

Bobbie

Dorothea Conyers

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NOVELS BY DOROTHEA CONYERS.

THE STRAYINGS OF SANDY.  
MEAVE.

THE SCRATCH PACK.

THE WAITING OF MOYA.

THE TOLL OF THE BLACK LAKE.

ROOTED OUT.

THE ADVENTURES OF GERRY.

THE TWO MAUREENS.

TREASURY NOTES.

HOUNDS OF THE SEA.

Etc.




*BOBBIE*



*By*  
*Dorothea Conyers*

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# BOBBIE

## CHAPTER I

“YES, I’ll read the letter, Bob.”

Bob Bryan tossed a sheet of stiff notepaper back to his sister and buttered a slice of toast with elaborate care.

“But, Bobbie, it’s rather wonderful. After all these years.”

“Too many years, old girl. Bah!”

Bobbie stared at the letter as if it were a paper wasp with a sting. “Knockbui, Kilderry,” was printed in red type on it.

“Knockbui, the Yellow Hill. Father’s home, and father dragged out his life anywhere, anyhow, because that wicked pig-headed old man would not forgive him for marrying our mother.” The boy waved his teacup. “A governess. Not good enough for a Bryan of Knockbui. Rob, do you expect me to forgive? I’ve seen father fretting, fretting—his dear tired eyes fixed on that picture there. I’ll hold out no finger of reconciliation.”

Robina turned her head and looked sadly at a water-colour hanging on the wall, the picture of a long old house, dark against a spring sky of tender blue. Great trees massed and, to the right of the house, a conical hill of a curious yellow hue.

Crudely painted as the picture was, it gave the idea of being true to life.

“Mother did that. Read that letter again, Bobbie.”

“It’s full of damnable pride, of I, I, and I again. *I* have decided to overlook the past. *I* do not wish my heir to be a girl. (He refers to Yvonne, of course.) *I* will receive my grandson, and if we get on he shall inherit Knockbui. . . . *I* wouldn’t go to his house for all his money.”

“Father always longed. Oh, he wanted you to have the place, Bobbie. He just dreamt of it. Couldn’t you? I would.”

“You’re a girl, my lady. I bear malice.”

“And inherit some of your grandfather’s pigheadedness,” snapped Robina.

“Maybe. Grandfather can leave it to Yvonne. Bit unlucky, wasn’t he? He

hated his daughter marrying a Frenchman. Now, Rob, be sensible. We've scraped and half starved on our miserable income—an income from the compassionate fund given to Robert Bryan's grandchildren. I've got this job in Valparaiso, and to Valparaiso I go, and up country until I can send for you."

The boy's face hardened.

"I shall not go to Knockbui," he said tersely.

"Father wished . . . you . . . to have . . . Knockbui."

The twins stared at each other across their little breakfast table.

Rob had boiled the kettle on a gas stove fixed in the sparsely-furnished room. She had fried bacon for her brother, and only ate bread and butter herself.

The Bryans were twins, both tall, lightly but strongly made, grey-eyed, brown-haired, but the girl's face was cast in a stronger mould than the boy's. Robina was broad-shouldered, lithe in her movements, thin as a lath and heavily boned for a woman. Robert was slower on his feet, and a discontented wrinkle, young as he was, puckered his forehead. But irrepressible humour twinkled behind his eyes.

Robina was pale and worn; the bones on her wrists stood out; she looked underfed as she stood up, pleading, wistful.

"Rob, you must pull along. I can leave you the whole of our dole now to help you out. I'll make good. What is this place? A phantasy, a wraith. I'll go on no trial. What is Knockbui?"

Robina's eyes were fixed on her brother. She was obstinate. "It was father's home, Bobbie. Father's home. Ah, Bobbie, do."

"It is grandfather's home. A fetish made of stone and mortar and wood and iron. I'll not worship at his shrine, I tell you. Oh, I know, I know. Don't talk. Horses to ride, horses." His own eyes grew wistful. "Hounds to ride after. Motors to drive. Big rooms and air and comfort. But he would not let my father have all these things, and he shall not dole them out to me. Yes, I'd like to be Bryan of Knockbui, but I won't bow down to that wicked old man."

"Well, you know," mused Robina; "if father looked at matters from that standpoint, I cease to wonder at the quarrel continuing. Seems to me, Bobbie, if your son marries a half-caste you'll cut him off."

The boy said "Huh!" furiously, and flushed an angry scarlet.

"I'd like to hunt, but I won't sell my pride for it, Rob, I won't. I'm off to

make my own way in the world. Answer the letter if you like. Tell him his grandson is as proud a Bryan as he is. I must get off to see Hilton now.”

The boy walked away. His blue suit showed signs of decrepitude; the polish on his shoes could not disguise the age of the leather; his socks were darned.

Robina was left alone, and it was time to go to work, but instead she sat thinking.

Thinking of a big house, far away. Of air blowing across the bogs, bringing scents of wild thyme and meadowsweet, of bluebells and daffodils rioting in the woods; of birds in the trees and little rabbits scuttling and hopping from hole to hole. Of foxes, gloriously red, stealing by, of the yellow hill which she had never seen. And of horses standing in stables, glossy-coated, spirited, waiting to strain and strive across country with hounds flitting ahead. Rob had ridden when her father was alive, for he had managed a stud farm and trained the owner's young hunters there. She had even hunted for two seasons. But that was all past, for her father had faded slowly and quietly, always longing for his heritage.

He had had to give up his work; they had drifted to a tiny cottage, and scraped along somehow. Robina got a place as typist to a lawyer. Robert took a situation in a garage. There was just enough to exist on for the two when their father was laid to rest, and now the boy was being sent off to a job in a distant country. Something concerning tractors, which sounded problematical to Robina, but which was, at least, a chance.

And . . . Robert Bryan might become the owner of Knockbui. He might ride to hounds in pink, and drive a high-powered car. He might come to his rightful place. Oh, it must be.

“I hate all Bryans,” said Robina, getting up. “I wonder if my mother did. Not always, of course, but the more one loses the more one sees things.” She re-read the letter.

“Robina, I notice, is left to bloom unseen,” she murmured. “Oh! ‘a provision for your twin sister.’ I observe that. I’ll make Bobbie go. . . .” Robina’s eyes flashed, and she sat down again, crushing the fateful letter in her hands. Her lips came together.

Words are boastful things, yet actions often beat them in life’s tourney, and women get their way.

For, three weeks after, a letter from Knockbui had reached the little town of Redbray, and Bobbie Bryan got into a first-class carriage at Euston, giving a



little pleased sigh as he leant back in a softly-cushioned seat.

A battered leather bag stamped with "R. B." was poised in the rack; the shabby blue suit was replaced by one of grey tweed, of very dubious cut and fit. The youngster's grey eyes twinkled a little, as if he regarded life with quiet humour, yet his mouth was firmly set.

A cheque for twenty-five pounds had been sent to him, and he had reserved half of it for travelling expenses.

Out with a gliding drive through a crisp autumn night, on and on through England. Rugby, Crewe, Chester, then the keener tang of air from the sea. Windows were closed, sleepy passengers turned up the collars of their coats. Holyhead, keeping its vigil, and the mail boat throbbing at the quay.

The channel was choppy. Bobbie Bryan endured the nervous pangs of a dubious sailor, but was not actually ill.

Kingstown was veiled by a pearly morning mist, and the Customs had to be passed.

A tall young fellow opened Bobbie's bag and, glancing at a weather-stained pink coat, ceased to fumble at the contents as the label caught his eye.

"In the name of God, did he send for one of you?" the man said breathlessly. "I'm Mike Guinane, the steward's son, sir. And we never thought to see a grandson home."

"You come from Knockbui? You know the Bryans?"

"Aren't I after telling you me father is the steward? He gave me a good eddication. And you are Mr. Bobbie. Me father taught your father to shoot, sir. But the old gentleman is a holy terror. Six foot tall, an' he'll be faultin' your size."

"Will he?" said Bobbie calmly.

"Yet he can be kind sometimes. Good luck, sir. Don't miss the train. Pass this gentleman on, Pat; see to his things. The like of that!" muttered the official, fumbling blindly in another case. "Anything to declare, any spirits, or Bobbies . . . or . . ."

A choleric gentleman replied snappishly that he was not in the habit of secreting policemen, and Guinane, unaware of his own slip, promptly turned out the contents of the bag on to the table.

Young Bryan passed to an empty carriage and was carried southward, on and on through the wild lovely country, with the pearly mist still capping the

hills. Past the brown bog of Allen, through a green land fenced by green banks, until he reached Ballin, his destination.

Shabby boy and worn luggage were eventually deposited on a small platform. A little crowd jostled and hummed. Women put down bulky packages for the unwary to trip over; the guard's voice rumbled, replying to numerous hecklers.

“The meal, Mrs. Malone? God above us, can ye not see a stream of it rollin’ down the platform? No, Mikey, I have no *consignment* of iron bars. Bars is goods. Let her off. I will so. Out of me van, Michael Dunne, or I’ll carry ye to Loughmore. Did I not tell ye I had no iron? Give her the flag, Dennis.”

The train began to move, the guard cast a forgotten parcel on to the platform, hoping optimistically that it was not eggs, and Bobbie, who had listened to the altercations, looked round him.

The only porter, a stalwart, good-humoured looking man, touched Bobbie's shoulder.

“Mr. Bryan, ye're welcome, sir. His honour sent the chestnuts down, an' Hartigan has his work med out to hold them, so he tolt me to fetch ye.”

Chestnuts! Horses! Bobbie hurried into a little street which was packed with carts, some standing, some drifting along, meeting and crossing and recrossing as the occupants talked to each other. A Ford car was throbbing noisily, and Bobbie spied a four-wheeled dog-cart with two blood chestnuts harnessed to it, a groom in livery at their heads.

“Oh, beauties!” cried Bobbie.

“That trumpetin’ old Ford had thim off their heads, sir. Easy, Silk. Ah, steady, Satin. An’ Mulcaty says if he lets the contraption out she might never go agin. Paste up that luggage, Mick. Don’t make a funeral of it, man; they’re wild this day.”

“I’ll drive,” announced Bobbie. “Oh, this is fun.”

“They are ticklish stuff, sir”—Hartigan looked nervous—“an’ it is market day. Woa, steady. Is it chickens ye think they are, Anne Malone, drippen’ meal under their noses?”

A trickle of Indian meal fell at Silk's feet, causing the chestnut to plunge.

“Hold them, sir! The Ford is hit, an’ mend it for a concertina! It's Mrs. Malone's ass now. Brake, sir, brake, or they'll kick down the hill.”

Bobbie gripped the reins, a merry grin on his face. He found the brake and steadied the pair to a swinging trot.

“Oh, topping,” said Bobbie. “Fun.”

Hartigan moved his lips in silent prayer, for it was market day.

But they passed, still complete, from the town on to a quiet country road.

“I know now what it is to get ye’r head above wather an’ ye drownin’.” Hartigan wiped his face.

“Straight on to the right at the next cross roads, sir. Ye can drive.”

“Father taught us.” Bobbie felt the steady pull on the reins. He loved the rhythmical swing of the highly-bred pair, the clink and jangle of bit and bar; the horses began to sweat lightly as they flew along.

The chestnuts felt the sympathy of the young hands on the reins. They slacked to a walk up a long ascent.

Slopes rose and fell all round, humping greenly as they topped the rise. A saucer-like valley lay in front, rimmed round by ranges of hills, hills flecked by golden lights and purple shadows; the land was touched by the wondrous shades which Ireland alone can paint. Gleams of pearl, and of silver, shades of brown and ochre, flashes of vivid emerald. Smudges of smoke drifted from little houses; cattle wandered in the fields and on the narrow road.

Ireland wrapped her tendrils round Bobbie’s heart. He knew that he had come to his own land. The chestnuts walked soberly.

“That’s a big fly, Hartigan.” Bobbie pointed to the bank fencing the road.

“It is no fly, but a double,” expounded the groom. “A horse must hop on to it and hop off it, nate and light and steady too, for there is a fall on to the road, and it is the main way to Cara now. Tar on it no less, that the poor horses go skeetin’ over, losin’ every leg.”

“Yes.” Bobbie’s eyes scanned the wide stretch of pasture land. It was a permanency, and he was coming on approval. His lips tightened.

“Hartigan, d’ye think my grandfather’ll be glad to see me?” Bobbie looked round at the groom.

“A lot’ll depend on the ways you take ’em up the avenue,” mused Hartigan. “A lot. He is a hard man, sir, is the master, but I’d say he’d be glad to see an heir to folly him. Wimmin isn’t heirs at all.”

“No? I wonder. Well, go, you beauties.” The chestnuts sprang into their

collars, flying along, their hoofs beating rhythmically, their harness jingling; the soft air rushed against Bobbie's cheeks and he let the pair go until the hedges swam past, and Hartigan's thoughts flew once more to his gods.

"Steady 'em. Keep 'em in hand. There is the gates."

Bobbie's heart thumped. Knockbui, at last! The chestnuts were sweating, but they fought for their heads as he swung through the wide white gates.

Knockbui. Great beeches at either side of the long rambling house, Virginia creeper flaming on the grey walls, peaceful green lawns all round the front.

Bobbie pulled the horses to a walk. There was the yellow hill lumping up to the west, the hill from which the place took its name.

The boy's eyes grew dark. He looked dreamily, steadily at his father's old home.

"Let 'em off, sir," said Hartigan. "Never did we walk this hill. He'll kill us."

"The horses are hot, and I like looking round me. Woa, boys, steady."

Nothing grazed on the stretches of grass on either side. Robert Bryan disliked palings and gates.

Bobbie looked at the conical hill. Yes, it was really yellow. Golden, rising from a green base of grass.

Bobbie's eyes, eyes which took in so much and gave away so little, drank the hill in. He came at a walk to the front door.

"May I ask why you walk horses up an avenue?" thundered a mighty voice.

So this was his welcome. Bobbie Bryan looked down at his grandfather, and Hartigan rushed to the chestnuts' heads.

"The horses were hot, sir," said Bobbie quietly. "I let them slip along, the beauties," he added boyishly.

"Um! You did, you let 'em slosh all over the place, did you?"

"I let 'em go," Bobbie laughed, but his heart felt heavy, and his cheeks whitened.

Robert Bryan was a splendid old fellow, six feet high, straight as a larch pole, hardly a line on his tanned skin. Fierce, keen blue eyes burning under heavy eyebrows, a hooked nose, bending to greet a jutting chin. His mouth

hidden by a white moustache. A beau sabreur of the old school, autocrat and despot.

Bobbie jumped down and held his hand out.

“Glad to see you, boy. Lord! what chickens you city-bred pups are.”

“I’m not city bred.” Grey eyes met the glare of fierce blue. “But we hadn’t much chance of growing p’raps for the last few years. Lord! I’m jaded.”

“Canter the hill next time, m’lad. Take ’em round, Hartigan. Oh, Costello, take in Mr. Bobbie’s traps, will you?”

Arrived! Bobbie was taking Knockbui to his heart. He smiled at an elderly butler.

“You’d like a bath, of course. My man will look after you. Huh!” Robert Bryan took note of the boy’s cheap, ready-made overcoat.

Bobbie, sauntering into the hall, replied that he always looked after himself, and studied some foxes’ heads attentively.

“‘Fiona to Drumree, forty minutes.’ Seven miles. That was some hunt, sir.”

Old Robert was now scanning a badly-fitting tweed suit and Bobbie’s thick brogue shoes, so his reply was “Huh,” given grumpily.

“Turn on a cold bath, James.” A second man appeared.

“A hot one, thanks. ‘Drumree to Ballingary, thirty minutes.’ What’s that—hot baths sap strength? I like ’em hot, sir.”

The boy seemed to have slipped into a place in the house.

“Cold,” roared old Robert. “Cold, James.”

Bobbie nodded and smiled. The taps, after all, were his once he got to a bathroom. He followed James.

His room was a vast one. Heavy curtains draped a carved mahogany bed. Heavy curtains shrouded the high windows.

“I’ll have those curtains off, James,” said Bobbie, flinging the windows wide. “Lord! it’s lovely out there.”

He looked across the trimly-shaven lawns, over the tops of trees, at Knockbui. Yellow in the sunlight, a lump of pale gold set in a coronet of rich green.

“Have a whiskey and soda?” thundered a voice from the stairs.

“Tea, thank you,” called out Bobbie.

“Bathroom next door, sir. Glad to see you home here, Mr. Bobbie. Very glad.” James tried to open one of the shabby cases.

“Thank you, James.” Bobbie gripped the old fellow’s hand. “That’s locked. P’raps . . . you knew my dad, James?”

“I bought him his first razor, Master Bobbie. Ah, we missed him sorely. Be a bit quick, sir; the master is fidgetin’.”

James went away. Bobbie stood at the window and looked out. Knockbui washed over him in a wave of sunlight, soft airs, comfort, luxury, riches; and his father had been sent away to die in poverty. Bobbie’s lips tightened.

He lingered in his bath, and changed into riding kit.

Old Robert was waiting at the foot of the stairs. He wheeled as he heard footsteps, and stared at his grandchild.

A splendid old man, but a hard one. Young eyes returned the stare, and as old Robert realised that he too was being summed up he roared “Huh!” throatily.

“Luncheon time. *God*, who made ’em, lad? Cocktails ready.”

“Not taking any, thanks, sir. I’ll be glad of a spot of lunch.”

“I . . . hope we’ll . . . get on, Bobbie.” Robert’s eyes softened.

“I hope so indeed, sir.” Bobbie lighted a cigarette.

“Throw that fag away. Sapping your strength. Take to a pipe.”

“I like fags.” Bobbie moved out of the light, for his grandfather was staring at him intently.

“You remind me, Bobbie. Oh, hang it. Huh! Luncheon.”

A gong thundered.

The old man dashed—he never walked quietly—towards the dining-room, in which portraits of Bryans were hanging on the dark walls.

“That’s your father.” Old Robert pointed to a picture of a man on a grey horse, a little boy clinging to a stirrup.

“There . . . as a child,” said Bobbie, a little bitterly. “Oh, fizz! How good.”

“We celebrate an occasion.”

Bobbie liked the spotless damask, the shining silver and glass; even the

stiffly-arranged vases of flowers toned with the proud austerity of the old room.

“Late as usual. This is Yvonne, Bobbie.”

A girl came in with a little rush, came nervously.

Yvonne was very slight, her slenderness giving one a false impression of fragility, for Yvonne was seldom tired. Her eyes were widely set apart in a little heart-shaped face; her skin was creamy, delicately pale, with a faint flush of rose on her cheeks.

Bobbie had forgotten the rival heir. He flushed. Yvonne gave a scared glance at her grandfather.

“This is Bobbie. Don’t patter French at him.”

“I wouldn’t understand it.” Bobbie shook his cousin’s hand. He was coming to supplant her, yet she smiled welcome to him.

“Roast beef?” thundered Robert.

“Chicken, thank you. Hens are a treat to me. We seemed to live on foreign meat at Redbray.”

“Have you forgotten how to ride?” shot out the old man.

“Oh no, sir. One doesn’t forget. I can ride all right.”

“You shall try Rufus, then. He put Yvonne off.”

“He is a pig, that animal. Do not ride him, Bobbie.” Yvonne’s voice was slow and very soft.

“Oh, I’ll ride anything. I just love it so. No port, thank you.”

He was refusing nectar, and did it carelessly.

“You must drink your wine, boy. Pour it out, Costello.”

“Sorry no. It would go to my nose.”

Costello shook the precious bottle and Robert flushed scarlet. He was accustomed to obedience.

“So you’ve got a will of your own,” growled old Robert.

“P’raps I inherit it,” said Bobbie, meeting his grandfather’s glance, his own eyes twinkling.

“Huh!” The old man gulped a glass of port down. “I believe you are a Bryan,” he said, as one reluctant to believe in his own words.

“Father thought so,” said Bobbie gravely.

“La! le bon garçon.” Yvonne’s soft laugh rang out. “Eh!” She grew white.

For Robert Bryan flung a withering glance at Yvonne and rushed out of the room.

“Do not mind that. He always rushes in and out.” Yvonne lighted a cigarette, and looked happy.

“For God’s sake don’t answer him back, or ye won’t be here a month,” pleaded old Costello. “He is cruel aisy to anger, Mister Bobbie.”

“I am not afraid of him,” ruminated Bobbie. “You are, Yvonne.”

“But . . . soon will you learn to be.” Yvonne spoke with a slight French accent. “He is so difficult, stupendous in his rages, Bobbie.”

“I never saw but one to enter this house that was not afraid of the master.” Costello had dropped butlerdom and become a friend. “But one—his wife. She’d smile back at him, the same, why, the very same way that Mister Bobbie did.”



## CHAPTER II

WHEN Robert Bryan left the two young people alone, Yvonne smiled with the air of one who discards a toothache.

“Ah, he is so cross,” she said, with her French accent.

“Is he?” Bobbie said calmly.

“Yes. I fear him. And he is so glad to get you here. Because I am what you call the thorn in the flesh to him. And his great scheme is to espouse us.”

Yvonne dimpled demurely. Just as Bobbie burst into a peal of merry laughter, hearty and unrestrained, Robert Bryan stalked in, nursing a cobwebbed bottle in a cradle.

“So you’ve got a joke”—his eyes softened—“you two young people.”

“I saw nothing funny,” remarked Yvonne huffily.

“I did, then.” Bobbie laughed again, boyishly, his eyes twinkling.

“And here’s a glass of liquid nectar, young feller, old brandy, soft as a coaxing woman and fiery as a cross one.”

“Benedictine is my poison, but I like liqueurs.” Bobbie watched the hallowed ceremony of drawing the cork. He took the glass of amber liquid and neglected to sniff it ecstatically before he drank it, with reserve.

“Well?” said his grandfather.

“Oh, it’s good, but very strong,” decided Bobbie. “I like Dom better, sir.”

His grandfather said “Huh!” very irritably.

“Come to the stables, Pussyfoot,” he growled. “A cellar is wasted on you.”

To get to the stables at Knockbui one goes through to the west entrance to the portico, and into a dark walk shaded by high trees and bordered by clipped laurels and box, a faintly bitter smell drifting from both shrubs. Then out and under a long archway under which coaches and carriages had been washed in olden days and into a great square yard; horses’ heads poked from a long line of boxes; foxhound puppies sprawled in the autumn sunlight.

A slight, alert-looking man of middle age touched his cap and came forward.

“This is Condon. His father taught your father to ride.”

Bobbie shook hands graciously.

(“A slip of a lad, but spirit in him,” decided Mick Condon.)

“Ye are welcome, sir,” he said aloud.

“Now, Bobbie, I’ve got a string together for you. If . . . you stay here, they are yours. Six of them. All mine are up to too much weight.”

“Six of them.” Bobbie flushed. “Six horses. Oh, glory be!” He darted into the box which Condon opened, starting his inspection.

There were two chestnuts, a black, a grey and a brown, all hunters, well bred and good jumpers.

Bobbie patted their noses, stroked their satiny coats, drew back and gazed at them. Yes, he had done right in coming to Knockbui.

*His*, these strong fleet beasts, so vibrantly alive, with their lean intelligent heads.

“Like ’em?” snapped Robert Bryan, a pleased note behind the snap.

“I want to ride them all at once.” Bobbie smiled gratitude. “I love ’em, sir.”

“Which is your pick, sir?” Condon asked.

“The grey,” decided Bobbie, “the grey mare.”

Now the grey mare was light of her middle piece and missed a rib; moreover her fore legs were shaky and she had been purchased on her performances. But she had a beautiful, well-bred head, and was showy.

“You’ll learn better,” grunted old Bryan. “The black is the best of the lot. You can ride, you say you can ride?”

“Oh, I ride all right.” Bobbie returned to the grey mare, Smoke, and patted her lovingly. “I won’t fall off and disgrace you utterly, if that’s what’s stinging you, grandfather.”

“You won’t, won’t you? Like a canter now? Huh! Saddle Rufus, Mick. He was out this morning, so you needn’t be nervous, Bobbie.”

Bobbie’s lips tightened. Something told him that Rufus meant a trial by ordeal, that he, Bobbie, was to be tested. Condon’s face confirmed his thoughts.

“Remember I haven’t ridden for some time,” Bobbie said quietly. “I’m out of practice, grandfather.”

The old man's eyes were hard and anxious as Condon led a long raking chestnut out of a stable. A five-year-old, of great substance and quality, unfurnished as yet, but likely to make a magnificent horse.

He showed the whites of his eyes uneasily, and laid back his ears as Bobbie approached him. He was no horse for a boy to ride.

"Kape a holt of his head," whispered Condon. "He is a schemer."

Bobbie held up an ill-shod foot and landed in the saddle.

Good. Good to be there again, to feel the life beneath the leather, to gather up the thin reins.

"Do you ride him in a watering bridle?" queried Bobbie. "A plain snaffle?"

"He wouldn't stand a curb, sir," answered Condon.

Rufus walked springingly but sedately under the archway, and Bobbie patted the horse's neck.

"Lave motherin' alone," counselled Condon. "Howld him tight." The man opened a gate into a paddock.

The Rufus found short turf beneath his hoofs and light lax hands on his bridle. His strong back arched and he shot upwards with a buck and outwards with a plunge. Bobbie had a fleeting vision of a saddle beneath him as he went high and clear out over the horse's shoulders.

"*And* you said you could ride," came with a chuckle from old Bryan.

"I said I was out of practice, and I didn't know the brute had no manners." Bobbie rubbed his shoulder. "Mick's got him. Hold him, Mick. I'll get up." Bobbie was thoroughly put out.

The boy vaulted into the saddle and thrust his feet home. He sawed the bit across the chestnut's mouth.

"Can he jump?" he said sharply. "He wants sobering."

"The moon, if ye sot him at it," said Condon. "Oh, cripes almighty!"

For Bobbie set Rufus going. Sawed the bit again as the horse tried to plunge, got him from a canter to a smart gallop and went straight at a low fence at the end of the paddock. That it was a sunk fence and wired meant nothing to angry Bobbie.

He heard a roar behind him, incoherent and furious, as Rufus soared high above the wire.

“Get on,” said Bobbie, catching the horse by the head. Rufus got. They sailed down the lawn straight for Knockbui. A ragged double bank overgrown with thorns loomed in front.

Straight at it went Bobbie. Crash! into the thick thorns, breaking through and out into a soft boggy field.

“It’s full of rabbit holes,” roared his grandfather, but Bobbie was too far off to hear. “Mind the dyke,” rose the second roar. “God! He is going for the dyke.”

“It was wrong doin’s to put him on Rufus,” muttered Condon.

“That’s too soft,” decided Bobbie, steadying the chestnut, so he swung to the right and carried on, taking all his fences at a quick canter, and missing the dreaded drop fence, known as the Devil’s Dyke.

Only the chestnut’s activity saved a fall over a high narrow bank, which the youngster took from field to field, a method Bobbie quite approved of. The going became sound and for a mile Bobbie galloped on.

They crashed through a loose wall—Rufus was going too fast to take off properly—they floundered in and out of a treacherous boggy ditch. Bobbie pulled the sweating horse up at last.

“Now will you buck me off?” he said, with a flash in his eyes strangely like his grandfather’s.

Two more banks, high and green, too big to fly, though Rufus had to take them at a fast gallop, and Bobbie began to look for a road. He saw a dark object in the distance, flew at and crashed into another stone wall, and discovered that the blur was a man riding.

“Hello,” cried Bobbie.

“Hello,” came a somewhat grumpy response.

“Tell me the way back to Knockbui, will you? I’ve brought this horse along to give him a lesson.” The man on the road stared at Bobbie, looked at the ill-made coat and well-made breeches—the latter had belonged to Bobbie’s father—looked at the steaming horse, looked at blood running down an off fore leg and a knee already swelling.

Bobbie disliked this man. He disliked his perfect turn-out, his cleanly-cut tanned face and critical deep brown eyes.

“You . . . seem to have given Rufus a lesson,” said the stranger easily. “Hi, steady on there. Hi, stop,” for Bobbie took the brown chestnut back to put him

at the narrow bank on the road.

Bobbie pulled the chestnut up so sharply that his horse swerved and Bobbie himself all but went off. He recovered to look straight into the cool eyes which were watching him.

“Tailor,” they said most plainly.

Bobbie flushed scarlet.

“Is there wire there?” he said angrily.

“No, but there is a gate, and a nasty blind ditch this side. Ah, easy, you young fool.”

For Bobbie’s answer was to put Rufus at the fence. The horse kicked back cleverly, but blundered on his head on to the road, just saving a bad fall.

“Never jump on to a road when you can find a gate, my lad. I am riding towards Knockbui, so can show you the way. I presume you are young Bryan. My name’s Hume, Hickman Hume.”

Bobbie grunted and rode on.

“I suppose now”—Bobbie hated the rather slow voice—“that no one told you the old boy paid five hundred for that horse. By Happy Warrior out of a Red Prince mare he is.”

“Grandfather had no business to put me up if the beast is so valuable,” growled Bobbie. “It’s got no manners at all and I just lammed it along.”

“Apparently,” mused Hume.

“He crashed into two stone fences.”

“Perhaps you crashed him into them. Walls ought to be taken slowly, y’know.”

“I took ’em all at a gallop.” Bobbie’s eyes shone. “Topping it was, too. I came straight out of the paddock along to this road.”

“Out of the paddock near the stables! You were lucky, my boy: there is a drop called the Devil’s Dyke to the east there, and a bog to the west, and I suppose luck brought you just between the two. I should say the old man is throwing several fits at the moment.”

“He put me up to see me worsted,” Bobbie grinned elfishly. “I did the worsting.”

Mr. Hume’s glance at Rufus’ knee was more eloquent than any reply.

The two jogged in silence; the chestnut was going short on the near fore.

“You’ll have to go slow to get on with your grandfather. He’s difficult—go quietly.”

“Next time I ride this horse, *he’ll go quietly*,” snapped Bobbie.

“I expect he will, when the next time comes. Ridden a lot, have you?”

“A good deal,” returned Bobbie sharply, sensing criticism. “But I’m out of practice. I haven’t even had a bike to throw a leg over for some time.”

“Well, there is the gate of Knockbui. Robert had no business to put a youngster up on that horse. Rufus wants handling.”

Bobbie’s heels thumped the chestnut’s sides, for the cool slow voice insinuated, too plainly, that Bobbie Bryan could not handle.

“Morning,” said Bobbie, trotting away.

“A cheeky young brat,” decided Hume. “And all over the place. Can’t ride for nuts. He’ll never stay here.”

Bobbie rode quietly up the avenue.

A tense hush hung over the yard. Condon was pretending to polish bits, the stable boys hung about watching as time slipped by, and Robert Bryan stood waiting, waiting at the gate, having sworn himself into silence.

“He never done it better, even when the strange man lepped on Cossack,” whispered Condon. “He’ll eat that poor child alive.”

And into the yard, on a dead lame, sweat-stained young thoroughbred, rode the poor child.

“Hello, sir. There was no room to teach the horse a lesson in that paddock, so I just went straight ahead.” Bobbie jumped off. “He’s a lovely mover, but bad over stone fences; took two from the root. He won’t buck me off when I ride him again, I tell you.”

“God in high heaven this day!” Condon drifted from the harness room. “He has chips med of the young chaser.”

“He . . . will . . . not.” Robert Bryan appeared to find it difficult to speak at all. “God! God! Hot water, Condon, iodine.”

“I loved it, grandfather. I met a fellow who said one ought to go slow at walls, but it was all a fly country where we hunted. Rufus just flew the banks beautifully.”

“Indeed.” Robert Bryan put a big hand to his throat as if speech hurt it.

The men waited for the thunderbolt to fall, for the dam to break.

“Hot wather, Andy,” breathed Condon faintly.

“He’s a peach, though. I’d like to hunt him, grandfather. And—oof! I’m tired, and I’m sorry he’s got a knock or two.”

“The first fence was wired, sir,” Condon muttered. “An’ we to see ye facin’ the Devil’s Dyke with its twinty-foot drop. Andy, get the iodine.”

“Well, it was topping, anyhow. I’m glad he bucked me off or I’d never have had that canter.”

“Canter!” came in a hoarse gasp from old Robert.

“It was nice of you to put me on such a valuable horse. And let’s go to tea. I’m dying of thirst.” Bobbie slipped his arm through his grandfather’s. The old man towered up, looking down at the boy, the old face worked, then suddenly smothering a fierce growl, Robert wheeled and walked away, that young arm through his own.

“He has met his match,” squealed Andy joyously, “the old man has met his match.”

“It’s the sack ye’ll meet if he hears ye, Andy Doolan.”

“He is too upsot to hear me. ‘I put him along, he won’t buck again,’ Rufus eyah.” Andy upset the bottle of iodine. “An’ he standin’ there with the light of hell in the masher’s two eyes. I’ll get a slap of Lysol, Mick, if all the iodine’s gone from us, the cut is nothin’ at all, the knee’s the boyo.”

Bobbie meanwhile held an irresponsive arm and prattled on.

“The man I met, Hume, said you paid five hundred pounds for Rufus, and not too much either. I had a ride on Scarlet Lancer once and he ran in the National, third I think he was, too. He was jolly, and so gentle. That chestnut wants work, grandfather. A few rides like to-day would——”

“Would make a horse of him, no doubt,” said Mr. Bryan heavily, but the glare died out of his eyes and his arm lost its stiffness. “You are as thin as a rail, Bobbie.”

“We didn’t have a lot to eat,” said Bobbie. “Just a kipper or so for breakfast, and jam or butter. Things weren’t too easy, grandfather.”

“Ah,” said the old man angrily.

“Doesn’t Knockbui call to you? It does to me, as if it said, oh, I can’t

explain, 'I watch over the Bryans. I stand for them.' ” Bobbie stood, looking at the hill.

“They bury us on Knockbui, Bobbie. Maybe it does watch.” The old blue eyes looked hard at the hill; the only being on earth who had not been afraid of him had been carried to rest in the vault there.

His wife, Hylda. If she had lived, old Robert knew that the quarrel between father and son would have been smoothed over.

“I love Knockbui,” said Bobbie, stooping to pet Duck, the water spaniel. “I’d like a dog, grandfather, a nice one, which I could keep in the house.”

“I do not allow dogs in the house,” said Robert sternly.

“Mine would sneak in, I’m afraid. There is Yvonne at the window.”

Yvonne, bobbed, short-skirted, nude-stockinged, opened the long French window and called out, “Tea.”

She poured it out with prim deftness, but when her grandfather came near the table a cup clattered, or Yvonne dropped a lump of sugar or spilt cream.

“How you rattle things, Yvonne,” he said irritably.

“Not always,” returned Yvonne nervously. “More tea, Bobbie?”

Bobbie, looking very weary, had bundled into a deep chair.

“Old brandy would be more to the point. Bobbie, are you aware that your cousin is waiting on you?”

“Sorry, sir. I’m doggo. Hardest day Bobbie’s had for years.” Bobbie jumped up.

“I just came in to ask how Rufus was,” said a cool voice at the window. “Knee not too bad, I hope?”

Bobbie sat down and looked cross.

“The knee is nothing, Hickman, thank you; the boy went a trifle too fast at the fences, I expect.”

“I should have put him on old Shortlegs, Robert. He’d teach anyone how to do this country.”

Cool criticism. Calm impertinence. Bobbie gulped his tea and choked.

“Cake, Hickman?” Old Robert glanced somewhat pointedly at his grandson. Bobbie got up and handed plates with manifest reluctance.



“Takes a lot of practice, riding over an Irish country,” mused Hume.

If only the man would stop lecturing!

“Bobbie rode Scarlet Lancer to hounds,” said Bobbie’s grandfather sharply.

“Good sort of old crock, wasn’t he?” Hume enquired. “Ran up in the National the year they all fell, I think.”

Bobbie did not reply. His dislike for Hickman Hume deepened.

“Stay and dine, Hickman. I’ve got a bottle of the old brandy open,” said Robert Bryan.

“You brought it up like a brandy baby,” Bobbie chuckled. “It’s wonderful stuff, nearly as nice, once it gets down, as Dom.”

Old Robert said “Huh!” twice before he could speak.

“As Dom, you young ass. As Dom! I tell you, Bobbie, that old brandy could bring a man back from the jaws of death. Mild as milk, soft as satin, strong as steel.”

“If I’m dying I’ll ask for a glass,” said Bobbie softly. “I promise, sir.”

Autumn sunlight streamed into the fine old room, glinting on great bowls of chrysanthemums and Michaelmas daisies, touching the polished tables. A wood fire crackled in the big grate. It was peaceful and homelike, and no one knew how that promise would be redeemed.

But a strange silence fell on them, broken only by the crackle of the logs, and the cry of a peacock on the lawn.

“Bah! I like not such a silence,” said Yvonne. “It is an omen; some say a revenant hovers . . . a . . .”

“Give it some old brandy,” said Bobbie sleepily. “I’m off for a tub. A nice hot one, grandfather,” and as he passed the big figure he laid a light hand on the massive old shoulder and shot a merry laughing glance straight into the fierce old eyes.

“I wish to heaven he was not . . . what he is. Huh! kippers,” snarled Robert Bryan, stamping out of the room.

## CHAPTER III

BOBBIE slept soundly through his first night at Knockbui. He woke to a delightful drowsiness. A light wind stirred the heavy curtains of his room, a wind which came across the bog and brought faint scent of wild thyme and peat and tall meadowsweet.

Daylight-saving was still gripping the world. It was light, and birds sang, and Bobbie heaved a sigh of sheer relief. No clang of early trams, no whistle of trains, no rushing down to cook breakfast over a gas stove.

Peace, and a many-voiced stillness.

Tap on the door.

“Yes,” said Bobbie sleepily.

The voice of James. “Your shavin’ water, sir. The master says he’ll be goin’ off in twenty minutes, sir. At half seven. He’ll be ridin’ out with the hounds.”

“Tell him I’m too tired to go out this morning. I’ll ride later.”

“Save us,” remarked old James to the dim passage.

“All the horses do be took out in the mornings, Mister Bobbie,” he said.

“Well, they can leave mine in. I’d like some tea, James, in an hour or so. I’m tired.”

“Save us,” said James once more, and departed to deliver a carefully-doctored message to the big man who was waiting at the front door. The cold morning light picked out faint lines and wrinkles in Robert Bryan’s face, showed the patches of colour on the high cheek-bones, but the old man made a splendid figure, despite his years: upright as a dart, broad-shouldered, long-limbed, his movements those of a young man.

“Mister Bobbie is tired out, sir, this mornin’, and he’d like to do his ride later on. It took me tin taps to waken him.”

“Tired out. Huh! The soft young rat,” growled Robert Bryan. “He’ll get no horses here later, James. Wants training, that pup. Give me my whip.”

Stalking out into the chill of the morning, striding along. A man who was in a cold bath every morning at six-thirty; and Bobbie his grandson had

betaken his blue-pyjamaed form to the window, and was looking at the yellow hill, a smoke of mist about the crest wreathing it softly.

“Cheerio,” yapped Bobbie at the striding form.

What Robert Bryan remarked was cheery slug, but he said to himself, “Yes, this pup must be hardened up.”

Bobbie drank strong tea in lazy luxury, and loved the yellow cream floating on its surface. But Bobbie did not laze too long; he went to the stables just as the cavalcade of horses were being done up. Rufus’ knee had swollen enormously and the horse was dead lame.

“I’ve messed him about,” said Bobbie repentantly. “You do keep early hours here, Condon.”

“It’s the master’s habit,” said Condon. “I’m agin it meself. It’s too early to be exercisin’, an’ the horses would be all the better to take their aise, an’ go out at eleven. I have terrible trouble with their coats. But ye cannot change him, Mister Bobbie, ye cannot.”

A great gong echoed sonorously. Breakfast was ready in a small room which looked out on a flower-garden. A fire burned in the grate. Silver dishes gleamed, and Yvonne was lifting a huge teapot. One could note the strength of her slender arms as she raised it easily.

“Sorry I was too doggo to ride, sir.” Bobbie caught his grandfather’s glance at the ill-fitting tweed coat. “It was so grand to smell the country and to look out at Knockbui, splendid not to hear trams clanking by.”

“You’ll have to harden up, m’lad. Start with porridge now.”

Bobbie was faced with a plateful of steaming oatmeal, and put it aside calmly.

“Thankee, no, sir. We filled the gaps with Quaker oats when it didn’t run to kippers or bacon. I’ll give it a miss.”

“Eat it, boy. It’ll build you up. I can’t have you all peaky.”

Bobbie took a meagre helping of omelette and a piece of bacon.

“Huh!” exploded his grandfather, who was never at his best in the morning. “Huh! When you couldn’t run to bacon. Couldn’t run to. Damn it, boy, hadn’t you enough to *eat*?”

“Not always, not enough of what we liked.” Bobbie met the flaming glance of the fierce blue eyes. “I . . . we . . . we hadn’t got work at times, sir.”

“Huh!” roared Robert, gulping his mess of porridge and burning his throat. “Huh! Costello, if this is sent up too hot for me to swallow again, I shall dismiss Mrs. Dunne. Tell her so.”

“Very good, yer honour,” said Costello placidly.

Yvonne kept silence during her breakfast, which she picked at languidly.

“Such a pair of feeders. Eat those, m’lad.”

Two brown eggs were extracted from the shelter of a china hen, and placed before Bobbie.

“Couldn’t if I tried,” said Bobbie. “I had tea at eight, and such cream and bread and butter, and a lovely pear.”

“Huh! rotten habit, spoiling your breakfast. Costello, tell James no more tea for Mr. Bobbie, remember.”

“But I like it,” said Bobbie, unruffled. “And it’s inside same as if it was part of breakfast. And I’m sorry Rufus’ knee is so big, grandfather. I went out to see him.”

The glare died out of the old man’s eyes.

“Some stuff in you,” he growled more amicably. “The knee’ll be nothing, boy. That grand puppy Ransom,” he burst out, “is sickening for distemper. The best ones always go.”

“I’ll nurse it,” said Bobbie eagerly. “I’m good at distemper. Dad had Alsatians. Brandy he swore by, stimulants.”

“Huh! Jones has her on the sick bench; three of ’em are down.” Robert lighted a black cigar and went out of the room.

“Bobbie, don’t you bear him any ill will?” Yvonne, all in knitted white, got up. “You seem to like the old bear. And he ruined your father.”

“It was a case of Bryan temper on both sides,” said Bobbie thoughtfully. “Yes, I bear malice, but I want Bobbie Bryan to own Knockbui, Yvonne, and . . . oh, I oughtn’t to have said that. . . .”

“I don’t mind, I hate this staring English breakfast. Great teapots and hens’ eggs and cold boiled pigs’ legs,” Yvonne grimaced. “He doesn’t know I have my breakfast early and only pretend down here. I’m going out for the day, Bobbie. You’ll be alone.”

“You were brought up in France, then?” said Bobbie.

“Until I was seventeen, then my mother died and I came here. We lived at

a dear old château, and my heart's with France. I shall return there."

"Not if we marry," grinned Bobbie.

"*Mon ami*, I shall marry Anne de Joyeuse," Yvonne laughed, "but I must wait until I am of age, or our bear can cut off all supplies from me."

"Who's Anne?" queried Bobbie.

"Anne Gaston, Marquis de Joyeuse," said Yvonne dramatically. "His name makes grandfather just mad. A girl's name, but they are all called by it. Their château was next to ours. See."

She pulled out a flat gold case suspended by a thin chain, and opened the locket.

Bobbie stared at the portrait of a merry-eyed, dark young fellow with a jutting chin and firm mouth.

"He can ride. He would not fall off. He can shoot, fence, yet grandfather says he is a ninny just because of his name."

"Complications," said Bobbie, lighting a cigarette.

"Cave!" Yvonne stuffed the flat case back out of sight and flushed faintly, the faint rose flush which was so like the inside of a delicate shell.

"Cigar, Bobbie?" roared Robert from the door.

Bobbie shook his head earnestly.

"It'd make me sick," he said. "I like gaspers, sir."

"So long, *au'voir*." Yvonne went out with a lavish display of slim legs.

"Kilts," growled out Robert, "that's what girls wear. No reticence in 'em. Legs, bare arms, cropped heads. Tights next, I s'pose."

"Everything honestly on view." Bobbie's eyes twinkled. "Look at it that way, sir, better than making mysteries of God's fashioning."

"Damn good thing if some of 'em were mysteries. Bandy legs, an' pipe stems and things like pillows, all in pink silk or checked wool. Come into the library, boy."

The library was the most comfortable room in Knockbui. Wide and lofty, the walls lined with books. Deep chairs to snuggle into. French windows opening into the pleasure grounds. A big tidy writing-table stood in one window. A second table carried an orderly litter of hunting-whips and mementoes of the chase. Inkstands fashioned from the hoofs of old hunters.

Foxes' masks and brushes, pictures of favourite hounds.

"There's Rallywood, the best hound I ever owned." Robert lifted up a coloured photograph of a fine foxhound.

"Ransom's his granddaughter. Never told a lie, that hound, and was killed by a kicking brute of a race mare; and that's old Greylegs' hoof. Great horse he was. And that's Cherrylass's, poor old girl. She broke her neck over wire. It makes one sad, Bobbie, looking back. Somehow the great horses aren't there nowadays. Hackney blood spoilt a lot of our hunters."

A photograph stood on the writing-table, that of a tall slender girl with an old-fashioned slim waist and a curly fringe hiding her forehead. A little terrier was tucked under her arm.

"My grandmother, sir?" Bobbie looked hard at the pretty wilful face. "*Her* dog came into the house, I bet."

"Yes, Bobbie, he did. He . . . was on her bed when she . . . left me. And he fretted to death afterwards. She had a bad fall and got crushed. There was wire in the fence."

The old man looked out of the window.

"Father was like her, sir, wasn't he?"

"He was not." A sudden blaze. "He was afraid of me. He was never like her. Vera, Yvonne's mother, was like her mother."

"I don't think father was afraid of anyone," said Bobbie. "Perhaps he was afraid of not being afraid and of saying too much in consequence. He was a pig-headed Bryan."

"I am infernally complimented," murmured Robert Bryan somewhat blankly.

"When can I ride, grandfather, please?"

The old man's soft mood vanished at this remark. He thundered out that all the horses had been out and that if Bobbie wanted to ride he must do it before breakfast and not lie in bed.

"Well, now," said Bobbie, quite unruffled as the peroration ended, "there's a hard court, let's play tennis. I've brought my racquet. Yvonne's out, and one must do something."

"Let's play tennis! I haven't played for years. I'm sixty-six, boy."

"You don't look fifty-six, sir. And I expect you'd beat me. Have a game,

do,” coaxed Bobbie.

“Huh!” Robert Bryan made one of his customary rushes from the room, and Bobbie followed him. It was so lovely outside, the air silvered by floating gossamer webs, the trees just turning to their autumnal glory. So good to wander down the row of horse boxes and pat lean, well-bred heads; to look proudly at his own string of hunters, even if they had been exercised.

“I must burn the early dawn,” said Bobbie. He strolled on to the kennels, which were half a mile away. Jones, the kennel huntsman, greeted the heir deferentially. And Bobbie looked with joyous eyes at the hounds. He tried to learn some names. He petted wistful silken-skinned heads, and patted hard muscley bodies.

“An’ the master’s in a state over Ransom,” confided the kennel huntsman. “An awful state. She’s got it bad, and at an unusual time of year, sir.”

Bobbie went to the sick bench. A cold, comfortless spot it seemed to him, unheated, and smelling of disinfectants. Poor Ransom lay there, her coat standing, her breath fast and laboured, some food untouched beside her.

“The master won’t come anigh her. He hates ’em sick. I wish to Gawd we could cure the bitch.”

“I’ll cure her,” said Bobbie. “Pack her into a wheelbarrow, anything—there must be warm spots near the kitchen—and I’ll spoon-feed her.”

Before Jones could protest, the sick puppy had been lifted to a wheelbarrow and packed up in hay, and a stable boy, his eyes wide, wheeled Ransom towards the house.

Mrs. Dunne, plump and good-natured, watched the arrival of the procession.

“A warm house, sir? Save us. I was tweeny maid an’ your father here. A warm place, blankets. I never seen one of the hunting dogs brought around before. Well! Well! Let’s see—the stick house,” advised the cook. “Ye can clear a cosy corner. An’ I’ll get an old blanket, Mr. Bobbie.”

Having laid the inert Ransom down, Bobbie flew to the dining-room. He quested in the old fashioned *garde de vin* and seized a bottle of brandy.

“It’s the liqueur he said it would bring anything back from the dead,” said Bobbie. Then he ran back, and Mrs. Dunne helped him beat up an egg and raised Ransom’s head while Bobbie poured the liquid down.

“She is anear gone,” decided the cook, “the craythur.” But Ransom

swallowed the egg and a few minutes later lapped a little milk and fell into uneasy slumber, breathing quickly and heavily.

Bobbie slashed at an old blanket until a coat had been roughly fashioned and tapes sewn on to it. He slipped it round the sick hound, very deftly. Someone must fly off for a sheep's liver; a rabbit must be shot.

"Delia," said Mrs. Dunne, "could belt off to the butcher, but shot-guns she could not be meddlin' with. Joe, the keeper, is the lad for rabbits; we'll send a message to him this very minnit."

Ransom slept and Bobbie watched her, and gave her more brandy, and the bitch ate a mouthful of raw meat and slept again.

"She'll do," said Bobbie joyfully, "she's getting better already. Stimulant, that's what saves 'em."

Bobbie sat at the kitchen table waiting for Joe and the rabbit, which he ordered the cook to stew to rags.

"And you remember my father, Mrs. Dunne?" he asked.

"Surely I does." Mrs. Dunne rolled pastry tenderly. "An' glad we all are to see ye here, Mr. Bobbie. An' long may ye stay."

"Oh, I'll stay," said Bobbie. "That's good pastry."

"Me hand is as light as an angel's wing," boasted Anne Dunne. "Wait till I make ye a soffley, Mr. Bobbie. Like the froth of the say it is."

Kitchen-maids scuttled in and out with saucepans and vegetables, the odour of boiling bacon came from a big pot on the range. A great jug of cream and a dozen eggs stood ready for some sweets; there was no stint of anything at Knockbui. Riches for a Bryan, for Robert Bryan of Knockbui.

Bobbie coaxed the patient to drink a saucer of milk and soda-water and went up to luncheon alone. His grandfather was out looking for snipe.

Later on Bobbie put on some discoloured flannels and got his tennis racquet. He met his grandfather outside.

"Huh!" snorted Mr. Bryan, looking hard at the flannels.

"Come and have that game, sir. It's such a lovely day."

"Far better if you got a gun and tried your luck."

"I never had the chance of learning to shoot, so I should be dangerous. Joe will teach me later on. Ah, that looks a topping court."



"I . . . haven't had a bat in my hand for years. I . . ."

"But you'll beat me," said Bobbie.

Robert Bryan grunted, and with one of his swift rushes dashed into the house. He emerged in ten minutes, beflannelled and carrying a racquet.

"Come on," he growled. "It's exercise, anyhow."

The old man had been a good player, one who relied on his volleying.

He came padding in after his service and Bobbie passed him with a swift sideline return. Bobbie played well, he was quick on his feet and fairly accurate when he came up to the net. But Robert, smashing anything weak, grunted contemptuously.

"Your overhead game's all wrong," he growled. "All wrong." This after Bobbie had won the first set to one, and was four games up in the second. "You're all back line."

"Give me a lesson in volleying, then. Do. I don't use my wrist enough. Is that it?"

Hickman Hume came across the lawn and said "Hello," in surprised accents. The old man dropped his racquet and swore softly.

"The boy had nothing to do. I just came out, and—eh, beat him? No fear; I haven't the legs. You take him on now, Hickman."

Hampered by breeches and gaiters Hume took the racquet. He was a fair player, but he had to run to try to beat Bobbie, and having run could not do it.

But Bobbie's colour went. He grew hot and suddenly stopped.

"Had enough," he said easily, sitting down. "I'm melting."

"Had enough at four two? Play it out, Bobbie, don't be a coward," the cool voice mocked lightly.

"Better a coward than a corpse, may-happen. Is there anyone good round here?"

Mr. Hume reddened faintly. He rather fancied himself as a local Borotra. "Impertinence," said the brown eyes.

"There were some fine players at Redbray," mused Bobbie, "and I got in a lot of tennis there. I'd have a covered court here. Oh!"—Bobbie hurried off; he had forgotten Ransom.

"Of all the young pups," muttered Hume irritably, picking up the racquets

and balls.

Ransom was easier, her breathing less hurried, and after a third dose of egg and brandy she picked at stewed rabbit.

There was no shirking next morning. Bobbie was ready to go out riding at seven-thirty, but he looked pale and heavy-eyed, and shivered in the raw air.

Condon had saddled Smoke for him. Bobbie had hoped for a canter across the fields, but they jogged behind the hounds, bumping along through grey mists, the horses going listlessly.

“Hold your mare up,” roared Robert as Smoke stumbled.

Jog, jog, bump, along narrow roads, the blackberry vines spangled by countless dew-jewelled gossamer webs, the grass pearly by moisture.

“Take the hounds round by Cullen, Jones. We’ll go back. Come, Bobbie.”

The ride out had seemed a long one, but going back appeared to be longer. The horses, noses towards home, wanted to trot fast, and that bumping quiet jog must be kept to.

“Hold your reins. Bobbie, you’re half asleep.”

“B’lieve I was,” apologised Bobbie.

“I suppose you’d like to gallop ’em,” roared old Bryan; “that’s a boy’s idea, sweat all the flesh off your horses. Pace, pace. Harden up, Bobbie, you look like unbaked pastry. Don’t canter up the lane, get ’em in cool. Don’t doze again.”

“He is tired out, up all night with that pup,” broke out Condon, as Bobbie slipped off the mare. “None was to tell, but I must. He never left her, an’ she is better this morning.”

“With what pup? With Ransom?” roared the old man.

“I said I’d nurse her; she’s doing fine.” Bobbie slouched off. Condon now poured out the story.

“Took her to the wood shed, did he. He’s never been asleep. And she’s better. Jones said she couldn’t live. So there is stuff in the boy.”

When Bobbie came in to breakfast, he understood the peace-offering of a plate of porridge, three boiled eggs and a pile of ham, all laid ready for him.

“I have to thank you about that bitch.” Robert Bryan studied Bobbie’s face. “Have you . . . ever had an illness, boy?”

“I had pneumonia last year. It left me a bit shaky.” Bobbie eyed the eggs unhappily.

Mr. Bryan said “Huh, pneumonia!” and then “Huh, kippers!” and made one of his violent rushes from the room.

“He always does it,” chuckled Yvonne.

“He’s upset because I said we had kippers for breakfast.” Bobbie decapitated the eggs, and hurriedly hid their contents in the porridge; the shells and cups he ranged round him proudly.

“That’s better.” His grandfather swung in again. “Connolly.”

“Yes, sir.”

Connolly appeared to hover near the door.

“Tell Mrs. Dunne if she sends me up cold porridge I’ll dismiss her.”

“Very good, sir,” said Connolly.

“You haven’t eaten yours, Bobbie. P’raps it’s hotter than mine.”

“My God, no, it’s iced,” said Bobbie. “Take it, Connolly, carefully. It’s hatching three eggs,” he whispered.

“Pneumonia. How’d you get it, boy?”

“My waterproof let in the rain,” said Bobbie absently. “It was one of father’s. I walked back from a dance. I was pretty bad that time.”

“Damn kippers and waterproofs,” roared his grandfather, rushing to the door.

Bobbie went to his sick puppy, now rapidly getting stronger, and then he strolled away from the house towards the yellow hill.

Sun had dispersed the mists of the morning. It was warm and still. Bees hummed among the tassels of the ivy, wasps hovered, the air was a-hum with insect life. Here and there the sycamores were yellowing, and a few birch leaves had taken the hue of red rust. Bobbie went by a long path, tidily kept, a riot of old roses struggling with the ivy on a high wall. The path was wide, ominously so, for down it the Bryans were driven to their last rest. Ever without pomp of hearse and plume and black horses, but carried on a cart, and drawn by a powerful work horse.

How many feet had paced sadly by the high wall, how many Bryans had been carried past it?

Bobbie left the path, and struck across the fields, the yellow hill humped close to him, its sides scarred by outcropping slabs of rock; gorse grew there, and the coarse grass which looked so yellow in the distance. At the bottom of the hill, facing west, a triangle of ground had been walled in and a low stone vault crouched in the loneliness. Its sides were smothered by Virginia creeper, flowers bloomed on the graves of the few Bryans who had wished to be laid in the earth.

Bobbie shivered. So, striving and suffering, happy or rich, all came to this. He found a sheltered corner out of sight of the graveyard and cuddled down into it, smoking and dreaming, looking out across the flat green land.

“Hello, Bobbie!” Bobbie started. Hickman Hume, driving a big grey colt in long reins, had come up across the fields.

“Hello Hickman!” returned Bobbie.

Mr. Hume’s cool eyes expressed faint surprise.

“I’m lunging this fellow. Come on, Jim.” A boy with a whip jumped over a bank and hurried up the field.

“He dropped the whip,” said Hume. “Jim’s a rotten fencer. You’re looking peaky, boy.”

“The result of a ten-mile jog in pursuit of hounds.” Bobbie yawned and leant back.

“I’ll put this fellow over the big double here. Like to see it? It’s finikitty work, driving ’im.”

Bobbie said it ought to be quite simple—just hold the reins and shake the whip; and Hume replied, “Try it, young cocksure,” rather drily.

The man’s cool superiority always annoyed Bobbie. The boy got up, his ill-made tweed coat smeared by green moss, and tramped towards the big double fence.

Hume handed him the long reins.

“Keep him straight at it. Straight. Now, Jim; get on, Mist.”

Mist, the big grey, walked up to the bank alertly, decided that it was too big, and turned, plunging. Bobbie found himself immersed in a cocoon composed of rope and horse, which spun round him giddily.

“Not so easy as it looks. Straighten him, Jim. Now hold the reins, boy, put him at it.”

“Get on, you,” roared Bobbie angrily. “Hit him, Jim.”

The lash flicked Mist just over his tail, the horse jumped on to the bank and over, and Bobbie followed.

Not quite according to plan, as the rope tore his hands and he landed short, to slide over the top of the fence flat on his stomach and plop into the ditch as he let the rope reins go.

“The colt will be apt to do himself mischief,” remarked Jim dispassionately. “He is gone wild entirely.”

Bobbie, covered with duck-weed, emerged from his lair.

“Come out, Undine,” snapped Hume. “You were a softy to let go of the ropes.”

“Rude brute,” commented Bobbie damply. “I hope Jim’ll never catch the nasty beast.”

Bobbie went towards home, for Jim cornered the grey against the wall of the graveyard. Bobbie was wet and bruised and cross; the memory of coolly contemptuous eyes was sorer than his smarting hands.

“Sakes alive! Were ye dippin’?” Old Connolly met Bobbie at the front door of Knockbui. “And the master fox-trottin’ since twelve with a glass of the ’98 an’ a biscuit. Let ye run an’ change quick, sir.”

Robert Bryan came out of the library.

“What the hell!” he began. “You’re a waterfall, boy.”

“I fell into a ditch,” explained Bobbie. “Trying to long-rein a grey horse. And it’s time to feed Ransom.” He fled.

“The clothes dripping on him and he off to the sick hound.” Connolly shook his grey head.

“Pneumonia, kippers, huh!” Mr. Bryan went out the hall door and in again in record time. “Get the old brandy, James, and give Mr. Bobbie a glass directly he returns.”

“I cannot, he tuk it for the pup,” said Connolly calmly.

“He . . . took the old . . . brandy . . . for the . . .” Robert Bryan went in and out again, beating his own previous record. “That boy will be the death of me, Connolly.”

“He’ll be apt to bring on the appleplexey,” mused Connolly, and aloud: “He is a Bryan to his toes, sir.”

Mr. Bryan went into the library, banged the door and then called to his own man.

“Get Mr. Bobbie into dry clothes at once, James—if he has any. See to him.”

“Very good, sir,” said James. “He is mixin’ up stewed rabbit in the kitchen, sir, and makin’ eggs and brandy for Ransom at the moment, sir.”

“Put the egg and brandy down Mr. Bobbie’s throat. Hang Ransom!” roared the old man.

## CHAPTER IV

“BOBBIE.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Bobbie, *was* it necessary to choose the liqueur brandy for your sick puppy?”

“I took it because you said it was so wonderful, grandfather. And the first spoonful bucked her up no end. Wasn’t she worth it?”

Memories of the hallowed ceremony of uncorking that bottle brought a twinkle to Bobbie’s eyes.

Yvonne shuddered, for the old man looked very grim and muttered something about pups, keep ’em in their places in the pack.

“You said it would bring a man back from death. It brought a hound.”

The fierce blue eyes glared across the big table, glared at eyes which met his without a trace of fear in them.

“Huh!” Old Robert took hold of the port decanter and Yvonne shrank back, but it was merely pushed along the table.

“Take a glass, Bobbie. It’ll do you good.”

“I had to drink port after I had pneumonia. Thank you, sir, just half a glass. But it was awfully dear, four and six a bottle.”

Robert Bryan wilted in his chair. A look, blending anger and pity came into his blue eyes.

“Four and six. Kippers,” he muttered. “Don’t, Bobbie. It’s . . . too much.”

“It was too much for us.” Bobbie drank his port carelessly. “But, you see, a bottle at a time is always more; we couldn’t put it in as cheaply as you do.”

The old man’s big form sagged once more. For the nectar gleaming ruby red through its veil of cut glass was worth two pounds a bottle.

Yvonne, humming the Marseillaise, drifted out of the room; she was dreaming of Anne de Joyeuse.

“Bobbie”—old Robert sat up, looking fierce—“you must order some clothes. You cannot wear those wax dummy abominations; there’s a good man

in Dublin.”

Bobbie flushed, and returned huffily that he would rather write to a tailor whom he knew in London.

“I’ve got father’s kit to hunt in,” he added.

“Bobbie, what is your sister like?”

“Well, we are twins, sir.” Bobbie smiled. “I think that answers it. Peas in a pod.”

“I am afraid,” Robert Bryan drank his port slowly, “that you were . . . very poor . . . boy. I should have seen to it. I shall send an allowance to Robina.”

“She doesn’t want it, wouldn’t take it,” said Bobbie decidedly. “My twin has not forgiven you because of our father.”

The old man murmured “Indeed,” flatly.

“He wanted Knockbui, wanted to come back to it. He died . . . because . . . because . . . things were too hard to face. It is only to carry out his last wishes that I gave in and came over, though you know, grandfather, I like you.”

“‘The dame made a curtsy,’ ” whispered the old man helplessly.

“I am so stiff-necked myself, I can understand what you feel. Rob’s all right. So long, sir. Yvonne wants me.”

The old man sat still staring at nothing, his rugged face fell into deep lines. Long ago, he had sat in the same chair with a slight woman opposite him. A girl, brown-haired, soft-skinned, whose eyes had never drooped before his.

She had never feared him, and Bobbie’s father had been her only son. If . . . she had lived . . .

“‘I like you, grandfather.’ Huh! sauce.” Harshness returned to the fierce blue eyes. “I’ll teach that pup. I’ll harden him and put him in his place in time.”

Bobbie made no further excuses in the early mornings. He rode obediently through the chill grey mists, against cold winds. He learnt the hounds’ names, and grew accustomed to the slow jog.

After four mornings, his grandfather told Bobbie that he could ride again with Yvonne, who never got up early. So Smoke was left in. She was Bobbie’s favourite, and the second ride on her was a pleasant one.

Bobbie admired Yvonne from the crown of her broad-brimmed bowler to the soles of her well-made boots. She always wore brown, “the brown girl”



people called her. Her light build suited the ride-astride kit, she sat easily and well on her small, perfect horses. Her cool smooth cream cheeks were never flushed by wind or rain.

They galloped together across the fields. Larking over low walls or a drain or two, they went too fast for quiet exercise, letting the horses stretch out until their coats lathered.

“Grandfather would kill us.” Yvonne pulled up, laughing. “I love riding with you, Bobbie. Condon keeps me in order. Ah, wait until you see my Anne ride. He is like a centipede on a horse.”

Bobbie, feeling that comparisons were being drawn, hoped that the Marquis de Joyeuse did not use a spur on every leg, and suggested drily that Yvonne meant a centaur.

Yvonne, laughing, said that it did not matter; Anne was *it* upon a horse. “I get letters from him,” she added, “through a girl friend. Grandfather used to pounce upon the French stamps. If I were only of age, Bobbie! But I have to wait until I am twenty-four for that, and Anne’s mother urges him to marry. See, there is Hickman out riding. He’ll scold us. He’s got Belle Riche with him; they say he will marry her some day. Oh, the coldness of the English,” sighed Yvonne. “Just ‘some day.’ ”

She put her brown at a wall, sitting him perfectly as the horse soared over.

“Nice gruelling you’ve given those two,” was Hume’s first remark, as he eyed the sweating horses.

“I told you.” Yvonne shrugged her shoulders. “Hello, Belle, this is my cousin Bobbie.”

Belle Riche nodded.

She was a big, sturdy girl, her broad shoulders and wide hips giving an unpleasant hint of weight later on. Belle’s colour was high, and her eyes big and rather bovine, but she was distinctly handsome.

Bobbie’s eyes, taking in so much and telling so little, studied the girl critically.

“Cool those horses off,” ordered Hume.

“I’ll race you to the trees,” said Bobbie carelessly to Yvonne. “Come on.”

Bobbie set Smoke going in earnest. Yvonne raced beside him. Miss Riche joined in, and the three flew towards a clump of distant beeches. There were three fences on the course, which were taken at a dangerous speed.

“Young pup,” muttered Hume, cantering behind the competitors.

Smoke forged ahead. Brownie was all out. Belle Riche struggled on, her weight telling.

Hume suddenly caught his big grey by the head and passed them all rather easily.

The cool eyes for the second time, as Bobbie, reins loose, knees loose, made a last effort, said “Tailor,” all too plainly.

“Hold your horse together,” observed Hume. “Keep your knees in, young feller. He can’t gallop if you are all aflop.”

Bobbie slipped from panting Smoke, he was too breathless to speak, but he caught the meaning in Hume’s eyes.

Yvonne was as cool and collected as if she had never galloped hard.

“Brownie’s not fit,” she remarked. “She could beat Smoke, Bobbie. I don’t count you, Hickman. You came as we stopped.”

And then Nemesis, with a gun in its hand and a cocker spaniel at its heels, hurled a gate open.

Nemesis, splendidly tall, white-haired, blue eyes flashing.

What the . . . something . . . did they mean by killing their horses? Tearing across country and disturbing a snipe bog with their beastly noise?

“We were just having a spin with Hickman,” said Bobbie meekly.

“You! Leading these young fools into folly.” The storm of words gave Hume no chance of exonerating himself.

“Bobbie——” he began at last.

“My God, I saw you. You won, too—beat the children. You’ll have a groom out next time, you two. I won’t have my horses half killed. Get off now and walk them home,” thundered the old man.

“I’d have won if I had known Hickman was coming,” said Bobbie huffily. “I eased up.”

“You’d have won if you’d held your horse together,” countered Hume coldly, and rode off followed by Miss Riche.

Bobbie sat calmly in the saddle, and made for home.

“Walk,” said old Bryan.

They had to get off and walk, leading the horses along a rutty boren. The colour slipped from Bobbie's cheeks, he grew tired, and handed over the mare to Condon with a weary air.

A long lecture as to the proper exercising of horses was delivered before tea-time. Walk, trot, never gallop. An occasional slow canter was permissible.

"But I like larking." Bobbie merely smiled at his grandfather. "Hello! Visitors. Visitors come to inspect the heir, I suppose."

The visitors were the Martins, who had taken Ballyallea. Martin, tall, rather stout and very uninteresting; Mrs. Martin, slim and small and very pretty, her dark bobbed hair breaking into curls round her small face.

Then came the Riches, father and daughters, Laura and Belle; the O'Briens—two girls and a lumpish brother; and then fresh visitors arrived and were ushered in with ceremony.

The Hon. Julia and Jane Scanlan, relics of a bygone age, their ample skirts down to their ankles, their waists trim and taut, toques on their grey heads.

The Scanlan sisters refused to allow the wave of progress to wash over them; they stood as Canute on the shore, and dared the tide to come on. They still drove a carriage and pair; their faces had the smoothness of the skins of those who always travel in closed carriages and who take their walks abroad interned in blue gauze veils. Just up and down to the gardens and no more.

They were personalities in the county, and kept it in its place. And they had come to inspect Bobbie. Bobbie greeted them politely, gazed pensively at their skirts, and brought them some tea.

The Hon. Julia did not let him go. She catechised him with severity; wished to know what school he had been to.

"None," said Bobbie. "We had to learn something at home, y'know. Father taught us. I know all about Europa and all that kind of stuff, too. He was great on gods and goddesses. Have some cake?"

The Misses Scanlan accepted cake. They minced out their words rather laboriously. Bobbie pulled out his cigarette-case. "Have one?" he said. "They're only gaspers."

"The lady became one herself," Bobbie said afterwards to Yvonne.

The Hon. Jane dropped her cake. Smoke! Bobbie was lighting up. No one had told him that smoking was anathema to the two old dames. When they entered a drawing-room, the rest of the guests endured until they left.

Bobbie knew nothing of this. He held out his battered tin case calmly. Hickman Hume, a repressed grin on his face, held a piece of cake, which he was about to eat, poised an inch from his mouth.

Pink Early Victorian blushes mantled Julia Scanlan's cheeks. Yvonne declared later that the decorous mauve toque stood up, lifted by bristling hair. The Hon. Jane snorted.

"We do not smoke, boy. We detest it."

"If you just tried one," coaxed Bobbie, "you might get into it. They're so soothing."

Julia and Jane blasted him with fiery glances. Bobbie, engaged with a match, saw nothing.

"'Fraid of being sick, I expect," Bobbie went on. "One isn't, y'know. If you had a cigar now, it would upset you, but these gaspers are all hay. You'd be all right. Start right now."

The four smooth, well-preserved cheeks were scarlet. Four faded eyes flashed. And everyone listened.

"We do not smoke. We do not allow smoking. When you come to stay with us for the shooting you cannot smoke in our house, except in one room."

"I don't know how to shoot," said Bobbie with polite decision. "More tea?"

"We thank you, no." The Misses Scanlan, disarrayed, faced the odour from the cheap American. Bobbie took their cups, puffing carelessly. Belle Riche daringly lighted up also.

"Our carriage, if you please," commanded Julia icily.

Their carriage was delayed; the cockaded coachman was having his tea.

Bobbie retreated to pretty June Martin, and for the first time for years Julia and Jane were absolutely overlooked.

Full-skirted, toqued, they got up and walked to one of the French windows. The snorting of a Henry Ford outside added to their anger, for from it was alighting the ponderous form of Mrs. Hartigan, a genial old lady who had by sheer determination penetrated into the upper stratum of society, and was so impressed by her cleverness that she became quite patrician when discussing other people.

She made for the bell with a swaggering rush, two hound puppies surging round her.

“Dear creatures,” said Miss Julia. “Are they not, Jane?”

Robert Bryan came to the old ladies. He was distressed, but could not tell his other guests not to smoke.

“Dear creatures.” The Hon. Julia’s voice shook with rage. “Merry loves, Robert. See, they are playing with something.”

Safety and Sunshine were toying with a black object, rolling it over, biting it, both catching it together and having a tug of war. Their sleek coats shone; occasionally they laid their plaything down and raised their beautiful wistful heads to growl lovingly at each other.

“We adore hounds. We would walk puppies if it were not for the peacock, Robert. What a game they are having, the dears.”

“The hounds have a man’s hat,” announced Mrs. Hartigan in her piercing jolly bass. “They are tearing it, Mr. Bryan. I ran over to see your grandson. It’s great to have him here with us.”

Mrs. Hartigan’s deep voice implied that she owned Knockbui.

At that moment Bateson, staidest of coachmen, came at full gallop round the corner of the house, and he was hatless.

Robert Bryan opened the window, sensing tragedy.

“They took me hat off the table, sir.” Bateson rushed at the puppies. “No one saw them sweep it.”

“Drop it, Sunshine,” roared old Robert, choking a roar of laughter. “Hi! Bobbie, help.”

Sunshine, hat in mouth, lolloped away.

Bobbie overtook the puppy.

“I think the man had better borrow a cap.” Bobbie held up the ruin. “There is very little hat left, sir.”

Julia and Jane swept towards their carriage, skirts held up, toqued heads erect.

“Abominable mischievous beasts,” said Julia to the one-time darlings. “Home, Bateson. Don’t apologise, Robert. No, Jane, no bread to-day. The man cannot drive through the village in that thing. *Home*, Bateson.”

Bateson, crowned by the chewed hat, whipped up his horses.

“Bobbie.”

“Yes, grandfather.”

“Bobbie, no one smokes when the Miss Scanlans are in a room. Remember it in future. You have offended them.”

“No one smokes when they are in a room? Then they are egotists,” said Bobbie calmly. “Are ten people to be deprived because two will not float with the tide? It’s only fancy on their part, grandfather.”

“Splendid,” boomed Mrs. Hartigan. “My very opinion.”

“And Bobbie offered them gaspers.” Yvonne laughed helplessly. “Oh, it was too lovely.”

“Huh!” Old Robert tore out of the room.

Jane Martin sat by Bobbie and cooed to him. The O’Briens talked to the boy when they got a chance. Belle Riche hoped that he loved dancing.

For was not Bobbie the heir to Knockbui, and very desirable indeed?

Captain Martin’s face was extremely like a sheep’s, long and stupid. No one quite knew why he had left his native land to settle in Ireland. Had the idea of economy urged him to do so, it had certainly not materialised.

“He looks at us all through an eyeglass,” Belle Riche murmured to Bobbie. “But he has electrocuted the place and drained and bathed it, and now he can’t leave, he’s spent so much.”

Jane Martin ousted Belle, whispering softly again.

Yvonne, slender and neat, drifted about with a preoccupied air. She was thinking of her Anne.

“Isn’t Belle handsome?” Yvonne said to Bobbie, when the guests had left.

Bobbie replied that he did not see it. “Too bricky, too red in the face; not a patch on you, Yvie.”

“And here I have to sit,” burst out Yvonne, “waiting, waiting. And they are urging Anne to marry Luce de Santry, an heiress. Eighteen; she is just longing to be married. It’s monstrous.”

“You ought to face grandfather, and have it out with him, old dear.”

“But I have the fear of him,” said Yvonne calmly. “He terrifies me. Wait, wait until to-morrow; see him hunting hounds.”

The next morning brought its thrills, for it was the first cub hunt.

Bobbie blinked at a still dawn and wished that cubs were not such early

birds. But his pink coat was hung over his chair. He had been ordered, as one of the house, to wear pink. An old coat, but perfectly made; white breeches, good boots.

The whole house was stirring. Doors banged. The old man's voice thundered unmelodiously as he rushed about.

"Up, Bobbie? Up, Yvonne? I wait for no man."

They breakfasted before six in a chill room. Robert Bryan was a splendid figure in hunting kit, but his temper was not pleasant.

He abused his porridge fluently. To-day it was lumpy. He ordered the immediate dismissal of Mrs. Dunne, and rushed from the room twice.

"He won't really send off old cook, will he, Connolly?" Bobbie asked.

"Is it Anne Dunne that reared yer own father? She to go? That is only a habit the master has. Save us, what ails him now?"

A fresh roar and rush.

Ned, the third whip, had hurt himself, had fallen and cut his hand badly.

"How dare he choose this morning to fall on a broken bottle? I'll discharge him. Take Micky. No! Mr. Bobbie can do it. Bobbie!"

"Yes, sir?" said Bobbie.

"Can you whip in? You'll have to."

"I cannot," said Bobbie, drinking tea absently.

"You can't stand at a covert and tally a fox? You can't get tail hounds on? You shall. You're a ninny, Bobbie."

"Yes, sir," agreed Bobbie, quite unruffled. "If it's only to shout, of course I'll do it."

Robert Bryan attacked an egg fiercely.

"It is time to go. Where is Yvonne? Late again."

"Miss Yvonne has gone out, sir, to the yard."

"Gone out! Breakfasted in bed." A fresh outburst. A last rush for whip and gloves, a stampede to the yard, and more trouble.

"Where's your hunting cap, Bobbie? How can you whip hounds with a top hat?"

Bobbie couldn't say—so gravely that Condon rushed into a stable lest he

should laugh aloud and lose his place.

“Go for one of mine. Get Ned’s, then.”

A hunting cap several sizes too large having been procured, portions of Bobbie’s face could be seen under it.

“And, my *God*, your boots are too big for you.”

“They were father’s,” said Bobbie, looking at a slim leg. “I can pad ’em out, sir.”

“You’re a scarecrow, Bobbie. I’ll see to it. Ah, gently there.”

The Master’s voice changed as the hounds rushed at him, leaping round his big grey horse, flinging little joyous notes to their huntsman.

“Gently, Drummer; down, Ravisher; own brother to Ransom, Bobbie. Co-op, my lads and lassies.”

Twenty couples, sterns waving; lovely heads look up. Puppies wondering what it all meant. Old hounds eager to be off.

Jones fell in ahead. Jack and Bobbie and the Master brought up the rear.

Off. The sky a pall of smoky grey, gossamer webs bejewelled by dew floating everywhere, every blade of grass spangled by beads of moisture.

Bobbie was on Harkaway, a rather headstrong chestnut. The horse put up his back and plunged and a hound yelped.

“Keep him steady, you, Bobbie. You’re not out to dance on my hounds.”

On at the steady hound jog which eats up miles so swiftly. Blackberries hung purple on their yellowing vines in the hedges; the thorns were thick with scarlet berries; the smoky grey of the sky commenced to take on a red tinge as though a great fire had been lighted behind it.

“There’ll be a roaring sun by eight and no scent,” barked old Robert. “Get back there, Challenger.”

Challenger, a big puppy, saw a pig, a nice juicy grunting pig, and it was too much for him. He put the porker through a gap and gave chase.

“Get him back, Bobbie. Get him back, I say.”

“Poor lamb,” said Bobbie mildly. “Get back, Challenger, you bad dog. ’Ware pigs, old thing. ’Ware pigs.”

Challenger, rounded off, made for the road.



“Whip him in, Bobbie. Give him his lesson. What are you out for?”

Bobbie unfurled his lash and let out at Challenger, but he missed the puppy and caught the Star, the Master’s grey, on the quarter.

The outraged animal bounded forward, landing among the pack, scattering them, and knocking down Challenger, who yelled wildly.

One of the many strange contradictions in old Bryan’s temper was made manifest. He was never angry with an animal.

“Steady, old man. Steady, Star. What’s up, lad?” One hand firm on the reins, the other patting the Star’s neck.

“What on earth frightened him, Jack?” Robert was quite unaware of Bobbie’s bad aim.

“Maybe a wasp picked him,” muttered Jack nervously, “or it might be a bee or one of them wingy ants.”

“Idiot,” roared old Robert, still petting his horse. “I didn’t tell you to kill that pup, Bobbie.” Challenger was still wailing.

“I don’t think your horse has really hurt him,” said Bobbie thoughtfully. “He’ll be all right. Co-op, poor old Challenger, and ’ware pigs, I tell you.”

Robert Bryan pushed up his velvet cap. ’Ware pigs was too much for him.

“If you ever call that out again, Bobbie, I’ll . . . I’ll . . .”

“I thought one said ’ware to everything hounds chase, except foxes,” Bobbie resumed, bumping to the jog. “Grandfather,” he remarked.

“Well?” in a muffled roar over a huge shoulder.

“Why can’t one hunt cubs in the daytime?”

“Scent,” snarled the Master. “Heat. Here we are at Ballydale.” They stopped at big iron gates and some people were waiting for them: Hume, the two Riche girls, Martin, Frank Weshopp, a genial youth who lived by making and selling young horses; also a couple of dealers on animals of dubious worth.

No waiting for cub-hunting. Hounds were put into the woods at once.

“Watch the puppies, Bobbie. Don’t let ’em flop about. Rate ’em if they open on rabbits.”

Bobbie went along the edge of the wood and took a place there. Little cotton-tails scurried to their holes, and the puppies chased them. Challenger,

bereft of his pig, caught one cleverly.

“You are a very bad pup, Challenger,” admonished Bobbie. “Ah, naughty dog. Leave it and get a fox, man.”

“Nought here.” Jones came through the wood. “We’ll go to the round wood.”

Bobbie was ordered to take up a position at the western side of the wood. He whispered to Laura Riche as he passed her: “Come down with me. Slip along.”

Hounds rushed through thick undergrowth. A bitch’s sharp, peevish note rang out and was taken up and confirmed, and the wood rang to it. A brace of foxes, if not more, were on foot.

“Isn’t it glorious?” Bobbie said. “Listen to them.”

The horn twanged sharply at the far side of the covert.

“I wonder if they’ve gone off. Oh, Lord!”

A fox stole to the bank and jumped into the field. A big old fox, grey muzzled, long and lean. He listened and loped off.

Bobbie’s shrill “Gone away!” was well given.

Five or six couples came crashing to it.

“Gone away, forrard away,” screeched Bobbie. “Get on, hounds, get on to it. Oh, fun. What glorious fun.”

Chantry and Dragon, old hounds, were only too eager to get on to it. Challenger joined them ecstatically; better this than pigs.

Is there any finer sight on earth than to see hounds swing and cast, and then race away hot on their fox? Other hounds dashed out and joined in.

“Come on,” said Bobbie. “Come on. Oh, this is perfection.”

They ran across a wide field and came to a sunk fence, which Harkaway took easily. Laura Riche’s brown blundered over awkwardly. Hounds were flying along all together; other hounds were running up.

The sunk fence bordered a long field, and the two galloped up a steep hill topped by a crag.

The fox had tried an earth in this, and hounds checked. Far off the horns tooted madly.

“There is grandfather. He seems very pleased.”

Bobbie pointed to the big man on the big grey. Mr. Bryan's left arm was waving frantically, his right held his horn to his lips. Jones, just behind, was shouting.

"All *right*, he's on," sang out Bobbie, and the light wind carried his voice clearly. "He's on. Hurry up, slow coaches."

"Now *I* think he's cross. He was hunting another fox," suggested Laura Riche.

"He won't be able to see us in a minute," said Bobbie, as they flew down the steep hill. A high wall loomed and was thrown behind. Hounds carried on, and Bobbie's heart throbbed to it to the rush of the wind against his face, the swing of the chestnut's shoulders, the powerful lift of his quarters. Above all to the pied hounds streaming ahead, and the echoing crash of their tongues.

"Glorious," he cried, sailing far too fast into a high double bank.

"Steady," cried Laura, pounding in his rear. Steady? What youngster of twenty-two could steady with hounds in front on a dew-spangled October morning? Bobbie dug his heels into his horse and drew out on the right, galloping beside, but well wide of, hounds.

And then it was over. A peal of deep disappointed notes, a cluster of hounds round a rock.

"The beastly thing's got in," said Bobbie. "Yoicks wind him, my beauties. Yoi, there."

Bobbie was quite proud of his cries. He gathered up the hounds and turned to go back.

Pounding over the crest of the hill, a brilliant splash of scarlet against the green, came Bobbie's grandfather, a little ahead of him Hume, on his big black.

"I'm sorry you missed it," cried Bobbie. "We had a grand little gallop, sir."

"Sorry I missed! Huh!" the big old man's eyes flashed blue lightning. "Didn't you know we were on a cub or covert? God! boy, didn't you see me wave and hear me shout?"

"You should have stopped," said Hume coldly.

"I . . . thought . . . they were all after my fox. I thought you . . . were cheering me on. I was sure . . . you were delighted."

Bobbie's lips trembled; his cheeks grew red and then white; he looked angrily at Hume.

The kink in his grandfather's temper manifested itself again. The flash died out of his fierce eyes.

"How the dickens could the lad know?" he grumbled. "You be quiet, Hickman. But if you see me wave again, don't you take it for applause, my boy. I lost my other fox on account of you."

"Well, it was topping, anyhow." Bobbie recovered his serenity. "And didn't they chase him too. He's in a hole up there, all comfy, the cowardly beast."

"Get to your place," snapped old Robert. "Jones, go to . . . oh, hell."

"Yes, sir," agreed Jones politely.

They jogged back. The sun was strong now, drying up the dew diamonds. The colouring leaves made a mass of soft reds and yellows. Bees buzzed among the ivy, and belated wasps went by, flashing their mischievous yellow bodies; the horses moved lightly across the pasture.

Far off, high mountains nosed, mist-shrouded, into the clear sky.

A bog lay to the west, its grasses turning to a sea of dull brown.

Ireland knows lights of purple and silver, shadows blue and grey which no other country can dream of. Wild as her sons, fair as her daughters, she can lay hands about a heart, and whisper that she must be loved, despite her faults.

Bobbie gave a quick short sigh, for he felt the touch of the hands, heard the whisper of the soft voice, and knew that he loved his father's country.

They passed by the shell of Ballydale House. It had been burnt down to four gaunt walls, with the green ivy climbing up them as if to hide the gaping wounds.

A mute witness to folly. For no men worked in the big gardens now, and the stables, which had given employment to many grooms, were becoming ruins.

Wild politicians had gloried in an orgy of destruction, and had hurt no one save the sons of their own country.

They trotted on to a long wood of larch, and hounds were put in. Bobbie took cover well out of sight.

Hounds opened at once, but when a puzzled, flurried cub scuttled past Bobbie and slipped away to the woods near the front gate, Bobbie kept silent. No doubt another fox was being hunted, and he had learnt his lesson.

In fact, when Gaylass and Gamester broke out in pursuit of the cub, Bobbie whipped them back decisively.

He heard the toot of the horn and an old fox broke to the east. But scent failed now and they could only work slowly along.

“It’s getting too hot, and this fellow is going up the hills,” the Master scowled. “Jones saw a cub. We might have caught him. Hi, there, Bobbie. You didn’t view anything, did you?”

“One cub,” said Bobbie. “I whipped a couple off, as you were hunting the other fox.”

Bobbie’s voice was tinged with the pride of having done right. His grandfather opened a stern mouth and shut it again as though adequate words failed him.

“We’ll go home,” he thundered. “I’ll teach you yet, Bobbie.”

Clouds gathered in the sky. The glory of the morning faded and a chill wind sprang up suddenly. As they waited, gathering up elusive puppies, rain began to fall.

Bobbie had to gallop back to the larch wood and unearth Rallywood and Waspish. Jack went further still. The rain came down in straight grey ropes.

Yvonne had slipped away and was at home by the time they left Ballydale.

The road appeared to have stretched as they jogged homewards. Wet got through Bobbie’s knees, came damply to his elbows; the chestnut pulled, trying to get on to his stable. Knockbui was a welcome sight, and Bobbie gave a sigh of relief, dreaming of hot water.

But a thunderous growl dispelled these dreams.

“Hi, you, get back with the hounds. You’re whip to-day.”

Bobbie had slipped his feet out of the stirrups.

“We don’t want him, sir.” Jones looked nervous.

“He’s got to go. Get on, Bobbie.”

The kennels were half a mile on.

Bobbie fell into place without a word.

“Go you back, sir. I don’t want you.” Jones looked kindly at the amateur whip.

“But I must go on if I am told to. Get on, you.” Bobbie flicked Waspish

and the puppy yelled.

It was pouring now, ropes of chill rain.

Yvonne, who had got home dry, was in the hall when her grandfather got in, and she asked for Bobbie.

When the girl heard that Bobbie had taken the hounds on, she shrugged her shoulders.

“He will get pneumonia again,” she said.

“Pneumonia!” Yvonne quailed before the roar. “Kippers, pneumonia! Huh! Cheap port. Quiet, girl.”

The old man was soaked, but he stamped through the house, waiting until Bobbie, walking slowly, appeared.

“You’ve been an hour, Bobbie.”

“I just ran in to give Ransom her tonic,” said Bobbie. “Oh, hallo, what’s this? A yellow puff ball?”

A glass filled with a nauseous mixture of egg and port was thrust into Bobbie’s hands.

“Drink it up,” roared his grandfather. “The yolk’s whole in it. Go on.”

“I’ll take it—in my bath.” Bobbie eyed the yellow pill floating in the ruby wine, and fled wildly.

“Connolly,” he called to the old butler, “I’ve got a yellow tennis ball here in a glass of port. Take it away and bury it.”

Bobbie’s bath was hot. He came back from it glowing, to encounter old Anne Dunne carrying a tumbler containing something frothy.

“Hearin’ you were wet through, Master Bobbie, I med ye a whip. Try it, Alannah.”

Bobbie tasted a compound of eggs, milk, whiskey, sugar and nutmeg, and drained the glass.

“Now *that* was good, Anne,” said Bobbie. “I dislike naked eggs.”

The rain passed away swiftly as it had come; the sun shone warmly. Bobbie sat by the open window and, lulled by Anne’s egg whip, fell fast asleep.

He awoke chilled, shivering, his throat contracted and sore. James knocking at the door awakened him.

“Luncheon is on, Mr. Bobbie. Is it asleep ye were afther that wettin’, an’ sittin’ in the windy too?”

Bobbie croaked an answer. He had acquired an active cold.

He came down shivering, declining luncheon, and begging for hot tea or coffee.

“I went to sleep an’ got a chill,” croaked Bobbie hoarsely. “Sorry, grandfather.”

“Did I not say it? I’ll make you a honey drink, Bobbie boy. A tisane,” Yvonne cried.

“Bobbie, you’re feverish. We’ll get up Dr. Riordan.”

“I’ll have no doctors,” wheezed Bobbie. “Swear I won’t.”

## CHAPTER V

WHEN dinner-time came Bobbie's cold appeared to be better. He coughed and his throat was sore, yet he laughed when Yvonne comforted him.

Old Robert looked anxiously at the boy, but Bobbie took all the blame, making light of his trek to kennels in wet clothes.

"It was all my own fault," he said serenely. "I messed about Ransom, boiled myself, and then went to sleep by the window. The world looked so lovely that it acted as a sleeping draught."

"We'll get Riordan up to sound you, my lad," growled Robert Bryan. "There you go, coughing again."

"Sure you won't. I'm sound as bells, grandfather, but I'm not accustomed to the open-air life yet."

Hickman Hume was dining with them. His slow superior voice seldom failed to irritate Bobbie.

"Office life plays the devil with stamina," he said now. "I s'pose you put up an umbrella when it rained."

"I never ran to one, Hickman; they were too expensive," answered the cool young voice.

Bobbie saw his grandfather wince.

"And—my 'tosh was more holy than righteous. I'm used to wettings, but I had no time to go to sleep in the daytime."

"If you'd take a cold tub," barked the old man, "as I've told you to, Bobby. I don't boil myself after hard work."

"Oh, I couldn't. Oh, champagne. How nice."

"Nothing like it for a cold." The old man's voice softened. "Don't sip it as if it was tea, Bobbie. Drink it down, lad. You're soft, boy, soft. But we'll harden you up."

"Soft things hardened too quickly, break," Yvonne muttered, her eyes fixed on Bobbie's flushed cheeks.

"Break, huh! Break." The old man was about to thunder out something,



when he checked himself. Yvonne liked Bobbie, and that was according to plan. These two must marry and reign at Knockbui when he, Robert, took his last journey to the yellow hill.

Horses would tramp behind him, and hounds trot past the ivy-covered wall. The horn would ring out, and he would neither see nor hear. But Bryans would still be at Knockbui. Bobbie would hunt the hounds . . . the fierce old eyes flashed again. How hang badly the boy would do it! “Mess ’em up. Mess ’em up,” Robert growled aloud. “Bustle ’em. Bustle ’em. Think he knows better than a foxhound’s nose. Port, Bobbie; go on now. I insist.”

Bobbie shook his head and waved the decanter away.

“Go on, boy. Drink it, I say. D’ye hear me?”

“Yes, sir, but I should hear nothing more if I took it on top of champagne.”

Those quiet eyes which saw so much and told so little met the autocratic angry look fearlessly. The wills of the two Bryans clashed. Bobbie had the power of surrounding himself with a soft yet impenetrable hedge of resistance.

“I . . . do not care for disobedience,” thundered old Robert.

“It’s not disobedience, sir. It’s self-defence.” Bobbie smiled serenely at the angry old man. “I dunno what I’m like when I’m squiffy, and I mightn’t be nice.”

“Oh, very well then.” Robert Bryan turned purple.

Connolly scurried out of the room to tell Mrs. Dunne that appleplexy was imminent.

Yvonne slipped away and asked Hume to put on the wireless. She felt nervous.

“Bobbie”—the old man leant back in his high-backed chair, his eyes blazing—“Bobbie, do you want Knockbui?”

“Robert Bryan should own Knockbui,” returned Bobbie steadily, but his colour faded. “I do, sir, greatly.”

“Yet you refuse to obey me. Is it the way to get what you want?”

“I did not mean to vex you, sir.” Bobbie stood up and coughed. “But I am myself . . . if you understand me. If I were to drink that port I should be sleepy and foolish. Don’t you see, grandfather? I cannot do stupid things even to please you.”

Not one trace of fear for that grim figure sitting so straight, for the

thundercloud on that fine old face. Quiet eyes looking straight and undaunted at other eyes. . . . The fire died out and old Robert relaxed.

“You are right and I’m wrong,” he said slowly. “I should not have tried to force you. It’s the Bryan will, Bobbie, the will which you inherit, my lad. But mine’s an axe cutting its way, and yours a . . . damn kind of cocoon which you spin round you somehow. Sorry boy.”

“Thanks; that’s that,” said Bobbie. “Come along, sir.” He slipped his arm through his grandfather’s.

“Huh! chicken legs,” growled the old man, striding on.

“Out of the room, linked,” announced Connolly to Mrs. Dunne. “Paycable as wood pigeons on a young cauliflower. An’ I thinkin’ the master’s eyes’d burn the young lad.”

“He is cool to burn,” replied the fat cook, pouring out a cup of strong tea for herself.

Yvonne, listening absently to the wireless perennial, “Who is Sylvia?” confided her fears to Hickman Hume.

“Bobbie has, oh, a nerve,” she said. “One day grandfather will thunder ‘Go!’ to him. And I do not want to reign here; the place should go to Bobbie. I only want my liberty. Was it not of a cruelty that they should leave me roped about until I am twenty-four?” Yvonne’s eyes grew dim with tears. “Mothers in France hold great power, and . . . I am afraid, Hickman, of a man’s constancy.”

“The French are inflammable, eh?” Hume smiled. “You will walk off then, Yvonne, on your twenty-fourth birthday. But . . . what of Robert’s ideas? He means you to marry Bobbie.”

“I do not marry little boys.” Yvonne flung up her little head. “What is Bobbie but an *enfant*? And I like him so greatly, so greatly.”

“Like him too well ever to love him,” Hume said thoughtfully. “Yes . . . love and aversion go hand in hand.”

“Then it’s a pity Bobbie is not a girl, and you would love her,” flashed Yvonne. “For you are always quarrelling. Ah! The Savoy! Let us dance.”

They had pushed back chairs and were swinging to the grating jazz music, just as Bobbie and old Robert came in.

“La. La.” Bobbie swung alone. “Come, Yvonne.”

Bobbie danced well, Yvonne perfectly. Old Robert watched them with a

smile on his lips . . . this was the perfect solution to the puzzle.

“Come, grandfather.” Bobbie seized the big man and pulled him out. “No, don’t waltz; just jig and shuffle.”

“God, it’s like hare hunting. Stop, Bobbie.”

“Let’s have a dance here, grandfather. The old speaker will thrum for us.”

“You don’t steer well, Bobbie.” Hickman stood watching the two youngsters.

“I do nothing well, O Hickman.”

“How differently everyone dances. If you blindfolded me I could tell every girl I have ever danced with by her step,” said Hickman Hume.

“Bet you couldn’t. Bet you, Mr. Cocksure. We’ll have that dance, and all the girls shall be masked and we’ll have a guessing competition. Bet you a fiver you make a mistake.”

“Lay you two to one, young feller,” Hume laughed. “I’ve danced too often with all the girls round here. Strangers barred, of course.”

“Oh, not a soul you don’t know.” Bobbie’s eyes sparkled impishly. “Not a soul, Hickman. Let’s have it, grandfather. We can choose a night on which we get the Savoy band.”

“Huh! dances,” said Robert mildly. “Mrs. Dunne’d have to get supper. Huh!”

“We can order things from Dublin. Oh, do let’s.” Yvonne charlestoned lightly.

“Of all the waggly abominations, Yvonne! Why can’t people revolve decently without becoming contortionists? . . . Well, I don’t mind.”

“And I’ll make the bet a level tenner,” Hickman taunted Bobby.

“Make it twenty if you like. I’ll win.”

“Look here, Bobbie boy,” Robert laid a big hand on the boy’s shoulder, “don’t gamble. It’s in your blood. And I’ll have no high play from you. Your father cost me a thousand once.”

“Poor dad. He loved a game.” Bobbie’s eyes darkened. “But he could not afford it. He always said he played poker bridge, just gambling on what his partner might have.”

“Then remember, Bobbie, you are *not* to gamble.”

Bobbie paid scant attention. Memory had called up his father's worn, sad face.

"He ought to have been able to lose," said Bobbie, his mouth growing taut. "It wasn't fair."

"Well, with luck you'll be able to lose what you like some day, boy."

Bobbie's eyes flashed. Was this a hint that his probation was over and that he was accepted as the heir of Knockbui?

"Is Bobbie Bryan then to have Knockbui?" he said unsteadily.

"We'll see, lad. We'll see." The big old man went out of the room, not with one of his customary rushes, but very slowly. Went to his own room to sit looking at a big photograph and remember eyes which, as Bobbie's, had always met his without a trace of fear in them.

"A puny lad; no Bryan," Robert muttered. "No Bryan, my Hylda girl; a bad rider, cannot shoot, and yet . . ."

He sat smoking his pipe far into the night.

Bobbie, when his grandfather had left, lighted a cigarette. Hume and Yvonne danced on. The youngster looked round the big luxurious room, lighted from big chandeliers. His father had often sat in this room, perhaps had first seen his gentle wife there; who knew? His father had eaten out his heart in vain longing for Knockbui, with his dying lips had whispered to his children a hope that Bobbie might get it back. Poor exile from Erin, banished by a fiery autocrat, choosing to stand by the frightened girl whom he loved.

"He, dad, must have been afraid," ran Bobbie's thoughts. If he had not been he could have made grandfather see reason. What do little things matter when life is so short? One woman instead of another, and dad should have had enough money for both. It was old Robert's crude desire to force his will upon others, his dread of giving in by one inch.

Bobbie dreamt, conjuring up that clash of wills, the stormy thundering voice. "My way, or you go!" Disinherited, penniless. The boy, stung to high wrath, flinging back bitter words. Oh, words, words which pour from angry lips. The gift of language misused, and years but little things which flit and are gone, until those lips are so soon dumb for ever and aye.

*Our* ways, *our* wants, with life so high on us, so high that it is as if immortality were in our veins. And behind us the grim reaper stands, and maybe sorrows, knowing how soon he will come to still that glib stinging tongue.

The young man had gone, the old man was reaching three score and ten, and the aftermath of those words remained.

And here—Bobbie’s lips twitched—was another striving for his own way, for Knockbui for Bobbie Bryan.

“Sunk in dreams, eh?” Hume’s cool deep voice roused Bobbie.

“Yes, Hickman, dreaming of war.” Bobbie looked up and looked down again very quickly.

“The Wars of the Roses?”

“No, the Wars of the Follies, my friend.” Bobbie danced off again.

“Take a turn with me, be Miss Bobbie. I’ll steer you.”

“I thank you, no, sir. There, it is over. ‘God save our gracious King.’ You served in the war, I suppose, Hickman?”

“Served? La! He is a colonel and got the M.C. and many wounds,” cried Yvonne.

“Two,” grunted Hume. “Two, Yvonne. Both in the back, too. We all served, Bobbie.”

“Father could not,” said Bobbie sombrely. “Good night, everybody—that twenty pounds is in my pocket, Hickman, and I want it.”

The dance which Bobbie wished for was arranged. Boxes arrived from Dublin, boxes containing fancy dresses and velvet masks, and as the night came nearer Hickman Hume still boasted that he would pick out every masked girl in the room.

He laughed at the idea of not knowing their steps and their voices.

A card was to be given to each man, and on this he was to write his guesses; say, a girl dressed as a fairy—Yvonne; a witch—June Martin, and so on. The girls also clamoured for cards and a prize. They wanted to guess the men’s names.

Bobbie and Yvonne stripped the carpet off the drawing-room, stuffed the old china into cabinets and cupboards, and decorated the walls with flowers.

The guests were invited for ten; they had to wait until the Savoy came on the wireless. It was a point of honour not to mention one’s choice of dress. Bobbie kept his under lock and key, and told no one about it.

The evening was still and soft, with a crescent moon hung in a silver blue sky.

Old Robert fumed and fussed, declaring the whole thing nonsensical.

“You’ll lose your bet,” chuckled Bobbie at dinner. Hume had come to dine. “You’ll not pick out every girl here to-night.”

“Bet you I will. June Martin, for instance, can’t disguise her swaggering walk. Belle Riche always starts off dancing with a kind of sliding flounder.”

“Under the circumstances, uncomplimentary,” mused Bobbie.

“Yvonne poises like a bird. Dunno what circumstances you allude to, young feller. Another fiver with you, Bobbie, that I don’t fail. Unless, of course, you import a stranger.”

“Done with you. There will be no one in the room whom you have not seen regularly. No, no port, sir. I must keep my head clear to-night.”

Motors glided to the door, and laughing masked figures passed into a darkened hall. Pierrots, witches, fairies, knights, devils, all effectually masked by velvet and black lace.

Then the wireless thrummed out a fox-trot and the lights went up in the drawing-room.

A red Mephisto, tall and sinister, twirled alone across the parquet floor.

“The dance commences,” he cried, swooping on a slim blue fairy, her green gauze skirt held out by wires, her white shoulders rising from petals of pink and green, long hair falling to her knees. Mephisto fox-trotted gravely, and wrote a name on the card.

“Oh, bother,” snapped June Martin, “and I’d even hired a wig.”

A Queen Elizabeth, vast and ponderous, was given away by the voice which had carried so many astray out hunting; there was no disguising it.

Mephisto bowed before a page in white satin, and asked for a dance.

“Lettice Hume, cousin of mine,” he wrote as they finished. “My dear, no man could own those feet.”

A geisha, black hair smoothed back, great red flowers behind her ears, pattered by with stilted gait.

“Come.” Mephisto caught her as she passed.

The mincing feet fell lightly as feathers; the geisha danced perfectly.

“I . . .” Hume paused at the end of the dance. “I . . . don’t know your step, Mimosa San.”

“No,” came the disguised voice behind the lace falling from the mask. “No, Sir Devil.” She trotted round him mockingly.

“Belle? No, I know her. Vi Bunn—no, Susie Lloyd. Hang it. Don’t go, Geisha, give me time.”

The geisha printed something on her card and pattered off, leaving the devil nonplussed. The rose-shaded electric lights shone on a pretty sight, on bravery of satin and silk, on sombre velvet and glittering mail.

Light laughter echoed when wrong guesses were recorded. The little geisha minced about when she was not dancing.

Once again Mephisto caught her as she passed him, pulling her close.

“No, I am weary, Sir Devil; let us sit awhile.”

She tottered out of the room, slipping to the boudoir next door, a pretty old-fashioned room bright with rose-strewn chintz, and next to the library.

“Geisha, who are you?”

The geisha fluttered her absurd fan.

“I can’t get you. Bobbie has played some fool trick on me. You must be a stranger.”

“ ‘A poor Japanese once sat at her ease,’ ” trilled a soft contralto.

“ ‘And an officer gay, who was passing that way.’ Geisha, you intrigue me. I want to know you better.”

Hume took one of the geisha’s gloved hands, rather tightly gloved they were, bunched up in stiff white kid.

“Geishas don’t wear gloves,” he said quickly.

“This geisha does, O unknown Devil.”

So she did not know him! Hume bent nearer. He caught a glimpse of a rounded powdered cheek under the lace fall, of a mouth touched to vivid scarlet; he saw merry eyes mocking him.

“Hang it, I know that I know you,” he said. “I’ve seen your eyes somewhere.”

“Many times, O Devil,” the disguised voice rang. “Many times.”

“And . . . I want to see you again, you witch.”

“Sir Devil, never again as a geisha. My life is a troubled one. We see each

other as through a glass darkly.”

“And I’ve a funny feeling that I’ve met you for the first time, the real you, that is.”

The geisha sat in silence, but the hand which Hume held shook a little.

“Keep to your muttons, Sir Devil. Riches are the devil’s wages.”

He started. She was mocking him. No, the geisha was staring into oblivion, no flicker of a smile on her painted lips.

“I want other wages, in the garden cool and shady.”

“He taught her to kiss, like the little white miss  
From over the Western water.”

Hume slipped his arm round the bundle of brocade and kissed the red mouth audaciously. For a moment he held her, a soft yielding thing, then with a laugh the girl sprang up.

“Not cricket, Sir Devil, not cricket. If it were Undine you might guess that way. And now fetch to me a tumbler of lemonade that we may drink to better acquaintance.”

“Geisha, I believe I’ve met my fate to-night,” he said thickly.

“And I know you have not, Sir Devil. Hi, there, for the lemonade. I thirst. . . .”

A table with drinks and coffee was just outside the boudoir door. Hume hurried out, leaving the geisha standing very still, her gloved hands held to her throat.

He filled a glass and came back. The room was empty, but a lilting song reached him.

“So she opened her gate, and sad to relate,  
He taught Japan’s fair daughter.”

Then silence, and the click of a door closing.

There was no other door that he knew of into the room. Hume ran round it, searching under the sofa, behind the curtains. The geisha had vanished, and a bell rang outside.

It was the signal that the mumming was finished and the guests were to unmask one by one.



A pierrot came down the hall, as Hume, utterly puzzled, left the boudoir.

Bobbie had made a bye-law. Every girl was to get into an ordinary frock before she unmasked, just to puzzle people, he had said.

So a flock of brilliant fairies and witches, Undines and many other things, ran upstairs, glad of the opportunity of powdering their hot faces, and a laughing flock of girls in georgette and chiffon and taffeta came trooping down.

Who was the geisha?

The cards were handed to girl after girl, who wrote "r" or "w" to the guesses. The geisha figured as Yvonne, as June Martin, as Susan Lloyd. Hume had left a blank opposite her name.

"He wins the prize. He has only one wrong. Bobbie, you've got four wrong." Heads bent over the cards.

"But I win my bet." Bobbie put his hands deep into his pierrot's trousers. The men had kept on their fancy dresses. Peter Dunne's bald head rose ludicrously above Queen Elizabeth's ruff.

No one save Hume had guessed Yvonne, padded as a fat cook, but Yvonne had won the prize for guessing the men.

"Who was that geisha?" Hume turned to Belle Riche.

"We none of us gave our dresses away, June? No? You say she was the fairy and changed twice. Susie, then. I don't know. Yvonne swore us to secrecy."

"I wish I knew. I've never danced with her, I'll swear."

"Looking humpy, Hick," said Bobbie lightly. "I win my money."

"Yes, you win and I lose, lose a geisha girl," Hume muttered. "*Who* was she, Bobbie?"

"That lass staying with the Lloyds, perhaps. I dunno. Come along to sup, and then we'll take turns at the piano."

"I left my cigarette-case in the boudoir." Hume turned into the small room.

His cigarette-case had fallen on to the floor and he had to search for it.

He sprang up with a sharp exclamation.

"He taught her to kiss like the little white miss."

The geisha's voice, lilting tunefully, and the click of a door.

Hume dashed out into the library, but the library was in darkness, and empty.

“Well, I'm *blowed*,” he said slowly.

## CHAPTER VI

CUB-hunting is delightful for those who like riding on crisp autumn mornings, watching hounds work and getting their horses fit. It is good to jump into a car and tear away through a murk of mist. No watching of clocks; one can always find hounds. Go out and ride for an hour or two; gallop over dew-spangled grass, brush through yellowing bracken, with gossamer webs festooning one's clothes, dressed in any old coat, a comfortable hat crammed on; then back, happily tired, to hot coffee and eggs and bacon and a bath.

But the business of cub-hunting is quite another matter. Ten, twelve miles to jog through fog or rain; the Master cannot choose his weather. Hounds must be punctual; there is no easy dawdling for them.

Bobby loved the fine mornings, but it grew to be an effort to turn out three times a week, wet or fine. And an effort to jog long miles to the distant meets, to have to remain until the last puppy was collected, and then jog home.

"It will harden you off," Robert Bryan often said. "You go with the hounds, Bobbie. I'll drive Yvonne."

Dressing by electric light on dark mornings, gulping a cup of tea, swinging, chilled, into the saddle. If it hardened Bobbie, it made him perceptibly thinner, and the cold which he had caught left a nasty little cough.

But he went out regularly, and learnt to know his horses and the country.

He found Rufus saddled for him one morning—the chestnut's knee had gone down—Rufus in a wild mood, his back up, his tail tucked in.

"The master says the horse wants a long day's work. Steady him, Mr. Bobbie. He's very fretful anear the dogs."

Rufus exhibited his fretfulness in the yard by kicking accurately at every hound which came near him. He proved himself a most unpleasant hack, boring, snatching his bits, shying at every bird in the hedges, sidling and trying to buck.

Bobbie was hot and weary when they reached the fixture, Rockbawn. He grew hotter still when the thoroughbred tried to bolt with him, which he did directly hounds were put into a straggling wood and a cub broke.

Bobbie and the fox did a Derby gallop together up a long field before

Rufus could be pulled up. When the chestnut settled down he was a charming horse, but Bobbie was not at ease with him. There are certain horses which never give one confidence; their riders sense some lurking mischief, as if the beast between their knees was waiting for the opportunity to do something wicked.

“Give him a gallop,” roared old Robert. “Take the stuffing out of him, lad. Don’t flop about.”

Bobbie obeyed. Smoke’s best pace was as a canter to this glorious rush through the air, her efforts leg-tied in comparison to Rufus’ elastic reaching stride.

“We’ll pick up a couple of point-to-points with him and then give him a try at Punchedown,” decided Robert Bryan. “That’s a great horse, Condon. He’ll carry me next year.”

“He has an ugly twist in his mind,” mumbled Condon, “an’ he is too much for Mr. Bobbie, sir.”

“Nonsense!” snapped Bobbie’s grandfather. “Boys must learn to ride.”

Rufus sobered a little, but never became really quiet, and pulled all the way home, a dead, slugging pull, hard to endure. Bobbie longed for Smoke or Tally Ho or sober Bidy as the miles slipped by.

“I didn’t think he’d ever put me on this horse again,” Bobbie said to Condon. “I cannot manage the brute.”

“The master is quare.” The groom rubbed a somewhat hastily-shaven chin. “Quare, Mr. Bobbie. I’d rather meself you was left off him. I mislike that horse.”

October days grew shorter. Frosts crisped the nights and blackened the dahlias, and the first meet was fixed for the 28th.

“Grandfather’s temper will be immense,” confided Yvonne to Bobbie. “He will rage all the morning, and probably throw his porridge out of the window.”

The whole yard hummed on the Monday morning. Grooms rushed about with saddles and bridles; bits were given a last burnish, horses strapped until they shone.

The meet was at Elm Cross, only eight miles off, but the house was astir by seven. Bobbie locked his door and took it calmly. For the first time he was to drive to the meet.

“Bobbie,” a roar roused him. “Are you up?”

“No, sir,” said Bobbie. “I am not.”

“Then get up. You’ll be late for breakfast. We start at 10.15. Get up. I won’t have unpunctuality.”

Bobbie got up. He had acquired new boots and a hunting cap, but he clung to his father’s pink coat.

When he came down, Yvonne, neat in her brown coat, was plaintively eating breakfast. She had been ordered to come downstairs for it.

Old Robert was attacking porridge viciously, and reading a letter.

“Bobbie,” he thundered, “I have to go round by Cahir Glen to see Hartigan; the fool has not stopped the place, and this letter has been delayed. You can take Yvonne to the meet in the small car. You drive, of course?”

Bobbie’s “I have driven” lacked enthusiasm.

Old Robert ordered the dismissal of Mrs. Dunne. His lips tightened. Young Robert Bryan, the future owner of Knockbui, sat at the oval table, but . . . many things were lacking.

The boy was no horseman. He sat moderately well and had good hands, but a plunge sent him on to a horse’s neck and he could not hold Rufus. The boy could not shoot, and showed scant desire to learn. Now, evidently, he could not even drive a car.

“Huh! kippers!” snorted the old man. “Connolly, tell Mrs. Dunne she can go; this porridge is awful.”

“Very good, sir,” said Connolly calmly.

“It is your own fault,” muttered conscience. “Your grandson never had a chance. You left him to be brought up in poverty, to work for his living in an office. Bobbie must be brought to his own, must learn to grip a horse, to master Rufus. The boy must be hardened until he becomes worthy of his name.”

Robert Bryan of Knockbui. “Huh!” grunted the M.F.H., flicking a glance at Bobbie—Bobbie, who got so palpably tired.

When the old man came in from a hard morning he was ready to go off with his gun, and the young one would slip away to read a book or laze in a deep chair.

“I’ll make a man of you yet, Bobbie,” roared old Robert across the table.

“Thank you, sir,” said Bobbie, meeting the challenge of the fiery old eyes

serenely.

“You’re soft, boy, soft. But you’ve had no chance. You’re not in training. Yvonne, your tie is not on. How do you expect to be in time, eh? Huh! without a tie. Absurd!”

“I hate tight things at breakfast,” said Yvonne meekly. “I shall not be late.”

“Huh!” again.

Yvonne was never tired. Slim and fragile, she seemed made of steel and whipcord. When the girl came back from cubbing she was ready to drive off to see friends, or to walk with her dogs, and Yvonne sat a horse as Bobbie never would.

“Well, I’m off. You know the road, Yvonne. Be in time. And bring that hunting-horn, Bobbie. You’re part of the show.”

“I can’t blow it,” mused Bobbie.

“*Can* you drive?” questioned Yvonne, when the long-nosed two-seater came to the door.

“Jim has given me a couple of lessons. And I’ve driven a Morris once or twice in England.”

“Shall I, then?” Yvonne asked.

“No. I’ll show him I can manage a car.” Bobbie flushed. “I’m not very fond of it, or I’d have practised. But I’m all right, Yvie. I know the gears.”

The car went into gear as a fresh horse might have plunged against the curb. It took three fresh plunges before top was reached, and they approached the front gate at gusty speed.

“Easy,” warned Yvonne. “Easy, Bobbie.”

Bobbie crammed on both brakes and put the car out.

“Never mind; one can start her so easily,” he said calmly, and he started her in gear.

But they got through the gate and streamed away down a narrow twisty road.

The small car was very powerful; she gathered speed too rapidly. They rushed along until they saw a tub trap driven by a vast man coming towards them.

Hoot, hoot. Cough, went the Klaxon. The man drove on without pulling his

reins. The road was edged at one side by a deep ditch covered by lacing thorn and brambles; the other was guarded by a narrow strip of slippery grass several inches above the level of the road.

Hoot. “Are you asleep?” yelled Bobbie, cramming on his brakes. The driver of the piebald pony raised his head. He was a low-browed, belligerent looking fellow, with fiery, deep-set blue eyes and fierier red hair, and his one redeeming feature, a sense of humour, was washed out by heavy potations of porter and new whiskey.

“Bobbie, it’s Pat Heffernan. He’s a savage when he’s drunk. Do be careful, I beg of you.”

The bulk of the man now became apparent—a hulking giant of a fellow weighing full fifteen stone.

“I’ll Pat him. Get to one side, you idiot.”

“Bobbie! Loughreagh gorse belongs to him, and there is always some trouble about the way in, and his sheep, and everything. Just wait and slip by.”

“I don’t care a hang what he is. Wake up, you man. Get out of my way, I say. Pull to one side or the other. I’ve no room to pass.”

“Dhrive on the bank,” the big man bellowed. “Do ye think the roads is med for ye’re oily cars?”

“I’ll drive over you if you don’t move aside. Will you or will you not?” Bobby turned scarlet.

Pat Heffernan did not know Bobby by sight, and the man had reached the angry stage of drunkenness. The pleasant fumes were dying, leaving a hungry desire for more.

“On your own head be it, you man. I can just do it, Yvonne, with one wheel on the bank.”

Heffernan grinned pleasantly and edged across the road just as Bobby dashed into first, and the car gave its habitual protesting plunge.

This plunge upset the niceties of steering; the car swerved, the mudguard caught the pony trap and upset it, the astounded Mr. Heffernan lurched over the wing into the depths of a thorny-laced ditch, and the engine went out, while the spotted pony, finding itself released, tore off at a lumbering gallop, for the trap righted.

A man’s head peered cautiously over the hedge.

“My mudguard’s crumpled, hang it.” Bobby got out to inspect the damage.

“That’s all, I think. Blow the idiot. Why the dickens didn’t you get out of the way, you absolute fool?”

This was addressed to the male Venus, rising from the thorny sea, scratched, festooned by briars, one cheek torn and bleeding.

“Half me face is below in the dyke,” roared the big man.

Bobby intimated curtly that had the whole remained behind the world would not have suffered. This was the match applied to tar. The giant lurched toward the car, towering over the slight figure in pink.

“How dared ye to hit me pony trap! I’ll have the law of ye. Drivin’ over dacent min on the free road. To hell with ye’re stinkin’ cars!”

“Scoot,” said Bobby, preparing to get in. “It’s all right, I think, Yvonne. No harm done. Scoot, you silly.”

A dull red flush mounted to Heffernan’s grizzled red thatch—his hat was in the ditch. His eyes blazed murderously. Scoot! as if he was a kitten. “You silly,” from this young pup.

“I’ll teach ye I’m no young cat. Me tore to bits and me pony gone wesht to hell. I’ll larn ye. Put ’em up,” roared the giant, clenching two mighty fists.

“Sorry I can’t box. If you’ll meet me with swords, I can fence a little.” Bobbie grinned, declining to take it seriously. But he showed no sign of fear as he faced the bulk towering over him, the bully, had he known it, of the countryside.

“Bobbie.” Yvonne stood up and caught up her riding whip. “Bobbie, he *means* it.”

“I’ll teach ye. I’ll larn ye not to turn men into ditches.” The great fist curled.

“Heffernan, it’s young Mr. Bryan,” Yvonne cried to ears deafened by rage. “Heffernan, *arreté* yourself. Oh-mon Dieu!”

Heffernan poised for the first blow; then the big knees sagged, the red flush died out. For he found himself looking down a narrow shining circle, a circle with Bobbie’s fingers curled round it ominously, though Bobbie’s arm was shaking slightly.

“Put your hands up. I’ll shoot if you come a step nearer, and straight too. Shoot you like a wren, you fool.”

“Firearrums! Cripes! I’ll take ye to court for threatenin’ me life,” Hefferman muttered, his colour sickly yellow.



But the huge arms went almost ludicrously skyward, and Pat Heffernan backed swiftly, still menaced by that faintly wavering circle.

“It’s young Mr. Bryan,” cried Yvonne. “Oh, Bobbie, what have you done! It’s young Mr. Bryan, Heffernan.”

The big man paused.

“Then if it is, ould Mr. Bryan an’ his dogs shall never cross me land agin.” Another step and a vicious thorn hooked the man’s trousers too firmly. “God in hivin, isn’t me face enough for ye wasters of thorn!” he yelled, as he tore himself free; then, with a last glance at the inexorable hand, Heffernan dashed down the road, running furiously.

“Scoot, you wren!” cried Bobbie jubilantly.

“Oh, *mon Dieu!*” said Yvonne. “What an *affaire!*”

“Wasn’t it lucky ye had a gun on ye? Pat’d bate all Ireland.” The hitherto unseen watcher leaped the ditch. “I was in dread to say a word. He is a holy terror with his fists, is Heffernan.”

Heffernan looked over his shoulder and, seeing there was a witness, halted and shook the said fists savagely.

“It was exceedingly well. Bit of an escape, what?”

Bobbie climbed into the car. “He’d have made a jelly of me in two secs., I s’pose.”

“I should have driven the car on to him,” said Yvonne quietly. “I had started her. But to carry a revolver, Bobbie, it’s dangerous, and grandfather will go mad about Loughreagh covert. That man is a fiend when he is drunk.”

“He is bad enough an’ he sober,” agreed Mat Dunne, the onlooker. “An’ the only thing is that he’ll not be ashamed of bein’ routed with a gun. A wren ye called him. I’d have got help before he’d killed ye entirely, sir. But he’ll never forget ye to name him a wren.” Mat Dunne chuckled.

“Thankee,” returned Bobby, crashing into gear. “Thankee, my friend.” Then Bobbie looked at Yvonne, mused a little, and replaced something shining in the pocket of his coat.

They were in time for the meet. Hounds were waiting by a big gateway. Horses were still being walked up and down. Lines of motors were disgorging men in pink and men in black, and women in smart habits. Spurs clinked, bits jangled, grooms hissed as they put their last polish to the shining coats of their horses.

Hunting, the mighty ruler, the great king, ordained that his subjects should smile as they waited for his yearly coronation.

The day was mild and still, the ground not too dry, and if the first draw gave scant promise of a good hunt, there was sure to be foxes, and galloping round the big fields would only settle horses down, before hounds moved on to Cara, or Loughreagh gorse.

Proudly aloof, in the midst of the motors, stood a half-closed landau. A stately carriage on cee-springs, with two shining sleek bay horses straining their poor cramped necks against tight bearing-reins.

The Hon. Julia and the Hon. Jane Scanlan always drove to the first meet.

Long ago they had hunted decorously, in long-skirted, non-safety habits with tight waists and little tails to the coats; be-veiled, top-hatted, modestly gaitered, poised on well-bred palfreys.

The Misses Scanlan never allowed that age had induced them to give up the chase. They had retired, they said, when apron skirts came in and women got off their horses and stood about in their breeches and boots, with a tiny flap of stuff just hooked up. "Horrible," said Julia. "Time for *ladies* to take to driving."

When this our cousin Belle Riche puffed a cigarette as she stood by the side of their carriage, they nearly denounced all hunting. But some innate love of sport brought them out still, looking with distaste at motor-cars and modern habits.

"Even if they exposed their legs in dark colours," snorted Miss Julia, gazing at Belle Riche's expensive leather breeches. "But to call attention to them. To see a tan expanse behind each time a horse jumps, Jane, is horrible."

"*Outrée*" agreed Jane. "*Outrée*, Julia."

The old ladies inclined their toques to Bobbie, who ought immediately to have gone over to the landau and said Good-morning. He merely touched his black velvet cap and looked for Smoke.

Yvonne swung into her saddle, as both Julia and Jane groaned.

"How Robert can allow her to ride crosslegs," said Julia piteously. "I have spoken to him, and all he says is she looks so neat."

Field money was collected; the great business of the year commenced as the dog pack crashed into the big wood.

A deep note rang and was taken up and confirmed, and a fox broke across

the lawn.

Out poured hounds close on him, fanning for a second, then away, their music echoing. Horses fidgeted, men, even though a hunt was most improbable, crammed down their hats and thrust their feet home into their stirrups. Only to the next wood, a cavalcade thundering in the wake of hounds, every horse stretching out joyously.

“Unless you’ve a second horse, keep your heels cool for the next covert,” said a kindly voice in Bobbie’s ear. “We’ll do nothing here.”

“Oh, I have a second out, thank you,” replied Bobbie. “Paddy, my brown.”

Round and round the big place, darting from wood to wood, until a cub was caught, and an old fox slipped out over the high wall and was gone so far that they could only crawl after him.

Yet Bobbie’s heart sang to it all. The soft moist air, Smoke’s long easy stride, as, excited, yet always tractable, she galloped along; the bursts of tongue in the coverts, the thrill of it all. Bobbie’s cheeks flushed, his eyes sparkled. It was worth—well, . . . everything.

June Martin, in a startling light-blue habit, cantered beside him up one long field. She liked Bobbie. June had a glib tongue; she gossiped carelessly when they were standing still, and Bobbie wanted to listen to the hounds.

“Belle Riche has got a new habit. I wonder when it’s going to come off.”

“Not till she gets home, I hope,” said Bobbie politely.

“Silly! I mean the engagement. It’s hanging fire somehow. I could never stand Hickman myself. He’s so superior.”

Bobbie nodded.

“But full of himself, what?” agreed Bobbie. “Kind of ‘no one can do anything ’cept me’ stunt. We’ve lost this fox. Now where do we go to?”

“Cara or Loughreagh.” Old Robert, in evil humour—he had been beaten by his fox—looked round him. “We are nearer to Cara, but——”

“Not Loughreagh! Oh, *non, non!*”—Yvonne, who did not often dare to speak to her grand-sire, rode towards him now and in among the hounds, and up to him, pouring out her story a little incoherently.

“Take your fences slower, Yvonne. What is it? You upset Pat Heffernan? He threatened to beat Bobbie? We can’t go to Loughreagh? Huh! huh! Go on.”

Robert flushed scarlet; his blue eyes blazed; he seemed to tower on his

powerful horse. There had been disputes over the celebrated gorse for many years. Now what had happened?

“Come here, Yvonne. Tell me slowly.”

“Oh, where is Bobbie?” Yvonne rode nervously through the hounds.

“What did you mean by this folly, you two?”

“What did we mean by it? The man was violent, grandfather. He would not move to one side, and Bobbie does not . . . er . . . steer well, so we tilted over the trap. *Comme ça*. Then he threatened to kill Bobbie, came to do it, great hands clenched, and Bobbie knows no fist work.” Yvonne’s English always failed her a little in moments of stress.

“So Bobbie . . . ran away, I presume.” Old Robert’s flush faded, and the lightning in his eyes grew frosty.

“*Non*. Bobbie threatened to shoot him as a wren,” said Yvonne simply. “It was Pat who ran away . . . oh, so fast. Bobbie took out a revolver. An automatic.”

“The devil he did!” The Master laughed, suddenly and harshly.

“We’ll never be allowed into the gorse again,” broke in Hume curtly. “Pat will not forgive this. I’ve never heard of a worse fool’s trick.”

Bobbie was cupping a match for June Martin; their heads were close together. A whip went galloping down for him.

Tall, slight, erect, Bobbie did not wilt before the storm. He listened quite quietly and without comment.

“Why didn’t you fight him, sir,” roared Robert, “like a man?”

“Because I can’t fight, and I don’t like giving in,” said Bobbie calmly, “that was why. He really meant to hit me.”

“You’ve lost us Loughreagh for ever,” shouted the Master.

“I . . . don’t think so,” said Bobbie slowly. “I . . . don’t think so, grandfather, really I don’t. Leave it to me.”

Robert Bryan said nothing more for a time. It was Hume who grumbled now, looking angrily at Bobbie. Loughreagh, their very best covert. It was too bad. Boys should be more careful. “Revolvers!” Hume shot out, “Nonsense.”

“What a crab cat he is,” whispered June Martin to Bobbie.

“You don’t think so?” Old Robert apparently had been reflecting. “Why

don't you think so? Huh! You'll give up that gun, my boy, to me."

A slow and quiet smile curved Bobbie's lips. His eyes, fearless and quiet, met his grandfather's fiery glances. He was not in the least afraid.

"He'll drive straight into the town and summon you for assault, or I don't know Pat," said Hume coldly. "It's a hang nuisance."

"But he made Pat run." A gleam of pleasure came to old Robert's face. "He made Pat run." A dry chuckle shook the big scarlet-coated body. "Well, Cara then."

"If Pat has gone to hale me to justice why not Loughreagh?" suggested Bobbie calmly. "If it's as good as all that, and our last chance of it."

"Loughreagh," roared the old man sharply; "the boy's right."

Loughreagh gorse lies in a sheltered hollow, with a bank country all round it.

Pat's slated house stands on a hill above the covert; the only way into the gorse lies across Pat's land, and he would only give the hunt a right of way to the place for a year at a time.

For the giant loved to bully all mankind, including masters of hounds.

Mrs. Pat, a stout and silent woman, rolled out to open a gate for them. She had endured many years of married life with her Pat, and seldom spoke when he was present.

"A great day for a hunt, an' two of them below," she said now. "An' they afther me ducks every blessed night. Himself is out, Mr. Bryan. He was at a fair this mornin'," Mrs. Pat sighed.

Girths were looked to as the hunt rode down to Loughreagh. A fox must go from it if he meant to save his brush.

Bobbie swung on his second horse, but Bobbie left it all to the groom. Yet he felt the tenseness of hoping for a good run, the undercurrent of excitement.

And hounds were scarcely into the thick furze when a big fox broke. An old fellow, who had learnt that there was nothing to be gained by dodging hounds in the strong covert.

He swung out wide to the west, hounds close on him.

Bobbie sat down to ride, but he got a bad start. The youngster had not learnt that a hunt is ridden in the first half-mile.

They flew on over a perfect grass country fenced by high banks, until their

fox twisted sharply to the north and raced up by the Heffernans' house.

Hounds over-ran it and checked. Bobbie welcomed the respite, for it gave him time to gallop up.

"Hold hard, you youngster!" rasped Hume's voice. "Don't gallop into 'em. Oh, sorry, Bobbie: didn't see it was you."

Bobbie flushed angrily. Hume had seen quite well.

The Master let hounds alone, and they cast themselves and swung carrying on towards the hill.

And fate, of course, ordained that Mr. Heffernan, his wrath deepened by fresh libations, should be coming towards his home, and that hounds should check again all round his battered tub trap.

"I'll teach ye to be tearing up me lands," foamed the big man. "I'll larn ye"—Bobbie landed on the road—"to knock me finces. It's the last time you dirty hounds draws Loughreagh. I've pison in the car."

"Be careful," whispered Bobbie, smiling softly, "I've got it still. Be careful, Mr. Wren Heffernan." And Bobbie raised his arms and moved them as if to simulate a bird flying.

Mr. Heffernan, bellowing incoherently, might have been understood to say that some people wouldn't crow so loud an' they in the court for threatenin' min on the public road. He stood up, tramping and swaying, until a board cracked and broke beneath his mighty feet.

"Wasn't the shaft enough, an' the mudguard, but to tear away me foothold as well?" he yelled. The piebald pony fled from a shrewd blow and rocked off at a gallop.

"It's good-bye to our best covert," said Hume as hounds carried on. "Oh, Bobbie, you have made a hash of this."

"I . . . wonder. . . ." mused Bobbie. "Let's kill this fox before he's poisoned, grandfather. Get a move on. . . ."

## CHAPTER VII

OLD Robert Bryan raged as he scanned a type-written letter. He rushed out of the room and back again. He dismissed Mrs. Dunne for ever. Yvonne looked terrified, but Bobbie drank his tea quite calmly.

“Now do you see what you’ve done, Bobbie? Here is a letter from a blackguardly solicitor, a fellow who owes me a grudge because he sold me an unsound horse and I made him take it back. Summoning you, *my* grandson, for threatening a man’s life, for carrying firearms without a permit, too. Also notifying me that the lands of Loughreagh are poisoned and that the hunt will be prosecuted for trespassing if they go there.”

“That solicitor has thought of quite a lot of things, sir,” said Bobbie placidly.

“It’s a case of humble pie or our best covert, of paying money to that oversized swine. Bobbie! Give me that revolver. I’d forgotten about it.”

Bobbie’s eyes, which took in so much and told so little, merely twinkled softly. He helped himself to home-made marmalade.

“Instead of eating orange jam, where is that pistol?” roared old Robert.

“I will give it to you, if you still want it, this evening, sir,” said Bobbie quite firmly.

“You’ll do this and do that!” Robert choked.

The wills of two Bryans met and clashed.

“Do you realise that you are here on probation young sir?”

“Yes, grandfather. I do not mean to vex you. And the man was never in danger.”

Bobbie was always ready with a disarming answer.

Quite quietly, Bobbie lighted a cigarette. A look of admiration crept slowly across his grandfather’s rugged face. This boy was no horseman, he could not shoot, evidently he could not drive a car well, but he was a Bryan. And . . . and . . . only one other being on earth had never been afraid of those royal rages. A sharp pang of memory wiped anger away. Bobbie reminded him of . . . one who lay in the green little vault on Knockbui.

With a last rather muffled “Huh!” the old man rushed out of the room.

“Bobbie, you should not,” said Yvonne. “Oh dear! it is to me as if a storm had gone down when he disappears.”

“I don’t want to vex him a bit,” mused Bobbie. “You see, I like him, Yvonne, but he must learn that I have a separate existence.”

Bobbie went to the yard later on. He ordered a horse to be saddled, and rode away down the avenue.

The miles slipped past until he turned up the narrow lane leading into Pat Heffernan’s.

The place looked prosperous. The big hay barn was full of hay, ricks of oats and wheat were waiting to be threshed. A flock of geese cackled loudly as if they resented an intruder.

A huge form bulked against the sunlight, and Heffernan, now sober, swung out from behind the hay barn.

“Well, young sir?” rasped the big man. So a Bryan had come to beg for pardon. Pat Heffernan meant to show his teeth. They’d see. Oh, they should see, these Bryans.

“Well, old sir . . .” returned Bobbie softly.

The boy on his horse could look down at the hulking giant. A great bully of a fellow, hard as nails, with cunning eyes set deep under overhanging eyebrows.

As Mrs. Pat peered from the half-door Bobbie sensed the presence of a friend.

“Well, my man,” drawled Bobbie, “I’ve come to see you.”

“Oh, ye have, have ye? Ye’ll do no good. Pat Heffernan is not going to be hunted around with firearms, the same as . . .”

“A wren,” mused Bobbie, flicking at his boot.

The man’s face grew crimson. “Joke let ye,” he stormed. “I might take fifty pounds to keep the name of Bryan out of sore disgrace. But”—Heffernan’s eyes shone. It was good to heckle a gentleman—“ye’re sport is done for. Done for. Herself put two chickens in the gorse but last night, with a fine dash of pison inside in thim.”

Herself moved to the doorway. Something akin to a smile trembled on her lips.



“A dirty rotten trick,” blazed Bobbie, really upset. “Your children might want to hunt.”

“I have no childer, only a darter,” roared the big man. “She is schoolin’ in a convent.”

“Oh!” Bobbie’s voice was honey-sweet. “You are quite determined, my friend the wren. You’ll summon me. You’ll close up the way to your covert. And you have done the lowest act on earth, poisoning foxes. But for that I might have kept my mouth shut, my runner. How you ran!”

Foam gathered on the bully’s lips. Mrs. Heffernan looked nervous.

“What choice had I but to run? With your hand shakin’ on the trigger.”

“Ah, it will sound so nice in court. I’ll tell everything. I shall pull out the weapon which you, the great fighter, ran away from.” Bobbie’s hand sought his pocket.

“Have done!” shouted Pat Heffernan, backing away.

“To a very frightened cowardly man it *might* look like a revolver. If held carefully, so.” Bobbie slowly pointed a hunting-horn at his enemy. “Just the end showing, see? I think—I think that they will laugh when I show my weapon in court, friend. The end is round and it shines, and I did not want to be smashed up by your hard fists.”

The big man’s knees sagged, the purple flush on his cheeks paled to mottled yellow. He eyed the hunting-horn as one in an evil dream. He, the bully of the countryside, had been routed by a polished tube in a boy’s hands. He heard the jeers and the delighted laughter. Every man whom he had battered would call him a wren. A hunting-horn! Only that. And . . . Pat Heffernan had run away.

“For the love of God, sir,” he muttered. “Anne, go about ye’re bizness, woman.”

“Pat Heffernan running from a hunting-horn! There was a fellow looking on, too. Gad! you did scoot.”

“Mr. Bryan—Mr. Bobbie. You’ll not disgrace me. I could never hold up me head agin; I’d be ashamed to go to Mass. I was but jokin’. I had drink taken. I’ll give a lease of the gorse. Come inside, yer honour. Ned will take your horse.”

“No. You have poisoned our foxes.” Bobbie shook his head. “I cannot forgive that.”

“Mr. Bobbie, I’m prayin’ of ye. Ye . . . ye . . .”

Pat Heffernan’s one saving grace asserted itself, his eyes twinkled and he grinned.

“Weren’t ye the devil’s pup to think of it so quickly, an’ me two fists up to batter ye? I’ll get them chickens at onst. Here is the man for the horse. Anne, Mr. Bryan’s coming in.”

“I have not said that I will let you off.”

“But ye will. The Bryans are dacent. Make a friend, sir, even if he’s a rough one. Anne, bile the kettle an’ get the port. I’ll be away to the gorse this minnit.”

Bobbie jumped off his horse. His head scarcely reached to Pat’s huge shoulder. He was a slim wand beside an oak tree.

“We-ell,” mused Bobbie. “I dunno.”

Anne Heffernan drifted from a small inner room and Pat went flying across the fields.

“That’s what gets my goat,” mused Bobbie, “the poison. That was a dirty trick.”

“Well, then, lave worryin’,” counselled the quiet woman. “For all that is in their stomachs is Epsom salts. It looks white, like poison. It might be a blessed day,” she added hopefully, “for himself must know I overheard ye. The cruel man he is an’ drunk sir, but he is kindly sometimes an’ he sober. Will ye step inside to the room?”

“No, I’ll stay here by the fire. You’re a good sort, Mrs. Heffernan.”

Back came Pat jubilantly with two untouched chickens, put away to be buried deeply. The big man fussed about his guest. He ordered eggs, and scones were baked on a girdle. Two heavy decanters of port flanked the teapot.

“I knew your father, sir. I solt him a horse. Signs by, he went a whistler and I was blempt for that same. A glass of port an’ . . . your word, Mr. Bobbie, to keep this quiet. You’re hand on it over a glass.”

“Here then.” Bobbie held out his hand, and having gulped down some syrupy port applied himself to scones and jam.

A big form darkened the doorway; old Robert Bryan had guessed where his grandson had gone to and followed in a car, raging as he drove.

Young fool, going off alone! A Bryan begging for mercy, pleading with

that drunken bully; and through the warp of anger ran the woof of fear. "Bobbie, he does not know the fist work." What if Heffernan was drunk and fought the lad, the slim brave lad?

"Are you there, Pat—er—huh! what, what?"

For Bobbie, the cause of the mischief, was sitting by the fire biting into a thick hot scone, while Pat, the aggrieved, was spreading butter on a fresh one, to have it ready for his honoured guest.

"Huh! Oh, Lord, eh, what?" Robert stared.

"I've made friends, grandfather. It was quite an accident, as Pat sees now. Good fellow, Pat. He was a bit squiffy, that was all."

"I had a bottle or so in, sir." Heffernan jumped up, looking anxiously at Bobbie. "I behaved stupid . . . on that mornin'."

"And he's giving us a lease of the gorse, grandfather. Top notch, isn't he? What?"

A lease! A thing striven for for years. How had this boy managed it?

"I—" Robert sat down. "A cup of tea. Oh, thank you, Mrs. Heffernan. I . . . how the hell . . . Bobbie?"

"These scones are spiffing. Thank you, Pat." Bobbie dived a spoon into the jam-pot.

"Thank you . . . Pat . . ." Old Robert drank some tea with a bewildered look on his face.

"Time to go now, I think," he said at last.

"You'll come to see me again, Mr. Bobbie, won't you? Herself is great at hot bread."

"Sure I will, Pat. On St. Stephen's day." A flicker of elfish mischief shone in Bobbie's eye.

Heffernan grew pale, and his wife smiled very contentedly.

"The day the wren boys do be round," she said, "with the poor little wrens."

Bobbie nodded.

"Howld yer gab, Anne," snapped the big man to his wife, but he looked at her with a pleading expression which was quite new to him.

Heffernan would not hear of young Mr. Bryan riding home. Ned would

take the horse back.

Bobbie, only too glad to miss the long hack, assented to this. He shook the giant's hand and got into the car beside his bemused grandparent.

"Like to drive, Bobbie?"

"Thankee, no, sir. I must practise in private. H'm, I see now. I let my clutch up too fast."

"Bobbie, *how* did you get round that belligerent ruffian? What did you say to him? I must know."

"Hand up you'll be mum, sir, an' I'll tell you. You see, I said I'd shoot him like a wren, and he bolted. And . . . I'll now return you the . . . er . . . revolver, now that its done its work. It wouldn't look well in a court, that was why he made friends." And Bobbie laid the hunting-horn on his grandfather's knee.

"Y'see, the end's shiny and round; and he'd have made jelly of me," said Bobbie frankly. "I had to bring it with me."

"Bobbie!" The old man stopped the car. "Bobbie, I see . . . you . . . you young ruffian!" Robert Bryan sat in silence for some minutes, then, "I'm glad you are to come after me at Knockbui," he said.

"Robert Bryan should come after you," said Bobbie, with a quiver in his voice. Probation was over.

"Huh! Hunting-horns." Old Robert laughed long and loudly, then he put Bobbie into the driver's seat and gave him a lesson, and never a word of abuse.

They found Hume at Knockbui; he strolled out of the house to meet them.

"I heard from Yvonne that Bobbie had gone off to try to trade with Heffernan. I'm sorry you went to eat humble pie, boy. Oh, you've made a nice mess. Loughreagh is gone."

"Kind of thing I always do," said Bobbie sharply. "You'd be quite sour if I did right, Hickman."

"Right! The lad has got us a lease of the gorse," roared old Robert proudly. "He . . . blew the fellow into a good humour."

Robert Bryan laughed again; his grandson was proving himself.

That night at dinner the old man, new pride in his eyes, scanned Bobbie's clothes unhappily.

"Is that what your London paragon turns out?" roared Robert suddenly. "You're very hard to fit, Bobbie."

“I thought I looked so stalwart in this,” said Bobbie meekly.

“Bantams,” Robert muttered.

“No, sir, Orpingtons,” Connolly murmured. “Our own hatching, sir.”

“Huh!” The old man showed symptoms of leaving his chair.

“Mr. Bryan was referring to pugilism, Connolly,” murmured Hickman.

“That’s *it*, the very thing. I’ll get Bobbie taught to box. I’ll get Rob Maloney over.”

“He’s the boy can belt,” cooed Connolly.

“I don’t want to learn, sir, thank you.” Bobbie sneezed. “If I am in trouble I can always carry firearms.” And he winked openly, calmly, at his grandfather.

“Save us and guard us,” whispered Connolly.

The old man turned scarlet, opened his mouth for a roar of wrath and changed it to a roar of sudden laughter.

“Oh, Bobb-ee!” Yvonne shivered.

“He has met his match.” Connolly rushed to Mrs. Dunne. “He has met his match. Anne, Mr. Bobbie pasted a wink across the table the same as if he was facin’ a sweetheart, and the master laffed.”

Robert grinned. “You’ll learn to box if I tell you to, Bobbie. I’ll make a man of you.”

“Perhaps. When the kippers die out of my system. All right, sir, left hook, straight on the chin.”

Bobbie clenched a fist with the thumb exposed, hit the port decanter and said “Oh-oo” ruefully.

## CHAPTER VIII

HUNTING, to those who never miss a day, is hard work. When hail, hunted by a north-east wind, sweeps across a sodden land, dimming the window-panes and making the roads slippery, or when fog swirls clammily, veiling the country, now rising as the sun tries to peep through, then gathering more thickly than ever, followers of a hunt, after a last look at the weather, can go back to bed.

“Jim wants to know will he go on, sir? He’ll scarcely be able to travel the roads.” Or, “Jim says the fog won’t lift, sir; will he chance it?”

No. It looks hopeless. Another hour in cosy warmth, a hot bath and a leisurely breakfast. But unless it is quite impossible hounds must go on from kennels.

The hunt horses pick their way over frozen pools, through the stinging fog. Hounds have to get to the meet and wait to see if hunting is possible.

We drive under cover; the hunt servants are often wet through before the clock strikes eleven.

Bobbie soon learnt that weather must never be made an excuse.

The month of November was exceptionally hard, cold and bleak, with heavy clouds looming out of the north and sharp ground frosts at night; but wet or fine, the Master’s grandson had to turn out. Sometimes he was told to hack on with hounds.

“Harden you, m’boy.”

Sometimes he drove. Bobbie was learning how to manage a car, but the three days a week were inevitable things.

Days in woodlands with scant chance of sport; days on ranges of hills, hunting backwards and forwards across rough ground. Bobbie learnt to watch hounds, he found out that every hunt is not a gallop, and how good it was to see the pack twist and cast over heather. And Bobbie loved it, even if there were times when he would willingly have stayed at home.

“Are you going on?” he said one morning when they breakfasted with the lights up and nothing could be seen outside but a blanket of fog.

“It may lift,” said Yvonne decidedly. “I hate fogs.”

“We cannot hunt if it’s too thick. Huh! damn all weather.”

They had to crawl to the meet; donkey carts were lurking dangers, the fog hung as a pall. When they crept to the fixture, hounds and the whips were alone in the chill gloom, then a few people came groping up, and a light wind stirred the hedges.

“It’ll lift.” Would it? It rose and fell and rose and billowed down, and then suddenly cleared.

“I wouldn’t trust it,” said Hume; “that fog will come on again.” Belts of fog still lingered here and there, wisps of smoke-hued mist.

Hounds were put in to covert and a fox was on foot. Scent was breast-high; he broke in a minute, hounds crashing out on his brush, away over a trappy, closely-fenced country, running at a terrific pace.

Then suddenly the world was blotted out and fences loomed, monstrous things, just seen by eyes full of stinging vapours; they could hear the hounds with eerie distinctness, rising, falling, dying away.

“Hang it, we’ll lose ’em.” Robert Bryan put his horse at a dimly-outlined mountain, which was in reality a low bank.

The cry of the hounds echoed faintly, swallowed up by the swirling fog.

Groping and swearing, the little field kept together until they reached a road.

“Have you seen the hounds?” Ned called out to a boy driving a donkey in a cart.

“I have so; they belted over under me ass’s nose. They are gone west across Mulcahey’s bog. Ye must carry on around it, for likely he is gone for the burrow at Standulagh.”

They groped on to Standulagh. No one had heard hounds there. They were utterly lost. The fog changed to thin penetrating rain.

“I’ll get into the car and see if I can find ’em. Bobbie, you take that road to the west, and Ned and Jones will go south and east. You don’t know the way? You can ask, surely.”

Bobbie had been dreaming of a dry coat and home. He rode on, his horse hacking badly, put out at going alone and away from its stable.

No one had seen any hounds, and the rain became fog again and Bobbie was soon sitting lost in it.

“Hello!” he shouted as a motor-horn hooted. “Seen hounds?”

“We can’t see ourselves.” He recognised June Martin’s voice. “Ray would come out, and we’re lost.”

“I say, let’s get in somewhere; there’s a wind springing up and it may lift,” said a second voice from the car. Something loomed and a dog barked.

“That’s a house,” said Bobbie. “I’ll find a stable.”

He found a shed and put his horse in and got to the house.

It was blissfully warm and dry there, a turf fire burning on an open hearth; brass candlesticks shone on the dresser, the dog which had barked at them wagged a welcoming tail.

“The woman says we are at Knockbawn, right up in the hills,” said June to Bobbie. “Quite out of our way.”

The lady of the house, a stout, pleasant-looking woman, nodded.

“Ye are, an’ crooked roads betune ye an’ home. Patsy, see to his honour’s horse, give it a taste of bran an’ hay an’ put a sack over it. And I’ll wet the tay. Mrs. Murphy is me name.”

The damp, chilled travellers looked round the cottage. A photograph of a man in uniform stood on the dresser, a couple of medals pinned to the frame.

“Hello,” barked Ray Martin, “your husband was a soldier, Mrs. Murphy, I see.”

“Pat Murphy, sir, B Company, the Munster Fusiliers. He jined up at onst, sir, the very bignin’ of the war.”

“And you were proud of him?”

“We never got on as well before.” Mrs. Murphy measured tea into her pot. “Never. He was a bit hasty, but maybe that was good with them Germins. An’ a great man he must have been, for the Commander-in-Chief to drop me a line over his death. He couldn’t be doin’ much fightin’ as to sit down to write letters for every poor soul that wint out beyond,” ruminated Mrs. Murphy.

“But sure I was tolt for a fact,” she added as she filled a sugar-basin. “Dennis Hayes tolt me that the generals only sat in houses an’ sounded telephones about guns and jam. An’ I suppose wrote letters as well; that was the bizness they did.”

Major Martin sat down rather heavily, then, invigorated by a gulp of tea, he proceeded to explain the real functions of great commanders, fluently, and



with much technicality.

Mrs. Murphy, having listened with due attention, made a fresh brew of tea.

“But Dennis was an orderly boy in the camp, sir,” she said. “An’ he knew for certain all about thim generals.”

“Give it up,” chuckled Bobbie. “Lord! What a night.”

A straight fine rain was falling through stillness, the cold of the fog was still in the atmosphere. Oh, hunting could be hard work.

Bobbie went to the shed, tipped the boy, thanked Mrs. Murphy and got on to his chilled, rather jaded horse.

He was directed to go back east and to turn west at the third next cross-roads, and then to follow on east till he met a public-house, and they’d direct him afresh there.

The Martins buzzed off in their car. Bobbie jogged along the lonely road. Hills towered to his left, nosing into the grey dimness. No sign of life appeared save an occasional donkey or goat, or the light from a cottage.

He passed cross-roads doubtfully, until he was confronted by three forks and there was no flare of sun in the west to tell him which way he was to go.

So he jogged in misery, the thin rain soaking him, and could not see a public-house, and asked at a cottage, to discover that he had come all wrong. Then the headlights of a car dazzled him and he heard the jar of brakes.

“Hello, Bobbie; where have you got to?” cried Hume.

Bobbie’s “I wish to God I knew,” was distinctly snappish.

“Hounds are home for hours; they got ’em at Shannessy’s, the fox had got in there.”

“I got lost up in the hills,” said Bobbie. “And they tell me it’s five miles on to Knockbui.”

“It’s nearer to eight. Look here, we’re just at Ballyalla. Come in and I’ll put up your horse and drive you back later on. It’ll be ‘Huh! pneumonia’ if you don’t, my boy.”

Bobbie hesitated.

“There’s the gate, where you see a light. Come along. I had to go out to send a wire.”

Bobbie turned in through wide gates and his horse trotted more gaily, as if

realising the nearness of a stable. Lights flashed, stabbing the wet darkness. Bobbie saw the outline of a long house, and a flood of light poured from the open hall door.

A boy took his horse, he stepped into a warm hall. Shanbally possessed the atmosphere of home. The hall was panelled, good pictures hung in it, cheek by jowl with foxes' masks and brushes, and heads of big game.

"You'd better change at once, Bobbie."

"I'll get on a dry coat. I won't change. Give me a warm sweater to put on." Bobbie followed Hume into a low-ceiled, wide room full of the comforts of a bachelor's den. Deep chairs, a blazing fire, and a table laid for tea drawn up near it.

Hume switched on lights, and rang the bell.

"Big drink for you, Bobbie. You look done up."

"Tea, thank you, and a smoke." Bobbie sank into a huge chair. "I've had tea too, up the hills with a widow lady, but I can manage some more."

The logs crackled and hissed. A sense of sleepy peace seemed to steal into the room. Hickman, in his dry tweeds, loomed up with his back to the fire.

There were eggs for tea and buttered toast, but Bobbie was not hungry.

"Old Robert oughtn't to have sent you off, Bobbie."

"Too big a fool, eh?" grunted Bobbie, grinning.

"Too big a stranger, in a fog. It's not all beer and skittles being part of the show, is it? But you're getting on all right up there, aren't you?"

"Fine," said Bobbie. "You see, the scheme is Bobbie is to marry Yvonne." He chuckled. "Grandfather sees red when he thinks of that Frenchy."

"You don't care for Yvonne?" said Hume quietly.

"Lord, I do; she's a topping sort."

"Not in that way, you are too great friends. One never loves without hating, Bobbie, my son. Whether it's a natural dislike of surrendering individuality or not, I can't say. But lovers always quarrel with each other."

"Do they?" said Bobbie thoughtfully. "A kind of instinctive dislike before the great breakdown. You know the ropes, Hickman, eh?"

Bobbie's eyes were in shadow, but they studied Hume's strong face closely.

Hickman Hume laughed. "Know? Oh, yes, I know, when the one being comes, one grows fanciful, jealous of everything, of everybody, of a dear dog caressed, a favourite horse patted, of friends spoken to carelessly; and so one must quarrel when one loves. See my point? It is only in the backwaters of life that patience comes. A man or a woman . . . well, they resent their own folly, perhaps, and when they really want to go on their knees and kiss the beloved feet, they snap and snarl instead. Kind of bellows blowing up the fire which burns so deliciously."

"Um." Belle Riche's handsome face, colour blown into her cheeks by fresh air, her soft mouth, her big eyes, rose before Bobbie. "Um," he said again, and snuggled deep into his chair. This was a new Hickman Hume. Bobbie waited for fresh confidences . . . for the announcement of matrimony looming near.

"I doubt if she'll quarrel with you," mused Bobbie, still thinking of Belle.

"Then she won't love me. Who wants to sail for ever on a calm sea? Haven is only delightful after rough waves and danger. So there, young feller. Don't just drop into matrimony to gain any heritage."

"Yet Bobbie Bryan must have Knockbui," he said. "It is his right; the loss of the place killed his dear father. Knockbui for a Bryan. They've held it for too long to see it pass to strangers."

"And you believe that Yvonne may be the clause." The old cool aloofness returned to Hume's voice.

"On account of the Froggy, yes. Good-looking feller he is, too. Looks a sportsman. He rides steeplechases. Wish I could."

"Well, I have said my say. I had better take you home now. And another time, if you are lost, carry on. It's fatal putting tired horses into sheds."

Hume held out a coat to Bobbie, who shrugged thin shoulders. The car sped through the dripping night until they reached Knockbui.

A big figure bustled against a blaze of light from the hall door.

"That damn little ass has lost himself," roared old Robert. "Gone up those hills and is stuck there, I s'pose, or shivering in some cottage. An' he'll be ill."

"I got lost all right," said Bobbie, getting out. "And I shivered all right too, grandfather, but I found my way back."

"And he would not change, either," volunteered Hume. "Just shed his coat. He's wet through."

"Get right into a boiling bath and I'll bring up port an' egg. Huh! James

will go to help you off with those things.”

“I object to being helped,” said Bobbie serenely, as he walked away.

“Pneumonia! Huh!” growled Robert Bryan. “Objects to being helped, Bobbie does. Won’t let my man do anything for him. Won’t have one of his own; says poverty taught him independence.”

“His boots won’t give him much trouble,” remarked Hume thoughtfully.

“Boots? Sacks! His father’s. Will wear ’em, won’t have new ones. Got some an’ discarded ’em. You’ll stay the night, Hickman. I can rig you out.”

Hickman Hume looked at the stream of silver wet against the lights of his car and accepted.

“That boy’s a fool,” growled old Robert. “Losing himself. Cheeky young beggar.” The fierce old eyes softened. “A regular Bryan if he could only ride and shoot,” he added half to himself.

## CHAPTER IX

HOUNDS streaming over a grass country, a tearing scent, fair fences and no wire. A soft wind blowing from the west, the thud of ironshod hoofs as they struck the soft pasture. The rhythmical swing of perfect shoulders, the easy movement of a good hunter as taking hold, eager, but never pulling, he sails on, cocking his ears as an obstacle looms, steady, bounding upwards and shooting out lightly, safely as a cat. If man can find heaven on earth he knows it as he rides a fox hunt. Yet heaven can hold no anxiety, and a gallop is salted and spiced by the fear of doing wrong. Are they bending right or left? Shall we swing away and take that bushed-up bank and so gain a field, or does wire lurk among those bushes? Wire, which will stop us, lose us our place.

Who knows? Try it. The man who docks hounds, following them as they swing and twist, may see his hunt, but he never knows the joy of the man who rides wide and sometimes has all the luck as they turn to him, or again has to gallop hard when they swing away.

Bobbie was riding one of these perfect gallops on a November morning. Bobbie's heart was in it, his cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkling as Smoke stretched out. On the right rode the Master, a conspicuous figure on a big grey horse. On the left, quiet, never hurried, yet always with hounds, Hickman Hume, and behind him Belle Riche, taking his lead over every fence.

Bobbie's method of riding a hunt was to keep behind hounds and curse a puppy when it got in his way. He left it all to his horse, riding with a loose rein.

Yes, it was glorious, this fox-hunting, seventeen couples of hounds in pursuit of one small fox. And the odds were on the quarry. There was none of the changing which mars so many hunts in England. One is glad to find one fox in a covert in Ireland.

Hounds swung sharp to the right. Bobbie's way was barred by a thick hedge, he had to find the gate and open it. And the hounds checked.

Bobbie put Smoke all out, tearing up to the smoothly grassed hill on which the baffled pack were questing.

Old Robert let them alone. He would only help them when they had failed. And then "try forrard." "You could always cast back," he would say, "if you were beaten."

The Master stood on the hill, his eyes fixed on the boy galloping up, and he frowned.

For Bobbie sat lumpishly, and his hands were anywhere. Smoke came at a low bank outstretched. She had to steady herself.

“He’s had no practice,” muttered Robert Bryan in a vexed whisper. “Steady her,” he called, really to himself, “that’s a trappy place.”

“Go easy, Bobbie,” called out Hume.

“Don’t talk,” immediately roared the Master.

The mare pecked. Bobbie rolled on to her neck, losing both stirrups, then recovering himself he galloped in among the hounds.

“Oh, I was afraid I wouldn’t catch them,” said Bobbie happily, and dived for a lost stirrup. “I had to open a beastly gate.”

“Anyone can catch them if you ride them off like that,” thundered his grandfather. “Do you expect them to pick up a line if they’re scattered, boy?”

“Sorry, sir. I was in such a hurry. It’s been such a topping hunt. And didn’t my Ransom beat it across those boggy fields!”

Bobbie, who ought to have been crushed, was chattering.

“Oh, it’s grand,” he said, finding the second stirrup.

“He is no more afraid of the master than a fox is of a rabbit,” confided Jones to an underling. “Another would have med off and kep’ still for a week.”

“There it is,” shrieked Bobbie. “Ransom has it. Tally ho!”

“If you would cease making noises at the wrong time, Bobbie! Hoick to Ransom. Forrard on.”

A species of frozen patience set Robert’s face. “Have you seen my fox, may I ask, with your Tally ho’s?”

“No, but Ransom smelt him, grandfather.” Bobbie loosed Smoke’s head and flew away.

“Bryan of Knockbui. Bryan of Knockbui,” muttered Robert Bryan. “And will he ever learn to ride?”

On again, another glorious fifteen minutes’ burst, and a stout fox was rolled over in the open.

“Such a hunt,” said Bobbie ecstatically. He had had a fall and was splashed with mud.

“If you’d hold that mare together she wouldn’t fall.” Hume was off his horse looking him over carefully. “Do catch hold of your reins, Bobbie.”

“I’d only jab her in the mouth at fences if I did,” said Bobbie coldly. He objected to criticism.

“Also don’t drive your grandfather crazy by yelling out ‘Tally ho’; when hounds hit it off, you hadn’t viewed the fox.”

Bobbie remarked gravely that Tally ho was a well-known hunting cry and the first which he had thought of. They moved on to Shindella.

Shindella gorse is a green jewel in a setting of deep-hued boglands. Sedges wave on the edges of deep black pools, little stacks of turf stand out dark brown against the yellow tints of the bog grasses. A steep hill bulks up some five miles to the west, and there is not a house within sight.

Foxes loved the loneliness, the gorse stands on a dry slope, well sheltered, and to draw Shindella blank would have broken all the traditions of the hunt.

But it was not easy to get away; the bogs had to be skirted, and a bold cast made to catch up hounds. For who could say if a fox would elect to try to gain the bleak sides of Knocksouna hill, or run north to the earths at Cappa Quin, or again, seek shelter in the larch woods of Castle Drummond?

The covert is approached along a narrow causeway, raised by the men who drew turf from the bog. There is a track which horses could flounder along, leading westwards.

Hounds dashed in, to be engulfed in the prickly green sea. For a moment there was stillness and the tenseness of waiting, as now and again a lean head could be seen and a waving stern, and then hounds spoke.

Another and another, until the music echoed over the lonely bog and Ned shouted:

“Forrard away, away.”

But which way? Straight over the yellow grasses, leaping trenches, went a stout old fox. Toot! Toot! the soul-stirring note of the “Gone away” from the Master’s horn, and out of the green jewel into the dull-hued bog went the bitches.

Bobbie forgot his start. He sat watching as the fox flew and gained, and that glorious wave of white and tan and black poured after him.

Which way, which way? Hickman Hume clattered back along the causeway, the Master hesitated and followed.

“He is for the hill,” yelled a young farmer. “An’ a fierce country it is.”

“He is surely for the hill,” roared the inevitable loud-voiced man who exists in every hunt, and whose volume of voice carries people with him.

This particular roarer was Peter Dunne, late Queen Elizabeth, a tall man with a broad back and a well-filled waistcoat.

The fox was out of sight. Hounds swung, and Bobbie began the passage of the deep track.

“Those others will never catch us,” bleated Dunne. “*Hold up*, horse, damn you.”

“If you get into one of them bog holes it’ll be ropes,” remarked the farmer. “Cripes! He has turned away from us, and we are out of it clean and dacent.”

It was too true. Hounds, on getting out of the bog, swung away for Castle Drummond, the division on the track floundered and stumbled, for haste was an impossibility.

Stumbled and floundered and cursed, until they reached sound going, and then could see, afar off, horses galloping at the east side of the bog.

“Oh, hang it,” cried Bobbie. “Can’t we catch them?” He put his horse out, swinging into a narrow bank at a hard gallop. The brown was too hustled to change, but kicked back cleverly. Bobbie hurried on over sour rushy land, churning up to Paddy’s fetlocks.

“He will be kilt,” remarked a farmer skirting the swamp.

“I would say drowned,” returned a friend. “He is facin’ Maddigan’s Croompawn anow.”

Maddigan’s Croompawn, a wide ditch fringed with reeds, was a formidable obstacle. Far away Bobbie could see the lucky ones who had gone the right way.

There are days when we are left behind, and lo! a sudden lucky turn, the glorious sound of hounds, and we are right with them, in front of those who have ridden the line. And there are days when, try as we will, we never catch them again. Just over this bank, up this hill, and we can gallop down to them. Up the hill on a tiring horse, and they have turned sharp, and the chase is still a mile away.

Bobbie rode until Paddy faltered, sobbed, and floundered into an open ditch, soaking his rider through.

“And that Hume will ask me why I didn’t go the right way. Come up,



you,” growled Bobbie, dragging Paddy out of the water.

The quiet country stretched all round him, the hunt had vanished completely. Now and again a dog barked, or a cow lowed, and here and there he could see smoke from the chimneys of cottages spiralling lazily upwards.

A chill white mist began to creep across the low lands, and the peaks of the hills were capped by vapour. A little lonely sobbing wind crept across the earth, rustling the thorns in the hedges, whispering sorrowfully of the rain which it heralded.

Bobbie rode up a long green field, he opened a gate and found a muddy, rutted, breen and jogged along it. Then he came to a cottage with a couple of pigs grunting near the door, and a flock of ducks singing their hymn of sleep as they waited to be fed.

“Seen the hounds?” Bobbie asked as he saw a countryman.

“Yes, sir. I was above on the hill. They swung to Castle Drummond, the grandest hunt ever ye seen. What brought ye around this way at all at all?”

“Trying to catch them,” said Bobbie irritably. “We took a wrong turn. That fool Dunne took us along an impossible causeway.”

“If ye wanted to catch them ye should have clouted the Innisheen road and wheeled wesht to Dundon’s public; that Shindella is a tricksome place to get away from. Captain Hume is the man to——”

“Oh, *blast* . . .” cried Bobbie, trotting away.

“The little felly is put out,” remarked Dan Cloghessy to his spouse. “An’ he is dreepin’ wet.”

“That is Mister Bobbie, the new heir,” replied Mrs. Cloghessy. “I have seen him in the motor-car with Miss Yvonne.”

“He is very narrow med for a Bryan,” mused Cloghessy thoughtfully. “Fine men they were always, an’ quick-tempered. Well, he is that for sure.”

Bobbie hacked on. His wet clothes clung to him, and the little sad wind blew coldly. Bobbie shivered, and Paddy jogged on in spiritless fashion.

“I wonder how far I am from Knockbui.” Bobbie yearned for a dry coat and a swift car. He saw big gates on his right and heard the clomp-clomp of trotting horses.

The Scanlans’ landau rolled into sight. The bay horses with their heads borne up tightly, the coachman flicking them as they came along.

The Hon. Julia and the Hon. Jane were in the carriage, leaning back luxuriously, air cushions behind their backs, jetted toques on their grey heads, sealskin coats protecting them from the chill evening air.

“Oh, hallo. Tell me the way to Knockbui,” called out Bobbie. “I’m lost.”

“Lost! It’s Bobbie Bryan.” Julia put up her lorgnette. “And wet through, you poor boy. It is eight miles to Knockbui. You must come in, Bobbie, and we’ll put up your horse and telegraph for a car for you. Dear me, you must come in.”

Although Bobbie had offended the elderly ladies by smoking in their august presence, they bore him no malice. He turned Paddy, very gladly, through the wide gates.

“The hounds ran in here,” explained Julia. “We drove out to look at them; they put to ground at Slane’s rock, just two miles away. It was a really fine hunt.”

“I took a wrong turn. I tried to catch them and I got lost.” Bobbie cantered up the short avenue and jumped heavily to the ground.

The hall at Castle Drummond was large and square, the boards polished carefully, yet the old ladies never winced as Bobbie stood dripping water on to the polish.

“Daniel! You must provide a change for young Mr. Bryan, Daniel. Some of your own garments, Daniel.”

The elderly butler weighed sixteen stone. He gazed pensively at Bobbie’s slimness.

Bobbie was hustled up thickly-carpeted stairs, ushered into a vast and dreary bedroom, with a canopied four-poster lurking grimly in one corner. Dark mahogany furniture reflected the glimmer of the bedroom candles, and it was cold, bitterly cold. Bobbie’s breath made a little fog. The room had the chill of constant airlessness.

“Got a bath?” said Bobbie, his teeth chattering.

“Only hip-baths, sir; the ladies object to any innovation here. Shall I light a fire, sir?”

“Bring a bootjack; the fire would only start the mushrooms,” quavered Bobbie, pulling off his soaked coat. Unfortunately there was not a bootjack in the house. James explained that the ladies had always hunted in gaiters. But the wet boots were luckily very big, and twenty minutes later Bobbie, gathering

James' suit of mufti round him, grinned as he looked in the glass and made his way downstairs. The house was dimly lighted by one hanging lamp on the stairs. But the little room which he went into was brilliant with unshaded lights, and a huge coal fire was piled up in the high old-fashioned grate.

"If you punch hard you'll find me," said Bobbie to Julia. Jane was not in the room.

Julia, her grey hair piled in twists and rolls, her neck cased by a collar, her skirts covering her ankles, surprised Bobbie. For she looked at him, and burst into merry laughter.

"I'm sorry," said Julia Scanlan, "I couldn't help it. James fills those clothes so beautifully."

They knew how to give you tea at Castle Drummond; there were hot scones and buttered toast and half a dozen rich cakes. Really strong tea was poured out of the huge silver teapot, thick yellow cream from the mighty cream-jug.

"Jane has one of her headaches. She is subject to them," explained Miss Julia. "I do hope you will not take cold, Bobbie."

Bobbie coughed, his nasty, hacking little cough, and he was too tired to feel hungry.

But it was cosy in that stuffy, old-fashioned room, overcrowded with heavy furniture, heavy curtains shutting out draughts, the great fire crackling. And Bobbie rested blissfully.

He grew red when Julia, rather stiffly, asked him to smoke a cigarette.

"We permit it in this room," she said. "When we have our shooting party the gentlemen are allowed to smoke here."

"You don't like it. I can do without it." Bobbie shook his head and coughed.

"Please smoke, Bobbie. I . . . do not really mind. If I had married I should have got used to it. I wish you had not got that cough."

Bobbie looked at the Hon. Julia. She must have been pretty once, with her soft ivory skin and deep grey eyes; she was pretty still with the softness of a rose which hangs on its tree in winter, all faded, yet still a rose.

"I wonder why you did not marry," Bobbie said slowly.

"I . . . he was killed in a steeplechase, Bobbie. I thought you might have heard. The church was decorated for our wedding, and I wanted him not to ride

that race. His mare grew tired and fell. The flowers were all there when I went to his funeral at Knockdrummond. I . . . I . . .”

Julia’s face puckered; two big tears ran down her soft cheeks. If—if she had married she might have had a son of Bobbie’s age. She might never have become stiff and particular and old-fashioned. She saw the boy through a blur. . . . And Bobbie got up from his chair.

“Oh, my dear, you poor dear,” he said, and patted Julia’s cheek with his young hand. “I never knew. I never knew. You poor thing,” he patted on.

Anyone who knew the Misses Scanlan would have prophesied a prompt snub. Something melted in Julia’s heart. It was as if a band of ice snapped. No male hand had touched her caressingly since her Peter had been killed. She put up white, heavily-ringed fingers and touched Bobbie’s, a vague sense of delicious impropriety stirring her.

“Thank you, boy,” she said very gently. “Thank you, Bobbie. And Jane—Jane cared for someone who married another. So here we are, two cross old maids.”

“I’ll never think you cross again.” Bobbie gave another gentle pat and returned to his chair.

It is strange how, as we pass through life, we see our friends through a glass darkly. Dull people, unemotional, ordinary, and one day the sash is thrown open and for a moment’s space we see these people’s souls. Palpitating, suffering, loving souls, enduring the sorrow which all men must suffer, longing for the joys which shine high up, stars in a sky we seldom fly to. Quite suddenly we know that some shy old maid has passed through her hours of futile longing, that some ill-tempered, silent man’s heart is buried in a girl’s grave. We see, and the glass comes down and we wonder if we have seen aright.

So Bobbie saw now the weary hopelessness which Julia had endured, and had coated over with the stiff wax of narrow conventionality; saw a faithful heart which had never thought of another mate; how she deemed herself the widow of the merry young fellow who had gone out to ride his race, sprung lightly on to his horse, felt his thighs grip his saddle, feet go home in the stirrups, felt the horse move under him, and who had ridden with cool wind on flushed cheeks, eyes set, hands low, as hoofs thundered on the dry pastures, and then—a crash and darkness, and no more.

Another tear plashed down Miss Julia’s soft pale cheek; her lips trembled.

“I don’t know why . . . I talked of it. Smoke, boy,” she said tremulously.

“I’d rather do without smokes for a week than puff one if it worries you,” was Bobbie’s crude method of saying “I’m so sorry for you.”

“He . . . Peter smoked cigars. I should have become quite accustomed to it,” was the gentle response. “You boys like those cigarettes nowadays.”

A car buzzed to the door. Bobbie covered the butler’s best suit with his own coat, and said good-bye rather regretfully.

“I liked being here,” he said, holding Julia’s ringed fingers.

Soreness and ill-humour returned when he got to Knockbui, for Hickman Hume had come to dinner and he and Yvonne were babbling of the hunt.

“Flew, fairly flew for six miles. Hello, Bobbie! Why did you go by that bog track? Never do, even if hounds go that way; it’s quicker to gallop round. I bet you listened to Peter Dunne. He wants to get out of a hunt as fast as he can. Rides ’em all with his voice, does Peter. There were some obstacles too; I saw four go down at Milligan’s bounds ditch. And the mortar wall into Ballyea took some doing. Yvonne flitted over it.”

Bobbie grunted and kept on his coat.

“I had a fall,” he said irritably, “and I got into a ditch, just as I was catching you. Paddy was beaten.”

“Milligan’s, I suppose. You got pretty wet in that.”

“Wet—huh!” Old Robert bounced up. “Wet, and stayed out in soaking things. The Scanlans gave you a change? Huh, Bobbie, why don’t you follow someone who knows the country? There, you’re coughing. Making a turkish bath of yourself in that heavy coat.”

“I am high and dry in the butler’s Sunday suit. And now he’s gone to immerse an egg in port,” said Bobbie wearily. “Tell him I’ve gone to take a tub, Yvonne, will you?”

Little Yvonne, neat, her soft skin unflushed by the day’s hunting, nodded sympathetically. Bobbie coughed and fled.

“I fear that he is not strong.” Yvonne pulled a letter from her pocket. “And I do so like strong people.”

“Anne, then, is a bit of a Hercules,” Hume said thoughtfully.

“Yes.” Little lines of care crept round Yvonne’s mouth. “But—his mother is also a Hercules, of the mind. And she wearies of this waiting. It is cruel.” Yvonne waved her hands. “Cruel, that I cannot do as I please.”

“Why don’t you face the old lion as Bobbie does?”

“Because I fear him,” said Yvonne. “I fear him. And I cannot say what is in my heart to him.”

Hickman Hume stared into the glowing fire. He knew that Robert Bryan meant his grandchildren to marry and so keep their inheritance between them, and he knew that, when Robert Bryan wished to do anything, the old fellow would smash through any obstacle to gain his point.

“Somehow I don’t think you’d ever care for Bobbie as a husband,” said Hickman.

Yvonne’s “As a husband, la!” was emphatic.

“And yet,” said Hume, “your grandfather is set on it.”

“Even grandfather cannot drag the ‘I will’ from lips which do not intend to say it,” returned Yvonne quietly. “I shall marry Anne de Joyeuse or no man, Hickman.”

## CHAPTER X

PEACE fled from Knockbui. Bedrooms were made ready. Connolly appeared to spend his day polishing silver, and Robert Bryan rushed about the house like a whirlwind, diving headlong into the cellar and charging out, with precious cobwebbed bottles which in some occult fashion he carried steadily, unearthing a Spode dinner-service, making ready for his guests.

“Nice thing that you can’t shoot, Bobbie,” he thundered. “My heir mincing round and watching in yellow shoes.”

Bobbie looked at his neat brogues and smiled.

“Steady on. I’ve been out with Jim day after day, grandfather, and I might hit something. If you give me the worst place Jim will pick up a rabbit and say I shot it, anyhow.”

The old man’s eyes flashed. He was openly pleased with his grandson.

“I’m damn glad, Bobbie; that was decent of you,” he said gruffly. “Now you can come to Castle Drummond with me.”

“Oh, lor,” said Bobbie blankly. “I’d upset them, sir, and smoke at the wrong time. I don’t mind Julia, but Jane is a gorgon.”

Jane’s long-standing infatuation for Bobbie’s grandparent softened the old fellow towards her; although he had never cared for any woman save his own wife, mankind loves adulation.

“Jane is a particularly nice woman,” said Robert huffily. “Huh, you youngsters pronouncing judgment. Huh!” The old fellow slammed the door.

Two days later motors disgorged quantities of middle-aged men clad in tweeds, and a few ladies, also suitably dressed. And everyone talked of birds and sport.

Bobbie sat in a corner contemplating the guests, most of whom seemed to bristle with grey hairs.

There was Sir Montague French, low of stature, his stout limbs hung about with dark brown tweed. Lord Knocklee, tall and debonair, carrying his sixty odd years lightly, his iron-grey hair thick and glossy, his blue eyes bright, his humorous lips ever ready to talk of the days when those blue eyes were irresistible. Derek Knox, slim and dapper, a sporting Peter Pan who had never

grown up, as jealous still out hunting as a boy of twenty, as eager to pinch a start as if he never took his own line, loud of voice, but big of heart despite his perennial childishness. There were only two young men, soldiers home on leave.

Bobbie's fancy was taken by an elderly dame in very short skirts and who wore a bobbed yellow wig, her kindly eyes flashing from a face which was quite frankly old.

A necklace of great rubies glowed against a background of creamy lace. Long ruby earrings dazzled and clashed, and her small hands were absolutely loaded with rings.

"Old Carrie wears 'em shooting." Bobbie started as Knocklee sat down beside him. "She'll be robbed some day. A real sportsman she is. Rides her own line, an' she's seventy; tramps all day with the guns an' sits us out at poker. She'll never die, that one, but some day death will want cheering up, an' will just whisk her off at a moment's notice. Glad to see you here, boy. That quarrel with your father was a fool show. Man to his mate. The trouble is, there are so many mates in a feller's life."

"One'd do me," mused Bobbie. "More than do me."

The keen blue eyes scanned Bobbie critically.

"A rumour says she is ordained." Knocklee nodded towards Yvonne, who was pouring out tea.

Bobbie grinned.

Old Lady Ardlie beckoned to Bobbie, her beringed finger flashing little fires of green and white and red.

"Come here, boy. I knew your father, and your mother. She was a nice, gentle girl. Come and talk to me."

"I've been admiring you," said Bobbie audaciously.

He sat by the old lady's side, talking to her, wondering why she crowned her pretty wrinkled face with yellow curls.

Evening melted into night and a long, rather dull dinner. For the Scanlans had been invited, and old-world ceremony prevailed. No smoking until Yvonne had smiled from guest to guest, and marshalled her flock into the big drawing-room, where Carrie Ardlie immediately pulled out her cigarette-case, and the Hon. Julia went to the far end of the room and sniffed smelling-salts.

And after the long dinner Bobbie discovered that the elderly gentlemen



knew how to play poker, and that he, Bobbie, did not possess a poker face.

He lost and won, but generally lost, cheerfully, parting with quite a fat wad of notes when play was over—and loving it.

The following morning bore the aspect of a volcano about to erupt.

The men ate breakfast as if doing it for a wager, pushing in important silence to the side table, despatching kidneys and sole, sausages and eggs as if they were eating enemies. Any attempt at light conversation fell flat; the peaty smell of Harris tweeds pervaded the warm room. Old Robert nearly choked over his porridge, which he longed to call cold, and his fierce eyes raked Bobbie severely. For Bobbie's face was serene, his shooting kit far too gaudy, and he sported a pale blue tie with a pheasant's head pin in it.

"Huh, kippers," growled old Robert. "Never fed, poor lad."

Behind the appraising glance was the biting point of futile regret.

*If, if, if,* If he, Robert Bryan, had accepted his son's wife, this heir of Knockbui would have been brought up in the country, would have ridden his pony and been taught to shoot, and have grown up tall and sturdy instead of half starved. The ills of our own cultivating are very bitter on the palate.

Then out into a soft still day with pale sunlight struggling through a mist, and across the Park to Dayley's wood. Beaters all ready. Keepers alert, each Harris-tweed man tense-eyed and taciturn. Carrie Ardlie, her skirts barely to her knees, her shapely legs covered by startling stockings, strode along as easily as the men. Bobbie, with a sinking heart, hoped that James would stand to his word and choose a corner over which no bird would pass.

James was faithful. Bobbie stood in the worst places and fired manfully at birds on the skyline, and as manfully James depleted the bags of first-class shots, and parked pheasants which he said Bobbie had shot.

At luncheon everyone ate enormous helpings of Irish stew, without which pheasants could not be shot. Good tough stew swimming in watery gravy—Mrs. Dunne knew her business—allied to cold ham, and with cold plum pudding to follow.

So the day passed to evening, the pleasures of happy weariness, hot baths and strong tea.

Bobbie played poker again and won a little, enough to make his eyes shine and his cheeks flush.

"Steady, Bobbie," counselled Hume. "It's in your blood, you know. Your

great-grandfather gambled away half the place one night.”

Hounds were out next day, Jones hunting them, and Bobbie decided to go to the meet, coming down dressed in pink without consulting his grandfather. The first “Huh!” told Bobbie that he had sinned, for the icy “You don’t care for shooting, Bobbie,” was very emphatic.

“It’s so solemn, sir,” said Bobbie softly. “And I do it so very badly.”

“If he looked at me like that I should rush into tweeds,” said old Carrie.

But Bobbie’s eyes were void of fear. He drank tea calmly.

“And you ride so well,” thundered old Robert, porridge spoon upraised.

“I haven’t got to stand in a corner and see the foxes fly over my head,” mused Bobbie thoughtfully. “I always seem to pull the trigger just as the feathered fowl pulls its joy-stick and banks.”

Old Robert’s spoon met the porridge so violently that a splash of gluey oatmeal lighted on Sir Montague’s left cheek. The oatmeal was very hot, and French’s magnificent effort to bite back what he wanted to say caused a minute’s consternation.

“Gad, I thought Robert’d get a fit.” Knocklee gave a sigh of relief. “The veins of his neck swelled, an’ he was bright purple.”

Hounds had a fair day’s sport in a poor country. Bobbie drove Yvonne and Ned French, Montague’s son, to the meet.

And that night came disaster.

Bobbie lost, and gambled on poor hands. He came in when he ought to have stayed out, and finally, full of elation, backed a full house against four aces. Bobbie’s face grew tense; the fever of gambling ran through his blood.

The older men, except Montague, went to bed, but Bobbie stayed on to play with young French, Arthur Ryan, and Carrie Ardlie. Hume lounged by the fire looking on.

“Better stop,” he said at last. “You’ve lost enough, Bobbie. You know your grandfather doesn’t like it.”

French slid a pack of cards through his fingers.

“Yes, we’ve had enough,” he said. “You’ll win it back to-morrow, Bryan.”

“I’ll cut you through the pack for fivers,” snapped Bobbie. “It’s only luck.”

“Not altogether,” said Hume. Bobbie’s cheeks flamed; of course Hume

blamed him.

French counted his chips. And Bobbie's flush died.

He had lost a hundred pounds. His grandfather would be vexed. Bobbie hated begging. Also the old man had forbidden any high play.

"I'll settle with you to-morrow," he said to French. "I'm cleared out now, and I've no banking account."

"Any time." Cyril French, a supercilious youth, very much the Guardee, yawned. Bobbie's temper quickened.

"What about that cutting gamble?" he said.

"Steady there," said Hume's cool voice. "Your grand-dad does not approve of high stakes, Bobbie."

His grandfather! The waters of humiliation must be waded through before that debt could be paid. A hundred pounds was a lot of money. The boy grew white; he looked frightened and very young.

"Look at my winnings," chirped old Lady Ardlie, waving a bundle of notes. "A cool century."

"Robert'd have a fit if he knew you were making a gaming house of the place," laughed Montague.

"Well, I'm off." French lounged out of the room.

Bobbie sat huddled up. He had spent all his allowance and one hundred pounds—one hundred pounds.

"The trouble is, I haven't got it," he said suddenly. "And I hate to go a-begging to grandfather. He told me not to play high. I kind of promised."

"Oh, cheer up; he'll understand," said Montague kindly; but Bobbie's face grew bleaker. A haze of smoke hung in the card-room. Bobbie was glad to feel the cool air blowing in through his open window. But he could not sleep; he sat smoking until his mouth was dry, thinking, thinking, and then he stole out of his room, padding noiselessly along the thick carpet.

A dog growled, a door opened, and light shone across the dark corridor. Bobbie jumped behind the curtains of a window; then the door closed, and he went on.

A light frost crisped the morning, the trees were powdered and the wind was thin and keen.

And Carrie Ardlie bustled into the dining-room, looking troubled.

“I’m sorry to bother you, Robert, but someone has burgled me. I had just a hundred in Bradburys and fivers, and I laid them on my dressing-table, and they are not. I have looked everywhere for the money; that’s why I’m late.”

“I heard footsteps last night,” Montague remarked. “Dick growled—he always sleeps in my room—and I looked out. Someone was moving about.”

Bobbie felt his cheeks grow hot. He hurried over to the sideboard and helped himself to kidneys, which he detested, and Yvonne, who looked chilled, slipped into the room.

Bobbie got her hot coffee and fussed over her.

The business of the day would soon begin, and before the men tramped into the keen air Bobbie handed a bundle to French.

“My debts,” he said carelessly.

“Oh, thankee. But if it’s any bother, let it stand.”

“It’s no bother, thanks.” Bobbie flushed, and went away.

“Funny not giving me a cheque. Oh, he said he couldn’t.” French laid the notes beside him as he wrote a letter, and then called open attention to them by forgetting them.

“Oh, hang it,” he said as he got his gun. “I forgot a bundle of notes in the library. Bryan paid me in specie. Funny of him.” French had again forgotten Bobbie’s remark as to having no account in a bank.

Montague looked up sharply and caught Hume’s eyes. “A bundle of notes. . . . Oh, look here . . . go shooting,” he growled.

Carrie Ardlie wailed at lunch, and would talk of nothing save her loss—her century gone.

Again eyes met eyes, and dropped as men mentally slapped themselves. Hang it, absurd! Even if the boy had slunk off in despair. Of course he’d asked the old man for the money.

The Irish stew failed to comfort; even the watery potatoes seemed full of tension.

“I thought I heard my door open,” chattered old Carrie, “but I sleep heavily. It is so annoying. My maid says I’ll find the things. I won’t, I know it.”

Robert Bryan’s face grew thunderous. He did not understand his guests’

unhappiness. Women were always losing and finding. But fresh search proved unavailing, and it began to look like a case for the police.

Even the card games were damped that night, for the host fussed about the tables, and Bobbie did not play at all, even when French drawled “Revenge?” to him.

“I’m not good enough,” was Bobbie’s quiet answer. “And I lose my head. If I had heaps of money to lose I should play for ever. Last night gave me a lesson. I was afraid I’d have to tell grandfather.”

The party was to hunt the next day, and the same gloom hung over breakfast.

Men’s eyes met covertly; they whispered to each other. Bobbie had not got the money from old Robert.

“Oh, what’s up, Hickman?” thundered Robert Bryan. “Do they think I robbed Carrie? It’s mutter, mutter, and look, look, and dead silence when I come near any of you mutterers.”

Hickman knew, but only shook his head. He had heard the reluctant whispers.

They suspected Bobbie; they avoided him. Instead of staying over Sunday, Montague had announced his intention of leaving on Saturday.

“It’s pretty awful. I suppose he was terrified of the old man. One can’t stay here, anyhow.”

Eyes full of sorrow followed Bobbie. He was avoided. Montague French did not joke at tea-time. Knocklee sat in gloomy silence. Derek Knox forgot to tell how he had led a good gallop.

Then Bobbie caught a glance, half heard a whisper and he understood. He flushed scarlet and then grew white, standing up slight and erect as if to fling his glove in the men’s faces.

Old Lord Knocklee looked up at him, such a pitying look that Bobbie realised that defiance had its place. Anger was replaced by a tightness of the throat. These elderly, Harris-tweed men were sorry and unhappy.

“Huh!” Old Robert, still in his pink coat, dashed out of the room, and Bobbie followed him. Yes he understood now, with bitter clarity, and yet it amused him.

“Bobbie.” The old man was stamping up and down. “Bobbie, do those fools think I stole Carrie’s money?”

“No, but they think that I did, sir. Steady there. I disobeyed you, and lost just that sum, you see, and I told them I hadn’t got it, and I looked peeved, as I was.”

“God, God!” Old Robert’s hand clenched. “You, *Bobbie*?”

“Yes, sir, and you were cranky ’cos I went hunting.”

“Cranky!” echoed Robert hoarsely.

“An’ I was too proud to beg, so I slipped out of my room and went to Yvonne.”

“In the middle of the night?”

“Oh yes, sir. I asked her to blow into the bank and bring me the money; she always has some. She blew off the little car, and I paid. . . . And now . . . it’s a bit of a scream; they suspect me of having pinched the money from Lady Ardlie.”

“A scream,” the present day argot. Then Robert Bryan shot to his feet and stood towering above his heir, old blue eyes meeting young blue eyes. No shadow of fear lay in the boy’s. Long ago blue eyes had looked like that, calm, fearless, but they had love behind the calmness.

“Bobbie.” A big hand fell on a slight shoulder. “I’m glad you’ve spoken out. And I want a promise. If you are in any trouble, come straight to me. I may bark, but I’ll help you, boy, always. I won’t bite, remember that. Bryan to Bryan when trouble looms.”

“It was my own beastly pride, not your bark,” said Bobbie gently. “We’re of one blood, you and I, sir. I was angry with you for being angry with me.”

Old Bryan said, “You were, were you?” and sat down heavily.

“And in the meantime,” said Bobbie, “I’ll bet the old bird tucked that boodle into some odd corner. She was doggo sleepy, the old duck. Let’s have a hidden-treasure hunt, grandfather. Come along. Her maid says that it’s hidden somewhere.”

Bobbie went up the stairs like a flash. His grandfather strode heavily in his wake.

Everyone was at tea, and the bedrooms were deserted.

Bobbie looked at the dressing-table and turned over silver boxes casually.

“She tucked it somewhere, to be safe. Who-whoop, tally ho!” yelled Bobbie.

The glass in the dressing-table was an old one. Some of the boards at the back were loose, and stuffed behind them were the notes.

“She slipped them in there. You can say that you remembered the loose back of the glass, grandfather. Ring the bell.”

“I—don’t like it. They may say that I . . . put ’em in, to save you . . . boy.”

“No, sir.” Bobbie scanned the bundle of notes. “Well, we’ll call up old Carrie. She has written her name on the fivers.”

Lady Ardlie came running up the stairs as lightly as a girl. She flushed and said “Damn” quite emphatically.

“What a dunderhead I am,” she cried. “I recall it now. I was late and sleepy, and had told Juliette to go to bed, and I poked the money in there. I am always afraid of thieves. I’m awfully sorry, Robert. I recollect it perfectly now. I’ll tell them all.”

Carrie Ardlie trotted off to lift a cloud, but old Robert Bryan went back to his study and brooded, alone.

He felt sore and shaken. That anyone should dare to suspect a Bryan, his grandson. This foul thing had been created because Bobbie was a stranger. If the boy had been born at Knockbui it would never have happened.

“Ah, if you had lived, my Hylde.” The old man lifted his photograph. “What did the lad say to me? ‘I was angry with you for being angry.’ It is my fault.”

A grey head dropped between powerful hands; tears stung old eyelids. Ay, his fault that this insult should have been offered to his race. He would delay no longer; the future of Knockbui ownership must be settled, and at once.

## CHAPTER XI

BOBBIE stood on the yellow hill, looking across the land. Soft lights, such as only Ireland knows, touched peaks and villages. Clanpatrick hills were indigo blue, with silver patches on their sides; further to the west a gleam of sun shone, flushing one bit of the hills to golden fire; the bog roads were soft tan against the grey of the crags behind them.

Had Bobbie been far away instead of standing on it, he would have seen Knockbui stand yellow out of the green fields surrounding it.

The day was strangely mild, sunless, yet warm as spring. Down in the woods foxes were slipping about. Bobbie often saw them hunting for a mouthful of little grey rabbit. Big badgers came ambling past at times, coarse-coated and furtive. Pheasants gave their raucous cries when he disturbed them.

Bobbie loved Knockbui, he loved Ireland, and never wanted to leave it.

A dark patch, about five miles, were the woods of Ballyalla, Hume's home. A little dark grey emerald set on a bare slope was Carron gorse.

Oh, good to live in, good to see; yet Bobbie's eyes were sombre and full of trouble, for he walked with fearless ease over dangerous ground, and now he saw how impossible his path might become.

"Bobbie!"

A tall figure swung into view. A broad-shouldered, splendid figure of a man. Dogs all round him, a gun in his hand.

"Bobbie, I heard that you had come this way."

"There are jolly lights about," said Bobbie rather wistfully. He had wanted to be alone. "I love to look at it all, sir."

"You like Knockbui, then? Sit there, Bobbie. It's sheltered here, and I want to talk to you seriously. You wouldn't like to give up the place? I've been thinking things out, lad."

"Knockbui for Robert Bryan," said Bobbie quietly, "that should be the law."

"Yes . . . but . . ." Bobbie listened as his grandfather talked.

Knockbui for Robert Bryan. But Yvonne had been brought up as the



heiress of the place, and . . . there was a good deal of chaff, but the grain which was winnowed was plain to be seen.

Bobbie and Yvonne must marry at once.

“If you say no . . . Well, I can take a great deal of Yvonne’s money from her. I can refuse to give her a penny until she is twenty-four. And I need not make you my heir.”

“Bit Noah-ish, isn’t it?” said Bobbie, after a troubled silence.

“Noah-ish?”

“Patriarchal, sir. Not quite cricket. Yvonne wants to marry her Froggy. And I—I don’t want to marry anyone.”

Robert Bryan said heatedly that no granddaughter of his should marry a *girl*. Anne! Huh! A Frenchman. No!

“And . . . this is an ultimatum.” Bobbie looked out across the peaceful country. The sun was lighting the crest of Knockcarron to more ardent flame.

Robert Bryan bulked, tall, straight, broad-shouldered, his jaw thrust out, his eyes flashing. He had made up his mind, and he would ride his resolution through fire and through water and over bleeding human hearts to its goal.

“Yes, I say she shall not marry that Polly Frog. She . . . Huh! What’s up now?”

For Bobbie laughed, suddenly and merrily, his eyes twinkling, his body shaking.

“Such a hang good name,” said Bobbie. “Polly, Poll. Oh . . .”

Mr. Bryan’s bulk folded up as he sat down on a mossy boulder. This grandson was often too much for him.

“And if we fail to obey?” Bobbie became serious.

“Then”—the big man shot to his feet again. “Then I leave Knockbui to Yvonne on condition she never marries her Annette. I keep her money until she is of age. And the old Marquise will never let the boy wait so long. And you, Bobbie, will go back to England with an allowance, go back to do as you please, but you will . . . go away. . . .”

Bleakness crept over Bobbie’s face; his lips tightened.

“And . . . Bobbie Bryan will not have what he ought to possess,” he muttered. “But, sir, Yvonne . . .” Then Bobbie’s eyes flashed. It was as if the westering sun lighted some beacon in his soul with a glow more ardent than

the golden flame on the hillside. Bobbie's hands clenched; flickers of humour twitched round his mouth.

"And if we two," Bobbie said, "agree to go through this ceremony of marriage, will you swear, hand up, that Knockbui comes to Robert Bryan, and that you hand her fortune over to Yvonne? Hand up, will you, if it's business, sir?"

Robert Bryan sat down and got up again, and stared at his grandson, and slowly, very slowly, put a massive arm above his head.

"Hand up," he said rather unsteadily. "Yes, Bobbie. Here, what the devil's in your mind?"

For Bobbie was grinning, openly and seraphically.

"Send it will be years before the bargain is ratified." Bobbie lighted a cigarette and patted a cocker's silky head. "And . . . I wonder if you'll ever forgive me for it, grandfather, or yourself, for this settling of to-day."

"Huh!" said Robert Bryan, sitting down again. "Here! why don't you smoke a decent pipe, boy?"

"I don't like 'em; too sucky. I'm going to Yvonne now, sir; but remember she is very fond of her Polly Frog."

"Bobbie."

Bobbie turned.

"Bobbie, I believe you would treat the last trump as a joke, and grin at the Almighty Judge."

"Might as well as weep at Him," said Bobbie calmly, strolling away.

"Bobbie."

"Yes, sir?"

"When you've seen Yvonne, take Rufus for a gallop; he is far too fresh. He bucked Pat off this morning."

"I can't manage that brute," said Bobbie uneasily, "and he knows it."

Bobbie went back to the house. Yvonne was out, walking in the sunshine. The winter light failed to pick a flaw in her creamy skin, but her eyes were dreary. She held a letter in her hand, and her lips drooped.

"Bobbie, it's from Anne. His mother is influencing him. She wants him to marry this heiress, and he says he'll come over and hunt here. I dare not let

him.”

“And in the meantime,” said Bobbie, “you have got to marry me, Yvie. Now don’t say you won’t. Come into the library and talk it over.”

“You don’t even love me,” cried Yvonne, spots of scarlet flaming on her cheeks. “No, and no again, Bobbie.”

“We’ll talk about that, love. My Yvie. Come along.”

Bobbie put an arm round her and they went into the big quiet library.

Robert Bryan looked anxious when he came to the house. He stood in the hall, listening, half afraid to hear a girl sobbing, or to meet his irresponsible grandson and hear a careless “No biz.” Just what Bobbie would say about a big thing.

“Have you seen . . . Mr. Bobbie, Connolly?”

“He and Miss Yvonne are in the library, sir. I am taking tea in; they asked for potato cakes.”

They asked for potato cakes! Their lives were being arranged for them, and they had asked for potato cakes.

“Huh!” roared the old man, stalking across the polished floor.

“He is in a passion,” murmured Connolly. “I often wishes to God that Mr. Bobbie would larn to be afraid of him.”

No sound of sobbing through the thick door, nay, but of laughter. The merry laughter of young people.

Robert Bryan opened the door. Yvonne was sitting on a creepie-stool, and Bobbie perched on the arm of a chair, and the two appeared to be perfectly happy.

Yvonne’s laughter died when her grandfather came in. She got up with a quick, nervous movement.

“We’ve fixed it, sir,” said Bobbie, “on certain conditions.”

“Yes.” Robert Bryan turned a little pale. He was accustomed to getting his own way, but things seemed to be too easy. Fruit thrown at one’s feet lacks flavour.

“I am so glad, Bobbie and Yvonne.” There was some real emotion in the old man’s voice. “I’ll give you a bumper allowance, and of course you’ll live here.”

“Oh, of course. We meant to. But the conditions are these, sir.”

Yvonne’s hands clasped tightly; a pulse throbbed in her throat.

“That it’s to be at once and at a register-office. And we come back in a week to hunt. I don’t want to miss the hunting, nor does Yvie. And that’s all. I trust you for the hand-up bit, sir. Knockbui for Robert Bryan. It is to come to him.”

“But . . . does Yvonne want a quiet wedding?”

Robert had dreamed of a ceremony at the little church, and of red baize and flowers, a monster wedding-cake, and the hunt servants in their pink, and the hounds, and a fuss.

“Yes, grandfather, I do,” said Yvonne tremulously. She was very white.

“Huh! I don’t like it,” growled the old man. “Don’t like this hole-and-corner work.”

Bobbie smiled softly.

“Steady, Yvie,” he whispered gently, “this is my show. Oh, Lord, she’s off. Missing her Polly a bit, y’know, grandfather, that’s all.”

For Yvonne gave vent to strange strangled sounds as she ran.

“The girl is hysterical,” grumped old Robert. “I heard her laugh outside the door.”

“Mr. Hume,” announced Connolly. And Yvonne came back with Hickman.

Bobbie liked Mrs. Dunne’s potato cakes. His matrimonial projects did not spoil his appetite. But he received Hume’s cool congratulations rather glumly.

“So you fixed it,” said Hume, when Yvonne and Robert Bryan had left the room. “You fixed it, Bobbie. Knockbui was too much for you.”

“Knockbui for Robert Bryan.” Bobbie looked tired. “Yes, Hickman, my son. It’s fixed.”

“And you are not a scrap in love with each other.”

“You ought to write a treatise on the tender passion,” snapped Bobbie. “Your idea of it is perpetual quarrelling.”

“People in love always fight,” said Hume sturdily. “How could one get on without pepper and salt? I hope to goodness you’ll make Yvonne happy, for I believe she really . . . er . . .” Hume stopped. One should not preach on former lovers to the bridegroom to be.

“She really loves her Anne.” Bobbie finished the sentence. “P’raps she does. No one could love me, of course.”

A wistful note crept into Bobbie’s hurt voice.

“Oh Lord, Bobbie, I never meant that. I’m quite sure . . . that . . .”

“You’re a regular crab-cat,” stormed Bobbie, flying out of the room.

There were congratulations all that evening. The hunt servants came in after dinner, and healths were drunk in bumpers of champagne, then an assembling of the domestic staff and more champagne. Dear old Mrs. Dunne kissed Bobbie noisily as she swore she would make the wedding-cake herself.

“Then hurry up, old darling,” said Bobbie, “for it must be ready in a fortnight.”

More congratulations at the meet next day. Peter Dunne was so delighted that he forgot to go away with hounds, which probably added to his delight. Yvonne, neat and calm, was surrounded by her girl friends, all hoping to be bridesmaids.

The Master forbore to swear when the field over-rode hounds.

“And you’ll be the next, I suppose,” said Bobbie, who had accepted overtures of peace from Hume. “You and Belle.”

“I’m looking for a geisha,” said Hume dreamily. “A little elusive geisha who once ran away from me.”

“I thought her rather a stupid little rat,” said Bobbie, after a long pause.

“Oh, you danced with her, then? Who was she? None of the girls will give her away.”

“She was just an ordinary sort of creature masquerading, pretending to be what she was not. A difficult thing to do, friend Hickman. Hold up, you.”

Bobbie raked at his reins as Rufus plunged. There was ever a sense of antagonism between him and the chestnut. The thoroughbred wanted stronger hands, a firmer seat, to quell his vagaries; the two were never in sympathy. One could not wait a turn on Rufus without endangering someone’s hat. Ridden out alone, he was fairly temperate.

“Sit in to him; get his head up,” counselled Hume. “Lord, Bobbie, you’ll be off.”

Bobbie hauled at the reins.

“Hist you”—the prospective bridegroom cutting a voluntary—“they’ve

found.”

Challenger spoke in the thick gorse. The centre of the covert was bare, with great mossy boulders cropping up. Hounds poured out and feathered among the stones. And Bobbie’s heart throbbed. He forgot Rufus, he forgot his future, as he looked at the hounds outlined against grey and green, heads down, sterns waving, eager to confirm Challenger’s note.

“Yoo-ou.” Dragon spoke to it, plunging back into the gorse. A little red beast crept to the bank of the covert and leaped on to it, head round, listening.

“Look!” shrilled Bobbie in a hissing whisper.

“Oh, quiet boy. He’s away.”

Hickman’s hat was in the air.

Just a little red fox flying over a green field, and forty hearts beating faster and eighty eyes glued to his galloping form, and eighty knees gripping saddles closer, many hands jamming down hats. Horses cocking their ears, eager, ready to gallop and jump and scorn sweat and panting breath; did they not love it as much as their masters?

Two short quick blasts on the horn, and hounds pouring out, fanning for a second, then settling to it, away close on their fox.

Time now for the thrusters to slip out right or left, for the mild-hearted to follow someone over a fence and maybe count their place by the number in front of them, for the honestly timid ones to gallop for a gap.

A shout of “Master!” Out went the gallant old figure of Robert Bryan, sending his big black at the first bank. Settling down to ride and to count it no hunt unless hounds were in sight. Men and women with the madness of fox-hunting in their blood, risking life and limb across fences to keep a few dogs in view. So the carpers say. But they have never learnt to send a horse along over a bank country, feel the wind on their faces and a great horse between their knees, and hear hounds, or they would never say it again.

Hounds were hustling their fox off his legs, racing close on him.

Rufus tore the reins through Bobbie’s fingers and went at the first bank at racing speed.

“Oh, young tailor,” muttered Hume, steadying his bay mare.

A great bound, a lightning-like kick, and Rufus was over, galloping on, almost out of control. Yvonne shook up Brown Mouse, and the little mare made up ground. The next fence was bushed up, a low bank on the take-off

side, and uncertainty beyond. Robert Bryan pulled up King Cole, hopped him on the bank and walked the clever horse into a small river at the far side.

Crash, swish, the thorns flew back as Rufus rose with a soaring bound, almost cleared the river, half fell, and scrambled up, Bobbie clinging to the mane.

“Steady!” roared the Master. “It’s not Leicestershire. Gad! he cleared twenty-five feet.”

“He’s cleared my nose off,” sang out Bobbie, sawing at the chestnut’s mouth, for there was a closed gate ahead.

Rufus smashed the top bar handsomely, then he sobered down a little.

“He can’t ride.” The old man watched the boy. “Bumping about and using the reins as a balancing pole. He’ll be down. No, he’s over. I’ll make him ride. Hold hard, Bobbie. Hold hard.”

For the pressed fox turned sharply and hounds over-ran it. Bobbie pulled vainly; Rufus cleared a stone wall with a mighty bound, and stopping dead, descanted Bobbie into the middle of the pack.

“Challenger, darling,” said Bobbie, helping himself up by catching the big hound’s neck. “Thankee, Challenger; now hunt away, old chap.”

The Master had so many things to say that the medley of words in his mind jammed. To ride into the middle of hounds, to fall off, to help yourself up by gripping a hound! And this was the future Robert Bryan of Knockbui. His heir and his grandson.

“You . . . should ride side saddle,” the old man gulped bitterly, rather hopelessly. “Get on to your horse and stand *still*, you boy.”

“I never could hold the brute.” Bobbie dived for his stirrup. “He’s got a mouth like almond rock. How did I know he was going to stop like that?”

“Yvonne has fallen,” cried Belle Riche. “Her mare is in a ditch.”

Bobbie said “Is it?” quite absently, his eyes on hounds.

That wonderful flying burst was over; the fox had twisted left-handed, and creeping along unviewed was steadily making for Dillon’s crags, where he hoped to find an earth open.

“Aren’t you going back,” Hickman Hume’s eyes twinkled, “to Yvonne?”

“There it is,” said Bobbie. “Challenger’s got it. Noble hound, Challenger. I fell on him, the old duck.”

“He’s got an eye for hounds.” Robert Bryan cantered on. “Got an eye for hounds, Bobbie has, and it’s something.”

Yvonne, exceedingly damp, arrived at full gallop. “A man crossed me, Bobbie, and Brown Mouse slipped. Ouf! it was deep, that river.”

“She’s not a scrap cross with him,” mused Belle Riche. “I should eat a lover who didn’t come back to pick me up.”

“Never marry a hunting man then,” said Hume drily.

They ran on at a fair pace, on the failing scent of a beaten fox, and marked him at Dillon’s.

But those first four miles had been exceptional, without the semblance of a check, pouring on over a perfect country. Never a strand of wire, never an unjumpable fence, the going deep, but not holding.

“He come up the field with the tail trainin’ on him,” declaimed a countryman. “I thought to head him off the burrow, an’ he threw an eye on me as wicked as a Christian’s, an’ in with him. It is not often ye runs up this way from Drumlyn. There is a fine straggle on the hunt,” he added, looking back at the horsemen who were plodding on far behind.

“The Galway Plate wasn’t in the first four miles,” said Ned, getting down to look at the earth; “they were on his brush, until he turned.”

“They are as cute as wimmin, them foxes,” returned the man.

Everyone arrived after a time. Some quite happy because they never aspired to lead the van, others full of bitter and futile explanation—one had fallen, another taken a wrong turn. Ned Dunne’s great voice had carried a contingent down a road which wound well away from the line.

They were ten miles for the next draw and, early as it was, the Master decided to go home.

“I wish they’d caught him,” he said, looking at the baffled pack.

“And I was so glad he got in. He went away with such a swanky look.” Bobbie shook his aching arms. “Grandfather, couldn’t I have a double bridle on this horse? I cannot do with this snaffle.”

“Try it on him, Bobbie.” Robert forbore to bellow.

“I’ll get Ned to. He might sit up with me and pop me over his tail.”

“You’ll get Ned to?” The bellow came now. “You’ll do it yourself, Bobbie. Do you hear? . . . I’ll make a man of you, I tell you,” Robert muttered half to



himself.

“Rufus will make a corpse of me,” said Bobbie cheerily. “And no one will marry the late Bobbie to Yvonne. Oh, grandfather, is there anything like fox-hunting?”

“Not much.” The rugged old face softened.

“To see hounds pouring on, and the fences and the jostling, and just everything. I’m *glad* I came to Ireland.”

“Just because of the fox-hunting?” The old man looked hard at the boy. “Home, Jones. It’s too far to go back to Dullen. Only for the fox-hunting, Bobbie?”

Bobbie missed the wistful note in Robert Bryan’s voice.

“Yes, for that will always remain,” said Bobbie slowly. “Yvonne, life of my heart, where is our automobile?”

“Coming down the road, silly Billy,” said Yvonne rather snappishly. She had had no luck in the hunt. The two rode off together talking, and their grandfather watched them go. He had not ordered Bobbie to ride back with the hounds.

They were a good-looking pair, but—Robert swung his shoulders back—but not Bryans. The boy sitting lumpily on his horse, gripping with his knees, his stirrups too short, his pink coat ill-fitting; the girl a little wisp.

Robert would have liked to watch a six-footer ride away, a great strapping boy weighing thirteen stone, instead of ten-seven.

“He’s thickening a bit. I’ll harden him.” The old jaw shot out. “He’s been slacking lately. Bobbie,” he called.

“Beat it; he’ll want me to hack.” Bobbie dug his heels into Rufus and fled away at a fast gallop.

Hickman Hume watched the two fly on, heads turned towards each other, young faces laughing.

Old Robert watched them, his great shoulders drooping forward, his hands letting his reins fall slackly.

“Wants . . . hardening,” he muttered.

The big shoulders were flung wide again; King Cole started as heels grazed his flanks. Ever after this long hunt the great black resented the touch of spurs.

“I’ll not drive home. I’ll hack with the hounds.” Humanity is strangely

obtuse, too often hurting itself with some vague idea that the punishment will fall on others.

That ride home was to be an example for Bobbie. An old man was jogging, jogging along the muddy roads, while a young one had driven away to the comfort of a hot bath and a hot tea.

Slack, slack, this grandson, obsessed by the speed lust of the age. Into a car, instead of riding and talking over the hunt with Ned and Jones.

Bobbie and Yvonne had finished tea when the old man stalked in, furrows deep on his cheeks and his eyes hard. He had been given his heart's desire, and in some strange fashion it had no taste of triumph.

Connolly bustled in with fresh tea and toast and poached eggs. But, still in his damp, muddy clothes, old Robert sat by the tea-table letting the toast cool.

"Take your tea, grandfather." Bobbie poured some out. "Now, at once. You'll get a chill. Take it and run off to change, like a dear."

Run off to change! Robert Bryan started. The boy was mothering him, a note of anxiety, almost of love, in the young voice.

The cup was thrust into the strong old hands. Bobbie put two pieces of toast on a plate and laid the dish on a brass trivet by the fire.

"Drink your tea, sir. You look tired."

"I hacked home, Bobbie. I don't slack," was on old Robert's tongue, but he bit the words back. "It's good for one to hack," he said instead, a little unsteadily.

"It was a long way, and there were showers," reproved Bobbie. "You mustn't do it again."

Old eyes, fierce and stern, met young eyes, and the Master put his tea down. Where had he seen that look before? A look devoid of fear, thoughtful, kindly, yes, almost—loving.

"Do get to your tub, sir. Here, this toast is scalding now."

"A hack hurts no one. You youngsters are too soft; too soft nowadays. I wish you to go out to exercise in the mornings, Bobbie. You've given it up. You don't walk to the kennels. If you're going to be M.F.H. when I die, you must train a bit."

Bobbie coughed his little hacking cough.

"Kippers. Huh!" roared the old man, and dashed away.

“He terrifies me,” said Yvonne. “I should not dare to put tea down his throat, Bobbie.”

“He looked so tired.” Bobbie cuddled down into a deep chair. “And I . . . worry him, Yvie. I worry him.”

“Oh, Bobbie, some day he will . . . Ah! I am afraid for you,” said Yvonne gently. “I . . . I shall be all right, but you are far too daring.”

## CHAPTER XII

Two very nervous-looking young people, attended by a tall old man, walked into a register's-office in Dublin one soft winter's morning. No pomp of bridal satin and tulle, no white veil, not even a bouquet. A hole-and-corner wedding without even a best man or a bridesmaid.

Bobbie had made his bargain and stuck to it. He would have no fuss, no frills, he said obstinately. Just the ceremony, since it must be.

Yet he and Yvonne appeared to be quite happy together. They laughed as they walked out into the quiet grey street, and they laughed as they ate their wedding breakfast with their grandfather.

"We'll be back in a week, sir. Don't find any foxes until then," was Bobbie's good-bye.

The two stayed on in Dublin, hired horses and went out with the Kildares and the Meaths.

"See this?" Robert Bryan roared five days after the wedding. "See this, Hickman?"

Robert Bryan had got Hume to stay at Knockbui.

"See what?" Hume asked.

"God! See this?" Robert tossed a newspaper across the table. "The Marquis de Joyeuse has arrived in Ireland for some hunting. He has taken rooms at the Arvagh Hotel, and means to hunt for the rest of the season with the Knockbui Hounds.' "

"See that? There's Frenchness for you, coming over directly the girl is married. I won't have this frog here. I'll send him home. I'll make an example of him, gesticulating at my foxes, yapping 'Ooly oo' to my hounds."

"I've heard he is a fine rider," remarked Hume staring at the paragraph.

"But what brings him here, now?"

Hume said thoughtfully that perhaps the Marquis might have not found it pleasant if he had come before.

"He won't find it pleasant now," roared the old man. "I'll have no French affairs here. Anne! Anne de Joyeuse! What a name."

Hickman laid the paper down.

He wondered if at the present moment Anne de Joyeuse was hunting with the Kildares. The paragraph said "has arrived." He wondered and felt puzzled.

"Those two," muttered Hume, "had something up their sleeves."

At the end of the week the bride and bridegroom came motoring from Dublin in their new Lancia car.

Yvonne looked perfectly happy, but Bobbie had caught a fresh cold and was coughing again.

They hurried, laughing, into the hall, laughing merrily; but Yvonne's laughter died when her grandfather came to meet her.

He kissed her, a frosty peck; he took Bobbie's hand.

"You've done your part. Mine is done too," said Robert gruffly. "We'll sign some papers to-morrow."

Bobbie flushed.

"Knockbui for Robert Bryan," he said, but his voice shook, and a curious frightened look came into his eyes.

"I'd got the red suite ready for you, but Yvonne wrote to Mrs. Dunne." Robert's fiery glance said plainly that the wishes of brides must be attended to, but that, personally, he considered them ridiculous.

"Come along, Yvie," Bobbie yawned. "Beastly long trek from Dublin, sir; pretty dull up there when you get back from hunting. Yvie's not tired; she never is; she drove down."

Yvonne's "I loved it" was spoken from her heart.

Oh, right. He had been right. Yet, as the two scurried upstairs, both laughing together again, old Robert muttered as he waited in the hall.

Dullness had not entered into his honeymoon. Yes, he missed something in Bobbie's attitude.

"He wants hardening," the old man said. "I won't let him slack any more."

So when the pair came down to a regal wedding feast (Mrs. Dunne had spent two days preparing that dinner), with the table decked with white heather, and a wonderful sweet surmounted by a sugar Cupid and true lovers' knots, the Master of the house was glum. Sometimes, when we ride a race and win, we find the prize but a poor thing in our hands.

Win? A memory came back to the M.F.H.: of riding his horse, Black Pat, in a point-to-point, and how Pat had faltered at a fence and lost ground, and how he had pulled the gallant beast together, and lifted him on with knee and bridle and driven on, first past the post. And then Black Pat had crumpled and fell. He had severed an artery in his blunder, and galloped on with his life blood ebbing, and had been taken away in a cart, dead. Robert Bryan could recall his own determination to win: how he had held the failing horse in an iron grip and dashed the spurs in as they raced home. He had won then, at a price. Black Pat might have been saved if he had pulled up at once. Had he won at a price again?

The two looked happy, and yet, and yet . . .

“Ned’s got a cold, Bobbie. I shall want you to whip to-morrow,” said Robert gruffly.

Bobbie hated waiting about at covert sides. He always did something wrong. His face fell.

“And . . . you can ride Rufus.”

“I can’t whip hounds on Rufus, sir. He kicks when I use the lash. Awful thing to see a bridegroom kicked off.”

Yvonne laughed gaily, as if she would rather like to see it.

“If I’m to shout ‘Gone away,’ it must be off one of my own horses,” said Bobbie carelessly.

“Must. Huh!” old Robert thundered. “*Must*, boy.”

“You know I can’t manage Rufus, grandfather,” Bobbie replied calmly. “If I could ride as you do it would be a different thing.”

The old eyes flashed and calmed and flashed again.

“You’ll ride Rufus,” he said crossly.

“And I did want a nice hunt to-morrow,” murmured Bobbie to Yvonne. “Annette will be out.”

Old Robert caught the “Annette.”

“And”—Connolly gazed apprehensively at his master’s flushed, angry face—“I hear, Yvonne, that your French friend is coming here, this de Joyeuse. I don’t approve of it. I say I don’t approve of it. What does he want, huh, now?”

Yvonne flushed rather prettily.

“He wants to hunt in Ireland, grandfather. He drives down to-day. He has

heard so much of our country and of your hunting of hounds.”

“From whom?” thundered Yvonne’s grandparent. “Who wrote these accounts to him?”

Yvonne’s flush vanished. She looked at Bobbie, who smiled softly.

“He’s *it* to go,” said Bobbie. “Scoots over ditches and drains, I tell you, on glorious cattle.”

“Bobbie,” cried Yvonne nervously.

“I shall not be nice to him, remember that. He’ll be sorry he came here. I wonder at you allowing it, Bobbie.”

“I like him,” said Bobbie. “We met in Kildare,” he added awkwardly.

So this Frenchman had been hunting with Yvonne, on her honeymoon. The old man gasped. He felt vexed and outraged; the old brandy lost its flavour as he gulped it down.

One may win and not be happy. He had had his way, and something baffled him.

Bobbie was still smiling, the smile which troubled and exasperated his grandfather. The smile which reminded an old man of someone else who had never been afraid of him.

“I hope you got some new clothes in Dublin, Bobbie.”

Bobbie said, “Yes, posh ones,” and laughed merrily. “I wonder if they’ll fit,” he added. “They never seem to.”

Yvonne wilted before the outburst. A man buying hunting clothes wonders if they’ll fit; brings them home and doesn’t know!

The wedding-feast was not proving a success.

“I want a benedictine, Connolly,” whispered Yvonne as old Robert stalked to the fire and lighted a cigar.

“He only put out the brandy,” confided Connolly. “Ask him, Miss Yvonne, yerself.”

“You ask him,” said Yvonne.

“He is like a nettle this night,” said Connolly, hurrying out of the room.

Bobbie and Yvonne played pool after dinner, sprawling merrily over the table, laughing as they missed easy shots.

They went off to bed still laughing; they were certainly not unhappy together.

The meet was at Knockbui next day, a lawn meet at eleven-thirty. Everyone who could find a horse came out, for this was a gala occasion.

The day was misty. Indigo clouds hung softly on the horizon, shafts of pale sunshine turning the vapour to silver higher up; the pink coats made gay spots of colour against the soft brown of the woods.

Servants carried out trays laden with port and liqueurs; the hall echoed to the clank of spurs and the tread of top-booted feet. Horses were led about outside, and a fleet of cars gathered on the sweep.

Old Robert, towering in his pink, saw to everyone. He looked in a good humour until Bobbie, in his old coat, sauntered down the steps.

“The new one was hopeless,” said Bobbie, catching a fiery glance. “Oh, hullo, Nan. Cheerio”—this as a great, long-nosed car glided up.

Robert Bryan, roaring out “Huh!” knocked against Connolly, who dropped a salver.

For out of the car stepped a tall man muffled in a fur coat, a pleasant-looking young fellow, dark skinned and dark eyed, with a determined jaw and a merry smile.

“Hello, Bobbette,” he returned, and shed his coat.

Cut-away swallow tail, a blue waistcoat, breeches and boots were all of the best. A big well-bred bay was led up to the car.

“This is my grandfather,” began Bobbie. “Grandfather, the Marquis de \_\_\_\_\_”

“Time to move off,” roared the old man; and then, recalling that he was the M.F.H., Robert touched his cap savagely and rushed towards his horse.

Anne de Joyeuse smiled comprehensively. He was as fine a figure of manhood as the M.F.H., close on six feet, light limbed, broad shouldered, active, with an unquenchable twinkle of humour in his dark brown eyes.

“Nettley,” sighed Connolly, picking up the fragments of a wineglass. “Arrah, nettley intirely.”

Monsieur de Joyeuse’s English was routed. He said “*Comment?*” in puzzled tones.

“I would get on quick, sir,” advised old Connolly. “The Master is helter-



skeltering to the beechwood, an' there is two foxes inside in it."

"But what is nettley?" asked the Frenchman.

"The Master," said Connolly emphatically, retiring with his salver.

But he turned as de Joyeuse dived for the stirrup.

"Have a care, sir," he warned. "Half the bitteens of the decanter is in the gravel, an' that '98 is better in the head than the heel."

"*Mais!* I must to a night school." The Marquis swung to the saddle, sitting easily, playing with the horse's mouth as the bay sidled and plunged.

"The devil to him, he can ride," growled the M.F.H., watching de Joyeuse galloping across the lawn.

"Easy, you on the bay," he roared aloud. "Keep away from hounds."

As the last stern was vanishing into the wood, this was simple.

De Joyeuse pulled up by Yvonne, who was smiling happily.

"I can see I've joined the mustard club," murmured the Frenchman softly. "But he won't get rid of me, Yvie. Ah listen!"

A hound spoke in the covert, a big fox appeared, and went back again.

"That's right, head him," roared old Robert. "Stand in his way. He's not being enlarged like a deer, sir."

"Tally ho back!" yelled Bobbie. "Tally ho, bo-ick."

"Keep your mouth shut, Bobbie. God! How is a fox to break over the heads of fools and foreigners?"

Bobbie merely grinned philosophically.

The fox peered out again, and with supreme nerve loped right past Yvonne.

Out came hounds on his brush, flying, a glorious sight, across the lawn towards a round spinney of larch.

The field on the whole was well-behaved, but one young woman from Caherdaven lost her head and charged wildly into the middle of hounds.

"Hold hard, lady. You're not entered. Hold hard. Learnt it in your French convent, I s'pose," roared the M.F.H., his eyes dwelling balefully on de Joyeuse, and not on Miss Costello, who pulled up, looking infuriated. She was a staunch Protestant.

There was scant hope of a hunt from Knockbui. Foxes dodged about from

wood to wood and got chopped, or found some hole in the crags to the east. But the place was well gated and a joy to those who liked to gallop hard until they met a big obstacle.

The fox soon left the larch wood, and made for the crags—the place was too hot to hold him—and the field swung for a gate. Anne de Joyeuse put his bay straight at a great hairy bank overgrown with saplings. Pace took him on to it, for the ditch was wide; the bay steadied on the broad top and jumped off with a mighty bound. And straight in his wake went Yvonne, faint pink on her cheeks, her hands low, a sparkle of sheer joy in her eyes.

“Bobbie, stop her!” cried Hume.

“I’ve got to look after hounds.” Bobbie scurried through the press of horsemen, calling out “*Hunt servant*” in a peremptory voice.

Yvonne got over with a scramble. She and the Marquis were a field ahead as hounds hunted hard towards the grey crags. The Craugh field, its grasses reddish yellow, lay between Knockbui and the huddle of stony land. Black and white and tan, hounds showed clearly as they flew over the thick pasturage. Far off the hills loomed, misty indigo.

“*Dieu!* It is a country to hunt in.” Anne de Joyeuse caught his bay by the head and swung to the right of hounds.

“He’ll be into them. Hold hard, you sir. *Arrête* yourself!” Robert roared. “There! that gate will *arrête* him,” added the Master gleefully.

De Joyeuse steadied the bay, brought him on to his hocks, touched him once with his heels, and cleared the timber.

“The only thing you can do is to sing the Marseillaise,” said Hume thoughtfully. “We’ve struck a fire-eater. Yvonne! stop,” he yelled. “Don’t you try it.”

Yvonne did, bravely, and broke the top bar.

“If she is going to follow that Parisian gate-jumper, I—I’ll send her home.” Old Robert put his own horse at the broken gate. For he remembered bitterly that he was no longer an authority. Bobbie must speak now.

Out across the humping crags, hounds leaping from stone to stone, clearly outlined against the grey and the green, and then over the low hill and out of sight.

“A fox crossed this bog years ago, right to Mount Mellick.” Hume sent his horse along.

“Forrard! Forrard!” yelled Bobbie, hurtling down the slippery incline. “Forrard! They’re half a mile away.”

Across the yellow bog went the hounds, drawn out now, checked by the rough deep ground, splashing into a bog trench, struggling from tussock to tussock. This was where their fox gained on them.

“If that Gallic cock-a-doodle tries the bog we’ll be rid of him.” The Master’s voice was full of hope. “He’s not a duck, thank God.”

“We shall also be rid of Yvonne. No, she’s stopped him.”

“A morass, is it?” De Joyeuse listened to Yvonne. “We must then make a detour, and by which side? Ah, to the left. This is a good horse.” He went on, galloping hard, yet easing his horse when the ground was soft, and he and Yvonne caught hounds just beyond the bog.

Field upon field of green in front, scarcely one scarred by plough. Never an unjumpable fence, never a strand of wire.

“I have died in the night and got to heaven.” The young fellow swung over a low easy bank. “Yvonne, Ireland for me every winter.”

“Cheerio,” responded Yvonne, merrily.

Hounds were hunting now, going at a steadier pace, occasionally dwelling for a moment, yet never checking.

“He’s going for Mount Mellick.” Yvonne pointed to the range of hills cutting across the grey sky. “He’ll get in there. This is a hunt. It is yet many miles.”

They could see the rest of the field pounding behind. Pink and black dots, rising and falling like little mechanical toys at the fences. One pink coat had taken a good turn and was catching them fast.

In fact, as they swung to the west, making for the rising ground, Bobbie jumped into the field with hounds. And hounds, just at the moment, were brought to their noses.

“Now if I could tootle this thing. There’s a man waving over there. Co-op, beauties, co-op. I can’t wangle a horn, dash it. What’ll we do, Annette?”

A figure leaped on to a fence, its hat off, its legs and arms moving frantically. “Blow ’em to it, yer honour. He is this way. Arrah, don’t be delayin’.”

“Give it to me, Bobbie.”

Anne de Joyeuse put the horn to his mouth and galloped on, blowing skilfully.

“He has just pasht me out, the tail trailin’ on him. A gran’ big felly. Success.” This as the Marquis flew a wall and hounds took up the line. Robert Bryan knew the country. He had cut off a corner, and was coming up over the big green fields just below the hill.

The sound of the horn drifted to him.

“Bobbie’s there. He’s learnt to use a horn at last. Good boy. They’ll catch this fox.”

“Here, do not tell him.” De Joyeuse gave the horn back to Bobbie. “*Magnifique!* they have him!”

A last turn, bared omnipotent teeth, and a cluster of pied backs and snarling savage heads. A gallop of nine miles, a point of seven, and a kill in the open.

Swiftly, his rugged face set, the Master galloped up to his hounds.

That merry death cry ringing up the hills, that last post sounded so bravely, for a fox had died so that many foxes might live. Died for the glory of sport and the glory of his race.

“If it was not I had to see him, he was losht.” The countryman arrived, breathless. “He would be into the burrow beyant. But the dogs came quick to the bugle an’ it was nately done.”

“When did you learn, Bobbie?” The big old man looked at his grandson. “I heard you.”

Bobbie said hurriedly that it was pure chance. “I . . . took it out, and, er . . . it . . . went blowing. . . .”

“My God, boy, it’s not a geranium,” exploded Robert furiously. “‘Went blowing!’ ”

“Do not tell him or he will burst,” said Yvonne in French to de Joyeuse.

“Ned, go and give that Frenchman the brush,” growled the Master. “I have to do it.”

“There isn’t a bit of it left,” said Ned. “I have the pate, sir.”

“Give it to him, then.”

Anne de Joyeuse rode quietly up to the big old man.

“It will ever bring a memory of a great hunt over a glorious country, sir,”

he said courteously. "And of the perfection of your great pack."

Robert's hand went to the peak of his cap; his face softened slightly.

"We were fortunate not to lose him just by those bushes. Luckily I could—that is—*mais* . . ."

For "*Tais toi!*" hissed Yvonne wildly. Robert Bryan did not grasp the familiarity of this form of address, and de Joyeuse caught Yvonne's glance and held his peace.

Hounds moved off, going down the steep hill, the pink coats bright spots against the dark stony slope. Blown horses regained their wind and picked their way over the rough ground.

Everyone talked of the gallop, and of how the stranger had led the way.

But the Master rode with his head up, his rugged face gloomy, his mind working in dismal circles.

What was Bobbie thinking of? Did not the boy care?

"Yvonne," the old man called out.

Yvonne trotted up, looking frightened and yet emancipated. She was no longer in thrall.

"Yvonne, I won't have you breaking your horses' necks. You know that bounds fence is a practical impossibility."

"Yet we got over, grandfather."

"That—that—fellow thinks horses are frogs. He doesn't understand."

"He is of a bravery," said Yvonne proudly, "is Anne."

"I suppose you'll ride your hunts in French by next week," roared old Robert. "You two. Bobbie talking of a hunting horn as if it were a geranium, you using broken English. I'll—I'll send that Houdan home. Hi', you Bobbie, look after your work. Look at Conqueror."

Conqueror, a young hound, was looking longingly at a goat. Bobbie stopped talking and pursued the big tan hound.

"'Ware goats, Conqueror," said Bobbie, trying to crack his whip.

"Oh, my *God!*" said the Master heavily.

## CHAPTER XIII

THE lucky people who had second horses changed on to them. Bobbie saw Rufus being led up for him, and Bobbie sighed. He was always ill at ease on the chestnut.

Anne de Joyeuse got on to a raking grey mare with a rolling, ill-tempered eye. He had not ridden the animal before.

“She has got no mouth,” he said, “and they have put a snaffle on her. Why is this, Patrick?”

“I was tolt she would not stand a curb, me lord,” returned his groom. “Your head man an’ meself had an argymint on the head of it, but the felly who carried her down on the train led stress on a snaffle.”

De Joyeuse understood about half of this.

“And what would she do then in a proper bit, Patrick?”

“Rare up on her hindmost legs, your lordship. She is a great mare certainly, but tricky as a hare, they tells me.”

The great mare put her back up and plunged as they turned into the fields; then she surged away at a wild pace past the hounds.

Rufus plunged as the mare thundered past him, raked his head away and joined in.

“Not being Autool,” roared old Robert Bryan, “perhaps you two gentlemen will pull up.”

“She has no mouth. I am surprised at Mulquin. I shall return her,” snapped de Joyeuse angrily.

Grey and chestnut were gradually stopped, and hounds dashed into a small gorse covert on the side of a green hill. They were scarcely in when a fox broke, flying away down the slope, and a second fox showed at the top end of the gorse.

Hounds divided; the Master’s horn twanged sharply as he endeavoured to get the body of the pack to him.

Bobbie sailed away to try to do his work, and only succeeded in shooting past the covert by a field.

He came flying back down the hill with hounds running in front, and a nasty blind bank to be jumped. A place to pull up at, for the ground sloped steeply into it and there was a drop outside.

Rufus straightened his neck and declined to be steadied, and at almost the same moment the grey mare took charge of de Joyeuse and tore down the same hill. Both horses might have got over if they had not collided; as it was they met with a crash, and Bobbie went flying to the right and the Frenchman to the left, right into the middle of hounds, who had checked just beyond the fence.

“Oh, he is hurt!” shrieked Yvonne.

Old Robert Bryan summoned up all his powers of oration. He started by being coldly polite, wanting to know if it was the custom in foreign countries to choose the hounds to fall on to; asking gently if it was usual to knock down the whips; gradually passing from frosty sarcasm to royal rage.

“And if you can’t manage your horses, sir, better get to Waterloo and stay there,” roared the Master, casting forward. “You get up, Bobbie, please.”

“I’m just seeing what is not broken, sir,” said Bobbie, rubbing his legs.

The Marquis’ jaw was thrust forward as he remounted the grey mare.

“You brute of no manners,” he stormed. “Female apache, I’ll teach you.”

The grey mare merely slugged her head out. She was always ridden in a chain snaffle, and this soft thing in her mouth was sheer delight to her.

Scent, the mysterious, had vanished with the morning. Hounds could barely speak to the line. Now and again they ran for a couple of fields, and whenever they did the grey mare rushed past them on one side, and Rufus generally galloped into them on the other. They worked through a field rusted with fern, with low grey boulders cropping through the rust, and ahead, against the indigo of a lowering sky, was the silver streak of a big river.

And then out of a tussock the fox jumped up.

Came an outburst from forty throats, a crash of music across the lonely world, and one rush of glorious pace, in view, thudding through the squashy fern, slipping over hidden rocks, away for a network of grey walls crossing and recrossing small green fields.

The grey mare stretched out like a greyhound; she paid as much heed to the light bit as if it had been a piece of silk.

The Frenchman swung her round, well away from hounds, and sent her straight along. He was not going to offend again. As the brute would not stop

when she was wanted to, he meant to make her go until she was tired.

Unfortunately, spurs home, he elected once again to thunder past Bobbie—poor Bobbie, sawing at Rufus' mouth, and trying to steady his hot mount. The rush was too much for the excitable chestnut; he took the bit in his teeth and raced the grey mare. The hunt swept on over the fern and across a patch of coarse-grassed, boggy land; the two pink coats fled up a slope, straight for the wall country.

“They've both bolted.” Hume checked his black. “I wonder if I'd better—gad—I didn't think she cared.”

This as Yvonne, crying, “He will be killed amid the rocks,” sent her horse in pursuit.

Hounds were brought to their noses again in the sour grass of the marsh. There was practically no smell. Silently Robert Bryan watched grey and chestnut thunder along, watched the stone walls slip beneath them as they jumped at full gallop.

“The bounds wall into Heggarty's might stop them,” he said slowly. “The point-to-point season has begun rather early this year.”

The Frenchman's grey gave an exhibition of absolutely perfect jumping, but pace got into her wicked head and she was completely out of control. Rufus had the bit in his teeth, and both horses were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

This mad rush through the air was good to feel, the swing as the low fences were flung behind; but Bobbie knew that some big double walls lay in front of them, and beyond these a stretch of crag, slippery and unsafe. Also, beyond the crag, a bog.

“Pull her up,” gasped Bobbie, “or we'll crash.” A grey line loomed ahead, a cairn of stone running for half a mile grown over with ivy, laced with brambles.

A fence to be taken carefully at any time, with just two or three spots where the stones had broken away, and a clever horse could scramble up and jump off.

But no horses going all out were likely to get over safely. The great mass of stone humped in front of the racing pair, solid, formidable, with huge rocks strewn about it.

Robert Bryan suddenly lost interest in his hounds. He rode to a hill, looking, anxiously now, at the two racing horses; his fingers worked on the



reins.

“*Stop, Bobbie, you fool!*” Bobbie was half a mile away. “You can’t take Heggarty’s at that pace. Turn him. God! He’ll be killed! Ah! the boy will be hurt.”

“Try to turn,” Bobbie was crying. “I can’t stop unless you do. I’m blown.”

De Joyeuse tore at the reins, jerking them. And the grey mass of stone loomed higher and nearer. The two runaways went shattering over the crags, their hoofs striking fire from the stones.

Yvonne galloped doggedly behind, her face white as paper.

“Turn, *you.*” De Joyeuse rammed his spurs home until they dripped blood. Then, as the grey mare leaped, startled from the sudden pain, the bit was wrenched clear of her teeth.

Bobbie’s arms had grown weary. He was blown and tired. He saw the grey mass loom nearer and nearer and set his teeth for the crash. Rufus was bound to fall. No horse could hope to reach the top save where the wall had crumbled.

Bash!—they would hit the stones and fall back, or turn a somersault.

“Pull your near rein, wrench it,” said a quiet voice. The grey mare was conquered; she swung to the pull on her mouth, and de Joyeuse, raising his crop, hit Rufus a crack on the head. Bobbie pulled, and Rufus, who was not a vicious horse, but one who lost his wits, wavered and stopped.

The Master had watched, his fierce old eyes straining, his teeth clenched, watched for the crashing fall.

He drew a deep breath as he saw the grey ride off the chestnut, and the two red coats stand still.

“That . . . La Bresse . . . can ride,” he said. “Put them to me, Ned,” and he turned to hunt his fox; but his face was very pale.

Hume trotted towards the runaways. He saw Yvonne fly over the last low wall, and gallop up to the men, her arms outstretched.

“Begd! She cares!” Hume whistled. “She’s getting down. She’s all over him.”

Yvonne, tumbling off, had slipped to the ground, and one of the red coats supported her.

“Oh, your Bobbie is all right,” muttered Hume. “And I’ll bet he is laughing at you, while the gallant Frenchman holds your tottering form. I was badly

mistaken, it appears.”

Youth soon forgets fear. Bobbie came cantering back to hounds, his reins slack—Rufus was now going very quietly. The grey mare recognised the fact that she had met her master, and also cantered with ill-humoured doggedness.

There was no scent. Once the fox slipped ahead again, hounds could scarcely hunt him; they dragged from field to field, requiring help every minute.

The M.F.H. just glanced at his runaway whip. There was no trace now of the fierce anxiety which had lined his rugged face.

“A pretty little exhibition,” he said coldly, as if no mighty wall had ever loomed in front of an extended horse. And then, savagely: “If that snail-muncher cannot manage his horses, I wish he’d stay at home.”

The snail-muncher kept decorously in the background out of danger’s way. It was not a hunt which cried for valour.

Aided by the country people, they dragged on towards a line of tall fir trees, where Robert hoped to mark. Their friend of the morning came running down a fence.

“He is over to Hartigan’s spinney,” he volunteered, “goin’ as cool as snow. Thim two mid a great fist of it this mornin’, Misther Bryan. An’ the long one is fine on the bugle!”

Robert Bryan started, and stared suspiciously at Bobbie, who did not dare to think what might happen if his grandfather found out that a stranger had actually dared to hunt the hounds.

“Tally ho!” yelled Bobbie, who was ever quick of wit. “Just over the thorn hedge. Tally ho!”

Pat Mulquin intervened snappily.

“How in the name of God can he tally ho what’s cosy in his burrow?” he said in puzzled tones. “Is it a rabbit he seen?”

But with a stirring blast Robert lifted hounds and galloped on to Bobbie, wide of the plantation.

The hounds declined to corroborate Bobbie.

“He must have scooted into the wood,” explained Bobbie gravely. “I saw him prancing down by this hedge.”

“Not unless it was a fresh fox,” Mulquin averred, breathless. “For the other

is in this tin minnits pasht.”

They marked the fox and decided to go home. Most people had had enough.

Yvonne and de Joyeuse trotted off together towards the road. Bobbie had to wait to get all the hounds together.

“Look you here, Patrick,” de Joyeuse burst out at his groom. “Let her rear up, but a curb must I have on this mare.”

“The chap warned me to be said by him,” remonstrated Pat, “or that she’d spill ye over her tail. But he had some talk about a chain, only your honour’s Mossos couldn’t make me out rightly. He is bad at languages,” added Pat thoughtfully. “To gibe me was all he’d do, and I sayin’ chain. An’ when I picked one up to show him, he axed me if I thought horses were cows, an’ with that I clapped on the snaffle an’ left him shakin’ his arrums up an’ down, the quare ways them mossos do.”

“Again not half have I understood; but see, Patrick, that this brute comes out in a double bridle.”

“Well, don’t be blamin’ me when she drops your lordship over her tail,” said Pat, taking the grey mare’s bridle. “Look at the eye of her, yer honour. She has her mind med up to be sour. Allee on, ye schamer.”

“Your French stud groom must be enjoying himself.” Hume looked at the Irish mare being ridden away. “Can he speak English?”

“He thinks he can. So did I, until I came down here.”

“Pat will learn French. He’s at it already. Yvonne, I was sorry for you today. You got a rare fright,” said Hume.

“But indeed I did.” Yvonne turned pale. “I thought he would be killed. It was of an awfulness. I thank God for the escape.”

Hickman Hume reflected on the folly of rash decisions. He had always felt certain that Yvonne did not care two straws for Bobbie. Now, looking at her earnest pale face, her shining thankful eyes, he knew that he had been wrong.

“We’ll all come to tea with you to-morrow,” said Yvonne. “We’ll pick up Anne, and bring him along.”

Hounds came jogging on to the road. Bobbie gave a longing look at the cars as he settled down philosophically to a ten-mile hack.

“Grandfather is unfair. Bobbie gets so weary.” Yvonne looked angry. “Then he coughs and cannot sleep.”

“Some strong men can never understand weakness in others,” said Hume slowly; “they think hard work is a certain remedy for all ills.”

Robert Bryan, with a fiery glance at de Joyeuse, strode past him to his car. This foreigner was going to spoil his enjoyment.

“He will yet Scamperdale me.” Anne de Joyeuse grinned softly. “Sing out, Jack. Sing out. Well, *au revoir*, Yvonne. I am not bidden to dinner, I fear.”

Yvonne muttered “Piggish!” as she got into her fur coat and started her small car.

Robert Bryan was not pleasant that evening. He darted in and out of the room, he muttered and he stormed. And as he had no real grievance he could not say anything definite, except that Bobbie had been a fool to Tally a rabbit.

“It’ll be appleplexy,” Connolly decided. “He has his match met in Mister Bobbie, an’ the bitterness of it is pickin’ the master. But sure we must all go some day, an’ some way.”

A sudden frost came in the night, crisping the puddles, powdering the grass with rime. The gaps were as iron, the slight wind stole to the north, and the sky was clear and steely blue. It froze all day in the shade, the sun sank in fiery splendour, and the glass fled upwards.

Robert Bryan considered frost a personal enemy. He stormed as the day wore on. He stormed when Yvonne and Bobbie, laughing together, came back late in the evening. The grass was growing crisp again where the sun had melted it, the roar of a train sounded too distinctly. The birds fluffed out their feathers as they fluttered to roost.

“If it freezes I suppose that Frenchman will go back to France,” was Robert’s one consolation as he tapped the glass and swore at its obstinacy. “Where have you been, Bobbie? At Hickman’s?”

“Yes, we drove on to the pub to see Anne’s horses. Pat says ‘*Wee wee*’ now for yes, and told us he was getting ‘O’ for the horses to drink. Gaston, the French groom, cannot understand any of the men, so Pat says he must learn to tell the craythur what is doin’.” Bobbie laughed. “Shall we hunt to-morrow, sir, think you?”

“Not if it freezes again. Bobbie . . . that Parlyvoo is after Yvonne. I can’t make you present-day youngsters out.”

Bobbie said gravely that he quite understood Yvonne, and spoilt this gravity by an outburst of gay laughter.

Bobbie looked tired. He was getting thinner, and he coughed a good deal.

Robert growled out that he did not know why the good God had created frost to spoil the winter. Horses out on straw rides. Huh! And he went towards the dining-room.

“He’s going for the port.” Bobbie fled upstairs, coughing as he went.

The frost held. Fifteen degrees laid ice across the ponds, and though a few enthusiasts slithered to the meet, Robert was too fond of his hounds to risk their feet in the gaps.

“Ned says the lake by Knockbui will bear to-morrow.”

Yvonne looked for her skates. Bobbie rode horses on the straw rings and declined to try to learn skating. It would not last, nothing ever lasts in Ireland. And he drove Yvonne to Arvagh village ostensibly to buy some elastic. The shopping terminated in a visit to the hotel and a second look at de Joyeuse’s horses.

Pat, the Irish groom, had quite taken command of the establishment. He did the honours proudly, merely deferring now and then to Tony, as he familiarly called the stud groom.

“Look at the gran’ rugs with a king’s crown on them,” declaimed Pat. “I med him buy some others for the night. Tony is moidered with Ireland, and but that I has a few words of his foreign tongue he’d be done outright. Didn’t he tell me this mornin’ the frost was jelly, an’ his arrums wint like windmills when I tolt him it was *door*—that’s ‘hard’ in French, miss, ye see.”

Gaston opened the door of the grey mare’s box and feared that she was “wot you call the bad case.”

“Without mouf,” said the Frenchman. “I would so return her but M. le Marquis says he will her master be.”

“Then Tony does be askin’ for claret with his dinner, dejoinay he names that dinner. He’ll roon his entrails with the black ink here. An’ he didn’t take it too kindly when I ran a glass of malt through it to hearten the stuff.”

The horses were a fine lot. Big upstanding weight carriers, full of quality. Yvonne looked rather wistfully at them. Her grandfather had never given her a big horse.

The frost held, crisping the world. The hills became blue blurs in the distance, and the roads rang like iron. The lake near Knockbui bore in two days, and a halting procession of inexperienced skaters stumbled on its steel-

grey surface.

Yvonne had learnt in France. She went swooping out lightly and surely, while Bobbie staggered on aching ankles, trying to balance himself.

The groaning, whining song of the ice rang through the still air, the sharp whirr of biting skates mingling with it.

Robert Bryan stood on the verge kicking angry heels against the hard ground, cursing the fox-hunters' Waterloo.

Far out, a pair were swinging along on the outside edge with long rhythmical strokes.

"Bobbie's a fool," muttered the old man. "A fool. Why can't he skate?"

"Get your wife to help you, Bobbie," he rumbled as Bobbie staggered past.

"She pulls me down," Bobbie grinned. "She's waltzing now with Nan. Watch. Isn't it pretty?"

"If he came over to hunt I can't think why he stays to prank on skates," growled Robert.

When the blue dusk fell and everyone adjourned for tea at Knockbui, the old man had to ask de Joyeuse to come in.

Robert's keen eyes were heavy with trouble. For this Frenchman was good to look at. Tall and lithe, with a strong merry face. Such a grandson as old Robert would have been proud of.

Bobbie looked tired, and coughed, and sat with June Martin, instead of waiting on his guests.

"The glass is falling," Hume strolled into the room. "This beastly frost will break up."

"No skating to-morrow if there's a thaw," commanded Robert Bryan; "that lake is none too safe. Hear, Yvonne?"

Yvonne looked gently towards Bobbie, and her grandfather snorted ill-humouredly.

"Glass falling, did you say?" Bobbie jumped up. "Then we'll hunt on Wednesday. I want to try my new bay over the wall country—Fitzgibbons bay. Oh, I forgot to tell you, grandfather. I bought him last week, with some of your wedding present."

Old Robert said, "The three-cornered brute with curbs," very gruffly. "And also a slight whistler," he added.

“I saw him jump the bounds wall out of O’Donnell’s. I had to buy him. I know he’s not sound.”

The old man flushed darkly and looked furious.

“You said you liked him, grandfather, and thought of buying him as a hunt horse.”

“A raw-boned brute. Huh!” growled Robert, rushing out of the room.

He would teach Bobbie. But he could not teach Bobbie now, for Bobbie was his accredited heir. Robert Bryan must succeed to Knockbui. Bobbie in his ill-fitting pink, mounted on this partially ugly bay horse, would come out hunting.

“Soft, he’s soft,” growled the old man, pacing up and down.

Then he turned to gaze at that big photograph, and it seemed to him that Bobbie’s eyes looked out of the pictured face. Cool, never afraid, full of quiet humour, meeting his squarely, as his wife’s had done.

“I’ve half a mind to get that sister over,” he said slowly. “Bobbie never mentions her.”

The frost broke slowly, thawed in the sun and froze again lightly at night. Rain fell on the Tuesday and a slight frost followed it. But hounds met at twelve, waiting for the sun to soften the ground. The fixture was at Asheen village. Horses and cars grouped in in a wide square; the river ran by the village, foaming past the gaunt ruins of an old Hell Fire Club where, in bygone days, men had to drink their four bottles of claret or be thrown out the wide window straight into the Dula. The stone frame of the window was still intact. Then the river ran under an old arched bridge and, suddenly widening, gave itself to calmness, and to its business of bearing up turf boats at high tide.

The roads were hard and slippery, coated with frost as they jogged in to draw Inchavala. The river was in flood, surging and roaring bank high, its waters silver-fringed in the sunlight.

Bobbie bestrode Yellow Boy, his new purchase, a great gaunt horse, goose-rumped and ewe-necked, but with perfect shoulders and great second thighs, and the best of forelegs.

Yellow Boy was a well-mannered horse, easy to turn though bold as a lion.

“A nice sight,” muttered Robert to Hume. “A nice sight, Hickman. Bobbie on that mealy brute.”

“He’s a topping horse,” comforted Hume. “This place is blank.”

They went on to Castle French, horses slipping badly, and found at once in a belt of scrub. Scent was of the poorest. Everyone pressed hounds and the Master's temper rose to fever heat.

They turned and twisted and Bobbie enjoyed himself thoroughly, larking over unnecessary walls just to feel the perfect ease with which his yellow horse jumped. Twice, seeing Phantasy touch the line, he made his grandfather furious by shouting joyously.

Hounds crept on back towards the village which they had met at. And the walls were enormous. As they ran for a moment, one loomed well over five feet, built of great jagged stones, and no other way unless they went back. Ned, the whip, sent his beast at it, and the horse refused. Then out came a gallant sailor who had earned a V.C., and flew high over the topmost stone. Then Ned got over and one other. And of course hounds checked. But someone measured that wall afterwards and found that it was over five feet six.

The fox ran them out of scent, the wind flawed to the south, bars of cloud crossed the blue sky, and they jogged on to their last draw, a gorse covert by the Dula river.

Hounds were scarcely in when they spoke, emphatically, and two foxes were hollered away; then a third, a great dark fellow, swept out defiantly, and hounds were on him in a minute.

There were bad lines to be taken, but he ran south, hounds racing close on him, up the railway, horses slipping and stumbling over the sleepers, across an icy road. And then to the left, flying on over a perfect country, sound grass to gallop over, big walls to jump, on until a great government drain blocked the way, with just a chance of getting down the steep sides and jumping into it.

The Frenchman looked at the descent uncertainly; he was not accustomed to horses creeping. Down went one of the local men and into the water. Down went the Master's horse, catlike, and Yellow Boy easily. Still de Joyeuse hesitated.

"We've beaten the froggy," roared the Master joyfully. "Steady, Bobbie, don't override 'em, boy."

"No, he's done it." Bobbie swung at a high wall.

"If the horses of this country can descend precipices, so can mine," said the Marquis, beginning the scramble. There were only six with hounds now, flying across light pasture land. A check, as the fox tried a hole in a bog, hounds spreading over the coarse yellow grasses with the gaunt grey walls of the burnt workhouse of Rathduff beyond it.



They clustered for a minute at the drain, then Gaylass had it, her small brown body swept through the bog and on to the sound turf near a road. Settled to it again now, the bitches flying on a breast-high scent. In and out of the narrow road, away, skirting the Dula. A big wall loomed, no single, but stoutly built, and yet not broad enough to double. At a swinging canter a bay horse ridden by a well-known racing man flew it, and the sailor took another big spot. Hounds flew on.

Dula, bank high, roared or spate on their left, silver pools of surface water dotted the green grass. Hounds flew by the river and for a time there were bushed-up walls to get over, but ever the same springy soured grass to gallop on.

Behind, a string of horsemen were galloping up, catching hounds as pace steadied, on to another earth close by an old grey bridge, the water foaming against its buttresses, and the woods of the place they had found in loomed in front.

Tall masses of firs against the soft sky, the tangle of grey walls lacing across the green, and a dark patch of gorse on a low hill. Ten miles at least. Horses were eased as hounds dashed into the gorse.

“He was only two fields in front of ye,” a man shouted wildly. “But he’s not done with a-ye.”

But the Field straggled carelessly across a flooded stream and rode round the thick gorse, and a “View-halloo” rang, and the horn twanged.

A pressed fox knows the futility of trying earths; this customer was through.

“Ye are only at the bigning of it.” An old man danced and waved. For the beaten fox was carrying on straight for Castle French, a point of over three miles.

“It is of a glory,” de Joyeuse cried, as he clattered up the narrow boreen which crossed the railway and put his horse at a high double wall off the road. “Of a glory. I shall hunt here every year until my death.”

Slowly now, on the failing scent of a beaten fox the bitches worked through a great patch of gorse and ran on, over light land and low stone walls.

Mercifully low, for horses faltered and sobbed and the stones were scattered as they jumped with effort.

Viewed just in front, carrying on stoutly and doggedly. Viewed again as they ran into Castle French, crawling dead-beaten through some scrub with

hounds just on him and old Robert yelling jubilant Tally ho's. Across the road and into the fox cover, with fully fourteen miles thrown behind and in all those miles scarcely one bad fence and never one strand of wire or a field of plough. The good fox was not fated to die that day. For a sudden burst of tongue rang out and a brace of fresh foxes jumped up.

Grey clouds were gathering, evening was drawing near, and the woods echoed to music which the Master growled at savagely. His hounds had been beaten.

What a gallop! Spoilt a little by changing at the last, for instead of gathering to talk over their hunt, the Field slipped away in twos and threes, horses going gaily again now that they had got a rest, slipping off homewards as if they had not galloped and jumped practically all day.

"I shall hunt here for ever and ever," declaimed the Frenchman to Bobbie. "It is high heaven."

A hunting cap was screwed round, and the Master of the hounds found himself wishing that they had had a blank day.

"Hunt with him for ever. Oh Lord!"

"But the frog jumps," muttered the old man, giving credit sourly. "Yes, he goes, that French cock-a-doodle."

"H-s-s-h," whispered Yvonne. "H-s-h. Look!"

Something slipped stiffly over a stone wall. A big dark fox, all bedraggled, his brush trailing, his back bowed, was crawling homewards.

He trotted across a field and disappeared.

"If he ever finds out that we saw the poor blighter and didn't tell him, he'll foam at the mouth," said Yvonne. "Let's go home now. I'm tired."

"You can go." Bobbie's voice was tinged with weary bitterness. "I must go chasing round the woods until hounds are stopped. Tally ho!" yelled Bobbie vigorously, as a fox slipped by.

Everyone had gone home before Robert Bryan drew his hounds out of the stragging woods and crag-strewn fields.

Even then Bobbie's day was not over, for he had to ride home. His grandfather would have no slacking.

Yvonne had changed and taken tea before Bobbie walked in, stiffly and slowly.

“Oh, Bobbie, you’re dead-beat. Bobbie, it will kill you.”

Yvonne ran to meet the weary boy. “I’ll bring you up some tea and you pop into a bath.”

“Yet Hume says she is not fond of him.” Robert Bryan was at the door of his study. “Connolly, the port,” he roared suddenly.

“You bring it in to me.” Bobbie fled upstairs. “Hear me, Yvie. He’ll make that concoction now.”

A hunt to dream and talk over, even if Bobbie was stiff and weary. A gallop to chatter of all the evening.

Hume came to dinner and every mile of the run was ridden over again, and the V.C.’s jump was spoken of.

“And Anne says he will come here every winter.” Yvonne forgot caution in her excitement.

Old Robert, who had been in a good humour, looked thunderous.

“Bobbie may have something to say about that,” growled the old man.

Bobbie, eating salted almonds, said pleasantly that he liked de Joyeuse.

“He’s a real good sort,” said Bobbie enthusiastically, “and doesn’t half ride, does he?”

“He goes too wide. He’ll be in front of hounds one of these days and . . .”

Robert Bryan’s pause was eloquently full of what an M.F.H. could say.

“He seems a thorough sportsman,” said Hume slowly. “Plays polo, has made his centuries at cricket. No doubt his ancestors fought with Henri at Ivry.”

Yvonne’s “They did,” was given proudly.

“‘Now by the lips of those you love, fair gentlemen of France,’” she began.

“Will ye go aisy with the rhymes, miss? The veins is swellin’ in his neck,” breathed Connolly in Yvonne’s ear.

“‘And in he jumped, and on he jumped, upon his mad grey mare.’”

“Right over all my hounds comes this soldier of Navarre,” roared Robert Bryan savagely, and with a choking growl.

Bobbie chuckled softly, crying, “Well done, sir.”

“Bobbie!” said his grandfather.

“Come along, Bobbie.” Yvonne got up. “No, he won’t drink port, grandfather, he doesn’t like it. Come, Bobbikins.”

“May I ask what you think of it, Hickman? Letting that lover of Yvonne’s come over here. Encouraging the fellow. I won’t have it. I say I won’t have it.”

“I don’t suppose that Bobbie could prevent it. And it’s rather nice of de Joyeuse to take it in this friendly way, bearing no malice. But . . .” Hume’s face was thoughtful.

“Bobbie and Yvonne are . . . so devoted to each other,” the old man spoke with covert defiance.

“Yes, absolutely.” Hume twirled his glass. “They never quarrel. Lovers always fight, Robert. Dear fights, making love all the sweeter. It’s the complete smoothness of this arrangement that puzzles me.”

“It’s Bobbie’s lack of backbone that worries me,” grumbled Robert. “I’ll put it in for him yet. He shall ride Rufus in the Lightweight. He can’t manage the horse? He must learn to. From this on I shall insist on his riding Rufus every non-hunting morning.”

Bobbie had flopped into a deep chair in the library with Yvonne on a big cushion close to him.

“Bobbie, you’re not up to it.” Yvonne laid a small hand on Bobbie’s knee.

Bobbie said, “Knockbui for the Bryans,” with rather dreary bravado.

“We walk gaily into a wood full of briars, Yvie,” he said. “Oh, so easy to trample down the green trails. And they twist round us, fresh ones at every step, dragging and scratching. The beginning of things is so easy; we must not tire when the trail grows difficult.”

## CHAPTER XIV

“I SHALL only mess the horse about, grandfather. Do get someone else to ride him.”

Bobbie, hands deep in pockets, looked unhappily at Rufus the chestnut.

“Look here, m’boy: I want to win the Lightweight Cup. That Mossoo will run Glorious, his brown thoroughbred, and you’ve got to beat him. Are we Bryans to be flogged by frogs? Huh! Frogs.”

“Nan can ride races.” Bobbie shook his head. “I can’t manage Rufus, sir, and he knows it. Get Hickman to ride, grandfather.”

“The Bryans ride their own horses,” said old Robert arrogantly. “Ride and win. God! you’ve only got to sit still and Rufus will gallop that softly-bred Glorious into a cocked hat.”

“Sit still *and . . . sit on*,” murmured Bobbie ruefully.

“He wants four hours a day. You must take the horse out every morning at seven and give him two hours trotting and walking. Muscle, that’s the stuff, then two hours again in the afternoon; and he is getting twenty pounds of corn a day.”

“He looks like it.” Bobbie saw Rufus lay back his ears and show the whites of his eyes; “and he’s a pig in the cold, sir. Puts his back up unless he gets a gallop to steady him.”

“Not a gallop on your life. I’ll see to the fast work.”

Bobbie grunted. It was no easy task to be in the stables by seven, and to ride Rufus out alone in the park, feel the strong back arch, and know that the vibrating live beast between young knees was waiting, waiting for his chance. To trot and walk in the chill of the morning, and never increase pace to the gallop which would have sobered the thoroughbred.

“It must be as you wish, sir,” said Bobbie flatly. “I’ll ride Rufus in the Lightweight, for you and the Bryans.”

“The cup’s mine if I win, but that’s nothing. I want to beat that Frenchman.”

“Why do you dislike Nan, grandfather? He’s such a good sort.”

“Bobbie.” Old Robert towered up, blue eyes flaming, splendid shoulders thrown back. “Bobbie, you are a *fool*—that froggie is after Yvonne. If you two were not such good friends I should be more alarmed. But even as it is you are a fool. Yvonne rides her hunts with the fellow, dances with him.”

“Quarrels with him,” mused Bobbie. “Hickman holds that one must quarrel.”

“Don’t mutter,” roared Robert Bryan. “Tell your wife you won’t have it.”

“Wives,” murmured Bobbie, his eyes twinkling, “do not always obey. Do they, grandfather?”

“Obey.” The old man’s eyes clouded. He saw through the fog of gathering years, eyes, mutinous, merry, and unafraid, lips which quivered with laughter, and heard a soft voice: “Nonsense, Bob darling. I mean to do it.” Why did those mutinous eyes seem so near? Why did the echo of that loved voice ring close to him?

“They ought to, boy,” he said slowly, looking hard at his grandson.

Bryan’s glance met Bryan’s glance. Bobbie’s eyes, ever merry and mutinous too.

“I won’t have it. Hear that. I won’t have that Napoleon Bonaparte in my house; this hunt is not Waterloo, this house is not in Paris.”

“You’d send him to St. Helena,” Bobbie grinned. “Aren’t you a bit jealous of him, grandfather, because he rides and shoots so much better than Bobbie Bryan?”

“You never had a chance.” The big old hand fell on the young shoulder. “Huh! bones. You’re all bones, boy, rotten little sharp bones. Why don’t you muscle up? Huh! You must finish your porridge, Bobbie, every morning.”

Bobbie had learnt how to slip his porridge plate away when his grandfather flared up at breakfast time.

They walked back towards the old house. Spring was waking, and pale sunlight fell on the yellow hill, the sap was running up in the trees, daffodils were poking out green spears and heavy buds. Man, the ruler, withered year by year, while these children of earth came to fresh birth each spring.

“Hello,” called out Hickman Hume, riding into the yard.

“Bobbie’s going to ride Rufus,” called out Robert. “He’ll beat that snail-chaser. Are you going to start Britomate, Hickman?”

“No, she’s a bit groggy on the off fore. I shall not ride at all in the

Lightweight this year. None of my others are fast enough. I . . . hope you'll manage that chestnut, Bobbie, he's a tricky ride."

"I assure you that I have no ambition to be whirled over the course clamped on his back," said Bobbie coldly. "When Rufus pulls, he pulls."

Old Robert remembered something and dashed off.

"And he will have a light snaffle in his mouth. Rufus doesn't like me," Bobbie laughed and then lighted a cigarette.

"Why don't you take to a pipe," growled Hickman, "instead of those eternal gaspers?"

"I like 'em. I've been having a lecture on my duties." Imps of mischief danced in Bobbie's eyes. "Grandfather disapproves of my management of Yvie. But he tempers it by saying what good friends we are."

"Too good," said Hickman Hume gruffly.

"You still hold that to love one must quarrel?" Bobbie puffed his cigarette and coughed.

"It's nature, Bobbie. One lays down the kingdom of one's soul, and there is ever a perfectly natural rebellion. It is only when love dies that two people live in comfortable harmony. Little slights fail to hurt them, they do not trouble to take up and snap at ill-judged words. I've never seen you angry with Yvonne."

"She's too big a dear to get angry with. She doesn't carp at me, and say 'Tailor' with her eyes every time I get on a horse."

Bobbie walked on quickly, head up.

"If we were male and female we might fall in love," mocked Hume. "Bobbie, cease bickering. I wish you'd tell me, you must know, who wore the geisha's dress at that dance."

"I wonder," said Bobbie. "B'lieve you got smit then, my Hicky."

"She vanished so mysteriously, and none of the girls will own up to having worn that kit."

Bobbie kept well ahead.

"Huh! Damn fools, forgot to order meal for the hounds." Old Robert burst cyclone-wise out of a side door. "Bobbie, have you got fever? You're all flushed."

"I have not got fever," said Bobbie irritably. "Certainly not." He ran into the house calling to Yvonne.

Hickman Hume stood in the pale sunshine looking out over the lands of Knockbui. Bobbie Bryan would reign there, but what a different Robert Bryan to the old man at his side. Tall, straight as a sapling, broad shouldered, a fine sportsman. Young Robert would be a strange successor.

Then a high lilt cut across the still air: "A small Japanese once sat at her ease."

Hickman ran into the hall.

"Oh, hang it, it's the gramophone," he said angrily. "Bobbie put the record on, the young ruffian."

March hunting is often unsatisfactory. White dust smokes on the hard roads, scent is poor and foxes scarce. But the glorious uncertainty of the chase gives the lie to the record, sometimes March comes in softly before he calls to his minions, hail and the north wind . . . sometimes a dog fox travels from a long way off to a covert, and when disturbed quits dalliance, and makes his way home as fast as he can.

They had had three disappointing days. One in woodlands, hunting slowly on the poorest of scents; another in their best country, with vixens in each gorse; the third crawling in the hills in a downpour of rain. The poor day at Mount Callan was made poorer to the Master by glimpses seen of Yvonne and de Joyeuse loitering together in the rides. Dogwood flared on the banks of the river, primroses peeped from banks of moss, and the sun shone warmly. Old Robert saw no beauty in anything. Bobbie was a fool.

On the Monday they drew Loughreagh. Hefferman was all akin to hunting now. His gates were open, there was no wire twisted in bushed-up gaps. And as they rode through the yard Bobbie stopped to speak to the big man.

"There is two below. Ye should have a good run, Mr. Bobbie. Herself has me persuaded now to bring Maryanne back from schooling and to send her out hunting. I have a nate young mare breaking in for her to ride to the dogs."

"That's good." Bobbie was riding Smoke, and felt happy.

He was tired, for he had done his duty and taken Rufus out before breakfast.

"Bobbie looks so weary," Yvonne confided to Hickman. "Grandfather is making him do too much. See how thin Bobbie gets, and he sleeps not."

"You don't fret him at all, Yvonne?"

"*Mais non.*" Yvonne's eyes opened widely. "Why should I? Ah! They've



found, listen . . .”

Yes, they had found. A chorus rang from the low-lying gorse. A small fox jumped the hedge and turned back, tongue out, palpably a vixen, but even as she dodged Challenger and Royal, a big dog fox broke at the east end of the gorse, streaking away over the low-lying country between Loughreagh and Ballina village.

A sharp toot on the horn, that soul-stirring note of the “Gone away.” Men thrust their feet home in the stirrups, and sat down to ride; the hounds were out in half a minute. And there was a scent.

They flew across a field which, in November, was half under water, sailed at the first obstacle, a big bank.

“He’s heading for Ballina; there is the two bounds trenches,” breathed a farmer in Bobbie’s ear.

Bobbie had got a start and kept it for once. Smoke was a perfect hunter. She steadied herself, and seldom made a mistake. The fox, hard pressed, turned sharply to the right, and then again to the left, giving himself a little time when hounds over-ran it, but still making his point to Ballina, six miles away.

It was good to be alive, to see that pied wave wash across the green world, to feel a horse between one’s knees, and fling these big banks behind. Bobbie kept his place, letting Smoke alone. He saw de Joyeuse on his right and Yvonne just behind him. “He’ll be into them if they check,” roared old Robert. “I knew it. Hold hard, Mossoo, they’re not Germans.”

De Joyeuse was on the pig-mouthed grey; he was amongst hounds before he could pull up.

“Didn’t I tell you to hold hard, you sir? Think you’re going to spear him, do you? It’s a fox, sir, not a boar.”

Anne de Joyeuse merely smiled politely.

“They’re not the old Guards at Waterloo,” stormed Robert.

“No, but they are charging the fox, sir,” said de Joyeuse sweetly, “while you decimate me.”

It was true. Hounds had swung out and picked up the line and were away again.

The first of the bounds trenches loomed in front. A swift little river, rushing in front of a high, rather rotten bank. The river was unpleasantly deep, and any sticky horse which tried to jump in and out stayed in.

“You dear,” whispered Bobbie as Smoke rose with a powerful bound and landed lightly, right on top of the bank.

They were in for a great hunt. But the country was boggy now and stiffly fenced, and tired horses began to fail.

“There he goes!” Bobbie pointed to a brown speck three fields ahead, trotting doggedly towards the open earth in Ballina, putting on a last spurt even with back bowed and drooping brush.

Splash. A veil of silver spray rose as hounds crossed the second bounds trench, which was a deep stream flowing sullenly between crumbling banks. Out, scrambling up and away across a rushy field, running from scent to view with a great clamour of music.

Smoke sailed at the water and sailed over, landing clear. Old Robert took his big weight-carrier by the head, growling to himself.

He put her at it with the reins flapping. And she got there. “*Hold up,*” for the Master’s horse landed with a scramble and pitched forward on its head.

Yvonne’s little mare was blown; the girl rode gallantly at the wide trench, and Brownie rolled in.

“Oh, Yvie!” Bobbie could see fox and hounds ahead. “Oh, hang it. It’s deep.”

“It is all right.” De Joyeuse jumped off. “I’ve got her, Bobbie; finish the hunt. Out you come, Yvonne, give me your hands.”

Bobbie galloped on. The jaded fox won sanctuary with that last spurt, and the baffled hounds clamoured round the main earth in Ballina woods.

“Somehow I’m glad he got in,” remarked Bobbie, jumping off. “He gave us such a glorious hunt.”

His grandfather cast a bitter look at the hunting cap on Bobbie’s head.

“Yvonne got a nasty ducking,” said Hume. “Did you get her out safely, Bobbie?”

“She did—I didn’t,” replied Bobbie absently. “Nan was there. He dived for her. He can swim.”

Robert Bryan removed the horn from his pursed-up lips, and rode down to Bobbie.

“You . . . left your wife . . . in the river . . . with that frog . . .” Robert roared. “You left. . .”

"I've never been so well up," apologised Bobbie. "And Anne had hold of her. She'll have to go home now. She must be drenched. She didn't put the mare fast enough at it, I expect."

The Master's expression represented thunder allied to fork lightning.

"I declare to God I thought he'd bust," Ned said afterwards.

"We shall all have to go home. We are many miles from our next draw. The cars will have followed. Go to Yvonne at once, Bobbie; at once, I say."

"Smoke's got a cut"—Bobbie began to examine the grey—"on her off foreleg. Poor old Smoke, it's a nasty deep 'un. Got the iodine, Ned? Did I hear you, grandfather? Oh yes, but Smoke might get blood-poisoning, mightn't she? I'll buzz off now."

"It is the Master that'll buzz off," murmured Ned, and he used his iodine freely. "He is anear to a fit, this minnit."

Bobbie led Smoke towards the road; the cars were coming up, and he saw Yvonne's little brown mare being led by de Joyeuse's man.

"The Markis tolt me to tell ye he had taken Mrs. Bryan back to Knockbui," said Pat. "She was wet into her pelt, sir."

"It's all right, grandfather." Bobbie strolled to his two-seater. "Yvie's gone back home with Nan."

When a man drives your soaking granddaughter to her home one cannot be rude. Robert Bryan's face grew crimson as he realised that he would have to give the Frenchman a drink or luncheon, and even to thank him for his kindness.

Hickman Hume looked thoughtful. "If ever a fellow rode for a fall, Bobbie's doing it," he muttered. "Leaving his wife in a river like that. Look here, Bobbie," he said aloud.

"Don't . . . everybody's doing it," Bobbie said impudently. "No one would ever chuck me for another, Hickman."

Yvonne had changed by the time they got to Knockbui and was having tea with de Joyeuse. Mr. Bryan rushed to his room and remained there. And Bobbie, before the evening was over, was obliged to listen to yet another lecture.

For the Scanlan's landau arrived at Knockbui. The two old ladies had been out driving and seen the end of the hunt. The Hon. Jane sat upright by the fire, but Julia, when she had finished her tea, turned to Bobbie.

“Bobbie, come into the boudoir,” she said gently. “I want a book which I saw there.”

Long-skirted, toqued, Julia followed Bobbie into the little room.

“I . . . don’t want a book, Bobbie,” she said, her gentle face full of distress. “I want to talk to you. Don’t be angry with me. I heard . . . that to-day you left your wife in a river and allowed Monsieur de Joyeuse to pull her out.”

“She’d have got so cold if she had stayed in,” said Bobbie.

“And he drove her home. Bobbie, it is impertinence on my part, but, my dear boy, Frenchmen are . . . well, French.”

“They would be,” agreed Bobbie.

“Do smoke, Bobbie. I have even read a French novel, Bobbie—*Autour de Mariage*. I was informed that it was quite a girls’ book. But it was not, and it gave me an insight into the ways of the French. There was a woman in the book, Paulette, and I assure you, Bobbie, all the men pursued her as if she had been a *demoiselle à marier*. Pursued her . . . openly. . . . It is a French custom.”

“I’ve even heard of it over here,” mused Bobbie.

“So do be careful, Bobbie. Any scandal would kill Robert. And don’t be angry with me.”

“Never, you dearest of dears.” Bobbie laid his hand on Julia’s, who flushed a soft rose. No male had ever called her a dearest of dears.

“Yvie would never do anything to vex me, anything crooked,” he said earnestly, “she is pure gold, Miss Julia, always remember that. I wish that I could say the same for myself,” he added rather drearily.

“You wouldn’t do anything crooked, Bobbie.”

“Who knows? One flies into a fence without seeing the wire. One gulps down something greedily without thinking of indigestion. A child gathers the snow into a little ball, rolls it over, and in ten minutes it is a monstrous thing, growing and growing. Oh, here is grandfather.”

Robert strode into the little room. The electric lights were not on and he stopped with a start as he saw two figures by the firelight, two close together.

“Oh, you, Bobbie,” he said. For one awful moment he had believed the two to be Yvonne and de Joyeuse.

“Miss Julia wants a book,” said Bobbie, getting up. Bobbie looked very tired.

“Yes . . . er . . .” Julia fluttered towards the bookcase. “Yes, this book.” She picked out *Idols* without even glancing at the title.

“Why, you said you tried that and objected to it,” said Robert. “Where is Yvonne?”

“In the drawing-room with Jane,” said Julia firmly. “Monsieur de Joyeuse has left, I think.”

“He’s very strong,” observed Bobbie. “I saw him just picking up Yvie out of the river, and she’s heavier than she looks, y’know. I wish you liked Nan, grandfather. He’s such a thundering good sort, really.”

“St. Dunstan’s,” thundered old Robert, “is your proper home, Bobbie.”

## CHAPTER XV

A LIGHT east wind cut across the countryside, a wind cool, and sharp as a dagger. Frost had burnt the old grass and the fields were brown-hued, the banks bare, stripped of last year's long growth of bramble and tangle of couch grass. The high bright lights of spring caused the distant hills to look close, flecked the near range with lights of gold and dark shadows. Pale primroses starred the south side of sheltered hedgerows, but the world was still asleep, hushed by the cold winds and frost.

Yet the sun had gained power, and it was warm on the south slopes of Lisnea hill, the fixture for the hunt races.

There were several sharp bends in the course. Bobbie had walked round it twice, shaking his head as he thought of his hot-headed mount.

"If I am able to swing him round near the mill I'll win," said Bobbie. "But it's just the sort of place where he'd poke his head out and say 'I'm for the river, Bobbie boy. Come along.'"

"Bobbie," cried Yvonne, "you know he would not go into the river."

"I hope not; I can't swim." Bobbie jumped on a light bank and looked at the old mill. The river rushed fast there, a swirl of green and brown and white foam as it thundered over the fall to the mill dam. A lot of rotting timber had fallen and been washed away from the ruined house, and had gathered, lying in the backwater, close to the old millwheel.

"Look, this bank is close to the jam of planks," Bobbie said. "A horse would not see the river until he was half over the fence."

"Bobbie," Yvonne's voice rang shrilly, "do not, I beg, say such things."

Hickman Hume and the Frenchman were also walking the course.

De Joyeuse jumped as lightly as a hound, springing on to the bank, holding out well-shaped brown hands to help Yvonne up. It was Bobbie who slipped and floundered.

"Well, Rufus will not run away and I shall beat the foreigner," Bobbie laughed.

He stood on the bank, looking idly at the mass of rotting planks heaving in the backwater, watching the clear slide of the current as it rushed to the fall,

and listening to the roar of waters as they warred with jutting stones, or, turning aside, were pent in the narrow mill-race.

“Glorious will sail home,” chaffed de Joyeuse.

“Your horse may have the heels of Rufus for a mile, but he is not such a stayer. Bobbie, I’ll ride Rufus for you and win on him. We’ll pull the tri-colour down,” put in Hume.

A red flush stained Bobbie’s cheek. He kept his back to the two men so that they should not see it; his eyes flashed.

“Meaning that of course my riding will stop Rufus,” flamed Bobbie. “No, Hickman. I’ll ride and I’ll win. Fun to go tearing up that last big field, ahead of everyone.”

“I wish that you would not, Bobbie. You are not strong enough.”

Bobbie’s flush had died away. He jumped off the bank. Cool lights and cool dark shadows, and the cool breath of early spring, the riot of life stirring in earth’s womb, called to humanity; the hill’s dark crest cut against the pale blue sky, its scars jewelled by patches of green gorse.

“How good life is,” said Bobbie wistfully. “If one did not want too much from it!”

They walked over the rest of the course, human specks on the wide country.

That night two people spoke to Robert Bryan. First Yvonne, her voice timid, afraid, as she had always been afraid of her grandfather.

“Huh!” he roared at her, good-humouredly. “The boy must ride. It’s a Bryan’s place to win the cup for a Bryan.”

Then Hickman Hume, who was dining with them.

“Robert, I’m not riding in the Lightweight. If you like I’ll try my hand at managing Rufus.”

“I am riding Rufus, thank you,” Bobbie said curtly.

Old Robert looked across the table at his grandson. The boy should ride, and the answer pleased him.

“There’s your answer,” said the old man. “Bobbie rides.”

The narrow road winding along Lisnea Hill was crowded on the day of the races. Motors creeping, hooting, past innumerable tub traps, the fields dotted by people on foot. Ladies with their legs sheathed in nude silk stockings

climbing out of the tub traps, ladies in thick stockings and brogue shoes getting out of the motors.

Little booths had been erected, and the heavy smell of porter drifted from a big tent. Officials looked as important as if they were working at Aintree. Scales had been carted to a barn, which was also a dressing-room.

The hum of the crowd rose and fell in waves of sound.

“I’m tolt the furrin’ duke’ll win. He is great to ride. Micky Magner said he had it for a fact from a cousin that knew the brother of a French jockey, that Glorious won the French Derby. It wouldn’t help him to cross a country. I dunno. I hear that Aileen O will walk the farmers. If she holds above on her legs she’ll canter home. Castle Derg will win the open; he is brought here for it.”

“There’s many a horse brought to a race meetin’ that goes home as an also ran!” commented a friend. “Black Jack’ll do the trick with Hume up. He is steady in the head, is Hume, and that is worth two stone to a man.”

“I’ll be puttin’ a shillin’ on Rufus.” This from a girl in slight strapped shoes and pale stockings.

“I’m tolt he is queer in the temper, an’ young Mr. Bryan onaisy in the saddle. Didn’t I see the boy with me own two eyes rowl off over Egan’s bounds wall? In the name of God, Katey, why didn’t ye put a shoe on ye’re foot and lave ye’re ball slippers for fox-trottin’? The ground is soft ayet.”

Katey replied huffily that she would keep above the ground on the solid road, and not go trapsin’ around.

Old Robert on King Cole came riding up the field. A splendid figure. The hunt servants’ pink coats made brilliant dots against the cool grey lights of the spring day.

The Heavyweight race was run first, and Hickman Hume had a mount on a horse called Black Jack, a fiddle-headed brute with an iron mouth. De Joyeuse was riding Colleen, the grey mare, and hoped to win on her. Robert Bryan gave many entries, but he never raced his good hunters.

The race began slowly, and Hickman Hume realised that pulling at Black Jack was a futile thing. The horse belonged to Belle Riche, and never pulled her at all. So Hickman dropped the reins after the first rush, and found that this was Belle’s secret. If you didn’t pull at Black Jack he would not pull at you.

De Joyeuse sailed along quietly. His mare was not up to fourteen stone, but she had a rare turn of speed. As they swung round the second sharp bend,



Hume saw that the Frenchman knew how to ride a race—gripping with his thighs, part of his horse, holding his mount together so easily.

“Time for you to pull,” said Hickman, taking up his reins and just grazing Black Jack’s flanks with spurs.

The big black shot out, but the grey mare kept at his side.

They flew the last fence or low wall level, side by side they raced up the long field.

“Bate him, Mr. Hickman,” yelled a friendly voice.

So far de Joyeuse had not called on the mare; now he leant forward, getting every ounce out of her, catching Black Jack; grey shoulders, grey flanks passed black shoulders, black flanks. Jack made a last spurt, but the Frenchman swung home by a length.

“Why the hell can’t the fellow stick to Autool?” growled Robert Bryan. “The frog can ride . . . keep ahead, Bobbie. Rufus can stay for ever. Don’t let it come to riding.”

“Or good-bye-ee, eh?” said Bobbie rather bitterly. “He shan’t catch me, grandfather. I’ll just beat it all the way, hell for leather.”

Bobbie discarded his overcoat and weighed in, sitting in the scales in his father’s stained pink coat and his ill-fitting breeches and boots. Exercising Rufus had brought weight off. Extra lead had to be procured and fastened to the saddle cloth.

Rufus was cold, and in a bad temper. The lead across his withers slipped, and pinched him. He plunged and swished his tail as Bobbie mounted.

“Got the sulks, have you?” said Bobbie. “You would.”

He was never on good terms with the big chestnut, never since the day on which he had ridden him first, and there was always the sense of lurking antagonism. Ned led Rufus to the start, trying to soothe the horse.

“Take him aisy, Mr. Bobbie; let him off. He has his mind med up to be cross. Studdy, you craythur,” Ned added to Rufus.

The cool light wind, the crowd, went as wine to Rufus’ head. He plunged again, and Bobbie rocked in the saddle.

The start of a hunt race is a simple thing. Down went the flag. They were off.

Rufus was off. He thundered across the field, his head slugged out, dashed

at the first low fence.

If Bobbie had been horseman enough to steady that wild rush quietly, Rufus might have recovered his temper. But Bobbie sawed the bits until he got the horse's head up, and they all but fell at the second bank.

"Brute," said Bobbie, dashing his heels into the horse's flanks.

De Joyeuse was stealing along, handling Glorious perfectly; he knew that the bay did not quite stay. Rufus had the lead by five lengths. They swung for the second bend, and the chestnut did not answer the pull.

"Come . . . round," roared Bobbie, "you pig of a horse."

Bobbie had never ridden a horse across country at such a pace; the rush through the air, the lightning-like bounds were winding him a little. But he felt triumphant too. He knew that he could win, that Glorious would never catch up the chestnut, but rather that the gap between them would lengthen; and now the brute was trying to go the wrong side of the flag out of sheer perversity.

He *would* win, show Hickman that Bobbie could ride.

"Come round," said Bobbie, sawing, pulling hard. Pressure with his left leg would have done it, but Bobbie, trying to press, caught the horse with his spur. Rufus raked his head out, sprang, maddened, as Bobbie hit him, and bolted.

Right away from the thudding, pink-coated riders, right out of their path. Ted Floyd on Blanco led now at the bend; Glorious stole closer; the pace-maker was gone.

Bit in teeth, Rufus flew away. Swept over a bushed-up gap, over a high bank, drunk with his own pace, mad for the time being, master at last of Bobbie, his rider.

"I knew you'd do it." Bobbie pulled and jerked, uselessly. His wind went, he grew hot and very tired as the chestnut raced on, fencing perfectly.

"The river," said Bobbie quietly, as he saw a low green bank in front. "It was prophecy. Ah! stop, you fool, you fool."

Rufus did not stop; he soared over the low bank, saw the river, and, checking his stride too late, plunged in among the logs. Bobbie felt the jar as he was sent flying. The horse's wild struggles loosened the jam of timber, the old planks crushed against each other, and Bobbie, breathless and shaken, was caught between two of them.

Rufus plunged out, smashing the rotten timber, smashing the wire which held them in, was almost swept away by the force of the current, but struggled

to land unhurt, and commenced to graze.

Bobbie hung between the planks, trying to climb free. The jam of wood was moving, pressing outwards; one rotting plank swung round and was caught and swept as a straw over the falls; then slowly . . . another . . . and Bobbie was pinned and sinking lower.

Now the whole course was easy to see. Robert Bryan with powerful glasses had followed the race. He had chuckled as Bobbie forged ahead; that was the way to do it. Make use of Rufus. The horse was fit and could stay for a week; that was it. Huh! What was the young fool doing at that second bend? Losing lengths, lengths, going wide like that. Going . . . God! the horse had bolted.

Almost everyone watched the pink coats which were bunched together; only three saw one pink coat carried out of the course.

Straight along towards the silver glimmer of the river. Straight along, a little bright dot, safe still, safe still, then vanishing.

“Ned . . . my horse.” Old Robert flung himself on King Cole’s back. “My horse. The river. Bobbie’s into it.”

“The sinses has left him,” commented Ned, who had no glasses.

So without waiting to call help, Robert Bryan flew across country, straight across it, riding the black all out.

Bobbie was getting very tired; the planks crushed him, and one by one he could see them spin and float off, straws in the swirling current.

Soon he’d be the straw. Soon. How pretty the lights were, cool gold and cool grey. How good the world was . . . and he was numb and cold. He would sink down between these nipping planks into the deep water. Better than being a straw. Bobbie watched another slip away. He sank deeper, clutching mechanically at the rotten pieces of wood, waterlogged, pulp in his fingers. And no one came to help.

Knockbui might never come to Bobbie Bryan. His fingers clutched closer, he shook off his numbness. Hoofs, thudding, galloping hoofs, a horse’s head loomed above the bank. Rufus, startled, neighed.

Robert Bryan saw the loose horse, and in the same second Bobbie’s white tired face out among the logs.

“Bobbie,” the old man cried frantically. “Climb in, get in.”

“I’m pinned here.” Bobbie’s voice was quite calm. It was as if he discussed someone else, out in the river. “An’ they’re off one by one. Mine’ll go soon.”

Another piece of timber swung and was whirled away.

“I’ll get to you.” Robert let his horse go.

“Don’t try to walk on ’em, sir, or they’ll all flop off.”

“I’ll wade in behind you. Oh, Bobbie, Bobbie . . . I made you ride.”

“Made me sit on the horse,” corrected Bobbie, with faint pitiful impudence. “I could never ride. Bob can. I can’t even swim and my legs are numb.”

In those tense seconds old Robert knew how dear this grandchild was to him. God! Would the vault by the yellow hill open so soon for another Bryan? Robert ran along the bank and waded into the swift current. It swirled round his legs, the clear grey and green fangs tearing at him, but he walked on up to the backwater. The roar of the river rose loudly, clamouring for playthings. It caught the sodden logs, tossing them, floating them, dragging them on to the sheer slide above the fall.

“There are only four to go—straws. I’ll be a straw, grandfather. I want to tell you, before I go . . .”

But Bobbie’s weak voice was drowned by the cry of the river.

“Bobbie, I’ll catch you as you are drawn out. I can’t get nearer; the water’s too deep and strong just here.”

“Bobbie, Robert! I rode like hell.” Hickman Hume sprang over the bank and looked aghast at the lad pinned among the timber and the old man in the deep water.

“Get a rope,” cried Robert, “to throw to him.”

“The bridles,” shouted Hume. In a trice he had pulled off the bridles of both loose horses and knotted them together; then he waded out and, swimming, slung the leather across the jam of planks to Bobbie. “Under your arms, so—God, he’s fainted.”

But Bobbie managed to slip the bridle reins round him, and then hills and river and men merged and swam, and he thought that he was falling asleep.

He sank low now, only held by the nipping bits of old wood, and they, beginning to move, pushed him down until the cropped head reached the water.

“You hold; I’ll get out to him. It doesn’t matter if we move the wood now.”

Hume stepped on to the wood, went down, jumped on, and the whole mass

twisted and swung; the planks which held Bobbie were caught by the current. Hume leapt back, and old Robert, right in, shoulder deep, pulled hard, pulled Bobbie, head under water, to him, and tried to struggle to land. His feet slipped as the river tugged at him, but he caught Hume's hand, and next minute got to the bank.

Bobbie lay very still, very white.

"Go for a doctor, Hickman! Fly, catch your horse; get brandy. He's far gone. I'll do what can be done."

Hickman Hume ran to put a bridle on one of the loose horses, and Robert tore the soaked pink coat open, so as to put a trembling hand on Bobbie's heart.

Something stiff and hard resisted him, a kind of boned waistcoat it felt like.

"Padded. Huh!" growled Robert; and then . . .

"Dear God!" he muttered, his fingers on a faintly beating heart. "Dear God, what have I here? . . . Never afraid. . . . I can understand it now."

For it was not Robert Bryan the boy who lay nigh to death on the river bank, but Roberta, the twin sister, who had woven her web to catch Knockbui.

Bobbie, the boy, had gone abroad, for Robert would never eat humble pie. Even stone can be crumbled and steel drilled through and the girl had started on her great adventure, then, having rolled her snowball, soon found it almost too large to handle. Yet, heavy as it was, she had rolled it on. A girl whipping hounds, hacking miles in the rain, getting up to exercise a wild horse.

"Now I understand. Bobbie! Bobbie, wake up. Oh, my little Bobbie with my Hylda's eyes."

Robert Bryan rubbed the still, deathlike hands pathetically.

Bobbie was alive and nothing more. No colour came to the white cheeks.

"Bobbie." Yvonne leaped the low bank. She was breathless, panting. "I have brought whiskey." She rushed to the still figure. "Gently, just a drop or two." Yvonne tore off her coat and wrapped it round Bobbie. "You have done this," she flamed, "*you* made Bobbie ride this brute! You dragged her out of bed, overworked her, with your—la!—'make a man of him.' You have killed my dear, dear Bobbie."

Yvonne and her grandfather had lived as strangers for many years. Now, in a minute's time, they got to know each other; the girl would never be afraid of the old man again. In that agony of fear, love for him was born. She saw big

tears roll down his cheeks.

“Yvonne, how could I know?” he said humbly. “What web have you two woven round me? Ah, little brave Bobbie.”

“He’s stirring. Grandpa, do not cry. Ah, do not cry. Bobbie shall live. Rub, rub on, and drink whiskey thyself.”

Yvonne had assumed command. She was the dominant spirit, ordering the drenched old man to do her bidding.

Bobbie’s eyes opened.

“It was for our home,” Bobbie muttered, “for Knockbui. I’m out, am I, not a straw? Oof, how horrid!”

Bobbie spluttered as Yvonne administered raw whiskey.

“Bobbie! Bobbie, why did you do this?”

“My brother Robert never would. It was half . . . for fun, an’ . . . then I loved you, grandfather. . . . Father wanted Knockbui. I couldn’t stop the snowball . . . I did . . . mean to tell you. . . .”

“But the marriage. . . . Oh, Bobbie.” Robert Bryan was a staunch churchman.

“We had to, or Yvie might have lost her Nan; there was a girl in the offing. Let her have her money, grandfather, please, when I’m . . . gone.”

“All for other people, little Bobbie. Drink some more. Oh, God, he’s off again.”

“I’ve got men, a gate, but walk him if he can stand.” Hickman Hume, a crowd at his heels, came running, Riordan, the doctor, puffing behind.

“Keep . . . doctor . . . away,” muttered Bobbie.

“Righto. Easy with him, Hickman.” Robert Bryan wrapped a coat round Bobbie. “Carry him; he can’t walk. Get him to the nearest cottage.”

They carried Bobbie to a cottage, and then drove him home.

“We misjudged that child Yvonne,” said June Martin. “She adores Bobbie. I shall never forget her face when she saw his horse bolt. She just snatched a flask from someone and ran and ran, so fast she left us all behind.”

They took Bobbie back to Knockbui, and Bobbie lay in bed, very weak, very quiet, and a huge old man sat staring into a fire, stricken, and quiet as Bobbie, the weak patient.

So it was not Bobbie, after all, no grandson, but Roberta, Bobbie's twin, who had come to Knockbui. A girl, doing all that hard work, riding so badly, trying to shoot. A girl scheming for her brother, Robert Bryan. It was all for him. Cool eyes, seeing so much and telling so little, which had always met her grandfather's so fearlessly.

The young rogue! What a chatter of tongues there would be. Pretending to marry Yvonne, cheating everyone. "Yvie had to have her Anne." He could hear the faint wandering voice. "I meant to tell . . . soon. . . ."

Riordan came into the room.

"Well, if it isn't the queerest show ever I met," he said. "An' none of you to guess. I dunno what the law might say about that weddin', Mr. Bryan."

"How is he—she? How is Bobbie? Hang the law!"

"Weak." The doctor looked ill at ease. "Worn out, Mr. Bryan. And I don't like the heart's action. Wanderin', too. Yvonne is up there."

"You . . . mean . . . Bobbie'll *die*?" Robert roared.

"Crushed a bit she is. Oh, youth's a great fighter, but there's only a shell there. She's worn to a thread."

"My fault. My fault." The big old head dropped on quivering hands. "My fault, doctor. I tried to make a man of her."

"Good news?" Hickman Hume came in.

"No; bad news. She's very weak. She . . . he—Bobbie was the twin, Hickman, masquerading. It's the girl . . . the girl who came over here."

"Oh, Lord!" said Hume helplessly, "the girl." A sudden light sprang to his eyes, and Doctor Riordan spoke of Hume for the rest of his life as a "heartless felly."

For, standing with the strange light in his eyes, Hume whistled a tune.

A small Japanese once sat at her ease  
In a garden cool and shady. . . .

He knew . . . at last.

Days of golden light and cool shadows followed; the east wind kissed and stung. And Bobbie lay very quiet in her bed, rambling a little at times, gaining no strength.

The old determination to have his way deserted Robert Bryan. He

depended on Yvonne; he told her to ask de Joyeuse to the house as she wished.

“Bobbie likes him,” he said miserably.

No change for the better in Bobbie. Growing a little weaker, a little frailer, fretting in silence. . . .

“There’s something on the mind.” Riordan rubbed his hand across his eyes one evening. “She’ll go out before the dawn, Mr. Bryan, I’m fearing.”

“Go out . . . before the dawn.” Robert strode to the sick-room. “Go away,” he thundered to the nurse.

Bobbie opened weary eyes.

“Sounds like . . . porridge,” she whispered, and the smile wrung Robert’s heart.

“Bobbie . . . you’re fretting. Talk to me.”

A weak voice spoke feebly.

“It was a dirty trick, grand-dad. An’—all for nothing. . . . I—Bob wouldn’t come, so I . . .” the voice trailed. “I was just like a boy, lean, bony. . . . I wanted Knockbui. Dad wanted it. An’ . . . a snowball, y’know, you roll an’ it grows, until it picked us all up in its inside.”

“That wedding,” muttered the old man, “there’ll be a row about that.”

“We . . . did laugh,” whispered Bobbie. “It seemed the only way until Yvie came into her money. Frogs do . . . jump about . . . so . . . grandfather. He . . . might have hopped . . . away. An’ now . . . it’s all . . . gone wrong. . . .”

“Bobbie, I love you, dear. I forgive everything. God! you’ve looked at me with your grandmother’s eyes, never afraid. Never afraid. Knockbui for Bobbie Bryan. I’ve given my promise. Send for your brother Robert. He comes here as my heir.” Robert leant close to Bobbie.

“Oh, *darlingest*.” A weak hand reached up to touch the fine old face. “I love you too. I can go happily now. I’m kind of worn out. Even the old brandy . . . you said . . .” Her head fell back.

“It would bring a man from the dead,” whispered the faint voice mockingly, “or a hound pup . . . py. D’ye remember? I said I’d ask for it . . . when I was dying. . . .”

“Before God, I’ll try it!” Old Robert flew downstairs, found bottle, spoon and glass, and an egg, and rushed tornado-wise up again.

“Come, Bobbie boy. See if it’ll work. Try it, Bobbie, Bobbie.”



“Oof, fiery!” Bobbie spluttered. “It doesn’t matter now, grand-dad . . . for I’m happy. I’ve done the trick. I can . . . go . . . out and be . . . a straw. Father will have his wish.”

The nurse was still away. An old stiff-necked man sank on to his knees and prayed as he had never prayed before to be given the life of this child. All the love of his old age was Bobbie’s. He wanted to see the cool eyes look fearlessly into his. He wanted everyone to be happy.

“Go on, Bobbie, another spoonful. Come now.”

“Laudie! is there an egg in it—a yellow puff-ball?”

“No, beaten up. Go on, Bobbie.”

“I’m feeling stronger.” Bobbie smiled up into the rugged old face. “And you’ve forgiven me. I’ll go easily now.” Bobbie’s head snuggled against her grandfather’s shoulder; her eyes closed.

So Bobbie was going out. The little cropped head lay comfortably, but how lightly breath came and went. Going out. . . . The nurse came back. Robert raised a ravaged, hopeless face and looked at the face against his arm.

“Why, she’s asleep,” the woman said. “In a real sleep. Lay her back, sir; she won’t wake.”

“Oh God, our help in ages past,” whispered the old man.

Bobbie slept on, and woke, and drank old brandy with a faint smile.

“Bring a man from the . . . dead,” whispered the faint voice. “I’m happy now, grandfather, dearest.”

Riordan, head bowed, came about midnight. It was sad to see youth slip over the border-line.

Yvonne, white and quiet, sat by, waiting. She could only look at Bobbie. For Robert Bryan, spoon in hand, sat doggedly by the bed. Another watcher stood on the stairs.

“Well?” The doctor walked into the quiet room. Ah, the sadness of those rooms when one dear human being lies beyond our aid. The fire stoked with lumps of coal wrapped in paper, so that they may be added to it noiselessly. The array of bottles, the crisp rustle of a nurse’s starched dress; the powerlessness of those who wait.

Riordan had no hope, but as he looked sharply at his sleeping patient, his face changed.

“By Gad, she’s in a natural sleep,” he said softly, touching the thin wrist. “The pulse is stronger; she’s breathing more regularly. She’s taken a turn for the better at last.”

He looked away, but he need not have. Robert Bryan was not ashamed of the tears which rolled down his lined face.

“It was the old brandy,” he said brokenly.

“Bring . . . a man from the dead,” came a whisper from Bobbie. “Eggs, huh! yellow . . . billiard . . . balls.”

Another spoonful, a big one. Bobbie grunted and slept again. When dawn came rosy outside the windows, when bars of aquamarine and pink trailed across the pale sky behind the beech trees, and touched the hoar frost on the grass to silver, Bobbie had not passed over, but had rallied.

And by her side an old man knelt and gave thanks for an answer to his prayers, openly, before the watchers.

Youth is strangely resilient. Once Bobbie took a faint grip on slipping life, she held it, and improved quickly and steadily.

“All the old brandy,” she said, merrily now.

It was an unusual thing for a man to place an empty brandy bottle on his study table and give orders that it should not be removed, but Robert Bryan did it.

“I’ve cabled for Robert,” he said a few days later. “He has sailed. He comes here as my heir, Bobbie.”

“His proper place; but he’ll be snuffy, grandfather, at first. You mustn’t ‘Huh’ at him, darlingest.”

“I’ll tell him how sorry I am. You’ve changed me, little Bobbie, and, as many others, I should like to find the backward road.”

“Mind, he’s not to have the place for years an’ years,” ordered Bobbie. “And won’t he love the hunting! He can ride. I always wanted a quiet horse. And he can shoot, grandfather, though he’s no taller than I am. He is Robert, not Bobbie, though he is Bobbie to me.”

Came a day when Bobbie walked down to the little boudoir. A day of brilliant sunshine. Scarlet anemones flared and daffodils nodded heavy heads in the grass; some of the early tulips were out, little pink and crimson globes. It was peaceful and still, with gossamer veils floating from branch to branch; the thrushes were calling out “sweet-sweet,” the blackbirds “jug-jug,” a little

persistent bird shrilled an excellent imitation of “Hallo! where you going?”

Bobbie sat in a deep chair before the wide window, drinking in the beauty of the world.

Robert Bryan had gone up to Dublin to see about the wedding. He was very nervous as to the result.

“Yes, life’s good; I should hate to have left it,” mused Bobbie.

For spring was coming, and then summer and winter again, with horses to ride and no more hard work. And her twin brother would be at Knockbui.

Little lines gathered on Bobbie’s forehead. She wondered why Hickman Hume had not been to see her.

“Too disgusted, I suppose. He never liked me, ’cept once.” Bobbie’s eyes twinkled and she blushed.

“Bobbie! It’s good to see Richard himself again.” Hickman came in through the French window.

“Bobbie—the tailor,” Bobbie laughed. “You said that word mentally every time you saw me on a horse, friend Hickman. Yes, I nearly jumped the gate into the void. . . .”

“Did I say it? Antipathy, as I’ve told you. . . .” Bobbie grew red. “I stood on the stairs the night they said you must go, Bobbie, stood there until dawn, waiting.”

“You did . . . you’d have been sorry?” Bobbie looked out of the window.

“P’raps. Who knows? Bobbie, how did you manage your feet?”

“Three pairs of stockings.” Bobbie grinned. “My hands were worse, but luckily they are outside. . . . I went to a fancy-dress man and got a padded sort of straight waistcoat. It was fun, and I sold you all.”

“Outwardly, yes. Inwardly, no.” Hickman sat down close to Bobbie. “We should never have quarrelled if you had been Bob and not Bobbie. As it was, it was . . . inevitable.”

“Can’t see it,” grunted Bobbie awkwardly. “Look at those two, Yvonne and her Froggie; they do look blissful, and—and darlingest has gone to Dublin to brave the wrath of the marriage people.”

“Darlingest.” This pet name allied to Robert Bryan made Hume feel weak. Dar . . . ling . . . est. . . . “Good God, Bobbie, you’re a wonder.”

“He is a darlingest. I love him so.”

“Yet he was cross to you.”

“Only because I was such a mug.”

“And I was cross to you, because . . . people who care always quarrel—though, as a matter of fact, a stranger holds my heart.”

“Indeed,” said Bobbie coldly. “I thought Belle Riche had aspired to the priceless gift.”

“N—no.” He came closer. “A geisha has it, Bobbie.”

“‘A small Japanese,’” trilled Bobbie impudently, “who slipped through the curtained door.”

“A geisha . . . whom I kissed, Bobbie. Could she care for me?”

“You never . . . even liked me.” Bobbie sat up. “Belle . . .”

“No, but I loved you,” he said steadily. “I never even quarrelled with Belle when she told me she was going to marry an English parson. I loved you, Bobbie. I believe I loved you from the first minute that you crashed out on to that road on Rufus. See those two out there.”

Yvonne and her Marquis were walking as children do, hand in hand.

“A good fellow, that. He won the race by eight lengths. He is taking Castle Grey for next season, and Robert has got quite fond of him and wishes him ‘Bong chance.’ Bobbie . . . could you like me a bit . . . that way?”

“If . . . you don’t call me a tailor,” said Bobbie softly.

“Then the world’s a good place . . . ‘and he taught Japan’s fair daughter.’ . . . Bobbie, Bobbie, how good it is that you are a woman.”

The only person who felt a little defrauded was Miss Julia. She had thrilled to the touch of a male hand on her cheek, to a boy’s voice calling her “dearest of dears,” and she always felt that she had been slightly cheated.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Bobbie* by Dorothea Conyers]