn. He was indeed sanity itself. There was sanity in his desire for advancement, in his professional zeal, in his sharp realization that the morrow’s reaping was the fruit of to-day’s endeavour. The misapplied epithet was due to the constable’s reckless attempts in striving to master a velocipede—the first to be seen in Carberymore. In his efforts to control the machine he and the absurd penny-farthing were wont to go through the most fantastic evolutions. A salvo of derisive laughter always hailed the crash which inevitably followed the wriggling and twisting of the machine down the short incline that led from the barrack to the bridge. Scorning their laughter he picked himself out of the dust only to adventure as dangerously again. When he had mastered the “philosophy” (for so they called it) would he not have a means of swooping down unexpectedly on “The Angler’s Rest,” “The Fox and Hounds,” and the other wayside taverns that ventured to trade during prohibited hours? Did it matter a jot then his appearing on duty day after day with a criss-

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cross of sticking plaster on his features? Call him Mad Glynn if they liked, but his madness was a means of attaining more efficiency as an officer and of winning earlier promotion than his fellows. They’d see who was mad. They wouldn’t have long to wait, too. By God, they wouldn’t!

The boys kept silent, idly watching the flow of the stream till he had passed by. In the momentary silence Stephen felt the unquiet beating of his heart. When the constable was out of earshot Tom spoke.

“You know the old tumble-down summer-house by the mill dam. We’ll meet there — to-morrow evening. It’s a safe spot. No one ever comes near it.”

“But I’m all in the dark, Tom. What’s — what’s the idea?”

“To try an experiment. To see if we can make gunpowder.”

“Gunpowder!”

“Why not?”

“But what for? I — I don’t understand.”

“Listen, Stephen.” He paused a moment. “Some day there will be another rising. No one can say when, but it’s bound to come sooner or later. That’s as sure as that the Auling will go on flowing under this bridge. The other risings ended in disaster mostly through the need of ammunition. It’s up to us to see that that will never happen again.”

“But I always thought that gunpowder was some kind of government secret. What do you know about it?”

“Enough to try, anyway. I chanced on the informa­tion in an old almanac. There’s no secret about it. All you need is sulphur, saltpetre, and charcoal.”

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“Great Cork!”

“I was just as astonished as you. I could hardly believe my eyes. But there it was—staring at me from the page. Oh, look, Stephen—the saltpetre? Could you get us a little—just a fistful or two?”

The chest of small square drawers under the counter took shape in Stephen’s mind. In one drawer with its knob of amber glass he could see the white-powdered crystal—so innocent in itself, so frightful in combination.

“I—I think so, Tom,” he said. “I’m almost sure.”

“Bravo! I’ll see to everything else. I haven’t been idle, I tell you.”

“But, Tom—won’t it be fearfully dangerous? Gun­powder’s a treacherous thing to play with. Look at those men blasting the quarry the other day. Three of them blown sky-high in an instant.”

“Nothing can happen if one’s careful. Trust me to see to that. I’ve no wish to go to heaven yet,” he laughed, “even with you for company.”

Stephen laughed in return, but it was only the pale ghost of laughter.

“By the way,” he asked, “who else is in this? Ted Morris?”

“How’d you know?”

“He just came into my mind. Ted’s like yourself— dead earnest about things somehow. And no fear.”

“Like you too, Stephen,” he said with a comradely smile.

Stephen laughed uncomfortably. His conscience smote him. If Tom could only sense the ghastly fears already beginning to crowd his imagination. But he’d die rather than betray his real self. Tom believed in him, and Stephen would see to it that he went on believing.

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They had left the bridge and had now come to the top of Rock Street opening on the Square. Here they paused before parting.

“To-morrow evening, remember. At five. Three of us only. ‘All for one and one for al’” he added laughingly.

“I wonder, Tom, what would happen and a bobby to top on us?”

“Hard to tell. Penal servitude or something, I sup­pose,” he answered lightly. “But there’s little fear of that happening. Anyway, I’d have a story on my tongue to fool the foxiest of them. Trust me, Stephen.”

“I do.”

“In our small way, Stephen,” he said impressively, “you and I and Ted are trying to do something for the Cause. If things go wrong—well let them. We’ll have done our best. That’s the great thing”—and he strode away humming to himself a snatch of the National Anthem:

“Whether on the scaffold high,

Or the battlefield we die,

O, what matter when for Erin dear we fall.”

Alone, doubts and fears came crowding on Stephen’s mind. Suppose their plot should be discovered! What if some spy were lurking among the trees and under­growth screening the summer-house! What if from some distant point of vantage Mad Glynn, or some other watchful member of the force, should have his field- glasses to his eye, carefully noting their minutest action! How often had they not employed this manoeuvre to bring to justice those who, assured that the coast

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was clear, had slipped into a tavern for a drink on Sundays.

“Penal servitude or something”—so Tom said. And said so casually too—as if it weren’t a thing of fearful import. . . .

There would be a trial in the assize court. He saw the three of them in the dock, all eyes bent upon them. The judge would be in his perch—stern and pitiless as those who had condemned Emmet. His father and mother would be looking on, his father’s face black as thunder, his mother too stricken to raise her head.

Jail would follow. He could see a solitary cell; high up, sunk deep into the granite wall, a little grated window; a bit of sky. Sometimes the sun would shine through the grating, casting an oblong of barred gold on the opposite wall. A wisp of cloud would sometimes float by, and at night a star or two might show between the bars. Mostly he would be alone, and for hours he would have to pick oakum or do his dance of despair on the treadmill. In the neighbouring cells would be thieves and vagabonds, and, perchance—who could say? —some desperate soul under sentence of death. In the prison yard he would have to take exercise with them— men whose faces would be like those of Bill Sykes and Fagan of whom he had read, and who more than once had leered horribly at him in his dreams. . .

But all this nightmare ended, and the prison gates flung open, he saw himself and his comrades being welcomed as heroes. There would be cheering throngs, and the crash of trumpets and drums; banners would fly in the breeze, torches would blaze in the streets and bon­fires on the hills, and their names, like those of the Manchester Martyrs, would pass on, making a shining

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page in history. The murk of that other vision rolled away. Their suffering would be only the passage from Purgatory to Paradise.

But Stephen’s wayward fancy was wont to have its swift ebb and flow. With the setting in of dusk the glowing vision of Stephen Mangan as a national hero began to lose its warmth and splendour and to decline into a pale image of itself. That question he had put to Tom Halligan returned to dismay him. “Won’t it be fearfully dangerous?” he had asked. “Gun­powder’s a treacherous thing to play with.” He thought of those hapless men in the quarry hurled in a flash into eternity. Hadn’t he seen their poor mangled bodies borne on stretchers through the town and heard the despairing cries of the women who had followed the ghastly cortege? To his dying day he would remember it. Might that not happen to him, to Tom and Ted? If so, this would be their last night on earth. How—how was it then with his soul?

A week ago, he recalled, he had been to confession. He could remember that it had left him happy and care­free, his spirit soaring as he turned with the words of absolution still enchanting his ear to prostrate himself in grateful transport before the Living Presence. But now— now turning his eyes inward—searching every nook and cranny of his soul—could he be sure that his confession was good? If he subjected his contrition to a cold analysis would it not reveal itself as a passing surge of emotion rather than that deliberate attitude of the mind to wrestle with future temptation which true repentance implied?“ God, ”the catechism said, “cannot deceive, nor be deceived.” Was he trying to deceive God and to deceive himself by a passionate gesture which was little

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more than a fire of straws, which leaps into flame in a moment and in a moment dies? Under its delusive glow was there down somewhere in that frontier of the con­scious and the subconscious mind the feeling that his repentance was half make-believe, and that when tempta­tion came his way he would inevitably surrender as he had done times out of mind?

If so, he was lost. Eternally his tortured soul would burn—burn—and yet be unconsumed. And he recalled that dire legend which Dante saw blazoned over the gates of Hell—

“Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

He shuddered, and pulling himself together tried to shut out the monstrous vision.

This perturbation of the spirit having passed, his mind drifted into another plane of consciousness. In the shadow of that tragic destiny to which he saw himself being moved by fate everything acquired a new signifi­cance. He felt, as once before, like one outside a window in the dusk watching the movements of people in a lamp-lit room. It was thus he regarded his parents now as they sat at either side of the fire in the living-room, a quiet stream of conversation flowing from one to another. They were speaking in Irish and were hardly conscious of his presence. He sat alone at the table. A book lay open before him, but his eye and his mind were far from the printed page. It was possibly his last night on earth with these two who made up so big a part of his world. He was looking at his mother now with a poignant tenderness. Remembering all her love, his eyes grew dim. She would, he thought, almost die of grief. She would not, in the anguished way of those women who

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followed the bodies of their sons killed in the explosion, cry aloud or passionately embrace his broken body. She would suffer no less intensely, but she was comely in all her ways and her grief would express itself in under­tones. In his mind’s eye he could see her looking upon him with unutterable sadness, hiding from the world the pent-up emotion in her heart. If nature in pity touched the frozen springs of her being she would struggle with the rising surge of emotion and suffer only a strangled sob to escape her. Moved uncom­fortably by her distress his father would say “bíodh ciall agat, a Mháire”— “have sense, have sense, Maura.” There she sat now on her favourite stool knitting for himself the new stockings that he might never need, unaware that death might be approaching nearer to her son with every beat of her heart. He noted how in her small, deft hands the slender needles made play with the firelight as they fashioned the web. All the time the conversation kept flowing with that intimacy of feeling which gives to the speech of man and wife a character of its own. There were little intervals when he heard them laugh pleasantly. “Dear God,” he thought within himself— “Dear God, if they but knew!”

His father he regarded to-night as he had never done before. The strong outlines of his character seemed to fine down to a less uncompromising sternness. His essential goodness which was wont to be obscured by the dominant force of his will seemed to be revealed to him in a new and clearer light. He recalled those moods of his when, stepping down from his plane as an exacting parent, he met his boys on their own level. Those nights on their return from the circus when with lively interest he compared the jugglers, the clowns, and

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the acrobats of his youth with those of their generation. Those winter nights at cards when in the excitement of the game father and sons became wrestlers in a common arena. Those visits to the city when, however urgent his business, he never once failed to bring them gifts— no mere gee-gaws too, but substantial things—a cricket set—a fishing rod—or exciting things such as a stereo­scope and a magic lantern. And the frequent rewards, from a penny to a shilling, which any boyish feats of scholarship won so promptly.

Stephen felt with a pang that all his life he had mis­judged his father, that under the husk of his overstern disposition he had not recognized the finer human traits which were there all the time.

He went upstairs, all the chords of his nature vibrating. When he got to his room he threw himself on his knees by the bed and, burying his head in his hands, prayed as he had never prayed before. To-morrow night he would be past helping himself. The testing time would be over, and he would have to stand or fall according to the way in which he had lived his life. Lifting his bowed head he turned to the crucifix over his bed and, looking into the face of the Christ, he recited with a passionate in­tensity of feeling the old Gaelic “Rune of the Penitent” that had been taught to him in his childhood:

“I lie on this bed
 As I lie on the tomb. . ."

II

He spent a night in which snatches of sleep alternated with long intervals of wakefulness. In the first light of

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the new day objects in his room began to emerge and assume their wonted outlines. Looking into his eyes were those of the Virgin. They were clouded with a tender mist. She knew, and knowing, was full of pity.

He felt now that should he emerge safely from the danger which threatened him nothing would ever tempt him from the straight path. He’d scorn temptation. He’d give his life rather than surrender to the forces of evil that beleaguer the soul from within and without. Rather than give way to the promptings of the flesh and the spirit, he would go unfalteringly into the arena and wrestle with the enemy as Samson with the lion. Only let God test him and He would see!

He went through the day like one with his senses half-drugged. Voices—even the familiar voices of those about him—seemed to come to him through a haze. Objects took on the half-nebulous outlines of things seen in a fog. He sat down to meals, and rose, and moved through the house or went into the garden like one who walks in his sleep. And then, as if moved by some invisible force outside himself, he set out by way of the mill-dam to the scene of the conspiracy.

Lazily the sluggish water of the dam flowed between a high grassy bank and an old neglected walk, thick with the leaf-drift of many years. Ancient trees overhung the dam in whose depths one caught a glimmer of green weeds trailing their long plumes as if they were living creatures. Sailing on the surface of the dam were wisps of grey-green moss, spent husks, and bits of old wood-rack shed by the overgrowth. The air was full of the smell of damp decaying leaves. Midway in the walk was the roofless summer-house, its circular walls tufted with lichen and moss, its floor deep in leaf-mould. The

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twisted boughs high overhead shut out the sun, and diffused a dim green twilight.

Stephen made his way along the narrow path which straggled along the top of the bank. Coming to a giant sycamore whose branches extended over the dam he came to a halt. He set out to climb the trunk and, struggling on to a sturdy limb overhanging the stream, began to crawl across. On reaching the end he swung himself safely on to the walk, the bent bough dropping a little shower of leaves as it swung back into position. The summer-house was only a stone’s-throw from this point. As he drew near he could hear the voices of his comrades carefully modulated to the gravity of the enterprise. He came upon them scraping away the heavy drift of leaves and fashioning a circular space like a well in the centre. Both hailed him, their eyes sparkling with excite­ment.

“The saltpetre—you have it, Stephen?” asked Tom eagerly.

Stephen drew a paper bag from his pocket and handed it over.

“Bravo!” Tom cried approvingly, “now we’ve everything.”

On the cleared space he placed a disc of thick card­board and poured the ingredients, each in a small heap, upon it. For a moment Stephen’s eyes were held by their vividly contrasting colours—the wasp-yellow of the sulphur, the white gleaming crystals of the nitre, the dull smoke-grey of the charcoal. Tom turned to blend the elements, the others following his every movement as if magnetized.

“Now, lads,” he said, a note of triumph in his voice, “we’ll set the fuse and see what happens.” He had pro-

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vided himself with two long, slender canes of brown paper tightly rolled to serve as fuses. These he laid in position. Drawing a box of matches from his pocket he turned to his companions. “You two”—and his voice was almost imperious—“you two scramble up into the tree—high as that branch above. Soon as I set the fuse going I'll hop up after you. Nothing can happen us up there, and we can see everything.”

Obediently the two clambered up the tree, moving urgently from branch to branch. Reaching a secure vantage point they looked down.

“All well?” called a voice from far below.

“For God’s sake, Tom”—the answer filtered down to him through the boughs—“mind yourself.” The troubled voice was Stephen’s.

“No fear,” he laughed back.

They saw him strike a match, cupping his hands to shield the flame. For a moment they glowed like a ruby bowl. He dropped on a knee and in turn applied the match to each of the fuses. Seeing them ignite he darted to the tree, and mounting up with the swift ease of a squirrel had soon levered himself into a secure position beside his comrades.

Fascinated, they watched the slow progress of the flame as it crept along the fuse. At moments they saw it start into a sudden jet of brightness and then as suddenly die down to a few golden seeds of fire like miniature beads on a string. As it drew near to the little mound of powder they held their breath and instinctively clutched the branch lest the sudden detonation should hurl them from their post into the waters of the dam so far below. A little tongue of flame began at last to lick the explosive. The moment to which their minds had been so long

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straining forward was upon them. For an instant each felt his heart suspend its beating. Up there, hidden in the thick boughs of the sycamore, Time seemed to stand still and the world to hold its breath.

A little curl of yellow smoke began to rise slowly into the air. The second fuse acting on the pile set a twin cloud spiralling upward. The two met, merging into one like airy dancers, then fading to a pale misty vapour, dis­solved in the upper air. Save for this ascending cloud the pile seemed to remain inert as a handful of road dust. Tense expectation was becoming a long-drawn-out pain, and yet there came through the listening air no devas­tating thunderclap, no heart-shaking detonation. Slowly it was being borne in upon them that their high adven­ture was but another of the wrecked dreams of their young life.

To Stephen the anti-climax came like the sudden re­lease from the grip of some dark invisible force. Yet somewhere in his consciousness there was an odd sense of disappointment. Had all those agonizing doubts and fears that he had experienced been as idle as a child’s terror of the dark? Good Lord, all this self-torment, this sweat of anguish, for something that was merely a shadow created out of his own feverish fancy! From this day onward he should know better. He had learned —but God alone knew at what a price. Henceforth he would strangle imagination, not let imagination strangle him.

Tom Halligan’s brows were drawn into a pucker of vexation. “That beats the devil!” he said as he watched the sulphurous vapour twist in the air. “There’s no use waiting any longer,” and in a moment he was making his way down the tree, followed by the others. They

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looked ruefully on the still smoking pile, whose acrid fumes seemed to mock their impotence.

“There must be something more in the secret than you know, Tom” remarked Ted Morris.

“If there is I don’t despair of learning it. Look,” he cried suddenly. “I have it.”

They looked at him questioningly.

“Listen. There’s an uncle of mine in Boston. He was an old Fenian, and took part in the rising of Sixty- seven. Every week he sends us the Boston Pilot. I’ll write to him—write this very evening. He’ll tell me straight off. Till then,” he went on, stamping on the pile with his nail-studded boots, “we had better stow away this stuff.”

Under his direction they set to work to loosen some moss-covered stones forming part of an old fence. As they dragged the stones from their place a multitude of creeping things, disturbed in their secret kingdom, scuttled pell-mell in every direction, some disappearing into crevices, some seeking a refuge in bleached tufts of coarse grass whose roots were embedded in crannies in the mouldering wall.

They watched the rout. “I’ll dream of these loath­some things to-night,” thought Stephen.

“A surprise for the little divils,” laughed Ted. “Cripes, they’re all legs.”

“Some day,” remarked Tom, “we in Ireland may give as big a surprise to those who are now so secure in their little garrisons in the country.”

“A long way off, I fear,” ventured Stephen, remem­bering his father’s ruthless logic.

“How can you tell? Nations, haven’t they their ups and downs—all of them? You remember that piece

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of verse we had to learn off for old Hill—something about the ocean—how it never changes while empires rise and fall?”

“Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage—what are they?” quoted Stephen. His memory for verse was curiously retentive.

“That’s it: Why should you suppose that England wouldn’t suffer the same fate?”

“But that was all so long ago,” weakly explained Stephen. “Thousands of years since.”

“What difference does that make? To us it seems a long way off. It didn’t to those living then. It happened before their eyes. This may not happen to-day or to­morrow, but be sure it will happen, Stephen.”

They hid the powder and, having carefully readjusted the displaced stones, made their way to the friendly sycamore, whose spreading branches provided them with a means of crossing and recrossing the mill dam. The three had crawled over and were swinging themselves in turn on to the bank when they were startled by the sudden appearance of a figure in uniform. Constable Glynn was returning from an afternoon’s angling on the upper reaches of the river.

“Hallo! What have you three been up to?” he inquired, as he saw one after the other drop from the tree and alight on the bank before him. “Chasing rabbits maybe?” he remarked suspiciously.

“No, constable,” laughed Tom, spokesman on all occasions, “chasing rainbows.”

“None o’ your guff or you’ll soon find yourself in the lock-up maybe,” snapped the constable. “I have my eye on you, Halligan; you’ve been up to no good, I’ll warrant.

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“There’s no law against a fellow gathering chestnuts —is there?” and he pulled out of his pockets a handful of nuts.

“There’s a law against insolence to a policeman in the discharge of his duty—remember that. And don’t forget it you, too,” he added turning sharply to the others.
“Show me your company ----"
 And with that admoni­tion he turned on his heel and strode away.

Stephen drew a long breath.

His eyes ablaze with resentment Tom began to hum:

“Death to every foe and traitor;

Forward; strike the marching tune.

And hurrah, my boys, for freedom!

‘Tis the Rising of the Moon.

**Chapter XVIII**

**THE MAGIC CITY**

STEPHEN was in the garden drooped on one knee before a clump of sweetwilliams. Many of the flowers were long past their prime, and some had already burst their seed pods. In the riot of mixed blooms there had been one variety whose dark loveliness re­sponded to some sensuous need in his nature. It had the deep ruby glow of wine when poured into a glass and held against the light. When in the morning the flowers were dew-drenched, or when after a shower drops of rain trembled on their petals, the loveliness of it delighted his senses. He dreamed of a whole border—a gardenful —of this wine-dark splendour.

At the moment he was pinching off the ripened pods and emptying the fine seeds into an envelope. It was a simple task, for seldom is it Nature’s way to store the seeds in which she imprisons next year’s miracle so conveniently for the young gardener as in the case of this flower. The ripened pod with its star-shaped cup is like a miniature vase, and within it the seeds he loosely packed like grains of tea in a paper twist. He had collected a small quantity of the precious seed when he heard the click of the gate and saw his mother come into the garden, a clothes basket swinging from her hand. The linen that she had come to gather was bleaching on the hedge. In the belief that it gathered in something of the healthy

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fragrance of the shrubs, she liked to spread her linen there rather than on the line.

“What’s that you’re doing, Stephen?” she asked, laying down the basket and coming towards him.

He tried to explain. “Next year,” he said, “I hope to have a border of these running the whole length of the garden. Over there against the ivy on the wall. Won’t it be fine?”

“Lovely.” And in her mind’s eye she saw, as he did, a drift of crimson breaking like a wave against the ivied wall.

“I’ve saved that much,” he said, rising to his feet and showing the little pinch of seed lying so thinly in the pocket of the envelope.

“Isn’t that very little?” she asked.

“It just looks like that—the seeds are so small.”

“You should know,” she smiled.

“Oh, I’m sure,” he said confidently. “Anyway, there will be more. Look here, mother,” and with the ardour of youth instructing its elders he began to point out a number of pods still quite green, others beginning to lose their sap, and some bleached pale and ready to spring asunder in the next burst of sunshine, emitting as they unlocked a faint, dry crackle, perceptible only to the tense ear of the absorbed nature lover.

“You must be a little lonely all this time without Owen and Garry?” she remarked casually, as she turned to remove the linen from the hedge.

“Lord, no; what made you think that?” he asked in surprise. “I hardly ever think of them,” he confessed laughingly. “I never miss the time passing. There’s always something or other.”

She paused in her work. “Would you like to have a day in Cork, Stephen?” she asked unexpectedly.

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“In—Cork?”

“Yes.”

“I’d love it more than anything in the world!” he answered, his eyes shining.

“Your father’s going on Friday. I’ve been trying to persuade him to take you along with him—telling him now Owen and Garry were having such a good time in the country while you had nothing to do but moon around here.”

“And what did he say?”

“Only that he’d think about it. He wouldn’t make any promise.”

“Look, I’ll do anything if he’ll only let me go,” he said earnestly. “’Tis years and years since I was in Cork, and I was so small then that I understood nothing. ’Twould be different now. Try to persuade him, mother,” he entreated.

“I’ll do my best, Stephen. You can trust me.” And having transferred the linen from the hedge to the basket she left him.

He was too excited to continue the task in which he had been so pleasantly employed, and sat down on the garden seat.

A day in Cork—the magic city—the heart of so many sleeping and waking dreams. Once only had he been there. But he was then, as he had reminded his mother, only a small boy of nine or ten. Of that visit there remained only a hazy impression out of which, like tall spires rising above a grey landscape, a few memories emerged in clear outline.

He could remember that the occasion was the Great Exhibition of Eighty-three. Although the day had been one of unceasing rain, the wonder of the shop windows

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was still in his mind. To recall them was to feel a sudden inrush of light such as follows the pull of a cord on a drawn window-blind. He had thought till then that Carberymore with its church and its convent, its banks and hotels and warehouses, was a town of vast importance. In school compositions you always grandly described it as “the capital of Mid-Cork.”

His visit to the city reduced all its home splendours to mean proportions. Henceforth, they were to be re­garded only as symbols of disenchantment. The shops of the silversmiths dazzled him. Only in dreams—or when the sun shone through a shower—did one see such a glitter of diamonds. Yet it came with a shock to see displayed to the common eye among the watches and bracelets and jewelled rings a golden monstrance, a ciborium, and many silver chalices—sacred vessels so intimately associated in his mind with Catholic worship that he had till now some vague, half-formed idea of their being brought miraculously from Heaven. Hadn’t he seen a picture of Christ in Gethsemane and an angel all in a white flame of light bearing a chalice?

The ships in the harbour—the sailing craft with their tall masts and their tangle of rigging—the lumbering dredgers and the steamships with their squat funnels ejecting armfuls of black and tawny wool that kept rolling till they became teased into thin wisps of vapour in the upper air—these still made a picture in his memory.

But most vivid in his mind was the cafe in Patrick Street where he had been brought for tea. Here was the dream of a small town boy translated into reality. The tall slender mirrors—the steaming coffee urns giving out such a pleasant smell—the little round tables of black marble—the tiers of enchanting cakes and pastries—the

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attendants all dressed alike, all so swift in their movements, so deft in their service—the groups of smartly dressed people talking so animatedly—the ceaseless clink-clink of spoons on china—all this was as clear to his mind as when he first beheld the miracle.

Oddly, too, he could remember the brewery horses— great Clydesdales with bushy hair on their fetlocks— pulling drays through the wet streets. In comparison with these superb creatures the posting horses of Carberymore became dwarfed to the proportions of the lime steeds of Lilliput.

Of the Exhibition only a few impressions held fast in his memory. The click-click of the turnstiles—he could still hear that distinctly as the beat of his own heart. And almost as clearly, he could see the rain spilling through a leak in the glass roof of the art gallery, and working men flying up ladders to remove the pictures from the walls down which runnels of water had begun to slide, gleaming as they caught the light from above. And he could remember his being spellbound as he saw a glisten­ing mound of white sugary stuff, like an enormous snowball, being turned by some magical device into a shower of peppermints.

And, finally, there was the splendid tumult of the machinery hall—the ceaseless roll of wheels—great wheels revolving to a slow, majestic rhythm—smaller wheels that whirled with a blinding swiftness—the quivering of broad belts of leather—the flash of noisy shuttles—the glitter of steel. All save one of these machines remained a chaotic vision, a dynamic jumble, gloriously exciting. The exception was a spinning machine which they called—why, he wondered much— a mule. He remembered how like a bright wave one

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part of the machine ran forward from the main body, and, having reached a certain point, trembled and paused a moment, as if dubious of its bearings, and then returned on its course. The operator was a pretty, blue-eyed young woman whose bright hair was coiled into a knot at the nape of the neck. She hardly seemed to be con­scious of the shifting groups of onlookers fascinated by the movement of the machine, which, like some relentless taskmaster, absorbed every atom of her intelligence. “The Virgin and the Dragon” Stephen heard a young man say laughingly to another. Though the words held no meaning for him they had a pleasant rhythm like “The Lion and the Unicom,” and the picturesque phrase held fast in his mind.

Strain his vision backward tensely as he could, these were the only impressions that held their place in his memory. All else had passed from his consciousness. He could not even recall who it was that had guided his childish steps through the maze of that far-off adven­ture.

To see the great city now—to see it with wide open eyes —that would be little less than to ascend to the topmost rung of Jacob’s ladder and to behold the city of Heaven. Would his father unbend as his mother seemed to hope? Had he not shown signs of yielding, she, in her wise way, would surely have kept silent rather than arouse vain hopes in his mind. He himself had not the moral cour­age to go and do his own pleading. His father was too remote from him. Stephen would stand tongue-tied be­fore him, feeling stupid and embarrassed. Anyway, with such an advocate as his mother, where was the need? In that brief moment in the garden she had flung open to him a gateway leading to unimaginable delights.

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Could his father be so ruthless as to slam it against him, saying “Tush, tush, boy—some other day”?

That would be heartbreak—for was there ever a time when he was not conscious of a passionate yearning to revisit this Mecca of the youth of Munster? Among its most prosperous citizens the Munster capital numbered not a few who had migrated from Carberymore, and city folk were given to relate as a fine joke that when a Carbery boy was old enough to have a glimmer of under­standing his father, lifting him overground by the lugs of his ears, would bid him turn his eyes eastward to where the city lay and say to him impressively, “Your goal, my son!” His father had never sought to tune Stephen’s mind to this idea, yet the splendour of life in such a great city haunted his imagination.

He gathered up his seeds, left the garden, and made his way to the shop. Through the open door that com­municated with the meal store he saw his father seated before a ledger. He had laid his pen on the rack and was engaged in conversation with his mother. The sound of his own name came to his ear. His mother must be again pleading his cause. Burning with curiosity he was yet reluctant to play the eavesdropper, and moved to the street door to await the fateful issue of their conference.

The street was almost empty of life. Making his way along the opposite pavement to the workhouse was an aged pauper. He was clad in an ill-fitting uniform of coarse grey frieze on the shoulder-back of which, stamped in vermilion, were the letters, “C.U.”\* Often Stephen wondered by what strange process every inmate of the Union, peasant or townsman, old or middle-aged, acquired

\* Carbery Union

that pitiful air of abject resignation which marked him out from his fellows. Was it the dull consciousness of that badge of defeat on his back and the sense of isolation from his kind which it symbolized? There was much poverty in the town, yet it was easy to understand why so many preferred to go needy and in rags rather than endure the ignominy of putting on that grey jacket with its red brand—a ritual which public charity prescribed as the price of its benevolence. It was a queer train of thought for a boy, but Stephen’s mind was constantly drifting into by-ways oddly out of tune with his years.

Away up the street a knot of children had joined hands in a game. He could hear the shrill treble of the young voices singing:

“The wind, the wind that blew so high
 The rain came scattering from the sky,

Nancy Moore, she says she’ll die
 ’Less she gets a lad with a rolling eye.”

Hearing his mother return to the shop he turned to her, his anxious eyes questing for knowledge in her face.

“Well, mother?”

“It’s all right,” she said, smiling. “You’re to go.”

The words overwhelmed him. “Oh, mother,” was all he could articulate.

“You’re glad?”

“I’m in Heaven!” he answered, and flew towards the kitchen to tell Ansty.

The joy of it was like an overwhelming torrent. He felt that he should race from one friend to another to impart the news—that he should proclaim it from the housetops—that he should climb to the topmost crag of Ardnacarriga and there shout his tidings to the stars!

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**Chapter XIX**

**FOAMING TANKARD**

I

“He’s half drunk with excitement.”

It was the unspoken thought in his mother’s mind as she saw him set out for the station. His break­fast had been but a pretence. How could one choke down food with the heart so overfull? Silver jingled in his pockets—the silver with which she had privately furnished him. His father, she knew, would be generous, but she was conscious of some subtle sense of pleasure in this secret giving. Between them it established an intimacy of feeling in which they two alone participated.

He went long before the train was due to leave, ex­plaining that he should prefer to wait for his father at the station. Some instinct told him that his father would be more pleased to have it that way. A boy trotting along beside his elder took something from a man’s stern dignity. On his way through the town he could hardly control the impulse to tell passers-by where he was going. The school friends whom he hailed in passing seemed to move in a plane below him. He was about to voyage into the shining spaces of the upper air. They were earthbound. He fancied that they looked after him

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wistfully, as if they divined by some preternatural influ­ence emanating from him the intoxication of his spirit.

In tune with his mood was the August holiday—the Feast of the Assumption. No hint of rain—not even a cloud overhead. Clear blue skies, warm sunshine, and the church bell ringing for the ten o’clock Mass. It was queer to pass by the church with the bell calling like that, but his father had said they would be in time for High Mass at noon in Saint Peter and Paul’s. If they had sufficient leisure they would wait to see the procession which was to follow.

He grew anxious as the minutes slipped by watching the succession of travellers trickling into the station. Why was his father so slow in coming? There was still, of course, a quarter of an hour, but it made one so restless and uncomfortable watching for his appearance at the angle of that wide opening from the Main Street to the railway. The incoming train had long discharged its handful of morning passengers and the engine was already revolving on the turntable preparatory to setting off on its little canter to the front of the train, there like a restive horse to be coupled to the foremost carriage for the return journey.

What if at the last moment his father should change his mind? But this was hardly possible. Once he had determined on a line of action no circumstance could divert him from his course. But, then, by some un-happy chance—his watch being slow perhaps—mightn’t he be late? Often Stephen had seen that happen to people as he stood idly of an evening on the platform. A traveller would arrive breathless, only to see the train disappearing in a cloud of steam round the bend of the line. He always looked confused and self-conscious as

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he looked after it, and people gazed at the traveller curiously and smiled at each other in a meaning kind of way. Every eye followed him as he sheepishly made his way out of the station.

Good Lord, if that should happen to his father? . . . How steadily, how relentlessly, the hands of the station clock were moving forward. Only seven minutes more. At increasingly prolonged intervals an odd passenger was still to be seen arriving hot and flustered. Would his father never appear? It was cruel, this misery of waiting, this feeling of being wound up to snapping point. . . .

At last! And, unlike others, he comes with no hint of fussiness, but calm, unhurried, dignified—now, as always, master of himself. You got the feeling, somehow, that the train would not dare depart with­out him—that the sombre force of his personality was sufficient to hold it subject to his will. With what matter-of-fact unconcern—as if it weren’t one of the most thrilling moments in Stephen’s young fife—he waited for their tickets to be issued, and then moved to a carriage to take his place, nodding to Stephen to slip into the compartment before him.

The whistle shrilled through the bright morning air, a green flag fluttered a moment, and now—God be praised! — they were off.

II

On alighting from the train Stephen’s father seemed to take on a new personality. Stephen wondered what was the potent influence which could produce so trans­figuring a change. Was there some elixir in this new

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air which, entering into the core of his father’s being, produced the sudden metamorphosis? From the moment the two set foot on the crowded platform the relationship between them seemed to undergo a radical change. The cloak of reserve—of aloofness—of stern authority dropped from him. It was as if he had shed something that had been till now an integral part of himself. He became comradely in spirit—indulgent— almost tenderly protective.

They stood together for a little time watching the bustle and excitement which accompany the arrival of a train at a busy terminus. To Stephen this first seething manifestation of city life was a foaming tankard. He drew it in with his lips, with his breath, with every pore of his body. It went racing through his blood. He was tingling all over.

How he loved it all—the swinging open of carriage doors—the turbulent exit of luggage-laden travellers— the eager quest for waiting friends—the excited laughter of their first greetings—the obsequious porters tendering their services—the crowd of rival jarveys standing on the wings of their cars and gesturing with their whips, "Car, sir? Car, sir?” All this tumult—who could desire a more inspiriting prelude to the day’s adventur­ing? Standing there by his father who remained so calm, so assured, in the midst of the swirl, he felt like a spectator on a high headland watching a crowd of sails being tossed from wave to wave on a rough sea.

His father beckoned to a jarvey, and they took their seats on a sidecar. They turned into Summerhill its neat houses and small railed-in gardens. In a little time they emerged on George’s Quay. Across the river came the chimes of the church of the Holy Trinity, still

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wanting its spire—a soaring spirit arrested in its upward flight. On sandalled feet one of the friars, dressed in his brown Franciscan habit, his girdle, and his beads, was meditatively walking up and down on the flagged space in front of the church. It was the first time Stephen had seen a Capuchin monk, and the picturesque figure held him by its grave arresting dignity. His father noticed his absorbed eyes.

“One of the Capuchin friars,” he explained. “Father Mathew belonged to the Order. Over there he used to say his Mass.”

“A great man, Father Mathew,” observed the driver. “A power o’ good he done in his time, sir.”

His father nodded. “You’re a tee-totaller?” he asked—and he smiled covertly at Stephen.

“Oh bedad, no, sir. The dust o’ the roads—” he gave a dry forced cough—“it catches you here. I wash it down with a pint o’ Baymish when it comes my way.” And he coughed distressingly again.

His father bade him draw up at “The Punch Bowl.” Bidding Stephen keep an eye to the horse the two passed through the swing doors of the tavern and entered the bar. Some minutes later they emerged, the driver wiping the froth from his reddish moustache, which had become wet and bedraggled where it fringed the lip. A sourish whiff of liquor came to Stephen as he passed him the reins.

In Parliament Street they were held up by the conges­tion of traffic. Directly in front of them was a landau from which a handsome broad-shouldered old gentle­man was descending to the pavement. They idly watched him give instructions to the liveried coachman and then move away towards the Mall.

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“Know dat gentleman, sir?” inquired the jarvey.

His father shook his head.

“Dinny Lane, sir. The pote, you know.”

His father looked with interest at the fine figure as it turned into the Mall and disappeared.

Stephen was thrilled. Here surely was something to remember all his life. He had seen a living poet—not a maker of crude “come-all-ye’s”—but the composer of “Carrigdown,” that lovely plaintive song beloved of Corkmen all the world over. It was strange, though, to discover him in the rank of those who rode in fine carriages. You thought of a poet as different: careless in dress, down at heels perhaps, but with something— what was it? — which distinguished him from other men. Running through his mind was a passage in his lesson book which described the career of literary men in Johnson’s youth. Because the words had a kind of rhythmic swing they were pleasant to sing off, and one remembered them with ease like the lines of a ballad.

“To lodge in a garret up four pairs of stairs; to dine in a cellar among footmen out of place. . . .

“Sometimes blazing in gold-laced hats and waistcoats: sometimes lying in bed because their linen had gone to pawn. . . .

“Sometimes drinking champagne and tokay: some­times sniffing up the scent of what they could not afford to taste. . . .”

They drove into the Mall, the banking centre of the town, and swung round by the Grand Parade into Patrick Street. The sudden transition from the narrow rut of Parliament Street into the spacious dignity of these crowded thoroughfares made Stephen draw a deep breath. They drew up at Saint Peter and Paul’s and

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having dismissed the car, passed into the church just as the crowded congregation was shuffling to its feet in response to the first chiming note of the noontide Angelus.

Stephen felt himself borne along on a high wave of emotion. The beauty of the church, the impressive ritual, the rich vestments of the priests, the long train of acolytes, the myriad lights and flowers on the high altar, the swell and cadence of soaring voices, the roll of the organ and, at the Gloria, the sudden paean of wind and strings—all this fusion of colour and sound which makes the ritual of the Catholic Church unrivalled in its poetic appeal, overwhelmed him like a tidal wave.

Then followed the procession with its stream of young girls moving along in clouds of white veil, its endless train of boys, their crimson sashes fringed with gold, the forest of advancing shields and banners, the slow march of the priests, and all the time the fresh young voices of children singing:

“Oh, Mother, I could weep for mirth,

Joy fills my heart so fast.”

“Well?” said his father, with a sidelong glance as they struggled out of the church.

“It was all lovely. I—I never dreamed …” His father understood that sudden break in his voice. A queer fellow this boy of his. Garry and Owen—he couldn’t conceive their being moved in that way. They would be more likely to feel, as he himself did, that the ceremony was too long-drawn-out for an August holiday. He stifled a yawn as they turned into Patrick Street, the main artery of the city’s life.

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It was enchanting, Stephen thought, this bright- tempered holiday crowd on the pavement. Here life bubbled over and sparkled like some effervescent wine in a glass. With your eyes dazzled by its iridescence how far away, how drab and out-at-elbows, seemed Carberymore.

They drifted with the current moving southward to St. Patrick’s bridge. Here they paused, leaning on the parapet. The tide was on the turn and the Lee, impatient of being channelled between its frowsy quays, had begun to race turbulently towards the bridge on its way to the open sea. A flock of seagulls filled the air with wings. Stephen had never seen the birds at such close range. They seldom flew inland as far as Carberymore, and then he could only glimpse—a long way off—a wild scatter of wings against the dark furrow of some freshly- ploughed field. His sense of delight was stirred by their easy grace as they hung poised in the air, the lovely curve of their breasts, their cold purity. It was exciting to watch how some dropped suddenly on the surface of a wave and, yielding to its buoyancy, oared themselves statelily along down stream. When they rose again a little sprinkle of diamonds fell dropping from their wings.

“Over there on your left,” broke in his father’s voice, “is the Opera House. On the opposite side of the river is the Dominican Priory and St. Mary’s.”

Stephen’s eye, eager to take in all that was noteworthy, ranged from one object to another, and, questing further, was held by a slender belfry with domed roof perched high on the terraced slopes above the river.

“Isn’t that Shandon?” he asked. “It’s like the pic­tures I’ve seen of it.”

His father nodded.

“I’d love to hear the bells,” he said eagerly. “When do they chime?”

“At the evening service likely. I’m not sure. I’ve never heard them. Like most people I didn’t bother. But you must be hungry?” he remarked, remembering with concern that Stephen’s breakfast had been but make-believe.

“Oh, no,” protested Stephen, “—only a little.”

“Very well. Come this way,” and they crossed to the south side of the bridge and turned again into Patrick Street.

Time had left undimmed the splendours of Baker’s cafe. Here it was with all the jewelled sparkle which it had preserved in his memory. Here were the same bright mirrors, the same silvery coffee urns, the long rows of marble-topped tables, the tempting array of little glisten­ing cakes rising tier on tier before his eyes, the pervading odour of freshly ground coffee, the clink-clink of china dropping so pleasantly into the light buzz of conversation. His father, scornful himself of all but simple fare, pressed him to savour one confection after another, till the cake- stand stood so skeleton bare that the attendant smiled at him, and he blushed guiltily as she jotted down the items on the bill.

“All right now?” inquired his father as they emerged again into the crowded street.

“Full to that,” he returned laughing, finger on chin. He was heady with excitement and the playful gesture showed how the day’s companionship had bridged the gulf between them.

“Good. I’m going to let you fend for yourself now for a couple of hours. I’ve some calls to make. Meet

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me here again”—he glanced at his watch— “say at four. Mind you don’t get lost,” he added, and, thrusting some pieces of silver into Stephen’s hand, strode away.

III

Stephen was alone. Free to roam around at will --- free as a butterfly in the sun. It was an intoxicating moment. However indulgent his father might be, Stephen shouldn’t have liked to overstrain his kindness by his own spells of dalliance at shop windows. Here were two enchanting hours in which to let his fancy play at will, his mind untroubled by the fear of trespassing on another’s forbearance.

Eager with curiosity he went along the street lingering at the novelty stores, the bookshops, the florists, the jewellers. In the Grand Parade he came on an art store, its window display a little gallery of coloured prints. Prominent on an easel was a reproduction of Millet’s Angelus. Boy as he was, its appeal went right to the core of his imagination. Here was a homely country scene familiar to his eyes as children at play. How often had he not seen farm folk pause in their grubbing or plough­ing and, dropping their implements, bow their heads in the self-same attitude as these two. Yet till now he had never perceived the tenderness, the poetry implicit in the scene. There must, he felt, be a world of everyday happenings, lovely as this, to whose significance those moving in their midst were as blind as dumb beasts in the fields. He himself was like that—a dull dod with no more perception of the beauty encompassing him than a blind goat on the hills at sunrise.

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Carefully taking his bearings, for he was not a little fearful of losing his way, he left the main thoroughfare, and turning down Academy Street emerged into Nelson Place. Directly facing him was the School of Art. In gold letters on a black ground he read:

SCULPTURE GALLERY
Open free to the public
Monday, Wednesday, Friday,

12 to 4 o’clock.

Always in Carberymore you had to pay for things. Here was that irresistibly alluring attraction—something for nothing. What that something was he did not know —or knew but vaguely. This element of the unknown invested the gallery with a glamour of mystery. Two visitors, a thin bleak-looking man with scanty, greying whiskers and, in strange contrast, a little vivacious woman, plump and rosy as a ripe cherry, entered the hall. “English tourists,” concluded Stephen, as he noted the guide book in the man’s hand and heard them speak of the “School of Awt.” He felt shy of entering, but hesitantly followed in their wake. Through heavy swing doors of bevelled glass he passed from the hall into the gallery.

For a moment he stood transfixed—almost incapable of motion as the frozen figures looking down upon him from their pedestals. Into what strange world had he strayed? Here before his startled eyes man stood revealed as at the creation—naked as the moon—unabashed, un­ashamed. Wherever his eyes wandered nude or semi­nude forms presented themselves to his gaze. The colour rose and ebbed in his cheeks. He had stepped from a

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world in which man instinctively veiled his body into a sphere where the human form proclaims with the star in its shining, the sun in its splendour, the glory of the supreme creative Intelligence. His mind became a battle-ground of warring emotions. Custom, conven­tion, some instinct of religion, wrestled with the invading force of this impalpable beauty emanating from the sculptured figures and penetrating his senses. Gradually the first shamed protest of the alarmed conscience became subdued to a vague resistance.

Wandering from one piece of sculpture to another he came to a standstill before the cast of Laocoon. Some­thing in this tragic vision of human suffering smote him, burning up within him the last remnants of that con­sciousness of the nude which had so overwhelmed him on his entrance into the gallery. He was about to move away when the inscription on the base of the Laocoon made him pause. He dropped on one knee and, almost doubting, read—“The Original in the Vatican.”

The Vatican—the dwelling-place of the Vicar of Christ? Surely nothing but what was good could come from there? If all those sainted men who had sat on the chair of Peter could see only beauty in the figures assembled here, how vain the doubts and fears which had perturbed his spirit: “God, what a dull-witted clown I must be,” he thought. “I know as little of things as those who begin and end their lives in a bog.”

He wondered as he left if he should tell his father. His father was no Puritan, he had a breadth of knowledge beyond most men of his class—but yet. . . . His mother, for all her wisdom, would never understand. Her ways were simple, and however he might explain she would be likely to regard his experience as a spiritual

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catastrophe. Better surely that he should keep silent rather than excite doubts and apprehensions which he might not be able to dispel.

He found his way back to the appointed place. The hands of the blue-dialled clock over Cash’s indicated five minutes of the hour. Promptly on the stroke of four his father appeared.

“Well, had a good time, Stephen?” he inquired pleasantly.

“Oh, splendid,” he answered, a ring of pleased excite­ment in his voice.

“That’s good. I’ve still to call to the mills. You might as well come along.”

They turned into the Mall and, having crossed Parnell Bridge, began to make their way along the cobbled quayside with its endless succession of coal stores, mills, little fly-blown shops, and dingy offices. Their passage was impeded for a moment by the unloading of a collier. Over the gangway and across the cobbles came a pro­cession of men, their faces grimed, their bodies bent double under the weight of the sacks on their shoulders. The August sun beat down upon them and the sweat dropped from the tangle of hair on their foreheads. A sweaty ooze glistened on their faces, giving them the appearance of some negroid race.

“What an awful life, father,” remarked Stephen, as they passed on.

“Aye. Hardly better than a galley slave’s.”

“Why do men take it up—so many of them?”

“Needs must. And it means good wages. The merchants planned some time ago to introduce machinery and straightway the men were up in arms.”

“Oh, why?”

“Why? Because it would mean their having to look for work less well paid or going idle. Here’s Furlong’s,” he said, as they came to an impressive building in red brick. “I’ll not keep you long,” he promised as he left him and entered the offices.

Stephen turned to watch the river traffic. Up stream and down big craft and little sailed past, the water parting to left and right in a swish of feathery spray, seething lines of wash in their wake, the heaped-up waves making a continuous chug-chug against the quayside. The names of the ships excited his fancy. The Upupa—that had such a funny sound—one that you had to go on repeating— “U-pu-pa, U-pu-pa.” But what did it mean—bird, or beast, or river, or star? The Santa Maria—that was lovely. The Flying Fish—he was doubtful if he cared for that. The word “fish ” sounded flat in his ears. Anyway it always brought to your mind those bold trollops of women hawking herrings and sprats in the Market Square, their red hands coated with silver scales, glibs of hair dribbling untidily on their necks. Star of the Sea—that, like the Santa Maria, was poetry. A pity the colours of the figurehead should have lost their brightness, washed pale by the action of drifting wind and wave. He should love to restore them—to dip his brush in speedwell blue for the robe—to bring out the chestnut gleam in the hair —to make that faded star above the head glow with the brightness of a living star. The Rover—how good that sounded. And how good to watch her, all her wings outspread, speeding down the river on her way to the open sea. Her name made you think of far-off seas and of strange shores at the world’s end. You saw men of tawny race, their breasts bare, great rings in their ears; women with dark inscrutable eyes under their parrot-

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coloured shawls, drawn to the sun-tanned beach where they stood like figures in bronze to see the vessel go by.

From this animated river scene his eye roamed to Montenotte whose woodland heights dotted with white villas, with their gardens and lawns and orchards, seemed like a pattern woven into the blue tapestry of the sky. The “real gentry,” he supposed, lived in those dream palaces shining through the trees. How lovely life must be up there. Queer, he thought, the way Fortune will cast some into such pleasant places and send others reel­ing down the gangways of ships, crushed under their heavy burden.

He started, to find his father’s strong hand on his shoulder. Never before had he made a gesture con­veying so much warmth and kindness. It gave Stephen a curious thrill of pleasure—the feeling that comes to one long doubtful of his bearings who suddenly dis­covers where he stands.

“Dreaming?” he asked.

“Oh, no,” protested Stephen, laughingly. “Only thinking how nice it must be living up there among the trees.”

“You’d like that?”

“Who wouldn’t?”

“Mind your books, then. Learning has lifted many a young fellow far above the heights of Montenotte. Lads out of Carbery too.”

This unexpected twist in the conversation made Stephen uncomfortable. He shrank from any approach to the problem of resolving his future. Time and circumstance, he felt, would provide a solution. To divert his father’s mind from the line of thought in which it was tending to move, he assumed an eager

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curiosity about the more arresting features in their surroundings.

“Look, father,” he said, “that pretty place down the river—what’s it called?”

“Tivoli. People who have travelled say it reminds them of some place in Italy. The walk on the opposite side is the Marina. It runs all the way by the river down to Blackrock.”

“Down to Blackrock.” The phrase recalled to Stephen the burden of a song he had often heard sung to coax a child into sleeping. Always it used to make a picture in his mind in which he saw a boat go sailing down a river, its oars keeping time to the swaying motion of a cradle.

We’ll go boating, boating, boating,

We’ll go boating down to Blackrock.

His father glanced at his watch. “Time’s up, Stephen,” he said briskly. “It’s a good step from here to the station,” and with quickened pace the two returned along the quay.

As they took their seats in a carriage a minute or two before the train jerked out of the station his father turned to him. “Well, you liked your day, Stephen?” “’Twas all wonderful,” he replied. And hesitatingly,

"I’m—I’m ever so thankful, father.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” answered his father brusquely, and, opening the Cork Evening Echo, turned to read the news.

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**Chapter XX**

**VERNAL EQUINOX**

“STEPHEN, I’ve news for you.” In his mother’s voice there was a ring of pleased excitement.

“For me?”

“Yes. Good news too. Mr. Hill was here this even­ing. He had a long talk with your father. It seems there’s to be a vacancy for a monitor in the school very soon.”

He started. The premonition of some impending disaster shadowed his mind.

“How—how does that concern me?” he asked.

“Mr. Hill thought that among the boys you were the one most likely to make a teacher. He says you’re wonderfully quick at the learning.”

“Oh, that’s the wildest nonsense,” he protested.

“I only tell you what he said.”

“But it isn’t true. I’m only like the rest—no worse and no better.”

“Whether you are or no, he promised, if we thought well of it, to send on your name to the Board of Education. We were delighted, your father and myself. You’re glad too—aren’t you, Stephen?” she asked, a little dubiously, sensing his discomfort.

“No, mother.” His voice quivered.

“But why?—I can’t understand.”

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“I don’t wish to be a monitor. I’d hate it more than anything in the world.”

“You’re—you’re not in earnest, surely?” A vague perplexity drew her clear brow into a little pucker.

“I was never more so.”

“Oh, but you’re too young to understand all that it means, Stephen. At your age no boy rightly knows his own mind.”

“I do.”

“You only think you do.”

“I know I do. Only too well. Five years under old Hill! I couldn’t bear it.”

“Mr. Hill has turned out many a fine scholar in his time.”

“I don’t care. What is it to me?”

“There’s no use getting hot-tempered about it, Stephen,” she said reproachfully.

I’m not. I’m only saying what I feel,” he answered, hurt.

“But, Stephen boy,” she said persuasively, “don’t you see that such a chance may never come your way again? Five years isn’t so long when you’re young. You’d have a little pay from the start, and then you’d have two years in college in Dublin. At twenty,” she went on encouragingly, “you’d be independent and earning a fine salary.”

“Even so, I’ve no wish to become a teacher,” he repeated obstinately.

“But why? There must be some reason.”

“I don’t know. I can’t explain. I’m not made for teaching.”

“Then what do you wish to turn to?”

“I’ve never thought of it.”

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“That’s natural, I suppose, for a boy. But sooner or later, Stephen, one must make a choice. Your father and I would be glad to do better for you, but business isn’t what it was and colleges are expensive. Anyway, the appointment isn’t to be made for some months yet, and you’ll have lots of time to turn it over in your mind.”

“No amount of thinking could make the thought of it less hateful. I’m sorry, mother, but ---”

He heard his father coming downstairs and lapsed into silence. With a frown of deep discontent he drew to the window and gazed with unseeing eyes into the yard.

His father came in and caught the warning message conveyed in the mother’s glance.

“Is anything the matter?” he asked in surprise, speak­ing in Irish.

“Stephen that’s upset,” she answered in the same tongue. “Troubled he is with no mind at all for the teaching.”

“The young fool!”

“Bitter dislike he seems to have against it. ‘I’d hate it more than anything in the world’ he said, his lips trembling.”

“A clout in the ear you should have given him! That would bring him to his senses. How the devil did such a notion get into his head?” he asked impatiently.

“That’s what I can’t understand. He took my breath away.”

“God, woman, I never heard the like! Why, I thought he’d be jumping with joy. To be singled out like that from a crowd. Out of his mind with delight the fellow should be.”

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“That’s what any one would expect. But Stephen’s a little different from most.”

“What’s that?—different?”

“Shut up in himself like. Puzzling over things. I often wonder what’s going on inside his mind.”

“Nonsense,” he snapped. “Boys don’t worry their heads in that way.”

“Maybe not, but Stephen does, unless I’m blind.”

“Whether he does or no he’ll have to see reason in this. It isn’t for him to judge. What does he know about it? As much as that fly on the wall.”

“Go easy with him, Roger,” she pleaded earnestly. “He feels things more than others. He can be hot and stubborn and there’s no use driving him. Patience is best. This may be just a notion. There’s no need for hurry, and he’ll get used to the thought of it in a day or two. You’ll see he will.”

Her words made him impatient. “Oh, have sense, woman,” he answered shortly and, dropping into English, turned to Stephen.

“Well, Stephen,” he began, with assumed heartiness, “you’ve heard the great news?”

He turned round, his heart tightening. He divined something of what had passed between them.

“Yes, father.”

“It’s a wonderful bit of luck. To be singled out from all the crowd! I always felt there was something in you.” He listened in silent embarrassment.

“You should be the happiest boy in the town with your future so assured. An easy life, too, compared to most. Your day’s work done at three. No ups and downs as in business. Sure of your salary however the wind may blow.”

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 “I—I don’t feel that way about it,” he said haltingly. “You don’t?”

“No.”

“No? You’re joking, boy?”

Stephen shook his head.

“Well, and how do you feel about it?” His tone had hardened.

“Sick at the thought of it.”

“Sick? That’s good!” and he laughed derisively. “Why, man, you should be down on your knees thank­ing God this minute. What have you in your mind? Isn’t teaching grand enough for you?”

“Oh, no. It’s not that.”

“Well, then, what is it?”

“I can’t explain.”

“Of course you can’t! You don’t know your own mind. At your age that can’t be helped. It’s for others to direct you—for those long enough in the world to know.”

“But I don’t want to be a monitor.”

“But I do.” His voice was grim.

“I’d never be happy. I’d never know a moment’s peace,” he pleaded.

“Oh, don’t be a fool! Have you no spark of sense?” Stephen was hurt to the quick. “I tell you I couldn’t stand it,” he answered. “I’d gladly break stones on the road first.”

“Aye; and a fine fellow you’d be at the job! Listen to me, boy,” he said sternly. “I’ve had enough of this wild talk of yours. I’ve tried to be patient, but my patience can’t last much longer. Let’s hear no more about it.

You’ll just do as I wish. Get that well into your head.”

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He felt driven to bay. “I’ll never be a monitor,” he cried passionately. “Never!”

“Do you mean to defy me, sir?” His face grew dark with anger.

“Look now,” interposed the mother, distressed at the scene, “what’s the good of losing your tempers? Stephen’s upset—all this coming on him so unexpectedly. To-morrow or after he’ll feel different. I’m sure of that.”

“No, mother. I’m sorry, but my mind’s made up. Nothing can change it,” he said doggedly.

“A horsewhip may,” came from his father ominously.

The colour fled Stephen’s cheeks.

“Hush, hush,” entreated his mother, laying her hand on her husband’s arm.

He shook it off impatiently and turned to his son. “Quit my sight, lest I be tempted to give you what you so richly deserve. If I hear another word of this con­founded nonsense, I’ll not be responsible for what I do.”

Stephen left the room. A passionate rage choked him—anger against his father—something of anger, too, against his mother. Why should they coerce him into a way of life from which all his instincts recoiled? Mr. Wiseman, who knew, didn’t he say that it was hell? Let them do their best! They were all against him— father, mother, every one. He didn’t care. He wouldn’t give way—not even if he had to suffer the ignominy of being flung out and forced to take to the roads begging for a crust. His heart was throbbing painfully. Angry spots of colour burned on his cheek. His lips were quivering.

As he stepped into the street the church bell was ring-

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ing. It was Sunday evening and people were on their way to Benediction. He checked the impulse to go along with them. How could he take part in so solemn a service, his heart possessed by furies? To enter the church would be mockery.

The bell seemed to reproach him as he turned aside and found himself walking solitarily along the river bank. From there he could see little groups of people crossing the bridge—all responsive to the call from the belfry, he alone turning a deaf ear to its chime. He wished it would cease ringing. Its every ding-dong smote him. He would walk, walk, walk till his body should drop from sheer exhaustion. Then he would slip into some sheltered slope on the river bank and try to grapple with the first serious problem of his young life.

He was living every moment of that scene in the kitchen over again. He could hear his own voice pleading, “I’d never know a moments peace” and his father’s angry threat, “If I hear another word of this confounded nonsense . . .” He would never forget that glowering look on his father’s face—his father, who till that hour had never been crossed, whose commands, however exacting, had never been questioned by one of his three sons. He had threatened to use the whip— a threat he had never used before. Well, let him! But he’d live to rue it, maybe. In desperate circum­stance how often had he not heard of boys who were driven to run away from home. What was there to prevent his taking sufficient money from the cash-box to pay his passage to America? The box was always chockful of banknotes and sovereigns. It wouldn’t be stealing, for, sure as God, he would pay it back to the last penny. Over there in the States every one got rich.

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Dull clods of country fellows from the hills and the bogs went to Boston and New York and in a few years came home transformed into gentlemen, always wearing a gold watch-chain and with little shiny splinters of gold in their teeth that glinted as they laughed. There he would fly and find a refuge. Then would his father eat his heart out in unavailing regret. Then would his con­science gnaw at him like an aching tooth.

His mother? It would wound her to the soul. She would grieve all her days. The shame of it too—all Carbery talking, and inventing Heaven only knows what fantastic tales. He could see the pitiful droop in her face, the immense sadness in her eyes. After all, now that he began to consider it, she was hardly to blame. She had used no harsh word, she had been gentle in her manner of giving advice, and if she didn’t see things all at once as he did, could one blame her over­much for that? Besides, had she not endeavoured, though vainly, to intercede for him—to stem the torrent of his father’s wrath?

No, whatever he should do, he could not have her suffer for his father’s injustice. The thought of her hidden grief would torture him and he would never know peace. There must be some other way out if only he could see. With his mind and his body in a fever there was no use in trying to think clearly. This storm raging in his soul would spend itself, and then he could reason things out more calmly. If he could only forget that devastating scene, and the frenzy which moved him to defy his father! But there was no for­getting with every wound still open, with that dull ache in every nerve of his body.

The bell—how insistently it kept calling. Would its

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reproachful ding-dong never cease? And across the bridge people were still passing on their way to devotions. He quickened his step and followed the winding path by the river. Urged on mechanically he saw nothing, heard nothing outside the conflict in his own mind. He was unaware that he had passed the Pool of the Sally Trees, where he was wont to loiter. Without recognition he went by the stepping-stones which he could never resist crossing and recrossing, fascinated by each succeeding swirl of waters over which he leaped. Nor was he conscious of the downward rush of the river over the weir—a scene which always excited his imagination. He had wandered up the Auling for miles, and recognition only came when the ruined castle of Carrignagreine, standing solitary on its crag overlooking the river, broke in on his mood.

He was utterly alone here. There was no eye to see him but that first star which was just beginning to show its bright steel point in the east. How still the evening was. But for the lowing of a cow in some distant field, the jolt of a cart on the highroad, one might think that all life had been suspended.

He threw himself on a patch of grass showing green between stiff clumps of bracken and sat idly watching the procession of bubbles sailing along the surface of the stream. A blade of grass between his teeth he began to reflect again on his plight. One thing was clear to him — clear as that the sun was slipping below the edge of the hill—that he would never suffer himself to take on his shoulders the cross of five years’ apprenticeship to Mr. Hill. How to frustrate the plans of his elders— that was what he had now to discover.

God would pity him, surely, seeing his distress. He could

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see into his soul as no one else could, and in His own wise way would smooth the path for him. That very night on returning home he would go straight to his room,drop on his knees beside his bed, and begin to say the Thirty Days Prayer. If God saw it was for your good the recital of that prayer always ensured a response to your petition.

And then his mind in its grasshopper flight suddenly perceived another avenue of escape, obscuring that vision of a compassionate Providence leading him out of the darkness by which he was encompassed. For years it was perceptible to most boys that Mr. Hill was fast losing control of the machine which he operated. Heedless of every portent, obstinate as only those old in authority can be in their belief in themselves, he had become that most pitiful of human figures—an ageing man clinging to power on the strength of his past. Discipline in the school was giving way to disorder. Scenes in which the more daring spirits among the boys openly flouted his authority were becoming almost a casual incident in the day’s round. The clipped grotesques dangling so absurdly from the ceiling were now so many that they tended to crowd each other out as with every breath of wind they twisted and swayed in their fantastic goblin dance. Boys absent from school provided comedy for those in attendance by hurling stones on to the rickety roof from the safe shelter of some nearby garden fence. At each impact blobs of ancient mortar would drop from the ceiling on to the desks, causing those bent over their writing to jump up with a cry of dismay— pre­tending an alarm they didn’t feel—while the school struggled to hold in its laughter.

In so disturbed an atmosphere one was driven head-

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long into actions alien to one’s temperament. Why shouldn’t he, Stephen Mangan, deliberately contrive to bring himself into personal conflict with Mr. Hill? Could he not leave some task undone, and, when the time came to receive punishment, blankly refuse to hold out his hand? Mr. Hill, who, because of Stephen’s aptitude for learning, had come to regard him with some favour, would for a moment be staggered. Then, recovering, he would grapple with him, and, flinging him on the floor, would scourge his body, desisting only when his arm became too numb to hold the cane. But he was prepared for that. All the crude violence of the scene, all its pain and humiliation, were the purchase price of his happiness. No master would sanction the appointment of a lad who so insolently challenged his authority. Never could Mr. Hill forgive this gesture of defiance from one born of a father to whom learning was almost a sacred thing, and who saw in a teacher a man to be honoured only a little less than the conse­crated priest. But what boy cared a jot for old Hill’s enmity? Not he, Stephen Mangan, anyway! Owen and Garry, he knew, were too loyal to betray him to his father. Among the three there was an unwritten code of honour that united them in a conspiracy of silence when any of them became involved in some doubtful escapade. All would be well. Nothing would be known. It was all so easy.

He smiled to himself. The way was clear. There was no danger of missing a step. Queer how in less than an instant this perception had come to him. Swift as a lightning flash. Was it, he wondered, that Heaven had resolved his difficulties? Was this sudden illumination some ray from above? Why should he doubt when

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his inward eye could see it as a visible thing—a beam of living light pouring from the Godhead into his mind?

Yet now he would have to think of the future.

“Sooner or later,” his mother had said, “one must make a choice.” He felt that he had come to the end of a definite period in his life. He had reached the Vernal Equinox, and to-morrow he would be moving forward to the Summer Solstice.

A pity that responsibility should come so soon. Till to-day he had never cared to think what way of life he should pursue. “Tinker—tailor—soldier—sailor,” they were as remote from his existence as the stars in their courses. He was a boy, happy in a boy’s birthright of freedom from those vexing problems with which grown­up people had to wrestle. . . .

How lovely and quiet it was here! He would strive to shut out all intruding thoughts—they could wait for to-morrow—and let his spirit lose itself in the enchant­ment of the hour.

The sun had dipped below the hills and the west was still warm with the receding afterglow. In the east the moon’s broken ring was brightening to a clearer silver. Already there was a hint of dew in the fields, and small moths had began to fly about, their grey powdery wings making a soft purr. A faint scent came to him from the moist grasses.

In the little pine wood on the other side of the river, some one, his day’s work ended, had begun to play on the flute. The music, coming so unexpectedly, gave him a lovely thrill. The wistful air seemed to be one with the spirit of the evening. As the mellow notes floated into the deepening twilight, he thought that the

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voice of the river ebbed to an undertone. The hills, gathering their shadowy veils about them—did they perceptibly crowd nearer? And was it his fancy that on tip-toe, one by one, the stars began to appear?

THE END

The further history of Stephen Mangan and the evolution
of his mind in its passage to young manhood will form the
theme of a sequel to
“ SPRING HORIZON”

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS

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